

## X. Literary and Dramatic Productions (1976-2018)\*

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### 1. The Years After Swami Prabhavananda's Passing (1976-1984)

Swami Prabhavananda brought the initial, brilliant phase of literary work at the Vedanta Society of Southern California (VSSC) to a close with his English translation of and commentary on *Narada's Way of Divine Love: The Bhakti Sutras of Narada* published by Vedanta Press in 1971. The period after Prabhavananda's passing in 1976 was, of course, one of change and readjustment for the members of the VSSC, but its literary efforts continued. Christopher Isherwood was the only remaining widely known professional writer affiliating himself with the Vedanta Movement in Southern California, but new sources of intellectual and cultural creativity came from within the movement itself.

A unique aspect of the Vedanta Society is that it offers its members an opportunity to become creatively involved, in sharp contrast to a more traditional church in which a member's chief function is to attend a weekly religious talk. The Vedanta Society became, in effect, a "people's organization" in which a large percentage of the members themselves would use their talents for the betterment of the Society. Members of the monastic and lay congregation became actively involved in the writing of books, publication of articles, composition of hour-long musicals, production of art, and all aspects of religious plays.

Since the inception of the Society, the cultural creativity of its members has always far exceeded its numbers, perhaps because American Vedantists have sought out their religion rather than being born into it and therefore often have a more dedicated commitment than most conventional believers. To quote the astute analysis of Carl Jackson, a historian of the Ramakrishna Movement in the West:

Indeed, the movement's outreach can only be adequately judged by including its extensive published literature, the many outside lectures presented annually by the Swamis, the repeated visits of high school and college classes to Vedanta temples, and the frequent participation of Ramakrishna Swamis as spokespersons for Hinduism at national and international meetings.<sup>1</sup>

Of the many literary and cultural contributions made since 1976, we shall focus on a few of the more important achievements. A remarkable event occurred with the publication of *Meditation as a Path to God-Realization: A Study in the Spiritual Teachings of Swami Prabhavananda and his Assessment of Christian Spirituality* by the Catholic University, Universita Gregoriana Pontificia in Rome, Italy (founded in 1930). The volume, which came out in 1979, was written by Cyriac Muppathyil, MCBS, who goes into detailed analysis of the thoughts of Prabhavananda with regard to meditation – its meaning, ways and forms, techniques, effects, and its relationship to Christian practices. The book was, no doubt, in keeping with the University's specialization in the fields of religious culture, philosophy, and psychology, but it is certainly remarkable that Swami Prabhavananda's work was accorded such distinction by this venerable body.

Alan Arkin often attended Vedanta Society events before he moved east. In his expressive voice, Arkin's narration of six Swami Vivekananda lectures as audio recordings are sold by the Society to the public.<sup>2</sup> In his autobiography *Halfway Through the Door*, published in 1979, Arkin relates that after 1969 the practice of meditative yoga and detachment made him more peaceful and hopeful, and that he found more pleasure in life. Arkin has a distinguished resume, winning the Academy Award, Golden Globe Award, New York Film Critics Award, and Tony Award plus receiving several nominations.<sup>3</sup>

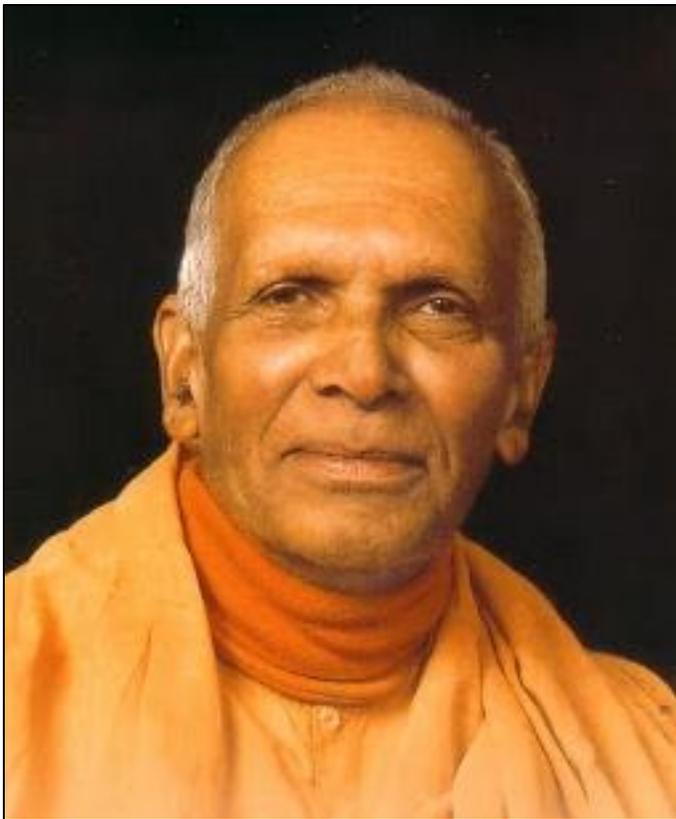
The period immediately after Swami Prabhavananda's passing produced a few works that memorialized him and celebrated his contributions to the spiritual life of the authors. Christopher Isherwood incorporated much of his *An*

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\* Coauthored by Gopal Stavig and Sister Gayatriprana

*Approach to Vedanta*, written in 1963, into the more comprehensive, autobiographical *My Guru and His Disciple*, published in 1980. In a delightful and sincere manner, the memoir tells of Isherwood's Vedantic experiences and of his close relationship with his guru 1939–1976. Relying heavily on his diary and novelistic talents, he produced what is essentially a subjective autobiographical history of the Vedanta movement in Southern California. Over half the volume covers his period of religious conversion, up to the year 1945. He candidly admits that there always remained some inner tension between his conflicting sensual and spiritual natures; between his Vedantic life and that of a novelist and a Hollywood scriptwriter and bon vivant. The book was honored as one of the “100 Most Important Spiritual Books of the 20th Century” by a panel of writers for *Spirituality & Health* convened by Philip Zaleski and HarperCollins publishers.<sup>4</sup> It received much critical acclaim. And it received a nomination for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in History and Biography in 1980. The *Times* citation (October 26, 1980) said in part:

With those qualities of candor, clear-headed observation and breath of human interest that marks his best writing, Isherwood uses journals, recollections, and subsequent reflections to tell the story of a sophisticated Western man's engagement with a sophisticated Eastern man's spiritual authority.



Swami Ranganathananda

Leo Dile translated the book into French in 1982, and Marco Papi into Italian in 1989.<sup>5</sup>

Cliff Johnson, who also wrote under the name of Clive Johnson, in 1980, published the diary of a close friend and fellow Vedantist, Nancy Pope Mayorga. The autobiographical *Hunger of the Soul* describes her inner spiritual journey of this short story writer. Previously, Johnson edited *Vedanta An Anthology of Hindu Scripture, Commentary, and Poetry* in 1971 for Harper & Row, under the supervision of Swami Prabhavananda. The anthology traces Hinduism's earliest beginnings with the Vedas and Upanishads, includes the Epics, Puranas, Tantra, and mystic poets, and continues through to its living representatives in Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, and Sri Ramakrishna.

