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Born: January 12, 1863 **Died:** July 4, 1902

Achievements: Played a major role in spiritual enlightenment of Indian masses; Spread Vedanta philosophy in the West; established Ramakrishna Mission for the service of the poor.

Swami Vivekananda was one of the most influential spiritual leaders of Vedanta philosophy. He was the chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was the founder of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna

Mission. Swami Vivekananda was the living embodiment of sacrifice and dedicated his life to the country and yearned for the progress of the poor, the helpless and the downtrodden. He showed a beacon of light to a nation that had lost faith in its ability under British rule and inspired self-confidence among Indians that they are second to none. His ringing words and masterful oratory galvanized the slumbering nation.

Swami Vivekananda real name was Narendranath Dutta. He was born in 3 Gourmohan Mukherjee Street, Shimla Pally, Calcutta at 6:33 a.m on Monday in a traditional Kayastha family, 12 January 1863, during the Makra Sankranti festival. His father's name was Vishwanath Dutta and his mother's name Bhuvaneswari Devi. Narendranath acquired the name of Swami Vivekananda when he became a monk.

As a child Narendra was very lively and naughty. He was good in studies as well as in games. He studied instrumental and vocal music and also practiced meditation from a very early age. Even when Narendra was young he questioned the validity of superstitious customs and discrimination based on caste and religion. As a child Narendra had great respect for sanyasis (ascetics). He would give away anything to anybody if asked for. Whenever a beggar asked for alms, he would give him anything he had. Thus from childhood Narendra had the spirit of sacrifice and renunciation.

In 1879, Narendra passed matriculation and entered Presidency College, Calcutta. After one year, he joined the Scottish Church College, Calcutta and studied philosophy. He studied western logic, western philosophy and history of European nations. As he advanced in his studies, his thinking faculty developed. Doubts regarding existence of God started to arise in Narendra's mind. This made him associate with the Brahmo Samaj, an important religious movement of the time, led



by Keshab Chandra Sen. But the Samaj's congregational prayers and devotional songs could not satisfy Narendra's zeal to realise God.

During this time Narendra came to know of Sri Ramakrishna Pramahans of Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was a priest in the temple of Goddess Kali. He was not a scholar. But he was a great devotee. It was being said of him that he had realized God. Once, Narendra went to Dakshineswar to with his friends see him. He asked Ramakrishna, whether he had seen God. The instantaneous answer from Ramakrishna was, "Yes, I have seen God, just as I see you here, only in a more clear sense." Narendra was astounded and puzzled. He could feel the man's words were honest and uttered from depths of experience. He started visiting Ramakrishna frequently.

It was in Narendra's nature to test something thoroughly before he could accept it. He would not accept Ramakrishna as his guru without a test. Ramakrishna used to say that, in order to realize God, one should give up the desire for money and women. One day Narendra hid a rupee under his pillow. Sri Ramakrishna, who had gone out, came into the room and stretched himself on the cot. At once he jumped up as if bitten by a scorpion. When he shook the mattress, the rupee coin fell down. Later he came to know that it was the doing of Narendra. Narendra accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guru and took training under him for five years in the Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of non-dualism. Sri Ramakrishna passed away in 1886 and nominated Narendra as his successor. After his death Narendra and a core group of Ramakrishna's disciples took vows to become monks and renounce everything, and started living in a supposedly haunted house in Baranagore.

In 1890, Narendra set out on a long journey. He covered the length and breadth of the country. He visited Varanasi, Ayodhya, Agra, Vrindavan, Alwar etc. Narendra acquired the name of Swami Vivekananda during the journey. It is said that he was given the name Vivekananda by Maharaja of Khetri for his discrimination of things, good and bad. During his journey, Vivekananda stayed at king's palaces, as well as at the huts of the poor. He came in close contact with the cultures of different regions of India and various classes of people in India. Vivekananda observed the imbalance in society and tyranny in the name of caste. He realised the need for a national rejuvenation if India was to survive at all.

Swami Vivekananda reached Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent on December24, 1892. He swam across the sea and started meditating on a lone rock. He meditated for three days and said later that he meditated about the past, present and future of India. The rock is presently popular as Vivekananda memorial and is a major tourist destination.



