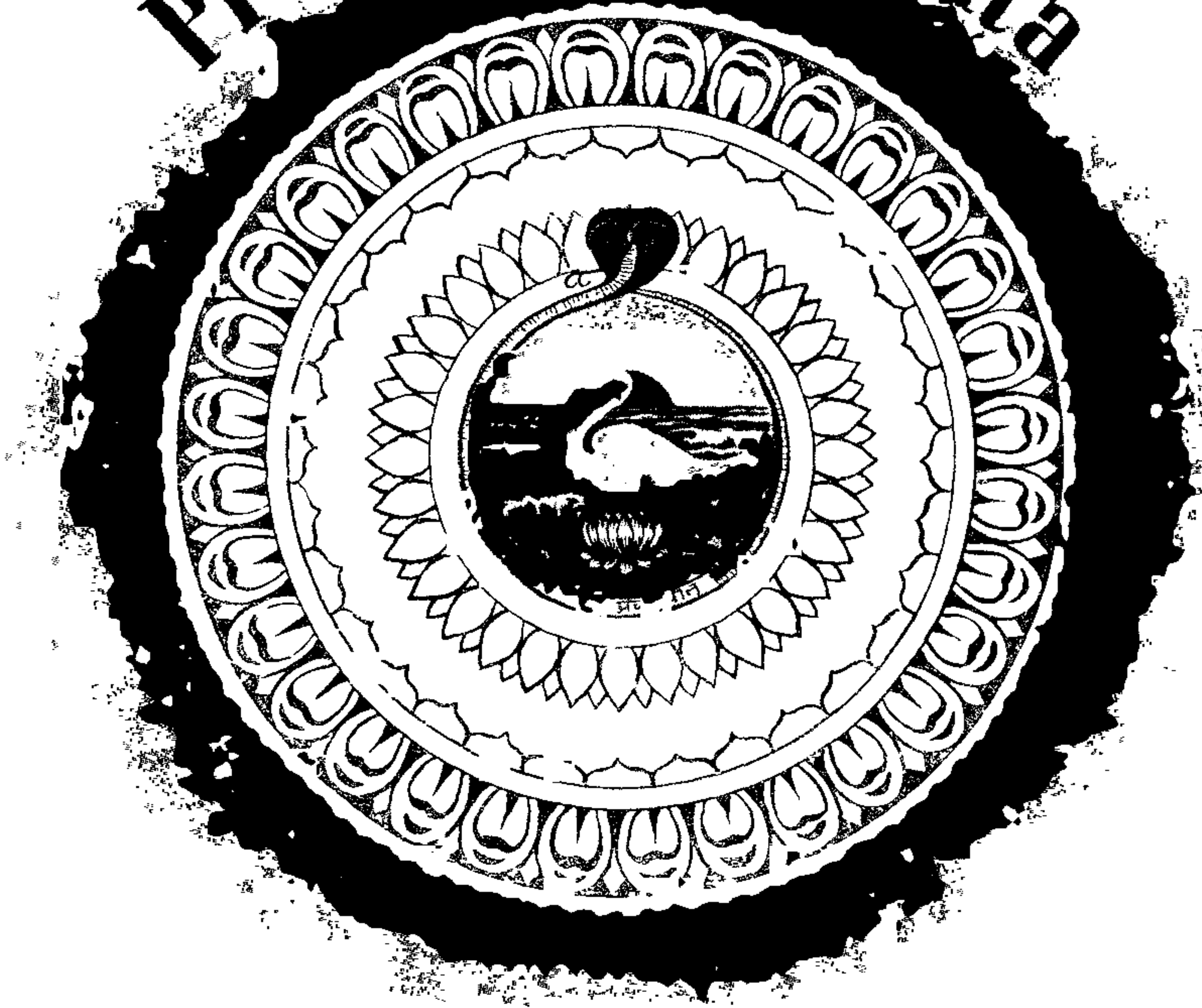


VOL. 91

DECEMBER 1986

Prabuddha Bharata



SRI RAMAKRISHNA 150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY
AND
RAMAKRISHNA-SANGHA CENTENARY NUMBER



Belur Math

The grace of God does not consist in giving us our daily bread. Every father is bound to provide his children with food and raiment. He is truly gracious when He gives us strength to overcome our daily temptations.