One of the most notable visiting speakers was Swami Ranganathananda (1908-2005). He visited the Society and offered stimulating discourses during the years 1969, 1976, 1978-1979, 1981-1982, and 1984-1985. Becoming a disciple of Swami Shivananda in 1926, he served as the President of the Ramakrishna Order from 1998 to 2005. He received the auspicious blessing from Swami Akhandananda, “Mother Saraswati will dance on your tongue.” Being the most outstanding orator in the Ramakrishna Order, his numerous visits to Los Angeles were part of his many extensive worldwide speaking engagements from 1946 to 1986 that encompassed over fifty countries. As a world ambassador of Vedanta, Ranganathananda spoke day after day brilliantly and

tirelessly for hours at a stretch, without notes and in varying locations. His spiritual and cultural talks blended Eastern and Western thought wonderfully, combining ancient wisdom with modern scientific concepts

## 2. A Changing Profile in Literary, Creative, and Other Activities (1985-1989)

From 1985 to 1991 some of the same players continued to contribute to the intellectual life supporting the VSSC, but there were, in addition, signs of fresh initiatives, some focused on Swami Prabhavananda and his legacy, but others moving on to more general Vedantic themes and texts. A period of intellectual inactivity had produced a challenge, and the response was an intellectual and cultural renaissance. With the exception of Katherine (Prasanna) Whitmarsh (1897-1992), the renewed

creativity during this time centered around the nuns of the Santa Barbara Convent and the Hollywood and Trabuco monks. What followed is a long series of highly impressive and prolific publications.

The year 1985 saw the publication of Prasanna Whitmarsh's in-depth *Concordance to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by

Swami Nikhilananda, a translation of M.'s Bengali *Kathamrita*. This magnificent, easy-to-use reference manual of over five hundred pages is comprehensive. It lists thousands of key words and phrases arranged alphabetically and cross-referenced. The volume is helpful, not only in finding what Sri Ramakrishna said on different subjects, but also in locating specific stories and in identifying the people he met on various occasions.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vidyatmananda said about it:

This must be one of the best and most complete scriptural indexes ever devised. Its publication is a major event in the Ramakrishna chronicle. The Concordance is a tool capable of making the serious study of Ramakrishna's life and teaching very much easier and infinitely more profound. Untold thousands of future Ramakrishna enthusiasts will reverently thank its compiler.... Every word Sri Ramakrishna uttered, every teaching he gave, every example he used, every song he sang or listened to, every person he addressed his remarks to may quickly be found by page number and position.<sup>7</sup>



Katherine (Prasanna) Whitmarsh

Prasanna and her assistants devoted fifteen years to compiling the *Concordance*. Such a work of dedication can be viewed as the fruit of a long association with Vedanta,

which in her case went back to her childhood at Ridgely. When Swami Vivekananda visited Ridgely in 1899, he played with the three Whitmarsh children who lived there and gave them pennies as prizes for running races. Vivekananda held the youngest child, almost two-year-old Katherine Whitmarsh on his lap. According to Prasanna, her father Theodore, "loved Swamiji and he said that when everything went wrong, he would sit down and think of Swamiji and then everything became all right again. He used to read Swamiji to me when I was growing up and talked to me about him."

Prasanna dearly loved her great-aunt Josephine MacLeod (Tantine), the close disciple of Vivekananda who became an important and positive influence in her life. Prasanna was a member of the VSSC from 1949 until her passing. In 1969, she built a house directly across from the temple at 938 Ladera Lane in Santa Barbara. Four years later she turned it over to the Vedanta Society, reserving a life tenure in the dwelling. She had the unique distinction of being the last known living devotee in the world to meet Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Atmajnanananda who joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1981, holds a Ph.D. in Sanskrit and Oriental Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. He translated Jiva Gosvamin's (1513-1598), *Tattvasandarbhā: A Study on the Philosophical and Sectarian Development of the Gaudiya Vaisnava Movement* (1986) with his own copious commentary under his pre-monastic name. This 16th century work, written by one of the greatest theologians India has ever produced, is a classic in Vaishnava literature. In the *Tattvasandarbhā*, Jiva Gosvamin discusses the valid sources of Divine knowledge (pramanas) such as reason and sense perception and considers revealed sound in the form of the religious scriptures (Shabda) as ultimate, particularly the *Bhagavata Purana*. Gaudiya refers to the Sri Chaitanya branch of Vaishnavism.

In 1988 Pravrajika Prabhaprana (1915-1998) completed the twenty-four page "The Vedanta Society of Southern California: An Oral History" taken by Edith Tipple which, though still unpublished, has provided much material for this manuscript. It is a very useful interpersonal source for people interested in the history of the Santa Barbara Center. The same year Prabhaprana also put together an informative piece on Sister Lalita for *Vedanta Kesari*. She was uniquely qualified to write on these subjects, as Prabhavananda had originally designated her the manager of the Santa Barbara convent in 1947. In addition, she helped Sister Lalita during her final illness. Pravrajika Varadaprana mentioned:

Prabhaprana drew many people to the temple and convent in Santa Barbara. Her motherly warmth and perceptive judgment helped those who came to her for advice or consolation. Her generous, loving heart also extended to

whomever came within her orbit—devotees, friends, children, and animals. She remained steadfastly devoted to her guru and spiritual life to the end.<sup>8</sup>

Another contribution from Santa Barbara came from Pravrajika Brahma-prana who, with her associates, compiled and



Swami Atulananda

edited Swami Atulananda's (1870-1966) *With the Swamis in America and India* (1988). Part I gives a succinct and informative biographical sketch of a man who closely associated with Swamis Abhedananda, Trigunatitananda, and Turiyananda. Atulananda lived in Vedanta monasteries in both America and India. Part II is a reprint of *With the Swamis in America* (1938), which provides historical insights concerning the early days of the Vedanta Movement in America, particularly under Turiyananda. The creation of Part III, which is the major section of the volume, was inspired and guided by Swami Swahananda. It is comprised of letter-extracts arranged chronologically within each subsection, drawn from two hundred and fifty letters written by Atulananda to Ida Ansell (Ujjvala) over a period of more than fifty years, from 1901 to 1954. The letters are replete with the quality of wisdom that only a person of high spiritual attainment could produce, such as:

Everywhere that joy is present; it lies at the base of all existence. The universe is an expression of God's joy. The flower tries to express it, man, beast – all manifestation is an attempt to express the inner joy. In life, in death, in happiness, in pain – deep underneath that joy is at work. The sages perceive that and therefore they are so happy under all conditions. They do not care for good and evil; they see Ananda everywhere.<sup>9</sup>

Brahma-prana is currently listed in *Who's Who in*

*America* and in *Who's Who in the World*.<sup>10</sup>

The literary work of the Society gathered momentum on a number of fronts, with new impetus coming from the Hollywood and Trabuco Monasteries. Vedanta Press in Hollywood compiled, edited, and published a collection of essays written by Christopher Isherwood and edited by Brahmachari Nirvana Chaitanya titled *The Wishing Tree* (1987), in which Isherwood tells us about his guru, his road to conversion, and other literary concerns. It is a transition book, in that it continued to rely on the legacy of Isherwood. The book is described as, "A fascinating collection of articles ... personal, reflective, moving essays that gently nudge the reader towards an understanding of Eastern thought. As lean and elegant as Isherwood's better known works, these pieces bristle with provocation" (*Kirkus Reviews*).