In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went to America to attend the Conference of World Religions in Chicago. He earned wild applause for beginning his address with the famous words, "Sisters and brothers of America." Swamiji mesmerized everyone in America with his masterful oratory. Wherever he went, he dwelt at length on the greatness of Indian Culture. He spoke with spontaneous ease on every topic, be it History, Sociology, Philosophy or Literature. He deplored the malicious propaganda that had been unleashed by the Christian missionaries in India. Swami Vivekananda also went to England. Many people became his disciples. Most famous among them was Margaret Nivedita'. She came to India and settled here.

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Swami Vivekananda returned to India in 1897 after four years of touring in the West.

He started disseminating the message of spiritual development among Indians. He realized that social service was possible only through the concerted efforts on an organized mission. To achieve this objective. Swami Vivekananda started Sri Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and formulated its ideology and goal. During



the next two years he bought a site at Belur on the banks of the Ganga, constructed the buildings and established the Ramakrishna Mutt. He once again toured the West from January 1899 to December 1900.

Swami Vivekananda died on July4, 1902 at Belur Mutt near Calcutta.

Presented by Pabitra Gain

N.B. Calcutta (Now Kolkata) Source: <u>http://www.iloveindia.com</u> & <u>http://en.wikipedia.org</u>



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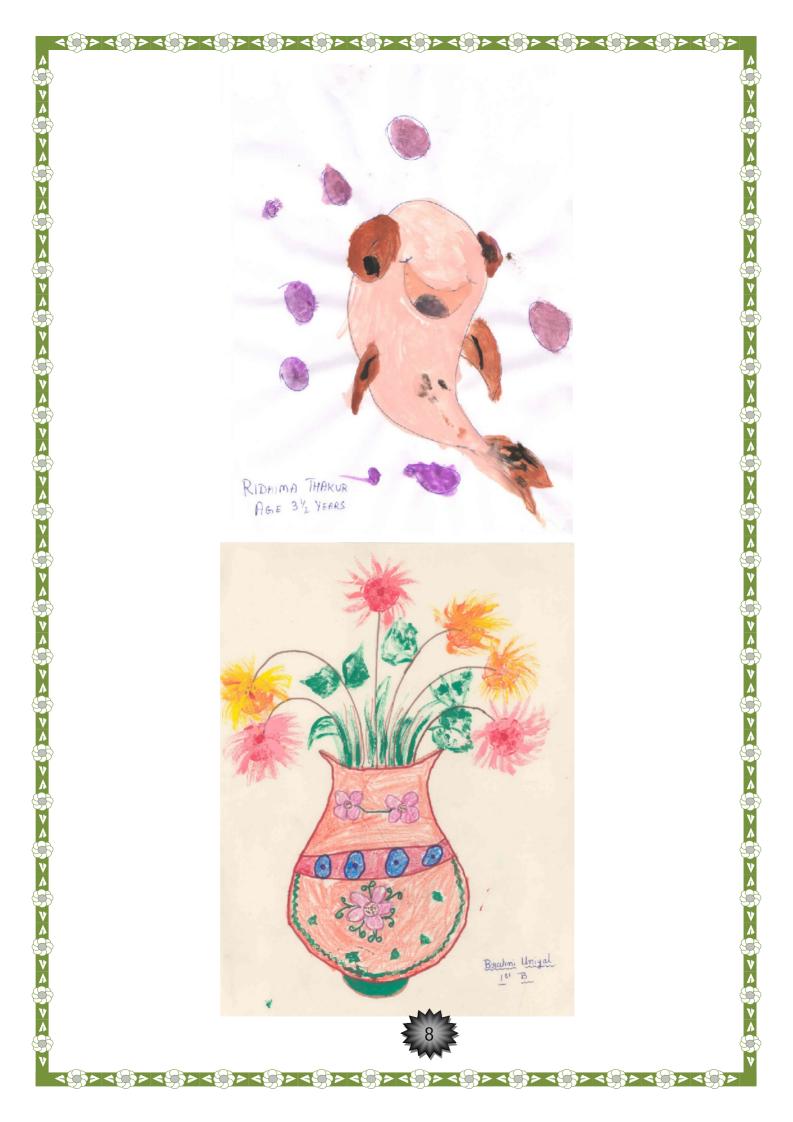
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* : MEADOWS TO MARKET: * *

Herbal drugs, herbal shampoos, herbal toothpaste, herbal oils, herbal creams..... any product with the prefix 'herbal' sells like hot cake today. But where do all the herbs that make these products so valuable come from? How do they reach the markets?