Sri Ramakrishna



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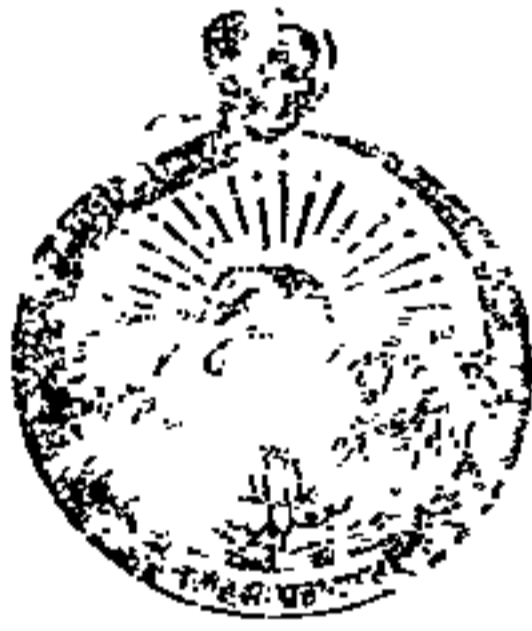


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Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone : 29-0898



[Rates inclusive of postage]

Annual Subscription

India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs.	20.00
U.S.A. & Canada	\$	14.00
Other Countries	£	6.00

Life Subscription (30 years)

Rs. 300	\$ 200	£ 60
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Single Copy

Rs. 2.00	\$ 1.00	50 P.
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**Information for contributors,
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Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

▲ MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

DECEMBER 1986

CONTENTS

Ramakrishna-Sangha-Stotram —Swami Saradananda	487
Main Events in Sri Ramakrishna's Life	488
To Our Readers	489
In this Issue	490
What Sri Ramakrishna has done for the world —(Editorial)	492
What I Learned from My Master —Swami Vivekananda	505
Sri Ramakrishna —Swami Premananda	508
Sri Ramakrishna-Lila-Stotram —Swami Abhedananda	513
Sri Ramakrishna and the Ideal of Seva —Swami Gambhirananda	516

CONTENTS (Continued)

Practical Steps to God Realization According to Sri Ramakrishna —Swami Bhuteshananda	519
The Perfect Man in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna's Sayings —Swami Tapasyananda	524
Influence of Sri Ramakrishna in Europe —Swami Nityanandananda	530
Ramakrishna and World Religions —Fr. Francis X. Clooney, S.I.	533
Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna —Gour Das	537
Sri Ramakrishna and Holiness —Dr. John B. Chethinuram C.M.I.	543
Ramakrishna and 'Science' —Dr. M. Sivaramakrishna	546
अर्थ समन्वय : A Forum for Inter-religious Understanding : Sri Ramakrishna and Harmony of Religions —Fr. Ignatius Girudayam, S.I.	556
Islam : A Testimony to Vedantism —Mahammedananda	563
Sikhism and its Principles —Bawa Budh Singh	567
Rededication	See after 572
Early History of the Ramakrishna Sangha (Illustrated) —Swami Prabhananda	573
Madame Calve's Visit to Belur Math —Kumud Bandhu Sen	594

CONTENTS (Continued)

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement	
—Dr. V. K. R. V. Rao ..	597
24 December 1886	
—Swami Anantananda	606
Swami Vivekananda, Human and Divine	
—Marie Louise Burke ..	612
The Mother I Adore	
—Swami Anantananda	620
Reviews and Notices	623
News and Reports	624
Swami's Invitation	631

AVADHUTA GITA OF DATTATREYA

Translated by

SWAMI CHEYANANANDA

Pp. XXIV+137

Rs. 5.00

'Everything in the universe is filled through and through by you, the Atman, alone. There is no mediator, no meditation, not even your mind. How then, O shameless one, can you meditate?' (L. 26)—Dattatreya negates every activity, both of body and mind, with the idea of ego.

