

about that! I often tell our boys, and the many devotees who take regular responsibilities for keeping things going, "It is true that you are not heroically doing famine relief or looking after orphans or serving in a hospital as so many of our members in India are doing. But in helping to make the ashrama well ordered, peaceful, and beautiful, so that our guests can be happy and comfortable here, you are offering noble service of a different sort. The West has plenty of its own kind of disaster victims who require relief, too."

A few days ago an affluent Dutch couple, who had finished a short sojourn with us, came to say good-bye. Frank said: "We used to take a month in Italy or at the seaside, but a week at Gretz does more for us than that kind of vacation ever did. Here we have had an experience which heals, instructs, inspires, and makes us better people." Sylvia added: "Gretz is an inspiration to me and shows me how to order my everyday life at home. Just to know that a place like this exists makes me love Sri Ramakrishna and believe in God."

## VIVEKANANDA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN KERALA

(Kumaran Asan, Dr. Palpu, Shri Narayana Guru and the S.N.D.P. Movement.)

SHANKARI PRASAD BASU

(1)

Mahakavi Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) was one of the three great creators of the golden age of Malayalam literature, the other two being Ulloor S. Parameshwara Iyer (1879-1949) and Vallathol Narayana Menon (1875-1958). These three poets are popularly known as Asan, Ulloor and Vallathol. All of them were influenced by Swami Vivekananda whose influence was most pronounced on Asan.

Kumaran Asan, "the first great creative genius to come from the socially backward classes in modern Kerala", was born on 12 April 1873, "at Kayikkara, a small coastal village some twenty five miles to the north of Trivandrum." His father was a trader of humble means, but "in his own way a cultivated man." Asan in his boyhood learnt a little of Sanskrit and Malayalam under a village school master. He came in contact with Shri Narayana Guru some time before he reached twenty. Later, with the help of

Dr. Palpu, a highly placed officer at the Native State of Mysore, he went to Bangalore and was admitted there as a student at the Vedanta College. After sometime he first moved to Madras and then to Calcutta, the acknowledged centre of cultural renaissance in the 19th century India, in order to study Sanskrit and English. After a two-year stay he returned to Kerala in 1900 and stayed at Aruvippuram, a village to the south of Trivandrum, with his teacher, Narayana Guru, helping him in his work. When in 1903 Narayana Guru started 'Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam', (S.N.D.P. in abbreviation), Dr. Palpu became the chief organiser, and Asan its first secretary. The primary objective of the organisation was all-round reform and development of the backward Eazhava community. For 16 years Asan worked as its secretary, the period recognised as the heyday of the institution. He also edited its journal *Vivekodayam*. Asan was not much interested in things purely political and was moderate in his attitude in the pre-independence period

of India. He represented the Eazhava community in Travancore State Legislature, as a nominated member for many years, and became instrumental in founding many educational institutions and also centres for spiritual culture on behalf of the S.N.D.P. In 1923 he became its president. After leading a life of a celibate for many years in association of his Guru, he in his early forties fell in love with Sm. Bhanumati Amma, whom he married in 1918. She bore him two sons. In 1924 Asan died in a boat accident.<sup>1</sup>

## (2)

Kumaran Asan's important role in Kerala's social and cultural life, especially in relation to the Eazhava community, can be seen in two fields; one, the field of literature, the other, social reform. These two roles were inter-related, as Asan's poetry largely bore the message of social reform. In both fields Narayana Guru's influence was profound on him but no less was Vivekananda's. If it cannot be ascertained that Narayana Guru got his main social ideas from Swamiji, it is nevertheless, historically true that the Guru started his social movements after Vivekananda's advent which created mighty waves of the awakening of the masses in the subcontinent. The trends of reform activities undertaken by Narayana Guru followed more or less the lines determined by Vivekananda. Here it will be relevant to present an important and interesting account which shows Vivekananda's significant though indirect influence even on the formation of the S.N.D.P.

Late R. Sugatan, an important member of the Communist Party of India in Kerala, one of the chief organisers of the labour movement there, himself belonging to the

Eazhava community, wrote an article on Vivekananda, which appeared in *Kerala Kaumudi*, on 22 January 1963. Incidentally, this Malayalam daily with the largest circulation at the time, was owned and conducted by persons belonging to the same community. R. Sugatan acknowledged in open and unequivocal terms the great influence Swamiji exerted on Kerala and India. "Vivekananda was the heroic sannyasin who cleared his path in life by his own purity, self-control and broad outlook," he wrote. In the same article Sugatan wrote, "When I read in Asan's poem *Nalini*—By his courageous and pleasant face he announced that he is fearless and merciful to all—in my mind flashes the faces of two sannyasins—one that of Swami Vivekananda and the other that of Shri Narayana Guru." Though a Marxist, Sugatan did not ignore the spiritual message of Vivekananda, and wrote,

"The path shown by Vivekananda is the Path. Those who follow the ever-greedy demonic powers... in this atomic age... will never for a moment have peace and quiet. Even in this Sputnik age we see men putting others in chains... and murdering them wholesale. Nations are divided on arbitrary boundaries and conflicting rights.... And how shining and hopeful was Swami Vivekananda's message against this background of darkness." "Of all the slaveries mental slavery was the worst," Sugatan quoted Vivekananda and added, "He spreads this message not only within the boundaries of India but all over the world. And finishing successfully a superhuman task undertaken within a short period of his life between 30 and 40, that divine man entered Mahasamadhi with a perfect sense of fulfilment."

Sugatan emphasised Vivekananda's role in Indian social context:

"It was Swami Vivekananda who made us aware of our slavery and inspired us for national freedom. The wonder of it was that he did this through his religious and spiritual talks and lectures. It was Swami Vivekananda who first loudly proclaimed that without removal of caste, poverty and ignorance of the masses, Indian freedom is an impossibility."

<sup>1</sup> G. Kumara Pillai, Kumaran Asan, published by Kumaran Asan Memorial Managing Committee, Thonnakkal, Trivandrum (1972).