In many ways, the main creative work at that time was in the visual and performing arts. Swami Tadatmananda (1932-2008) whom Swami Prabhavananda described as an "artistic genius," was at the forefront. Based at the Trabuco Monastery, Tadatmananda spent nearly fifty years steadily creating inspired works of religious art that have been enthusiastically sought by devotees throughout the world. In the 1960s he painted a large portrait of Sri Ramakrishna that was placed above the altar in the Santa Barbara Temple. To support the principle of universality, he also painted portraits of Jesus Christ and Gautama

the Buddha for the walls either side of the podium. His work is known for its exceptional purity of style and intuitive grasp of its subjects. Tadatmananda's portraits of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Jesus Christ, and Buddha are also located in the shrine of the Seattle Temple. And his 2x3-ft. oil painting on canvas of Sri Ramakrishna hangs on the wall at the Trabuco Canyon monastery.

Tadatmananda also painted colorful portraits of great spiritual figures such as Vivekananda, Brahmananda, all sixteen direct monastic disciples of Ramakrishna in a group, Krishna, and Ramana Maharshi, as well as various scenes from the Ramakrishna/Holy Mother history. Tadatmananda said, "I just feel fortunate that I was able to do these religious paintings and was encouraged by Swami Prabhavananda to do so."<sup>11</sup> His long spiritual practice and his vision live on through his art.



Swami Tadatmananda

Ralph Stuart (Dipak) has taken the lead in a project to archive and make available fine art reproductions of Tadatmananda's paintings and drawings. These inspiring works have been digitally scanned at museum-quality high resolution. Using the digital files, prints on canvas (giclée) and photographic art paper have been made available.<sup>12</sup> To view his classic artwork on the Internet, consult: [vedanta.zenfolio.com](http://vedanta.zenfolio.com) and [tadat-art.com](http://tadat-art.com).

### 3. New Developments in the Vedanta Movement in the West (1990-1999)

The period prior to and including 1989 had built up quite a momentum, not only in the VSSC, but also in the Ramakrishna Movement generally. The succeeding period, to which we now turn, showed signs of continuing growth and (perhaps as a result of the momentum itself) new developments that tapped fresh sources of inspiration. More importantly, non-monastics, both university professors, and devotees, began making their contributions to the Vedanta literature.

The literary work in Santa Barbara continued. Pravrajika Varadaprana, a senior Santa Barbara nun, made nine literary contributions to the *Prabuddha Bharata*, *Vedanta Kesari*, and *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture* from 1987 to 1997, including "Memories of Swami Prabhavananda" in *Prabuddha Bharata*, July 1992. It is an excellent study of the philosophy and life of her beloved guru. She also wrote a very informative pamphlet titled *Vedanta in Southern California: A Brief History* (1993). This valuable manuscript is a condensation of her article, "The Vedanta Society of Southern California: Its History and Traditions" (*Prabuddha Bharata*, January-February 1993). These two sources are often cited in this publication, since they inform us of many little-known facts concerning the history of the VSSC.

Another tribute to Swami appeared in 1993 in the form of an Internet presentation, [The Making of a Devotee](http://www.ramakrishna.eu/en/vidyatmananda/index.php) ([www.ramakrishna.eu/en/vidyatmananda/index.php](http://www.ramakrishna.eu/en/vidyatmananda/index.php)). Swami Vidyatmananda's 126,000-word autobiography is a valuable historical legacy. He preserved a great deal of pertinent material on the VSSC during 1950-1966 when he was a key monastic member of the Society. Information from this source is used in the present document and appears on the Internet in its entirety.<sup>13</sup>

In 1993 Elizabeth Harding (Usha) wrote *Kali: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar*, an authentic and inspiring account of the Mother Goddess. Reviewers of the work have made the following comments, "

A fascinating pilgrimage to one of the world's oldest surviving active temples of the great Goddess. Required reading for all of those interested in Goddess traditions (Barbara Walker).

[Harding] has performed a great service by filling a crucial gap in the Mother Goddess literature available in English... Ms. Harding's style is simple and engaging. Writing with assurance and warmth, the book presents even the most challenging ideas in a clear and understandable way.... [It] is extremely informative, offering charming and enlightening details on Durga Puja [and] the daily worship of Kali in the Dakshineswar temple<sup>14</sup> (*Vedanta Kesari*, April 1994).

That same year Usha founded and became President of the Kali Mandir Temple in Laguna Beach, California. It functions as a traditional Hindu temple dedicated to the worship of the Divine Mother Kali, for a one-hour worship performed daily. Throughout the year, pujas are held for other goddesses such as Durga and Lakshmi.<sup>15</sup>

Vedanta Press was active during this period with the publication in 1994 of *Living Wisdom: Vedanta in the West*, edited by Pravrajika Vrajaprana of the Santa Barbara Convent. This volume is a collection of forty-three essays that originally appeared in the VSSC magazine *Vedanta and the West* during the Swami Prabhavananda era, as well as additional sources. Although essentially a transition book, *Living Wisdom* met with critical success. Reviewers described the anthology as “one of the finest books that I have read in recent years. It is worth its weight in gold” (*Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture*, July 1999). “An excellent sourcebook for students of world religions and spiritual seekers in general and a touchstone for Vedantic practitioners. This work is highly recommended for academic and large public libraries” (*Library Journal*, July 1994).

Five essays also written by Pravrajika Vrajaprana dealt with Josiah John Goodwin (1870-1898) and appeared in *Vedanta Kesari*, then were published as *My Faithful Goodwin*. Goodwin served as Swami Vivekananda’s personal secretary and transcribed many of Swamiji’s speeches from his own shorthand notes. They were later published in a series of books during Vivekananda’s lifetime. In a letter to Goodwin’s mother after her son’s passing, Vivekananda wrote:

The debt of gratitude I owe him can never be repaid, and those who think they have been helped by any thought of mine ought to know that almost every word of it was published through the untiring and most unselfish exertions of Mr. Goodwin. In him I have lost a friend true as steel, a disciple of never-failing devotion, a worker who knew not what tiring was (CW, IX:106-07).

An American-born Ramakrishna Vedanta swami who was affiliated with the VSSC early on is Swami Yogeshananda. He visited Trabuco in 1945 and became a monk at the Trabuco Monastery from October 1949 to 1956, receiving brahmacharya vows in 1955 from Swami Prabhavananda at the same time as John Yale (later Swami Vidyatmananda). During his sojourn in the monastery, he did an excellent job of maintaining its diary. His magnum opus, *Six Lighted Windows* (1995), is an extremely informative account of his personal memories of six of the Indian swamis he lived with in the West. Seventy-three pages cover his association with Swami Prabhavananda in Southern California, primarily during the 1950s. David Nelson (Devadatta) described Yogeshananda as “a born storyteller, whose informal narrative unfolds with an authentic recreation of times, places and people. With rare exceptions, he remains an unobtrusive presence through whose eyes we are privileged to witness the intimacies of daily life with these six men of God in all their endearing humanity and spiritual grandeur, and to partake of their teachings.” Yogeshananda said, “Whatever spirituality is, or whatever could be, comprehended by me has been revealed continually as I lived with these men.”<sup>16</sup> In 2010 he wrote *Four More Lighted Windows* on Swamis Lokeswarananda, Asheshananda, Shantaswarupananda, and Shraddhananda. In addition over the years the Swami authored the books, *The Visions of Sri Ramakrishna*, *The Way of the Hindu*, *Waking Up*, *Ports of Call*, *Stories that Never Grow Old*, and *Learning Listening Loving*.