The book provides text with running translation and notes. The Preface and Introduction by the translator and the Foreword by Swami Harshananda are additional attractions.

ADVAITA ASHRAMA
5 Dehi En'ally Road
Calcutta 100 014



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 91

DECEMBER 1986

No. 12

Arise ! Awake ! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

RAMAKRISHNA-SANGHA-STOTRAM

SWAMI SARADANANDA

सर्वधर्मस्थापकस्त्वं सर्वधर्मस्वरूपकः ।
आचार्याणां महाचार्यो रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

Salutations to you O Ramakrishna, who art the establisher of the truths of all religions, the embodiment of the truths of all religions, and the great Teacher of all teachers.

यथाग्नेर्दाहिकाशक्ती रामकृष्णे स्थिता हि या ।
सर्वविद्यास्वरूपां तां सारदां प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥

I salute Sarada Devi the embodiment of all knowledge, who exists in Sri Ramakrishna as the burning power exists in fire.

परतत्त्वे सदा लीनो रामकृष्णसमाज्ञया ।
यो धर्मस्थापनपरो वीरेशं तं नमाम्यहम् ॥

I salute Vireśvara Vivekananda who, although ever immersed in the transcendental Truth, engaged himself in establishing Dharma at the command of Sri Ramakrishna.

कालिन्दीफुल्लकमले माधवेन क्रीडारतः ।
ब्रह्मानन्द ! नमस्तुभ्यं सद्गुरो लोकनायक ॥

Salutation to you O Brahmananda! the true teacher and leader of people, who is immersed in divine sport with Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the full-blown lotus flower of the Yamuna.

योगानन्दः प्रेमानन्दश्चान्ये वै ये च पार्शदाः ।
रामकृष्णगतप्राणाः सर्वान् तान् प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥

I salute Yogananda, Premananda and other attendants whose lives are centred on Sri Ramakrishna.

MAIN EVENTS IN SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S LIFE

- | | | | |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1835 | Visit of Khudiram, Sri Ramakrishna's father, to Gaya. | 1863 | Completion of Tantric sādhanā. Sri Ramakrishna's mother Chandra Devi comes to live at Dakshineswar. |
| 1836 | Birth of Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna) Wednesday, 18 February, about 5.15 a.m. | 1864 | Sri Ramakrishna's practice of <i>vātsalya bhāva</i> under Jatadhari. Practice of <i>madhura bhāva</i> . Initiation into Sannyasa by Totapuri. |
| 1843 | Death of Khudiram. First trance of Gadadhar at the sight of white cranes against dark clouds. | 1865 | Totapuri leaves Dakshineswar. Akshay replaces Haladhari as priest. |
| 1845 | Sacred Thread ceremony for Gadadhar. | 1866 | Sri Ramakrishna remains absorbed in Advaita experience for 6 months. Practice of Islam. |
| 1852 | Sri Ramakrishna goes to Calcutta to help his eldest brother Ramkumar. | 1867 | Goes to Kamarpukur with Bhairavi Brahmani and Hriday. Sarada Devi meets the Master there. The Brahmani bids farewell. |
| 1855 | Inauguration of Kālī temple at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna becomes priest of Viṣṇu, assisted by his nephew Hriday. | 1868 | Pilgrimage with Mathur to Deoghar, Varanasi, Vrindaban and Allahabad. |
| 1856 | Death of Ramkumar. Sri Ramakrishna appointed priest of Mother Kālī; through the sheer intensity of aspiration he obtains the vision of the Divine Mother as an ocean of Light. | 1870 | Tours with Mathur to eastern parts of Bengal including Kalna and Navadvip. Meeting with Bhagawan-das Babāji. |
| 1857 | Sri Ramakrishna remains mostly in a God-intoxicated state. | 1871 | Death of Mathur. |
| 1858 | Haladhari becomes priest of Mother Kālī. Sri Ramakrishna goes to Kamarpukur for a change. | 1872 | Holy Mother's first visit to Dakshineswar; the <i>ṣodaśī pūjā</i> . |
| 1859 | Marriage with five-year-old Sarada Devi. Sri Ramakrishna stays at Kamarpukur for a year and a half. | 1873 | Death of Master's second elder brother Rameswar. Holy Mother's return to Kamarpukur. |
| 1860 | Returns to Dakshineswar. Mathur's vision of Sri Ramakrishna as both Śiva and Kālī. | 1874 | Sri Ramakrishna's vision of Christ. |
| 1861 | Death of Rani Rasmani. Arrival of Bhairavi Brahmani at Dakshineswar. The Brahmani, Vaishnavacharan and Gauri Pandit declare Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God. The Master's Tantric sādhanā under the guidance of Brahmani. Second 'divine madness'. | 1875 | Sri Ramakrishna meets Keshab Chandra Sen for the first time at Belgharia. Master's last visit to Kamarpukur. |
| 1862 | Narayan Sastri comes to Sri Ramakrishna. Meeting with Pandit Padmalochan. | 1876 | Death of Chandra Devi. |
| | | 1877 | Close contact with the Brahmos. Death of Sambhu Mallick. |
| | | 1879 | Ramchandra Datta, Manomohan Mitra, Surendra Nath Mitra, and Kedar come to the Master. |
| | | 1880 | Rakhal, Latu, Narendra and Gopal come. |
| | | 1881 | Dismissal of Hriday. |