To give an instance how Vivekananda's "Clarion call" roused Kerala and India "from its slumber and ignorance", Sugatan presented facts relating to Vivekananda's inspiration in the formation of the S.N.D.P.:

"On his way to Kerala, Vivekananda (in his parivrajaka days), reached Mysore and there he met Dr. Palpu. During their talks, Dr. Palpu thoroughly briefed Swamiji about the inhuman caste system and the insults and injuries the lower castes suffered from the upper caste Hindus. Thus briefed, Swamiji told Dr. Palpu, 'Find out a good sannyasin from your own community, place him at the centre and organise the lower castes to uplift them. Agitate against untouchability. The lower castes themselves have to do that. No one will come forward to uplift the suppressed and the depressed except themselves.'

"It was after this that Dr. Palpu returned to Travancore (his home State) and discovered Narayana Guru. And it was then that the Aruvippuram Kshetra Yogam was formed. Shri Narayana Guru was the 'rising sun' of that organisation.

"It was after initiating Dr. Palpu with the Bijamantra to awaken Kerala and set it on the path of sanity, Vivekananda entered Kerala and condemned it as a lunatic asylum. All the social, cultural and political movements which came later for cleaning that Augean Stable like Shri Narayana Guru's founding of temples, establishment of S.N.D.P., the struggle against caste system, agitation against untouchability, the famous Vaikom Satyagraha, struggle for Temple Entry under the leadership of Shri T.K. Mahadevan, call against conversion into other religions, agitation for representation in Legislature for lower castes, fight for national freedom in Kerala—everything had their origin in the encounter between Swami Vivekananda and Dr. Palpu at Mysore. In the *Vivekodayam* magazine, which was the organ of the S.N.D.P., and first edited by Kumaran Asan and later managed by the Varkala Ashrama, Mahakavi Asan himself, while writing the obituary note on Swami Chaitanya, had referred to the meeting between Swami Vivekananda and Dr. Palpu at Mysore and the conversation they had together. I am writing this from my memory. I don't go into more detail about this for want of space."<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda-Palpu meeting took place in late 1892. In the meantime Swamiji deeply thought over the problem of caste. But even in his bitterness against the system he felt that it could not be undone only by attacking

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R. Sugatan's valuable article and translation of the same into English. Shri Lakshmi Kanta Boral, Shri Bimal Kumar Ghosh and myself accompanied him to the *Kerala Kaumudi* office on 20.10.1971, and obtained permission for using the article from Mr. K. Sukumaran, the managing director of the paper. Swami Maitrananda secured for me more relevant material from Swami Siddhinathananda relating to Vivekananda-Palpu meeting, and Vivekananda's dominant influence on some of Kumaran Asan's important poems against social background.

Swami Siddhinathananda gathered from Shri Gangadharan, one of Dr. Palpu's sons, the same account that has been given in Sugatan's article. Shri Gangadharan was a journalist. In 1940, in presence of Swami Ojasananda and Swami Siddhinathananda at Bangalore, he described how Dr. Palpu suffered in Kerala at the hands of the diehard caste Hindus, could not secure a suitable job there because of caste prejudices, though he had requisite qualifications. Swamiji after hearing from him the harrowing tales of injustice and tyrannies of the upper class on the lower, said, "Why do you go after the Brahmins? Find out some good noble person from among your own people and follow him. Suppose in a house there are four brothers and one of them is good and devout. If the other brothers consider him lazy, good-for-nothing and hypocritical, he would in course of time turn out to be so. If on the other hand they consider him really good and noble and follow him, then he would be established in his ideals and they would in turn be ennobled by following him. So you try to find out some good person from your own community and follow his advice." Shri Gangadharan added, "Dr. Palpu took Swamiji's advice seriously, searched for such a leader and discovered him in Shri Narayana Guru, who had by then established himself as a religious teacher and preacher."

Shri Gangadharan narrated the same incident some years later to Dr. Ponnamm (Gangadharan was a chronic Asthma patient) at the Trivandrum Ramakrishna Ashrama Dispensary where Siddhinathanandaji was also present.

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<sup>2</sup> I am deeply indebted to Swami Maitrananda of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission for

it from outside. The revolt must come from within. He knew quite well the history of the Bhakti movement in upper India in the middle ages. Bhakti movement led by more than one religious leaders with different philosophical strands were more or less unanimous in their attacks against ritualism, caste, community strifes, and religious conflicts. All of them advocated love, peace, and harmony. To Swamiji's understanding, these types of movements by a given number of people will help in creating new sects but the millions of lower caste Hindus would not be uplifted thereby. Perhaps Swamiji preferred the path shown by Shri Chaitanya, and realised in action by his friend and associate Shri Nityananda. Nityananda, a wandering monk for eight years in India, had enough experience of the social ills of the Hindu society. Against that background he organised the Vaishnavas of Bengal, and successfully tried to incorporate the oppressed Buddhists (oppressed by the Muslim rulers and the caste Hindus) in the Vaishnava fold. Nityananda did not try for the impossible task of forcing the Vaishnavas into the established *Varnas* of Hinduism. He thought it worthwhile to create a new *Varna* of the Vaishnavas which would not be bound by the restricting laws of the Smritis and whose social laws would be liberal enough to admit widow re-marriage (unthinkable during those days), dissolution of marriage, and provisions for re-marriage. The Vaishnavas were nevertheless Hindus. May be Swamiji had in his mind the history of the Bengal Vaishnava experience. We see that in February 1897, Swamiji in one of his Madras lectures (The Sages of India) said this of Shri Chaitanya:

"His (Chaitanya's) love knew no bounds. The saint or the sinner, the Hindu or the Mohammedan, the pure or the impure, the prostitute, the street-walker—all had a share in his love, all had a share in his mercy; and even to the present day, although greatly degenerated, as everything does become in time, his sect is the refuge of the poor,

of the downtrodden, of the outcaste, of the weak, of those who have been rejected by all society."<sup>3</sup>

Shri Chaitanya's social ideas were translated into action by Shri Nityananda.