Articles on Sister Christine (1866-1930) written by Pravrajika Vrajaprana were published in *Vedanta Kesari* from 1989-1990. In 1996 they were incorporated into the hundred-page biography, *A Portrait of Sister Christine*. The book explains the life events and characteristics of Christine, based largely on the many letters that Swami Vivekananda wrote to her. This is the first biography of Christine, who devoted two decades to organizing the girls’ school founded by Sister Nivedita in India. After meeting Swami Vivekananda Christine stated, “We have come to you as we would go to Jesus, if he were still on earth.” She also said:

The power that emanated from this mysterious being was so great that one all but shrank from it. It was overwhelming. It threatened to sweep everything before it.... He had a power of attraction so great that those who came near him, men and women alike, even children, fell under the magic spell he cast.... I had come to one in whom I had seen such spirituality as I had never even dreamed of. From his lips I heard truths unthought of before.<sup>17</sup>

In 1996 Vedanta Press also published Swami Shraddhananda’s *Seeing God Everywhere*, edited by Vrajaprana. It is a valuable guide for spiritual aspirants. The swami was initiated in 1925 by Swami Shivananda, under whom he received special training and spiritual guidance at Belur Math. For twelve years he served as Swami Virajananda’s private secretary while the latter was President of the Order (1939-1951), and then as the editor of the *Udbodhan* magazine 1952-1956, a Bengali language journal of the Ramakrishna Order. After taking charge of the Sacramento Center in 1970, Shraddhananda (1907-1996), a well-

known author in Bengali, visited our center in 1970, 1976-1982, 1988-1989. Often he would offer classes for several days in a row in Hollywood.<sup>18</sup> Professor Visvanath Chatterjee wrote:

*Seeing God Everywhere* is more than good; it is, in a word, wonderful. In more senses than one, it is the precious life-blood of a master spirit. Its every page is instinct with the vibrant sincerity and wisdom of a true and illumined soul. It has the power of transmitting the life of all persons, irrespective of sex, caste or creed.... *Seeing God Everywhere* is a beautiful spiritual oasis in the unpleasant material wilderness of modern living and a stupendous source of inspiration for the transcendental transformation of modern man (*Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission of Culture*, March 1999).

Huston Smith added, "Swami Shraddhananda is a deep and original thinker. His book conveys the beauty and joy of mystical experience, while giving practical suggestions for navigating the search. To say that it is worth reading doesn't begin to do justice to the book."

Pravrajika Brahma-prana worked as the general editor on the ninth volume of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* completed in 1997 under the supervision of the Advaita Ashrama. She utilized the talents, hard work, and generosity of about fifty monastics and devotees in Southern California.

In its Preface, the publisher Swami Mumukshananda writes:

We would like to express our gratitude to Pravrajika Brahma-prana under the guidance of Swami Swahananda, and the monastics and devotees at the Vedanta Society of Southern California and other American Vedanta Centres, who have rendered us immense help in collecting material, editing, composing, proofreading, indexing and in fact in everything at each stage of the project over a period of the last few long years.

As mentioned in Chapter VII, *Mahapurush Maharaj As We Knew Him: Reminiscences of Swami Sivananda* (1997) was translated by Swami Swahananda and edited by Swami Atmajnanananda. It is a collection of twenty-six reminiscences of Swamis and lay disciples who personally knew Swami Shivananda (1854-1934), a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who was for nearly twelve years the second President of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Sarvatmananda who had the good fortune to be blessed with his holy company wrote, "We led the life of sadhus with him at Belur Math just as children lead the life of the family with their parents, receiving great love and affection. We never felt any sense of reserve with him on account of his important position. We loved him and delighted in his company, and he also had great affection and concern for us. All these events are the holiest memories of our lives and our most sacred support. The passage of these many years has not faded these memories. On the contrary, they shine more brightly and bring more sweetness. I feel great joy now when I think of them. And I wonder just how great this Mahapurush was with whom we dwelled."

In 1998, long-time VSSC member Indira Christopherson, a professional actress, composed all of the music and dialogue for a full-length version of the *Ramayana*, one of the two great Indian epics. The masterful fully-costumed performance retells the wonderful story with all its spiritual metaphors, creatively employing the sounds of modern musical instruments in a highly original manner.

Another VSSC member, Dr. Amrita Salm, worked as the lead editor of an 888-page *A Portrait of Sri Ramakrishna* (1998) published by the Institute of Culture. This work is a translation of the Bengali biography by Akshay Kumar Sen (1854-1923), an intimate householder disciple of Ramakrishna, who witnessed many episodes in the Master's life. The biography offers new information and insights about Ramakrishna previously unknown to English readers. Vivekananda wrote, "Just now I read Akshaya's book. Give him a hundred thousand hearty embraces from me. Through his pen Shri Ramakrishna is manifesting himself.... Well, I do not find a single irrelevant word in it. I cannot tell in words the joy I have experienced by reading his book" (CW, VI:334).

William Page, a teacher at an English Language Center in Bangkok wrote:

There are not many books that are guaranteed to put a devotee in an elevated mood after a few hours of reading, but this is one of them. The editors/translators have performed an enormous service to English-reading devotees of Sri Ramakrishna by translating Akshay Kumar Sen's verse biography *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* from Bengali into English. In doing so, they have made a major contribution to the Ramakrishna canon.<sup>19</sup>

When patrons come to the Santa Barbara bookstore and ask for “something short and understandable” on Vedanta, the response has been and continues to be *Vedanta: A Simple Introduction* (1999). It is a concise and delightful ninety-page primer authored by Pravrajika Vrajaprana:

Clear, easy to comprehend, and concise, this small book is packed full of pertinent information that addresses the core issues of life, and gives a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of Vedanta in a way that makes it accessible to everyone.... I highly recommend it. Everyone will benefit from the author’s delightfully charming and spirited way of presenting this most ancient philosophy in a modern light, which makes it relevant and practical for all of us today (*Yoga International*).<sup>20</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna loved to have someone sing for him, but he generally entered into samadhi before the song ended. His disciples tell us about music, “The greatest aid to the practice of keeping God in memory is, perhaps, music. The Lord says to Narada, the great instructor of bhakti, ‘I do not live in heaven, nor do I live in the heart of the yogi, but where My devotees sing My praise, there am I.’ Music has such tremendous power over the human mind; it brings it to concentration in a moment” (Swami Vivekananda). “You must remember that God can also be approached through music. Music is ‘sound-Brahman’” (Swami Brahmananda). “Singing the name and glory of the Lord with other devotees helps to increase devotion and faith” (Swami Saradananda).<sup>21</sup>

Possessing innate talent, Pravrajika Varadaprana’s (1923-2014) exquisite and original musical compositions were her greatest gifts, and her Vedanta compositions are today widely performed in Vedanta Centers around the country. She joined the convent at age 21 in 1944, becoming one of the original nuns of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. When Swami Prabhavananda founded Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara in 1947, she moved there and remained as a nun for nearly seventy years, until her passing. In 1949 she embarked on the first of five pilgrimages to India. In 1959 she, together with Pravrajika Prabhaprana, was one of the five Western women (pancha-pranas) to first take formal Hindu monastic vows in the Ramakrishna Order of India. With every pilgrimage Varadaprana brought back numerous transcriptions of Indian devotional songs that have been widely used ever since. As a lifelong pujarini, she taught puja to several generations of nuns who followed her. She grew more joyful, sweeter, and more loving as she gained in years. In her later years her presence was a love that accompanies a long, noble, and holy life.