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1882 Balaram, M., Yogin and Baburam come to the Master.</p> <p>1883 Adhar, Kalipada, Sashi, Sarat and Kali come.</p> <p>1884 Death of Keshab. Nag Mahasay and Gopala's Mother come to the Master.</p> <p>1885 The 'inner circle' of disciples becomes</p> | <p>complete with the coming of Purna. Festival at Panihati. Sri Ramakrishna's illness, removal to Shyampukur and treatment under Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar.</p> <p>1886 At Cossipore: organization of the disciples. Mahasamadhi of the Master on 16 August.</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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THIS ISSUE OF *PRABUDDHA BHARATA* COMMEMORATES THE
150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE
CENTENARY OF THE FOUNDING OF RAMAKRISHNA SANGHA

TO OUR READERS

This is a special number issued in commemoration of two great events in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement: the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sri Ramakrishna and the centennial of the birth of the Ramakrishna Order of monks. On this holy occasion we salute the great monks of the Order, past and present, and send our good wishes to the readers and supporters of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

This issue consists of two sections. The first section contains articles on Sri Ramakrishna; and, to honour his message of religious harmony, three articles presenting Christian, Islamic and Sikh perspectives have been included in this section.

The second section contains articles on Ramakrishna Sangha and Movement.

Since the decision to bring out the December number as a special issue was taken rather late, some of the expected contributors could not send their articles before the deadline, and there was not enough time to contact new contributors. Nevertheless, we have tried to present a representative collection of articles from some of the finest minds.

We would like to inform our subscribers and regular readers that the March 1987 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* will be an ordinary issue and, henceforth, the December number will be published as the journal's annual bumper issue.

IN THIS ISSUE

We believe that Sri Ramakrishna represented Reality in all its fullness, and this month's EDITORIAL explores some of its dimensions.

There are four cardinal points which Swami Vivekananda imbibed from Sri Ramakrishna and which underlie all the teachings and exhortations of Swamiji. These four themes have been excerpted from his lecture 'My Master' and brought together in the article WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY MASTER.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA is a collection of the reminiscences of Swami Premananda, one of the greatest of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, translated from Bengali by Swami Satswarupanandaji, a very senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order now leading a retired life at Varanasi.

Swami Abhedananda, another famous disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, has with great felicity condensed the essential features of the divine life of his great Master in the beautiful hymn SRI RAMAKRISHNA-LILA-STOTRAM which devotees may like to use for daily recitation (*pārāyaṇa*).