Again, the echo of the same idea can be found in another of his Madras Lectures, *The Future Of India*. He said there:

Again, the castes are to rise slowly and slowly. There are thousands of castes, and some are even getting admission into Brahminhood, for what prevents any caste from declaring they are Brahmins?... Let us suppose that there are castes here with ten thousand people in each. If these put their heads together and say, we will call ourselves Brahmins, nothing can stop them. I have seen it in my own life. Some castes become strong, as soon as they all agree, who is to say nay? Because whatever it was, each caste was exclusive of the other.... Those powerful epoch-makers, Shankaracharya and others, were great caste-makers. I cannot tell you all the wonderful things they fabricated, and some of you may resent what I have to say. But in my travels and experiences, I have traced them out, and have arrived at most wonderful results. They would sometimes get hordes of Baluchis and at once make them Kshatriyas, and also get hold of hordes of fishermen and make them Brahmins forthwith. They were all Rishis and Sages and we have to bow down to their memory. So, be you all Rishis and Sages. That is the secret."<sup>4</sup>

Narayana Guru assumed the role of 'Rishi' in Kerala as desired by Swamiji. By "making Brahmins," Swamiji meant giving the deprived castes the highest cultural and spiritual rights. The above-quoted extract gives us only a portion of Swami's thoughts. Merely by declaring themselves as Brahmins, the non-Brahmins certainly would not be turned into Brahmins as such. The whole question was related to their getting equal rights in all spheres, educational, economic and social. Vivekananda had spoken much on these matters.

3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati Memorial Edition, 1960), Vol. III, p. 266-267.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

(3)

In 1892, at the time of Swami's meeting with Dr. Palpu, Narayana Guru (1857-1928) was still merged in his sadhana or just decided to offer to the people in general, the truths of his realisation. The little bit of information that we get about his early life does not provide definite clues to dates on major things. This much we know that he was born in 1857 in Chempazhanthi, a small village, about 7 miles north of Trivandrum.

He belonged to Eazhava community. His father Madan Asan was a teacher in the village school, and his mother Kuttiammal belonged to an important family there. The Eazhavas at that time, generally speaking, were untouchables, though they "stood first among the sub-castes of the untouchables....These people, about 19 lakhs in number, were then the professional manufacturers of liquor from coconut palms. As belonging to a higher social group of the serfs, the Eazhavas enjoyed certain privileges. They were allowed to study medicine, held a certain amount of land and wear better clothes." For this reason it was possible for Narayana Guru (his pet name was then 'Nanu') to learn something of Sanskrit, Tamil and obviously Malayalam. "After a few years Nanu was sent to a Sanskrit school at Puthupally in Karunagapally Taluk. He had good training in Grammar, logic and Vedanta philosophy." Nanu had a religious bent of mind. While in Puthupally, it is said, he saw religious visions. In 1882, he returned to his native place and founded some schools there. At the same time "he was also concerned about the deeper problems of human destiny, the relation between God and man, and the reality of existence.... He sought release from this world of Maya." His parents compelled him to marry but he refused to lead a householder's life. In 1885, after his parents' death he left his

home as a pilgrim. At 29, he embraced sannyasa. Shortly afterwards he came in contact with another spiritual aspirant, a wandering monk, Kunjanapillai Asan. When they both understood that Yogic methods could not be properly followed without instruction from an experienced teacher, they approached Ayyavu Shastri, a Brahmin from Madras, staying then at a place near Trivandrum. After learning the process of Patanjali Yoga, Narayana Guru moved to a nearby hill, Maruthua Malai, and there, it is said, he attained *Yogasiddhi*, and also the state of *Jeevan-mukta*. Subsequently he led a life of *Avadhuta Parivrajaka* for a few years. On return he made Aruvippuram, a place some 15 miles north of Trivandrum, his centre for preaching the truths he had realised.

It is not exactly clear just from when Narayana Guru started his preachings in a comprehensive and organised manner. This much we know that in 1900, he started the Yogam "without any formal organisation," which he with the help of Dr. Palpu gradually made into an established institution in 1903, and Kumaran Asan became its first secretary. It is to be noted that Narayana Guru and his Sangha did not take up any important activity not only before 1892, the time of Vivekananda-Palpu talks, but even not before 1897, when Swamiji undertook his triumphal marches through the length and breadth of India. Narayana Guru was the disciple of Shri Chattampi Swami whom Swamiji met in his wandering days. Chattampi Swami held Vivekananda in high esteem. When Narayana Guru was leading his Avadhuta life, the whole of India, specially the South India, was reverberating with the thundering call of Vivekananda. India held him as the Prophet of the age. Swamiji, in his speeches in different parts of Southern India, vehemently attacked the base caste system and put forward the claims of equal oppor-

tunities for the down-trodden and the untouchables. Narayana Guru could have known all these. He could have gathered or almost surely he did gather, Vivekananda's social ideas from Dr. Palpu, the main architect of the S.N.D.P.

We shall see now how Narayana Guru's social and religious ideas and activities resembled those of Vivekananda's. Here we shall quote extracts from Daniel Thomas's booklet *Shri Narayana Guru* (1956), from which the present writer has gathered most of the information of the Guru's life. This booklet was published from the Christian Institute for the study of Religion and Society, yet its accounts are objective, sympathetic, and reverential.

The first important work the Guru undertook was the founding of temples open to all people. These he did to create self-esteem amongst the lower strata of the society. To the end of his life the Guru went on establishing temples in different parts of Kerala. "The temple represents the crown of the social structure (of Kerala). It is the fortress within which all the abominations of the past are preserved", wrote Swami Dharma Theerthan in his *Prophet of Peace* and quoted by Daniel Thomas. Only the Brahmins then had the rights to perform pujas and other ceremonial works. The low caste people had not the right even to enter the temple. Thus the attempt of the Guru in founding new temples for the lower castes, was revolutionary, and some sort of a new dispensation. Daniel Thomas wrote,

"Narayana Guru revolted against the system of temple worship and consecrated a temple at Aruvirapuram for all classes of people. This was the very first act of his public work.... He picked up a stone from the stream nearby and placed it as Shivalingam. From that day onwards the lower castes enjoyed the freedom to worship the higher gods of Hinduism. They were released from unapproachability to temples and from

worship of evil spirits (which was prevalent with the Ezhavas). The event in itself was quite simple, but it shook the very foundations of the fortress of social and religious orthodoxy. When some high caste leaders questioned the authority of a low caste man to dedicate new temples, the Guru replied, 'I have consecrated not the Shiva of the Brahmins but of Ezhavas.' On the walls of that first temple the following motto was later inscribed, 'Without differences of caste, or enmities of creed, all live like brothers at heart here in this place.'