During this time, Hollywood demonstrated an awakening in music. In 1994, Swami Atmavidyananda wrote a highly successful musical, the “Vivekananda Oratorio” in which passages from Swami Vivekananda’s writings were set to music that called for six soloists and a men’s chorus, as classical Western oratorio. The oratorio is a musical composition with a religious theme, often telling a sacred story, in the style of Handel’s *Messiah*. In the Vivekananda Oratorio, the spiritual journey begins by asking the question: How can we find peace, love and freedom in this world? The aspirant goes through a series of nineteen ascending stages until at last the realization of our true divine nature brings us to God and to eternal peace. At each stage, Vivekananda’s teachings give us the answer to the problem. Emphasis is on meditation and control of the mind; discrimination and assertion of the truth; love of God; and unselfish service.

In mid-September 2013, Mrs. Nirupama Rao, the Indian Ambassador to the United States, and her entourage paid a surprise visit to the Hollywood Center. Her mission was to contact Swami Atmavidyananda. By chance, she had heard and greatly enjoyed the *Vivekananda Oratorio* on YouTube. She was most impressed that it was written in a Western musical style. She mentioned a Vivekananda celebration scheduled for October at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. She wanted a selection to be sung at that event. As a result, the two-hour cultural program included Sonya Subbayya Sutton, the music director of the World Bank/IMF Chorus, conducting a rendition of Swami Atmavidyananda’s “Vivekananda Oratorio.” The Vedanta Society was also represented by a closing speech by Swami Atmajnanananda, resident minister at the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, D.C.<sup>22</sup>

Atmavidyananda also wrote the words and music for the short opera *Mountain Journey* presented in concert at the Society on June 2, 2002. The theme emphasizes that different religions are like varying mountain paths leading to the same goal. This was followed by “Ramakrishna and His Teachings” presented at the Ramakrishna Puja on March 1, 2009 and later at other locations. The acclaimed oratorio by Atmavidyananda is written in the Western Classical style for mixed chorus with

at least seven soloists. It presents many different facets of Ramakrishna's teachings, including three parables, using devotional songs and musical dramatizations.<sup>23</sup>

The late Peter Shneidre (Hiranyagarbha) composed the script, lyrics and music for four successful musical plays performed by the Truth is One Choir at various locations. The well-received productions, which narrate the lives of religious innovators, include, *Jesus, A Folk Opera*, with seventeen original songs, in December 1998, 2001, and 2004; the upbeat and uplifting *Chaitanya* with a cast of sixteen in September 1999, and *Buddha, A Folk Opera* which appeared at the Bowers Museum Courtyard in Santa Ana, California in May 2004 and performed again in 2006, as mentioned in the *LA Yoga* magazine. Another folk opera, "Vivekananda, the Lion Between Matter and Spirit," features songs based on the poems of Vivekananda. A cast of fifteen actor/singers and musicians debuted the show on July 4 and 10, 2005 as part of the festivities at Trabuco and Hollywood respectively. A piano, flute, violin and drums are used in the performances. Shneidre's adaptation of the works of Sister Nivedita has been performed annually by actress Anya Liffey at the Vivekananda House retreat in South Pasadena in July. In addition, Shneidre published *All of Love*, eight Bengali poems of Swami Vivekananda recreated as English poems, some of which appeared in Ramakrishna-Vedanta journals in India.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. The New Millennium (2000-2018)

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the VSSC continued on its way, with many of the old guard still productive, and a group of new players entering its literary and creative scene. Another devotee active in the literature of the Ramakrishna Movement is Asim Chaudhuri. A retired engineer, his first biography, *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago—New Findings*, came out in 2000. Written in a clear and crisp style, the book provides, with rigorous attention to detail, several new discoveries about Vivekananda's activities in Illinois and Indiana. In the foreword to the volume Mary Louise Burke (Sister Gargi) explained:

Outstanding among these dedicated sleuths is Asim Chaudhuri, who has supplied Swamiji's fellow devotees not only with many details, but has as well uncovered material and information that adds substantially to our knowledge. Indeed, he has unraveled a mystery that has puzzled devotees for many years and has discovered many other fascinating facts, hidden until now.... There cannot be enough books that dwell with painstaking accuracy, as does this excellent book by Asim Chaudhuri, on the details of so unique a life as Swamiji's.

Asim wrote with his second biography, *Swami Vivekananda in America—New Findings* in 2008, documenting Vivekananda's visit to fourteen other states. This book gives people who are interested in following Vivekananda's footprints in their own state an opportunity to do so. Based on diligent field research of many years, it sheds new light on Vivekananda's travels in America. The author uncovered many newspaper and journal sources written during the 1893-1902 period on Vivekananda that have not previously appeared in Vedanta literature. In addition to Vivekananda's traveling, this manuscript also analyzes the historical perspective and relevance of his two visits. Asim completed his trilogy with *Swami Vivekananda in England and Continental Europe – New Findings* in 2015. For his exemplarily literary achievements, Asim Chaudhuri was awarded the prestigious Vivekananda Award in 2009, given by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, India.

Carolyn Kenny (Amala), who resided in San Diego as a member of the VSSC for many years, compiled in collaboration with Terrance Hohner, a one-of-a-kind study, *Chronology of Swami Vivekananda in the West* (<http://vedanta.org/vs/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/chronology2.pdf>), which was released in the year 2000. It is literally a day-by-day account of the life of Vivekananda during his years spent in the West, providing a daily record from July 1893 until December 1900. It chronicles where the swami resided and who was his host; the title of the lecture he delivered; with whom he corresponded; his social engagements and the people he met, and other key activities. The data is drawn primarily from Burke's six volume *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. The page and volume number in Burke's six books are given for each day's events. In addition, a collection of photographs are provided, and Hohner has expanded the Chronology to include a list of hundreds of influential Westerners that Vivekananda made contact with, catalogued by profession. The 2nd edition of the entire Chronology can be viewed on [vedanta.org](http://vedanta.org).

Carolyn Kenny's family has a stellar Vedanta presence! Swami Vedarupananda her son, has been the resident monk at the Vivekananda House in Pasadena, California for many years. Her daughter, Pravrajika Bhavaprana, is a resident nun at the Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara. Not surprisingly, Amala said that she felt each of her literary efforts was a contribution to her spiritual development. It helped to keep her mind on Vedanta and, best of all, it inspired a renewed dedication.