Many of these herbs originate in the sub-alpine and alpine mountain meadows, especially in the Himalaya. That the Himalaya is a store house of herbal plants is a fact known from the times of the Ramayana, which refers to the life saving properties of the herb *Sanjeevani booti*. Most sub-alpine and alpine plants have some or the other medicinal or aromatic properties and more than few have been 'discovered' by the market. Atis (*Aconitum heterophyllum*), ratanjot (*Arnebia benthamii*), salampanja (*Dactylorhiza hatagirea*), dhoop (*Jurinea macrocephala*), jatamansi (*Nardostachys grandiflora*), kutki (*Picrorhiza kurrooa*), bankakri (*Podophyllum hexandrum*) and dolu (*Rheum australe*) are some well known plants in the herbal market and the high demand for them has threatened their status in many parts of the Himalaya.

In the lap of Mother Nature

The Himalaya might seem inhospitable to man, but innumerable nooks and crannies provide micro-climatic conditions where plants can survive. *Aconitum, arnebia and Jurinea* bloom in the undulating alpine meadows along with *potentillas, geraniums* and *anemones* while *Picrorhiza* and *rheum* restrict themselves to the moist rocky slopes. Marsh meadows are adorned by *dactylorhiza* while *podophyllum* and *nardostachys* may be seen peeping through the rocky crevices and boulders. Almost all these plants occur at an altitude of over 3000 m.



Alpine meadows: Home of many important

Indian aconite or *atis*, as it is locally called, is a small plant up to 60 cm. high, with greenish purple flowers and dark veins. Its tuberous roots, which generally occur in pairs and contain alkaloid ' atisine', are in high demand in the market. *A. benthamii*



(called ratanjot) is a stout, hairy herb which can attain a height of one metre and is valued for the red dye yielded by its roots. This has earned it the local name of *laljadi* (red root) in Uttarakhand. *Hath panja* (*D. hatagirea*), gets its name from its palmate tubers and is a small herbaceous plant belonging to the orchid family. It bears rosy-purple flowers arranged in a cylindrical terminal spike. Though both kutki and dolu prefer moist, rocky habitats, they have different characteristics. *Kutki* is a perennial herb with creeping rootstock and pale or purplish flowers on a terminal elongatyed branch. On the other hand, dolu is a stout herb with large, oval, basal leaves bearing small, dark purple or pale red flowers on an elongated branched axis. Roots of both the herbs yield chemicals such as picrorhizin (from *kutki*) and glucogallin (from *dolu*), which form important constituents of many Ayurvedic drugs.



This is just a short list of some of the amazing medicinal plants that Himalaya is host to. Who knows what secrets yet unknown to modern science are housed in this biodiversity citadel? The Himalayan May apple (called *bankakri*) bears white or pink flowers in May and has a deep red apple like fruit. It is a source of podophyllin, which is used in anti-cancer drugs. Besides, their medicinal uses, herbs such as jatamansi and dhoop are valued for their aromatic properties. Jatamansi is a small herbaceous plant with fibrous rootstock. It is generally found above 3,500m along with *Rhododendron anthopogon, Juniperus squamata, Thalictrum pauciflorum* and *Meconopsis aculeate*. Its fragrant flowers are pale pink or purple and the roots are highly valued for making incense. Dhoop, a rosette-shaped perennial herb, is also valued in the incense industry for its fragrant roots.

With their different micro-habitat preferences, these herbs form a beautiful collage in an otherwise harsh mountain landscape. That such beauty still exists at all is owing to the traditional cultures and lifestyles. But that is unfortunately changing with time.

Eroding traditions, increasing commercialization

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The penetration of roads into the inner valleys and upper reaches of the Himalaya has exposed traditional mountain communities to the market economy and



unscrupulous urban traders and middlemen. This has put extra pressure on natural resources, especially medicinal and aromatic herbs. Traditionally, people made use of nature's resources only for their basic needs. Over the generations, the level of accumulated knowledge related to the values of different plants was such the dependence on the market was reduced to a minimum. Social customs and traditions such as rotational harvesting of herbs, maintenance of sacred groves, collection of plant material only after seeding and limited extraction for self consumption regulated the use of natural resources. Religious beliefs also played a major role in conservation. Flowers such as brahma kamal (*Saussurea obvallata*), jayan (*Primula macrophylla*), bhutkeshii (*Selinum teneufolium*) and kedarpati (*Skimmia laureola*) and most medicinal herbs were collected only after a local festival called Fulal or Nanda-ashtami (celebrated in September) in Uttarakhand, which allowed their proper regeneration. This is unlikely to have been a coincidence and more likely is the result of the knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors.