"He established more than 60 temples. These served as means of emancipation for thousands of people. He built them at different times of his ministry and according to the need of the people. Wherever and whenever people requested him to dedicate temples he readily did so; and they were open not only to Ezhavas but to all without distinction of caste or creed....

"It is very important to consider the underlying principle of Narayana Guru in establishing these temples. The first thing he adopted was to consecrate the higher gods of Hinduism in the place of the lower, satanic gods of primitive religion (which the Ezhavas generally worshipped). His idea of temple worship was somewhat different from the traditional one. As far as the Shri Vaishnava theology of the South is concerned, Ishwara, the personal God, appears in five different modes, one of which is His residence in idols and images, set up in houses or temples. Though these are made up of matters, He dwells, in them as spirit. Although Narayana Guru himself did not believe in idols and images, he did not object to the belief of the average people in them if it would result in helping them to live healthy and noble lives. Narayana Guru often taught and put into practice the principle that temples should be neat and tidy, with good airy rooms. More or less all the temples built under his guidance had gardens and reading rooms. He believed that such an atmosphere would produce in man thoughts about God, clean feelings, moral desires and freedom from mental cares and bodily weariness. Mr. John Spiers says, (in his *a Warrior Monk*, p. 7) 'His purpose was to cleanse the polluted atmosphere and to sublimate idolatry to a purer level of abstract virtues, bending social forces to serve the highest aims. Shiva was thus sanctioned as the symbol of pure beauty and truth. So by these methods he was able to lead the stream of devotion to the boundless ocean of Brahman, changeless and imperishable *Tat Tvam Asi*'.

"When we examine the whole process of his establishment of temples, we come across certain developments in his attitude to temple worship. He began his life with building temples with idols or images representing gods of popular Hinduism. In 1922, he built a temple at Murukkumpuzhai and in it he set up a plain stone containing words, *Truth, Charity, Love and Mercy*, in Malayalam script... In 1924, he built another temple at Kalavankodu in Sherthalai district with a big mirror in the sanctuary instead of idols or images. Each one should worship himself because God is within man. We can understand it easily if we remember that Narayana Guru was an *Advaitin* who believed in the identity of (Jiva ?) Atman and Brahman. In the temples, which he dedicated, he starts with personal gods, then seems to emphasise the worship of abstract qualities and finally ends with the contemplation of the Self as Brahman. To the common man he continued to advocate the worship of personal God."

In many ways Narayana Guru's thoughts followed those of Vivekananda. It could be seen from similar passages of Swamiji's published speeches. When in America, Vivekananda thought of Temple Universal, and in October 1894, he evinced much eagerness about it.<sup>5</sup> *Indian Mirror*, then an influential daily, published on 31 January, 1895 and also on 22 August of the same year, news items on the subject. While in America Swamiji could not proceed to materialise the idea, but that idea remained with him. In Madras on 14 February 1897, he in his lecture on the *The Future of India*, explained at length about his educational ideas, how in place of negative education, positive, 'life-building, man-making, character-making' education could be given. That task of imparting both the spiritual and secular education on "national lines" has got to be taken "in our own hands." Then he said.

"Of course this is very big scheme, a very big plan. I do not know whether it will ever work out. But we must begin the work. But how ?

5. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vol. III, p. 368.

Take Madras, for instance. We must have a temple, for with Hindus religion must come first. Then, you may say, all sects will quarrel about it. But we will make it a non-sectarian temple, having only *Om* as the symbol, the greatest symbol of any sect. If there is any sect here, which believes that *Om* ought not to be the symbol, it has no right to call itself Hindu. All will have the right to interpret Hinduism, each one according to his own sect ideas, but we must have a common temple. You can have your own images and symbols in other places, but do not quarrel here with those who differ from you. Here should be taught the common grounds of our different sects, and at the same time the different sects should have perfect liberty to come and teach their doctrines, with only one restriction, that is, not to quarrel with other sects. Say, what you have to say, the world wants it; but the world has no time to hear what you think about other people. You can keep that to yourselves.

"Secondly, in connection with this temple there should be an institution to train teachers who must go about preaching religion and giving secular education to our people; they must carry both. As we have been already carrying religion from door to door, let us along with it carry secular education also. That can be easily done. Then the work will extend through these bands of teachers and preachers, and gradually we shall have similar temples in other places, until we have covered the whole of India."<sup>6</sup>

Of course the dimension of Swamiji's idea was bigger and more comprehensive, but it includes Narayana Guru's scheme as well. Particularly the Omkar Temples which would be open to all, and their adjoining teachers' training institutions, remind us of Narayana Guru's libraries attached to his temples. Also it is worth while to remember here Swamiji's ideas about sannyasins and other dedicated persons going to villages, constructing temple-huts, and imparting both religious and secular education to all including the pariahs. This idea Swamiji had expressed in many places.

Though imbued with deep philosophic ideas, Narayana Guru, at the time of pre-

6. *Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 302-303.

ching, did not indulge in subtle intricacies of philosophy. Instead, he propounded easily understandable religious and social ideas. Just about a year before his death the Guru gave his last message of 'One Caste, One Religion, One God'. We do not want here to quote the all-time great words of Vivekananda on the Universal Religion, but for specific purpose let me quote from two of his letters. On 9 April 1894, he wrote to Alasinga,

"I believe that the *Satya Yuga* will come when there will be one caste, one Veda and peace and harmony."<sup>7</sup>

On 21 March 1895, he wrote to Mrs. Ole Bull,

"My Master (Shri Ramakrishna) used to say that these names as Hindu, Christian etc., stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now only stand as baneful influences under whose black magic even the best of us behave like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and must succeed."<sup>8</sup>

Narayana Guru was himself a Shankarite Advaitin, but as regards the material world and the Maya, he somewhat mellowed the uncompromising stand of Shankara. Like Vivekananda he thought that Advaitavada could be applied to daily life and social needs. "To him (Narayana Guru) speculative metaphysics and practical religion were not different in essence but only in form."<sup>9</sup> Here comes Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta, of which he was the pioneer and most powerful exponent.