With clarity, precision and authority born of his luminous mind, Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, President-General of the Ramakrishna Sangha, analyses the philosophical bases of SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S IDEAL OF SEVA, incidentally bringing out the distinction between Seva and Karma Yoga which many readers will find very valuable.

IN PRACTICAL STEPS TO GOD REALIZATION ACCORDING TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Sangha, expounds some of the essential features of the message of Sri Ramakrishna.

IN THE PERFECT MAN IN THE LIGHT OF

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S SAYINGS Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Sangha, well known for his erudition, gives an insightful exposition of one of the key concepts in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Nityabodhanandaji, head of the Vedanta Centre at Geneva, has been interpreting Vedanta to Europeans for nearly three decades. In INFLUENCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA IN EUROPE he points out five areas in East-West encounter in which the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna may have a vital influence.

Fr. Francis X. Clooney S. J. is a learned and enlightened member of the Society of Jesus, the largest monastic order in the Catholic Church, and teaches in the Theology Department at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He wrote the article RAMAKRISHNA AND WORLD RELIGIONS, which contains several insightful observations, as a 150th anniversary tribute in the March 1986 issue of *America*, a Jesuit magazine, from which it has been reproduced here with permission.

A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, under the assumed name Gaur Das, has made an attempt to point out some of the striking similarities between SRI CHAITANYA AND SRI RAMAKRISHNA in the hope that his modest effort will stimulate further studies in this neglected field.

Dr. John B. Chethimattam C.M.I., regarded as the doyen of Indian theologians, is a deep scholar in eastern and western systems of thought. A former Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, New York, he is currently the Provincial of the Carmelites of Mary Incarnation, India. In SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HOLINESS he brings out certain important characteristics of the

life of Sri Ramakrishna in the Christian perspective.

Readers will find **SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SCIENCE** a refreshingly original approach to a rather unconventional theme. Its author Dr. M. Sivaramakrishna, a creative thinker, scholar and devotee, is Reader in English at Osmania University, Hyderabad.

In **SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HARMONY OF RELIGIONS** Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam S. J., head of the Jesuit institute 'Aikiya Alayam', Madras, examines with enlightened consideration the implications of Sri Ramakrishna's life in the context of inter-religious understanding from the Christian standpoint.

ISLAM, A TESTIMONY TO VEDANTISM AND SIKHISM AND ITS PRINCIPLES have been reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata* Vol. 3 (1898) and Vol. 4 (1899), respectively, in which they first appeared. These articles, although written more than eighty-seven years ago, acquire an added significance in view of the turbulent roles played by Islam and Sikhism in the current socio-political scenario in India.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA SANGHA by Swami Prabhanandaji, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and one of the foremost authorities on the historical and hagiographical literature of the Ramakrishna Movement, is a brilliant flash-back which brings to the focus, one after another, all the crucial events in the early history of the Ramakrishna Sangha in an animated sequence.

In **MADAME CALVE'S VISIT TO BELUR MATH**, translated from the original Bengali by Swami Chetanananda, spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, U.S.A., the reader can feel something of the ambience of Belur Math in those early days.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT by Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao, former education minister in the Central Government, and a distinguished social scientist, provides an admirable summary of the life-giving principles which form the foundation of the Ramakrishna Movement, and gives valuable suggestions for maintaining its dynamism and social relevance.

In **24 DECEMBER 1886**, Swami Ananyanandaji, President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, recreates vividly the first three vitally important sets of events that led to the formation of the Ramakrishna Sangha.

Marie Louise Burke, the famous author of the six-volume series *Swami Vivekananda in America*, with that apparent ease, brilliance and thoroughness which life-long consecration to the cause of Swamiji has given her, presents a delightful article **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: HUMAN AND DIVINE**.

In **THE MOTHER I ADORE** Swami Aseshananda, an initiated disciple of Sri Sarada Devi and Spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Portland, USA, recounts, with that simplicity and directness characteristic of illumined minds, his meeting with the Holy Mother.