Market forces and the lure of easy money have affected this once symbiotic relationship of man with nature. Herbs are now considered mere market commodities to be bought and sold for a price, resulting in their overexploitation. Lured by the liquid cash earned via the herb trade, people have given up agriculture and livestock rearing and made herb collection a specialized task in many parts of the Himalaya such as Johar and Darma valleys in Kumaon (Uttarakhand) and Uhl valley in Kangra (Himachal Pradesh). Local villagers camp in the alpine areas and forests for six to eight months (April to October) to extract herbs. Apart from the excessive plant extraction itself, the presence of so many camps in these sensitive zones and digging of roots, tubers and rhizomes is interfering with the delicate mountain ecology. Generally the young and active members of the family work for eight to twelve hours a day to return campsites with sacks full of herbs, while the old, women and very young clean and dry them at home. The hard work, innocence and poverty of the locals is exploited by middlemen, who pay meager prices, as the locals are unaware of the actual market price that the herbs fetch. Most of the locals

also do not know that trade in many of the herbs is banned and what they are doing is illegal. Herbs such as dhoop (jurinea) and kutki (Picrorhiza), which are sold at a rate of Rs. 250-300/kg at the trade centres, are bought from the local people at a rate of Rs. 150-200 per kilogram. It is the irony of the 21st century that the people who once nurtured these resources are now unknowingly destroying them for their livelihoods.





Wild herbs, once plentiful, have now become rare because of habitat degradation and overexploitation. They are now restricted to areas not easily accessible to man. Simultaneously, the number and variety of herbal products in the market is on the rise. Recent surveys in some of the interior areas such as Great Himalayan National Park, Uhl valley, Gori valley, Nanda Devi National Park and Pin valley of Western Himalaya have actually proven that some of the herbs such as kutki, dhoop, atis and panja which were once common are now endangered. In high altitude environment, a plant takes months or even years to grow and bloom and species cannot withstand the pressure of people wildly extracting thousands of individuals of different species to make just one kilogram of dry weight! Moreover, harvesting now coincides with the flowering season, which prevents the plants from laying the seeds from which the next generation will spring up. Traditional management practices such as rotational harvesting have given way to simultaneous harvesting and no area is now seasonally conserved. The meadows have lost their beauty. Where once beautiful and valuable flowers used to attract visitors, now eroded lands, signs of over extraction, grazing and numerous campsites mar the landscape.

Short-term gains or long-term value

As a result of hard work and the concerns raised by many researchers and conservationists, the trade in several plant species has been banned and they have been put under Appendix I or II of CITES, in the IUCN categories, the Indian Red Data Book of plants and the Negative List of Exports issued by the Government of India. There is also an increased emphasis on both in situ and ex situ conservation of floral diversity. A very good example is the declaration of the Valley of Flowers as a Protected area (PA), which has helped in the regeneration of overexploited areas and reappearance of the vanishing herbs. But it is always not feasible to create new PAs. Techniques have been developed for the cultivation and propagation of valuable herbs. Various institutes are working in developing these techniques and one them is the Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT). Many villages of the western Himalaya have adopted these argo-techniques and have started cultivating aromatic herbs. However, there is still not much cultivation of high value medicinal herbs. These herbs which fetch a meager amount for the locals when collected illegally from the wild could be legally harvested and sold at much higher costs after cultivation. This will not only fulfill the market demands but would also improve the economy of local people and maintain the floral diversity of mountain meadows.

Anjali Uniyal



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Which letter in the alphabet is a type of a water-body?

"**C**"

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Which letter is a part of the body?

"["

Which letter is an insect?

"**B**"

Which letter is an exclamation?

"**O**"

Which letter asks a question?

"Y"

Which letters mean not full?

"**MT**"

Which letters mean a composition?

"SA"

Amisha Prashar