Disciples like Dr. Natarajan and others, after establishing Gurukula Ashramas, laid stress on the Guru's Advaita philosophy and wanted to present him more as a religious teacher than a social reformer. On the other hand the S.N.D.P. movement emphasised

his social role and ventured to depict him as the foremost social reformer of Kerala. The Guru's social reform activities include (a) Abolition of evil customs like some costly ceremonies connected with marriage, which made the families at times pauper, (b) Abolition of the evil of drinking, (c) Abolition of caste-restrictions. On the last count, it has been said, "the Guru led the foundation for a total social revolution."<sup>10</sup> Not only the Eazhavas but the whole of the Hindu society of Kerala were influenced directly or indirectly by him on this issue. It is true, "Very little change was brought about during his life-time. But his work has helped in many ways to release forces which eventually contributed to the removal of untouchability and other barriers of caste. He brought a sense of human rights to the Eazhavas and an awakening of a sense of social brotherhood to many Nair leaders."

The methods the Guru adopted for these reforms were practically a follow-up of Vivekananda's thoughts. They were, (1) Organisation, (2) Education, (3) Industrial development. "The revered Shri Narayana Guru Swami", wrote P. Seshadri in his article *Swami Vivekananda in Kerala* in the Vivekananda Centenary Volume, Trichur, 1963, "remarked in course of a conversation with Shri Nilakantha Tirthapada, 'Vivekananda Swami's teachings are laudable in all respects'."

In assessing Narayana Guru's historic role it has been said,

"Sri Narayana Guru awakened the Eazhava community and brought about many great changes in the life and thought of the Hindu society in Kerala. In fact, he has brought Kerala into the stream of national awakening in India."<sup>11</sup>

If this be true then we can well surmise what far-reaching results were produced

7. Ibid., Vol. V, p. 31.

8. Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 303.

9. Daniel Thomas, p. 25.

10. Ibid., p. 33.

11. Ibid., p. 42.

from the meeting of Vivekananda and Dr. Palpu. Here we find one of the many instances of Swamiji's deep and wide influence on Indian social life, which has silently worked through many great souls bringing revolutionary uplift of the masses.

(4)

Though extraordinary was Narayana Guru's role, yet he was not alone in the field, not even the precursor of the reform or revolt movement. The Christian missionaries took every opportunity to attack untouchability and in their hours of triumphs they were able to increase numbers in their fold by conversions. Keshavan Pandit and some others like him were propagating against caste evils but their efforts were not organised.

"Also there were two highly educated men of this community. Dr. Palpu, a Dewan of Mysore State and Rao Bahadur P. Velayudan, an officer in the British service—who through their influence awakened the people from their deep sleep of ignorance."<sup>12</sup>

(To be continued)

12. Ibid., p. 30.

Dr. Palpu remained a friend and co-operator of the Ramakrishna Mission. In March 1901, "a few admirers of Shri Swami Vivekananda being desirous of having a religious institution under the guidance of the Ramakrishna Mission started an organisation known as the Vedanta Society, with his direct blessings." One of the Vice-Presidents of the Society was "Dr. P. Palpu, L.M.S., D.P.H., F.R.I.P.H. (Cantab), Health Officer, Bangalore City, and subsequently Sanitary Commissioner to the Govt. Of Mysore." (*Mysore and the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement*, Bangalore, 1935).

## A PALACE FOR THE POOR : A TEMPLE OF LEARNING

(*Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Madras*)  
(Illustrated)

SWAMI PITAMBARANANDA

Shri Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home at Madras, an affiliated branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, is the direct outcome of the message of service to the poor and destitutes, in the field of education, with a view to helping the manifestation of the Divine in man. It was started under the guidance and inspiration of Srimat Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Maharaj, one of the direct disciples of the Master, who was sent as the apostle to South India by the great leader Swami Vivekananda.

After starting the Ramakrishna Math in Madras in 1899, Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Maharaj surveyed the needs of the people and thought of an orphanage where

orphan and destitute boys could be educated under the Gurukula system and put on their legs as properly oriented and useful members of society. At his behest, the cousins, Shri C. Ramaswami Iyenger and Shri C. Ramanujachariar started the "Home", nurtured it, and built it up. The "Home" was inaugurated on the 17th February, 1905, in a small house in the Kesava Perumal, South Mada Street, Mylapore, given free of rent by Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rao. It had then 5 orphans to take care of. It was afterwards shifted from one rented house to another to accommodate more and more boys. When Swami Ramakrishnananda died in 1911, Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Shri Ramakrishna took over the mantle of

because of her concept of *Dharma*. It is doubtful whether we will come across in the world literature such brilliant apostles of *Dharma* as Bhishma and Vidura who stood steadfastly for justice and virtue. In spite of the long procession of grief-causing events in her life, Kunti is not at all attached to worldly enjoyments even after her children became rulers. When she left for the forest along with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, she gave the following advice to Yudhishtira who followed her for a short distance, which is worth noting:

*Nivartasva kurushreshtha  
Bhimasenadibhih saha  
Dharme te dheeyatam buddhih  
manaste mahadastu cha.*

"You go back along with your brothers like Bhima and others. Let your mind and intellect remain established in *Dharma* always. Let your mind expand." What a great and noble counsel! How big a mother's heart!

While Vyasa emphasizes the necessity of doing actions based on *Dharma*, he also points out the need to discard actions based on *Adharma* at appropriate places.

Dhritarashtra who colluded with Duryodhana in his Adharmic actions due to blind love for his son, tells Sanjaya that men who protect *Dharma* are bestowed with peace of mind here and hereafter, and not men of Adharmic action.

Even Duryodhana is conscious of the superiority of *Dharma*. He says:

*"Janami dharmam na cha me pravrittih  
Janamyadharmam na cha me nivrittih".*

"I am conscious of *Dharma* but I am unable to abide by it. I know *Adharma* (evil) but my nature leads me to it."

Selfishness is the root of all evil. Only the observance of *Dharma* will lead to good both in this world and hereafter. *Dharma* consists in the effacement of self and striving for the happiness of others. True observance of *Dharma* is tantamount to worship of God. All actions dedicated to *Dharma* are offerings to God. This is what is meant by Swami Vivekananda when he says that all actions which turn our heart towards God are *Dharma*. The aim of life is the attainment of God. This is the message of the Mahabharata: *Yato Dharmastato jayah* (Where there is *Dharma*, there is victory).