In Santa Barbara, David Nelson (Devadatta Kali) undertook new literary initiatives. Under the name of Devadatta Kali, he published *In Praise of the Goddess: The Devimahatmya* (2003), a translation with a commentary of the Chandi, a 6th century spiritual classic within the Shakta Tantric tradition. In the view of Dr. Sthaneshwar Timalina (Washington University St. Louis), "[His] effort to bring an authentic translation fulfills the needs of an increasing number of devotees of the Mother for an accurate manual for practice. His presentation of one of the most ancient cultures of the goddess worship illuminates an essential primary source for the growing scholarship on Tantric studies and provides a lucid analysis that ably meets scholarly purposes."<sup>25</sup>

Continuing in the tradition begun by the *Concordance* (in fact, she gathered the Examples Appendix for the *Concordance*), Edith D. Tipple (Nalini), also from Santa Barbara, compiled a work titled *What the Disciples Said about It*. After completing a fifteen-year labor of love and sharing photocopies with a few interested friends, she offered it to Advaita Ashrama, which published it in 2005. The book conclusively lists the teachings of twelve monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Over six thousand pertinent teachings are recorded in the anthology, drawn from nearly thirty sources, many of them no longer in print. They are classified into over two hundred topics (e.g., Brahman, devotion, faith, grace, guru, japam, karma, liberation, ritual, samadhi, worship, and many more), and in all cases, the original source of the quotation is given. Her anthology provides an in-depth study of the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, but it can also be used simply as a window for viewing practical applications of specific spiritual practice. The essential meaning of several books is compiled into one volume.<sup>26</sup>

Response to the work was overwhelming. Swami Atmarupananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California wrote, "Many thanks for your wonderful labor of love. The volume is of great value and we will treasure it. Besides its general value, it's a lecturer's dream come true." Pravrajika Vishuddhaprana of the Vedanta Society of Northern California: "What a huge and valuable piece of work you have done!... We certainly will want to carry it in our bookshop." Swami Asaktananda head of the Ramakrishna Mission in Narendrapur: "Your work has been splendid! This book is a valuable asset to the Society." Swami Sarvagatananda at the Vedanta Society of Boston: "What a valuable book you have presented!... Congratulations! These are very useful and meaningful for all the devotees of the Lord." Swami Tathagatananda at the Vedanta Society of New York (Westside): "I am extremely glad to know your labor of love was not in vain and that it has been published. Your signal contribution in disseminating the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna will be remembered by grateful readers. This is a real dedicated labor of real devotees like you."

Philip Glass composed an oratorio, *The Passion of Ramakrishna*, for the grand opening of the new Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa. It was performed on September 16, 2006 by the Orange County Pacific Symphony Orchestra conducted by Carl St. Clair, and the Pacific Chorale directed by John Alexander.

Timothy Mangan, a music critic for the *Orange County Register*, in Santa Ana, California judged the forty-five-minute work as:

... a winner. It is direct, interesting, moving. The subject matter – the life, teachings and death of a 19th-century Indian holy man, told largely in his own words – seems to have genuinely inspired and revived the composer out of his old formulas to write something fresh. Some of it doesn't even sound like Glass (though much does). Ramakrishna speaks via the choir (the Pacific Chorale), giving his words and wisdom an extra-human quality. The words of his wife and devotees are given to solo singers, thus creating a fascinating dialogue between the terrestrial and celestial. With its crisp word setting (usually one note per syllable) and short sentence phrases, the narrative and drama remain front and center. The orchestra provides drive and mood – the latter quickly changing or ruminative, as need be – and introduces spicy harmonies and jagged rhythms, not just the usual Glassian thrum

Five years later Phillip Glass' *The Passion of Ramakrishna* returned to the Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa. Timothy Mangan, wrote (in part) on March 12, 2011:

The 45-minute work, for choir, vocal soloists and large orchestra, tells the story of the life, death and transfiguration of Ramakrishna, a 19th-century Indian mystic. It is based on his own writings and those of his followers. That may sound both touchy-feely and hippie-dippie, but Glass renders it all with such immediacy that you feel as if you're in the very room with these people.... It should make a terrific recording.<sup>27</sup>

Philip Glass is one of the most prolific and best-known avant-garde composers in the United States. For his innovative symphonies, operas, and film scores he has won Obie, Golden Globe, and Cannes International Film Festival Awards, and received an Academy Award nomination.<sup>28</sup>

The *Vedanta Free Press* began publication in May 1992 in an attempt to inject greater enthusiasm and momentum into the American Vedantic movement. It was "committed to the growth of Vedanta in the West, being convinced that Vedanta has relevance to contemporary Western life and culture.... [It] seeks to encourage critical discussions among Vedantists ... [and] seeks to explore new ways in which Vedanta can be expressed in a Western cultural context."<sup>29</sup> Cliff Johnson was its Coordinating Editor and Ken Walker its Secretary/Treasurer.

After three years of open discussion, during which some of the founding group dropped out and others came in, the balance of gravity shifted to the East Coast, with John Schlenck and Erik Johns of New York and Beatrice Bruteau of North Carolina. The name was changed to *American Vedantist (AV)* and John Schlenck became Coordinating Editor.

The following year (1996) Vedanta West Communications (VWC) was incorporated in New York to communicate Vedanta through Western language and culture. VWC became the publisher of *AV* and also of recordings of Western Vedantic music. When Schlenck's health deteriorated in 2007, a new Coordinating Editor for the *AV* was necessary and, with Swami Swahananda's encouragement, Gary Kemper of the Hollywood Center took the post in the summer of 2008.

Before assuming the editorship, Kemper wrote to Swami Atmasthananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Order, for his blessing. Atmasthananda, who received initiation in 1938 from Vijnanananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had previously visited the VSSC in 1998. He was already a reader of the *AV*, and replied with an enthusiastic endorsement:

A few years back, a group of dedicated Vedantists of New York started a quarterly journal *American Vedantist*, for the people of America who are unable to reach the Vedanta societies. Generally, a journal is the mouth organ of a particular movement; *American Vedantist* is also no exception. It is purely and absolutely dedicated to the Vedanta movement, acting as a bridge between the old and the new Vedantists. Through *American Vedantist*, the Vedanta movement will go forward. I hope and pray that *American Vedantist* will be on the soil of America for decades and throw the light of Vedanta to every corner of America.

Kemper served as Coordinating Editor for three years. Meanwhile, he took vows as Br. Shankara and was sent by Swami Swahananda to serve as resident minister of the Vedanta Center of Atlanta. Due to his heavy responsibilities there, in 2011 he had to give back the editorship to John Schlenck, whose health had improved. The *AV* published its last print issue in 2013 and continues as an online journal.

In 2010 Gopal Stavig's *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, was published by Advaita Ashrama with the thorough editorship of Swami Shuddhidananda. This volume of nearly 1,000 pages contains sections on roughly 600 admirers. They are classified into two groupings. First are the many Westerners who actually met Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Saradananda, Swami Turiyananda, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Trigunatitananda, and/or their brother disciples. The book describes their associations with Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and/or the Swamis, their background, and what they had to say about them. New biographical information that had not been previously found in Vedanta Society books appears in this volume. These people are classified in different chapters according to their vocation, e.g., devotees and supporters; religious leaders; professional writers; professors and educators; musicians, actresses, and artist; social reformers, humanitarians, and philanthropists; professionals, and business personnel. Second are the many prominent Westerners who wrote praises of Ramakrishna and the other disciples, including Leo Tolstoy, William James, Maurice Bloomfield, Romain Rolland, Carl Jung, Albert Einstein, Aldous Huxley, Arnold Toynbee, J. D. Salinger, Joseph

Campbell, Philip Glass, and many more in chronological order. These persons' involvement with India and its religion is also stressed.

