

Editorial note on the "Hymn of Shiva's Greatness"

As quoted in "Sisters and Brothers..."

In the article you just read, Swami Shri Vivekananda quotes a few lines from the *Mahimnastava*, an immortal and eternal Sanskrit prayer credited to have been composed by a Gandharvāja Puṣpadanta (see page 5). It remains one of the most popular and honored hymns in India, as Swami Vivekananda points out in his speech.

The verse Swamiji quoted was translated by an American scholar named W. Norman Brown as:

"Since the way of religion is diverse—including the Triad of the Vedas, the Sāṅkhya, the Yoga, the doctrine of Paśupati, Vaiṣṇavism—and one person considers this one best and another person that one suitable; because of the variety of preferences, you are—for men who favor different paths, straight or winding—the single goal, as the ocean is of waters."

Coincidentally, in our Summer 1997 issue of *Om Shānti*, we chose this very same verse to begin our selection from W. Norman Brown's translation of the *Mahimnastava* ("The Praise of Shiva's Greatness"). We felt that this verse beautifully portrays the message of Veda Vedanta Mandiram, the idea that we are all One and that cultural differences are deceptions of perception.

As translated by W. Norman Brown:

Since our Summer 1997 issue mailed, it has been brought to our attention that a verse from the hymn was omitted. The reason for this was that, with all due respect to Dr. Brown, his translation of this verse seemed inappropriate.

Omitted verse (#23 in W. Norman Brown's translation):

"O you who are devoted to restraint, if Devī, just because she is associated with you in the half-female androgynous form, still thinks you uxorious*, though

she saw even the flower-weaponed god (Kāma)—who had grasped his bow in reliance upon her beauty—suddenly burnt up before her like grass, O crusher of the cities, then what, O granter of boons, can we expect from unsophisticated young women?"

*Uxorious: excessively fond of or submissive to a wife (Webster)

The poet-devotee says: "bata mugdhā yuvatayaḥ"

Brown translated it as "what can we expect from unsophisticated young women?"

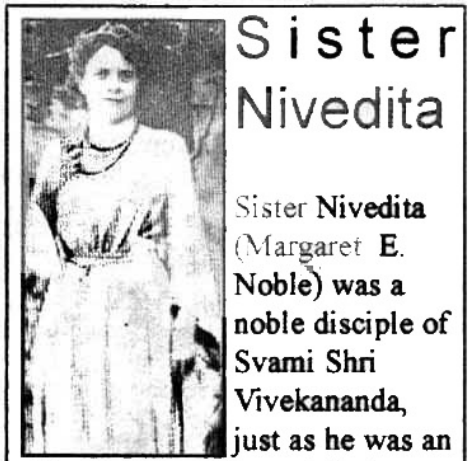
To us, this rendering seemed to be misleading. The Sanskrit language is one of the richest in the world. The poet has used a word that has two meanings. Mugdhā means "unsophisticated," but it also means "immature," "innocent" and "charming." A devotee of Shiva won't make rude remarks about His consort, Parvati. It is unthinkable.

As translated by an Indian scholar

W. Norman Brown is not the only scholar who translates verse #23 in such a way. Here is Swami Pavitrananda's translation in the Advaita Ashrama version of the *Siva-Mahimnah Stotram*:

"O Destroyer of Tripura, O Giver of boons, even on seeing in front the god of love, bow in hand, burnt like a piece of straw in a trice by Thee, if Parvati, proud of her beauty, thinks that Thou art under her fascination, because she was allowed to occupy half of Thy body on account of her austerities, ah, surely the young women are under delusion."

Swami Pavitrananda's footnote: "Parvati performed much austerity to get the love of Siva. Taking pity at her suffering, Siva allowed her to become a part of His body. But forgetting this act of pity on the part of Siva, Parvati might think, like ordinary women, that she got this favour because of her fascinating beauty. In that case she is wrong, as indicated by Siva's burning the god of love."



Sister Nivedita

Sister Nivedita (Margaret E. Noble) was a noble disciple of Swami Shri Vivekananda, just as he was an able disciple of Swami Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Ireland was the original home of Margaret Noble. She dedicated and devoted her whole life (as Sister Nivedita) for the service of India, which became her spiritual home.

"Our dream of an Indian nationality is not a selfish dream for India," said Sister Nivedita, "but it is a dream for humanity in which India shall be the mother of a great cause, shall be fosterer and the nurse of all that is noble, humane and great."

The following is a tale from Margaret Noble's homeland. It talks about holy wells in ancient Ireland. People make little piles of stones as they pray near the wells. This reminded me of a temple in Mount Abu where there was a pile of stones, and each person was supposed to throw another stone on the pile and make a wish. Another thing I noticed in India was a lack of wishing wells. People make their offerings directly to the gods, rather than to an abstract "Blarney stone" or pool of water. Of course, there is a difference between a wish and a prayer, and between superstition and faith.

-Kumari Kamalee