The great epic poem by Vyasa is for all time and for all clime. It has been a perennial source of inspiration for humanity through the ages. Many works in many languages are inspired by this epic. Reading of this great epic will serve to make us enthusiastic and interested in a pious life, and face it boldly and steadily with the deepest faith in *Dharma*. The relevance of the Mahabharata will never fade at any time.

## VIVEKANANDA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN KERALA

SHANKARI PRASAD BASU

(Continued from the previous issue)

Now about the role of Kumaran Asan. 12 years (16 years?). During this time the Daniel Thomas summarised Asan's contributions to S.N.D.P. thus: "Kumaran Asan was the Secretary of the Yogam for about 12 years (16 years?). During this time the Guru's advice and guidance stood him in good stead as he pursued the aims of the Yogam... Within these 12 years people

recognised the need of the Yogam. Kumaran Asan got the full support and co-operation of the majority of the Eazhava community. In the history of the S.N.D.P., these 12 years were years of progress both for the Yogam as well as for the community. There were 6 Malayalam newspapers; *Sujanandini*, *Kerala Kaumudi*, *Desabhimani*, *Gaja Kesari*, *Mithabadi*, *Sahodaran*, to serve as the organs of the Yogam and to speak for the downtrodden masses."

G. Kumara Pillai stated in the booklet *Kumaran Asan*, to which we have referred earlier, that Asan, before returning to his native place in 1900, studied Sanskrit in Bangalore and Madras, and then for two years at Calcutta Sanskrit College. "(These) five years... were of greatest significance to the development of Asan's personality. These were years of strenuous study of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit literature. It was at this time that he was introduced to English language and literature....The wider horizons in the big cities must have extended his personality, and in particular, the two years he spent in the heart of reascent Bengal have enriched his inner life in an indefinable way."

As we have seen, India was full of Vivekananda in the aforesaid five years. The return of Vivekananda to India from his glorious achievements in the West, his lecture tours from Kanyakumari to Punjab and Himalayas, founding of the Ramakrishna Mission and putting the 'Practical Vedanta' in action by his followers through the unique service activities in famines, floods, sometimes even braving deaths ('die-game' in Vivekananda's words) while nursing plague and cleaning the infected slums of Northern Calcutta, caught the imagination of the moribund nation.

Did Kumaran Asan meet Swamiji when he was in Calcutta in 1898-1899? We do not know. But it can be safely assumed

that he heard from Dr. Palpu and others about their personal talks with Swamiji and impressions thereof. Asan, who himself belonged to depressed classes, might have known about the orthodox attacks and persecutions on Vivekananda for his progressive acts and ideas. Deeply attracted by Buddha and his teachings, Asan could have seen similarities of those in the life and teachings of Vivekananda. We can say with some certainty that except that of his Guru, Swamiji's influence on him was the greatest.

Earlier we have said, Asan held a very important place in Malayalam literature. The poet started his career following neo-classical trends then prevalent in Malayalam literary arena. But subsequently he came to be the pioneer of romantic movement with the publication of his first book *Veena Pcovu* (Withered Flower). "The whole philosophy of his life has been condensed in this small book consisting of 41 slokas. It is a symbolic representation of the momentary glory of human life."<sup>1</sup> Gradually he became more socially conscious, made use of his poetry to expose social evils and oppressions, called for protest against them, and opened his anguished heart in sympathy and love for the degraded humanity. *Chintabistaya Sita* (1919) released his pangs for the suffering souls. Like Rabindra Nath Tagore he selected themes of his poetry from Buddhist legends, such as *Chandala Bhikshuki* (1923) (the subject being passionate love of a chandala woman for Ananda, a disciple of Buddha, and sublimation of the same through Buddha's grace.)

As regards social response in Asan's poetry, *Duravastha* (state of misery and wretchedness) published in 1923, was the most remarkable. Only in this poetical work Asan adopted contemporary incident as subject matter. Here we find his open

1. B. K. Nair, *Mahakavi Kumaran Asan Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8 April, 1973.

challenge against untouchability. It stands as a literary landmark of progressive ideas in Malayalam literature, "My words may be rough," Asan said, "and not very pleasant for many but what I am at is something great and that of universal importance."

Swami Siddhinathananda sent me a summary of the book through Swami Maitrananda. Swami Sevananda writing on this book, opined, "Asan's *Duravastha*, *Chandala Bhikshuki* and *Vasavadatta* are filled with the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda.... The very ideas expressed by Swamiji about caste, education, 'root and branch reform' etc., in his Madras lectures, are all there in toto with the same tones and tempo in many places."

The theme of *Duravastha* was based on Mopla revolt in Kerala. Moplas were converted Mahommedans, "notorious for their cruelty." The theme of the poem is love and subsequent marriage of a Namboodiri girl with a Pulaya youth. This "is too distasteful for readers even today," wrote Swami Siddhinathananda in 1973, judging from prevalent social attitudes.

The poem began with this narration: In the province abundant in nature's gifts, with blossoming plants, trees, forests and flowing rivulets, where the cruel Mahommedans let flow the hot blood of the Hindus, in that province of Eranad, in the fortress of self-created memories and traditions and pomp, where as if the time has entrenched itself in that fortress, there reigned the great Namboodiris of Kerala.

On the other side of the picture was the pariahs, those "bipeds, with whom if compared, four-legged animals will get angry. They have nothing of their own. Enough it would be if they possess a loin cloth or a torn towel to cover-up their modesty." This and a handful of rice were all they could get in exchange of their life-long servitude for the upper classes.

When Savitri, the rich and noble daughter of Namboodiri Brahmin family approached the noble hearted pariah youth Chattan for marrying him, Chattan naturally felt embarrassed and could not give immediate consent. At this point the poet burst forth with words of inspiration and a glorious vision of the future. "Why should you, Chattan, you worshipper of truth, brood over dead images of stone? Here is an image of consciousness,... a perfect image, waiting for you to accept your devoted worship. There should not be any hesitation on your part.... You are now in possession of the light which has come of its own accord....Go quick, and worship this emblem of the universal Lord in human form."