Swami Bodhasarananda, President of Advaita Ashrama described *Western Admirers*:

It is a classic work of research by Mr. Gopal Stavig Ph.D. who is based in Southern California. He has been closely associated with the Vedanta Centre of Hollywood for about five decades. A disciple of the late Swami Prabhavananda, he has presented massive information in this book.... There is no denying the fact that this book is a meticulously researched out documentation of a large number of persons, mainly westerners, associated with Ramakrishna and his disciples and their thoughts, directly or indirectly. Their background and vocation are presented in brief, and also, in most of the cases, the accolades they showered. All this makes this work unquestionably important, both for the scholars interested in studying the western mind coming in touch with these spiritual luminaries as well as for the ordinary devotee. For the former the book is a mine of information presented precisely, and for the latter, it is an inspiring account of western admiration for Ramakrishna and his disciples and Indian thought.... This systematic arrangement facilitates easy access to the personalities the reader wishes to know about. The work is copiously referenced, letting the scholars make further probings. At the end of the book the author has supplied seven 'Appendices' which we are sure would be of much help to the scholars.

In *Vedanta Kesari*, Professor N. V. C. Swamy, Svyasa Yoga University, Bangalore wrote:

Needless to say, this is a remarkable book. The author has presented a vast amount of information, most of it new, in a style that is neither dry nor pedantic, but eminently readable. It is an eye-opener to most Indians what an impact the Ramakrishna Movement has made on the Western mind, and continues to do even today.... This book is, indeed, a fitting tribute to the memory of these great savants. It is worth reading and referring to again and again as a treasure-house of precious information.

This book was followed by Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana's, *Interpreting Ramakrishna: Kali's Child Revisited* (2010). Readers of this acclaimed book have made the following comments:

In their long-awaited, in-depth, and meticulously crafted response to Jeff Kripal's highly controversial work on the life and psychology of Sri Ramakrishna, Kali's Child, not only have Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana thoroughly demolished the earlier book's thesis—which stands revealed as a house of cards, built on a foundation of faulty translations and tendentious speculations asserted as facts—they have also made an important contribution to the future of Ramakrishna studies, and to the study of Hinduism and of Indian culture more broadly.... One finds a very precise, careful, and detailed deconstruction of Kali's Child.

In their remarkably restrained response to Jeffrey Kripal's whacky treatment of Ramakrishna, the two authors mount a thoroughly researched rebuttal of his specious argument. What a pity that the North American academic establishment virtually abandoned its putative objectivity to defend Kripal's poor work and refused to acknowledge the cultural blinders that hindered his thinking.

At its core the book is a thorough refutation of the conclusions and methods of the book *Kali's Child* by Jeffrey Kripal.... Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana present a point-by-point critique of Kripal's theses and correction of his translations of the original sources in a very convincing manner.<sup>30</sup>

*Realizing God: Lectures on Vedanta* (2010), compiled and edited by Edith Tipple, is a major collection of the best lectures delivered in the West by Swami Prabhavananda between the years 1935 and 1976. It was edited so that the swami's personality would shine through the printed page. Prabhavananda possessed an extraordinary ability to make the most intricate and not easy to understand ideas exciting, understandable, and inspiring. The volume captures the swami's moods, speaking style, and personality while offering insight into a variety of topics. His highly praised talks cover fifty spiritual topics that include all aspects of religion: God, Brahman, Atman, Divine Incarnations, Upanishads, Gita, Bible, Buddha,

Christ, Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Vivekananda, Brahmananda, kundalini, reincarnation, karma, grace, how to pray, and many more topics.

The reviewer Cliff Johnson for the *American Vedantist* (Spring-Summer-Fall 2013) wrote, “Edith Tipple has put to good use her remarkable capacity for organizing and presenting spiritual literature in this wonderful collection of lectures by the former head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. The vivacity and universality of Swami Prabhavananda’s teachings are well represented in this aptly titled volume.... It is simply a delightful gathering of his lectures, fully demonstrating both his expressive personality and knowledge of the teachings of Vedanta.... Deserving special note is Tipple’s splendid short but informative biography of Swami Prabhavananda at the close of the book. It is a fitting tribute to a remarkably able representative of Vedanta to the West. She has also included an excellent, detailed index to bring the book to a close.”<sup>31</sup>

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana’s *Indian Saints and Mystics* (2010) contains twenty-seven well-researched biographical sketches of Indian saints and mystics beginning with Nivritti, Jnanadeva, Sopana, and Muktabai and ending with Mirabai. The material was originally appeared in the *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* (2001-2006).

Swami Vidyatmananda’s *Vivekananda in Europe* was published in 2012. The Swami received his training at the Vedanta Society of Southern California and then went on to become the assistant swami at Centre Vedantique in Gretz, France. The content of the book appeared as a series of articles in *Prabuddha Bharata* intermittently between March 1967 and April 1977. The material, which was the result of meticulous research by Vidyatmananda, was used extensively by Marie Louise Burke in her six volumes on Vivekananda. Written in an interesting and enjoyable style, it describes Vivekananda’s travels in France, Brittany and Normandy, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, and in the Near East during the years 1896 and 1900. There Vivekananda sowed the seeds for the further development of Indian thought.<sup>32</sup>

Amrita Salm’s *Mother of Mayavati: The Story of Charlotte Sevier and Advaita Ashrama* appeared in 2013. It is a loving portrait of a remarkable woman, Charlotte Sevier (1847-1930), who, with her husband, were devotees of Swami Vivekananda in England and in India. They provided the Ramakrishna Order with the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama situated in the Himalayas region of North India, and she later purchased Vivekananda Ashrama in Shyamalatal. After the passing of her husband, Mrs. Sevier lived at the ashram with the monastics for fifteen years. Little-known information was pieced together from journals, letters, and other British and Indian sources to form this fascinating biography. It also provides a history of Advaita Ashrama in its early years. It contains forty-nine photographs, twenty-five articles Mrs. Sevier wrote, and forty-seven previously unpublished letters.

Carol Lee Flinders, writer and author of *Enduring Grace* said about it, “What a story! Pieced together from journals and letters it fleshes out insignificant ways the history of the early years of the Ramakrishna movement. *Mother of Mayavati* is an important contribution to that history, but is memorable too, as a loving portrait of a remarkable woman.” And Pravrajika Vrajaprana of the Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara, called it, “A welcome addition to the literature about the early years of the Ramakrishna movement, both in India and the West. Glimmering with historical information little known to the general public, it brings both the remarkable life of Charlotte Sevier and the Mayavati Ashrama to vibrant life.”