The poet then sounded a warning to the orthodox Vaidikas: "In the interest of our Motherland, in the interest of our religion, and in your own interest, do away with the evil social laws and practices, take away everything you weave, the threads are rotten and worm-eaten. They no more are strong to keep society and nation together. If you do not care, then these very laws and practices of yours will remove you. Can't you hear the warning echo in the whole atmosphere of Kerala?" Finally the poet said, "If you do not hear the warning, if you do not see the signs of time, then I am sorry, indeed, sorry for you." Swami Siddhinathananda wrote, "Asan visualised a collaboration between the old orthodoxy divested of its non-essential parts and fortified with the essential which is universal, and the down-trodden masses. The initiative must come from the orthodoxy, in a spirit not of patronage but of service, recognising the dignity of labour."

We can add more. Following Vivekananda, Asan stood against conversion. At the same time he judged the problem from historical standpoint. That was also in the line of Vivekananda. Here it should be

mentioned that the S.N.D.P. movement fought tooth and nail against untouchability and social obscurantism. Yet at the same time it fought actively against conversion.

The major portion of *Duravastha*, specially its social contents, was practically a poetic presentation of some of Vivekananda's ideas contained in his Madras lectures and also in his letters. We shall present some extracts from those to reinforce our contention. Vivekananda said in his *Reply to Manmadura Address*.

We, as Vedantists, know for certain that there is no power in the universe to injure us unless we first injure ourselves. One-fifth of the population of India have become Mohammedans. Just as before that, going further back, two-thirds of the population in ancient times had become Buddhists.... Christians are already more than a million. Whose fault is it? One of our historians says in ever-memorable language: Why should these poor wretches starve and die of thirst when the perennial fountain of life is flowing by? The question is: What did we do for these people who forsook their own religion? Why should they have become Mohammedans?... Let us blame none, let us blame our own Karma.

In another of his Madras lectures, *The Work Before Us*, Swamiji said,

What can you expect of a race which for hundreds of years has been busy in discussing such momentous problems as whether we should drink a glass of water with the right hand or the left? What more degradation can there be than that the greatest minds of a country have been discussing about the kitchen for several hundreds of years, discussing whether I may touch you or you touch me, and what is the penance for this touching! The themes of the Vedanta... were half-lost, buried in the forests, preserved by a few Sannyasins, while the rest of the nation discussed the momentous questions of touching each other, and dress and food. The Mohammedan conquest gave us many good things, no doubt....

In his Madras lecture on *The Future of India*, Vivekananda said,

Was there ever a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in Malabar country? The poor Pariah is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high-caste man, but if he changes his name to a hodge-podge English name, it is all right; or to a Mohammedan name, it is all right. What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums, and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better? Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed.

We need not draw further upon Vivekananda in which he emphasised on the great potentialities inherent in the so-called low-caste people. About Asan's persuasion to the Pulaya youth Chattan to worship the living image of Savitri instead of a clay image, we can quote a portion from one of Swamiji's poems written on 9 July, 1897:

He who is in you and outside you,  
Who works through all hands,  
Who walks on all feet,  
Whose body are all ye,  
Him worship, and break all other idols!

.....  
Ye fools! who neglect the living God,  
And His infinite reflections with which the  
world is full.

.....  
Him worship, the only visible!  
Break all other idols!

Not only on burning social issues but also on deeper philosophical problems of existence, Vivekananda's influence can be traced in Asan's writings. During the period when Asan was the secretary of the S.N.D.P., he tried his best to popularise Swamiji's thoughts through his writings. The mouth-piece of the organisation, *Vivekodayam*, which he himself edited, was perhaps named after Vivekananda. Swami Maitrananda who studied Asan closely, thinks so. This journal regularly published translations from Swamiji's writings in Malayalam. Asan translated among others, Swamiji's poem *To a Friend* (the original in Bengali:

*Sakhar Prati*). This remarkable poem depicts on the one hand how a man who, with all his heart, loves his fellow beings, suffers most at their hands, being confronted with their selfishness and cunning, yet the hero plods on relentlessly in his cherished path to the goal of life which is love, the highest expression of Advaita in practical life. The poem contains in its original version some unforgettable utterances. In English translation they are (though no translation can express the inherent force of the original):

The nobler is your heart, know for certain,  
The more must be your share of misery.  
Thou large-hearted Lover unselfish, know,  
There's no room in this sordid world for thee;  
Let go your prayers, offerings, and strength,  
For Love selfless is the only resource;  
Lo, the insects teach, embracing flame!

And again,

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,  
And to the very minutest atom,  
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;  
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

To Asan this was the highest humanism. His translation of the poem was first published in a journal *Rasika Ranjini*, and now included in Asan's Complete Works Vol. II.

Asan, though a Karmayogin, did not consider man only as a social being, but recognised at the same time a man's personal identity. Standing before the funeral pyre he could not but think of life's transitoriness and felt envious admiration for those who could control themselves in every trying situation, "His vision of life is essentially tragic," wrote G. Kumara Pillai, "Life is transient and darkened by man's cruelty to man. But life at its best is irradiated with love even under the shadow of sorrow and death. In fact, love is the primal force that animates the whole universe.... In the face of the imitative stuff of the neo-classical poets, he asserted the primacy of individual

imagination." This philosophy of life was certainly akin to Vivekananda's ideas expressed in his said poem, *To a Friend*.

Asan also translated Swamiji's Bengali poem, *Nachuk Tahate Shyama* ('And Let Shyama Dance There'), which was first published in *Vivekodayam* in 1904 in two issues and then incorporated in his Complete Works, Vol. II. The vision of the dark and terrible Kali, before whom man shivers with fear, lest his world of enjoyment falls shattered, and cries and prays like baby, drew only Vivekananda's pity. He sounded forth trumpet call to fight. All these influenced Asan to form his deeper philosophy of life.

Asan engaged himself in translating Swamiji's three yoga books—*Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*. From him we come to know that when he was finishing up his work with the first two books, learnt that another writer (his pseudonym being K.M.) had already translated them. He ceased publishing the first two but came out with his translation of the *Raja Yoga*. We could find references to these translations in some of Asan's collected works.

Shri Mular, a contemporary poet, requested Asan to translate *Karma Yoga*, with the intention of publishing them in the journal *Chandrika*. Asan answered him in a poem written on 1 October 1900, (in Swamiji's life time) where at the last stanza he referred to *Karma Yoga*: "Karma Yoga is a glorious outcome of the enchanting oratorical powers of the great Swami Vivekananda. I am going to translate that into Malayalam as desired by you and shall be sending to *Chandrika*." (Asan's Complete Works, Vol. II).

Before 1908, Asan completed his translation of *Raja Yoga*. This translation became popular and ran into several editions. In introductions to different editions, Asan supplied some facts related to them. He

wrote this in the introduction to the first edition:

While presenting this translation of the Raja Yoga in book form, something by way of introduction has to be said. The original of this invaluable book was written in English by the great Swami Vivekananda. The first part constitutes of eight lectures delivered by Swamiji in 1893 in different parts of America during his travels after the famous Parliament of Religions. The latter part is a word-for-word translation of the Yoga Sutras of the great seer Patanjali and a superb free commentary thereof by Swamiji. Like the first part, the present translator intends to publish (in future) the latter part also in *Vivekodayam*. Among the works of Swamiji, the Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga are famous. Of these the Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga have already been translated into Malayalam and largely known. In reply to a letter seeking permission from the Ramakrishna Mission to translate Raja Yoga in Malayalam, Brahmarshi Ramakrishnananda Swami wrote, Our President (Swami Brahmananda) is glad to hear that 'a very competent man has been good enough to translate the most difficult book of Swami Vivekananda into Malayalam'.

Though the translator cannot admit of his being competent, he believes that the readers will agree with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji when he says that amongst the books of Swami Vivekananda Raja Yoga is the tersest. "It is now eight years since the Mahasamadhi of Swami Vivekananda. He was born, rather incarnated, in the year 1863 and left this world in 1902. (Here follows a short biographical sketch of Swamiji comprising 7-8 pages)." After that Asan continues, "This book Raja Yoga is divided into eight chapters. All that Swamiji had to say on Yoga has been compressed here in a telling lucid style, unparalleled and inimitable for its flourish of eloquence and power of expression."

This introduction was written in February-March 1910. In September-October 1914, Asan published the second edition of the book. From its introduction we learn that Asan kept his promise of translating and

publishing serially the second portion of Swamiji's *Raja Yoga* in *Vivekodayam*. That was incorporated in the present second edition of his works. While translating the second part, Asan at times drifted from Swamiji. "The entire second part (Asan wrote) contains the translations of the main sutras of Patanjali and free commentary of Swamiji thereon. While translating into English the main Sutras, Swamiji exercised certain liberties wherever relevant. That was quite right on the part of Swamiji in view of his realisations and thorough knowledge of the subject matter. Moreover, he translated for the Westerners." Asan stated that as his re-translation was for the Indian readers he tried to follow Patanjali more closely.

At the beginning of this translation, Asan presented fourteen Sanskrit shlokas, written on 24 October 1908. They include eulogies of Patanjali Yoga Sutra, of Swami Vivekananda and lastly of his own master Narayana Guru. At the end of the third stanza, Asan said that in course of time decadence crept into the study and practice of Raja Yoga. Vivekananda by his spiritual power and genius re-established the glory of this great Yoga. Verses 4 to 7 were written directly on Vivekananda. I shall close this article by quoting free translations of those 4 shlokas:

"There arose one, in the land of Bengal, endowed with unparalleled intellect and glory, who was foremost amongst the inner circle of the great lord of seers and venerable Shri Ramakrishna.

"The world at large was amazed by his oratorical powers, who for the resuscitation of Religion, not only crossed the boundless ocean, considering that as the hoof of a cow, but also crossed the Saraswata Ocean (i.e., Ocean of Knowledge).

"Though he attained to the Supreme State beyond the powers of Prakriti, he showed himself as one endowed with the fragrance of manifold virtues. His name bore deep meaning, which has been glorified in the world, beginning with the

word *Vivek* (power of discrimination) and ended with *Ananda* (Bliss).

"Such was one about whose eminence has been spoken of above, who in his command over language and knowledge of Yoga, stood in comparison with the great sage and seer Patanjali—who rendered in extraordinary and most beautiful English the Yoga Sutras with commentaries."<sup>2</sup>

2. I express here my gratitude to Shri R. Prabhakaran, son of Kumaran Asan, whom we met on 24.10.1971, at his residence in the suburbs

of Trivandrum City. Swami Maitrananda took us there. Mr. Prabhakaran showed us some old bound volumes of *Vivekodayam* in which Asan's translations from Vivekananda were published serially. He also presented us with a copy of *Raja Yoga* translated by Asan. The book is still in circulation though other editions are available. Mr. Prabhakaran sought information from us whether Asan, when in Calcutta, met Swamiji. He enquired also about Asan's Sanskrit teacher Kamakhya Nath Tarkavagish. Unfortunately, we could not gather any information about these issues.

## INDIAN AGRICULTURE: PERFORMANCE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

C. H. HANUMANTHA RAO

It has been persistently claimed in the recent period that we have not only achieved self-sufficiency in foodgrains in the country but also achieved relative stability in output and acquired the necessary resilience to withstand droughts. But last year's drought and the performance of agriculture cast serious doubts on the assumptions underlying our agricultural strategy. There are indications that droughts have become increasingly severe over a period of time. The failure of monsoons now causes a greater decline in output than a similar failure used to do 20 to 30 years ago. This is being misconstrued by some as a change in the rainfall pattern itself on account of deforestation and ecological or environmental degradation. However, if we look at the rainfall pattern over the last 100 years in India, it does not show any downward or upward trend, although it does depict year-to-year fluctuations. The incidence of below normal rainfall was as frequent in the past when forest cover was good, as in the recent period. Similarly, the frequency of above-normal rainfall years does not seem to have declined in the recent decades when there

has been a denudation of forests. For instance, within less than a decade, despite widespread deforestation, we have experienced two exceptionally good monsoons, that is, in 1983-84 and in 1988.

However, there is no doubt that ecological degradation has made the impact of droughts more severe. This is not so much on account of change in rainfall pattern as due to insufficient retention of soil-moisture and the consequent lowering of underground water level leading to scarcity of drinking water, fodder and fuel-wood. These scarcities have increased the burdens for the rural poor, particularly for women and children.

Droughts obviously cause greater hardship in the dry regions when compared to the irrigated areas. The poor comprising small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers suffer the greatest because of their low staying power and also because the proportion of people below the poverty line is higher in the dry areas or where the percentage of area irrigated is low. In general, the landless labourers suffer the biggest decline in employment and income when