Transferring from the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Convent in San Francisco, Pravrajika Gayatriprana (Jean C. MacPhail) moved to the Hollywood Center, where she stayed from 2002 to 2008. Between 1995 and 1998 she published a series of sixteen articles in the *Vedanta Kesari* that provided an interesting and detailed explanation of “How Swami Vivekananda Learned the Message of Sri Ramakrishna.” Gayatriprana explained the logical sequence through which Ramakrishna conveyed his spiritual ideas to Vivekananda in five stages of consciousness transformation and their corresponding modes of explanation. The fifth and highest spiritual state is holistic, the ability to immediately seek the whole in the part, and the resulting interconnectedness of all phenomena and their accompanying conceptualization. All of this material is discussed in detail in her comprehensive Ph.D. Dissertation *Learning in Depth: A Case Study in Twin 5x5 Matrices of Consciousness* (2013) available on the Internet.<sup>33</sup> The dissertation is over 1,000 pages in length and also covers Vivekananda’s teachings on yoga, consciousness, and samadhi in relation to those taught by Westerners like Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, New Age, Ken Wilber, Transpersonal Psychology, and many others; as well as the Indian Schools of Sankhya, Tantra, Integral Vedanta, and Sri Aurobindo.

A new venture for VSSC was translating and publishing Ramakrishna Movement literature in foreign languages. We are fortunate that in 1997 Pravrajika Dayaprana transferred from the Vedanta Society of Japan to the Hollywood Convent. She has translated Swami Vivekananda's *Inspired Talks* into Japanese. It was first published in a bi-monthly magazine and then into book form. She is also working on a translation of the Nikhilananda version of the *Isha Upanishad*. And she has written some articles for Douyuu, one of the biggest yoga groups in Japan.

Going back in time, in 1893 Vivekananda made a brief visit to some important Japanese cities on his way to America. Observing his facial resemblance with that of Buddha, many referred to him as the "Second Buddha." Due to failing health, he was not able to return to Japan in 1901-1902, in response to an invitation from Kakuzo Okakura, a brilliant Japanese aesthete. Romain Rolland's biography of Swami Vivekananda was translated into Japanese in 1931. The Vedanta Society of Japan began in 1958 with Professor Nikki Kimura of Risshyo and Calcutta University serving as its president. It was affiliated with the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984, and Swami Siddharthananda was assigned as its president. He was followed in 1993 by Swami Medhasananda. The society is located in Zushi, a small coastal resort town some thirty miles southeast of Tokyo. Mrs. Haru Nakai (1907-1999) with the assistance of Mr. Osonoi combined to undertake the difficult task of translating the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* into Japanese. They also published Part 1 of Saradananda's *Great Master*.<sup>34</sup>

In 2013 Swami Atmarupananda took a leave from Trabuco to work with a team of Belur Math monks on a long-range project of creating a rearranged edition of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. The first two volumes were published in 1907. Since then, material has continually been added. In order to keep the page sequence similar from edition to edition, the new material was added in new volumes, rather than inserted into prior existing volumes. Accordingly, if an author of a book or article cited the *Complete Works* by volume and page number, it would be valid for all editions. For example, Vivekananda's letters appear in the last five volumes. In the new edition, all letters will appear together, organized chronologically, as will be his conversations, lectures, and class talks, according to topic. Such a project requires a great deal of rearranging and some light editing. There are also plans for a third "unedited source edition," which will use original material in order to give full validity to all other editions. As well, a "critical edition" for scholars and detail-oriented devotees is in the planning stage. It will contain explanatory notes, cross-references, and extensive references for the Swami's quotes and paraphrases.<sup>35</sup>

Pravrajika Anandaprana (1922-2014) of the Santa Barbara Convent shared with close devotees her unpublished gem, *Conversations with Swami Prabhavananda* that she completed in 1987. Since that time it became *A Light to the West: The Life and Times of Swami Prabhavananda* in 2016 (edited by Pravrajika Brahmaprana). This masterpiece gives us details about Prabhavananda's early life in India and his many meetings with Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother, and eleven of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. Consisting mainly of notes gathered during her twenty-six years of association with the swami, it includes biographical information, reminiscences, and treasured sayings. This inspiring material will enlighten the reader with thoughts of spirituality.

Frances X. Clooney, SJ, Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University describes *A Light to the West* as "a wonderful record of a holy teacher and wise spiritual guide. Pravrajika Anandaprana tells the story of Swami Prabhavananda clearly and simply; his personality and wisdom shine through, so that even those who never met him can savor his presence and insight, his generosity of spirit and openness to all."

As Brahmacharini Usha, Pravrajika Anandaprana with Swami Prabhavananda as a consultant formerly wrote *A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* in 1962. Now in print as *A Brief Dictionary of Hinduism*, her book gives clear-cut definitions of six hundred Indian religious terms often used in lectures and Vedanta publications.<sup>36</sup>

In 2017, Dr. Malay Das came out with the biographical *Swami Swahananda: A Profile in Greatness*. This intimate, loving portrait, by his physician Dr. Das describes Swami Swahananda, as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his last illness. This book will remind those people who knew Swami Swahananda of the ways he touched and left an imprint on their lives. For those who did not have the good fortune to meet the swami in person, the book offers them a glimpse into the life and work of this great monk and spiritual teacher.<sup>37</sup>

The highly informative biography, *The Inspired Life of Sarah Ellen Waldo* written by Amrita Salm and Judy Howe Hayes was published in 2019. During the summer of 1895, Sarah Waldo took notes of Vivekananda's conversations at the

Thousand Island Park cottage. In 1908 it was published as *Inspired Talks* and now occupies 102 pages of the Seventh volume of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. In addition, Sarah edited Vivekananda's classic book on *Raja Yoga* that marked him as the founder of the modern yoga movement in the West. Concerning the biography Pravrajika Vrajaprana noted, "Both fascinating and illuminating, *The Inspired Life of Sarah Ellen Waldo* is a major contribution to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. A remarkable woman in her own right, this book reveals the critical role Ellen Waldo played in disseminating Vivekananda's teachings in the West. After reading this book, one can well understand why Swami Vivekananda placed such great faith in her." Advaita Ashrama wrote, "We sincerely thank both the authors for penning this beautiful book. This work is a valuable addition to the existing literature dealing with the history of the Vedanta movement in the West and we are sure that it will be well received by readers everywhere." From Vivekananda she received the name Brahmacharini Yatimata.



Swami Sridharananda

During this period an eminent public speaker Swami Sridharananda, the head of the Vedanta Society in Australia presented an enchanting series of classes. When he speaks at the temple it is full to the brim, and some must go to an adjoining building to hear him on the TV intercom. Devotees are stunned by the quality of his talks. Some of the Hollywood devotees have traveled to Australia to be in his presence. The Vedanta Press and Catalog ([www.vedanta.com](http://www.vedanta.com)) sells audio CDs of his lectures on *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, and some of his lectures are on YouTube. In their words, "He speaks clearly and articulates his words so Westerners can understand him without trouble. His dynamic delivery keeps anyone from boredom. One looks at his face and everyone is charmed. Here is a speaker worth listening to."

Another eminent visiting speaker is Swami Atmapriyananda, President, Vivekananda University, India who gave talks and retreats in four locations at the VSSC.

The VSSC has a long and distinguished literary and creative history that we have tried to chronicle here. As we have suggested, new trends are emerging, both inside and outside the centers, and they are opening up fresh horizons for all of us as we try to share with others the wonderful life-affirming message of Vedanta.

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## X. Literary and Dramatic Productions (1976-2018)

The word meanings for the abbreviations used in the endnotes can be found at the end of the eBook in the "[Bibliography Alphabetized by Abbreviation](#)" Section.

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