WHAT SRI RAMAKRISHNA HAS DONE FOR THE WORLD

(EDITORIAL)

Prāṇārpaṇa jagata-tāraṇa

On this occasion when we celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna let us pause and consider what he has done for the world—for you and me. We tend to take many of the natural blessings of life, like air and sunshine, for granted. We miss the waters of life only when the wells in our souls become dry. The blessings that great men confer on humanity exist in their plenitude all around us but often remain unrecognized, unutilized or underutilized. Very often the acceptance of these blessings is an unconscious process which soon gets so thoroughly ritualized and routinized that our souls cease to remain open to them. At least on special occasions such as the celebration of a birth anniversary we should wake up from our unconscious drift through life, rediscover the channels to the perennial sources of spiritual power, and replenish our souls.

It is a well-known biological law that every living being exerts an influence on its eco-system far beyond its immediate biological existence¹. In the case of human beings every person influences the society far more than he is aware of. If this is true of ordinary human beings, how much more true should it be of great religious leaders and prophets! The influence exerted by ordinary people is temporary and of limited range, whereas the influence of great religious leaders is of vast proportions and goes on spreading in ever-widening circles in self-perpetuating rhythms with no foreseeable end. It is to this class of Messengers of Light that Sri Ramakrishna belonged.

1. For an illustrated discussion of this law see, J. H. Storer, *The Web of Life* (New York: Signet Book/New American Library, 1956)

No one who tries to see Sri Ramakrishna's life in the right perspective can fail to notice one important point : that he 'worked' incessantly for the good of the world. Almost the whole of his youth was spent in various kinds of spiritual practice which in itself later on proved to be of immense value to seekers of God all over the world. The latter part of his life was spent in actively assisting spiritual aspirants in their struggles to realize the ultimate Truth, and in training a group of young men to carry on his mission and spread his message. The intensity of his life was matched only by his selflessness and self-sacrifice. That is why Swami Vivekananda has in his famous vesper hymn, referred to Sri Ramakrishna as 'one who gave his life for the redemption of the world.' (*prāṇārpaṇa jagata-tāraṇa*). What about his life after he withdrew his corporeal presence from the world? The answer has been provided by his spiritual spouse Sri Sarada Devi, known to his followers as the Holy Mother, and recorded by her disciple and attendant Ashutosh Mitra in his little book in Bengali *Śrī Mā*. One afternoon at Kothar in Orissa, where the Holy Mother had gone for a short stay at the invitation of Balaram Babu's wife, the attendant found the Mother seated in a pensive mood. After a long time she broke her silence and made the significant remark that people did not know how much the Master had to suffer. She was evidently referring to the redemptive work of the Avatar which did not cease with his physical death. He had to be born again and again for the good of the world. She also spoke of a vision she had earlier had in which she saw that the Master had become everything and that the miseries of creatures were his.

To be an Avatar does not mean merely

to be an object of adoration and worship, as some people mistakenly consider it to be. It entails tremendous cosmic responsibilities which ordinary people cannot even understand. In the Gita Śrī Kṛṣṇa states that he works incessantly for the good of the world.² This shows that Sri Ramakrishna's work is a continuing one, and what we recognize as his work can at best be regarded only as pointers to a certain course of development which he initiated. In other words, Sri Ramakrishna is not a mere past 'phenomenon', as Christopher Isherwood described him, but a *continuing* phenomenon.

Revelation of the noumenon

In the sphere of religion a phenomenon cannot continue for long without a powerful noumenal support. This means that Sri Ramakrishna was not merely a phenomenon but more truly represented the Noumenon. Indeed, it was as the revelator of the Noumenon that Sri Ramakrishna performed one of his important functions in the present age. What modern people need is an incontrovertible assurance of the existence of the transcendent Reality and the possibility of realizing It. This assurance Sri Ramakrishna gave through his life. In unambiguous terms he could state like the Vedic sage who had declared: 'I have realized the Supreme Self effulgent as the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance; by knowing Him one attains immortality; there is no other way to go beyond suffering'.³

Revelations of the transcendent Reality had taken place earlier, and countless

numbers of people had direct experience of it. However, these revelations and experiences had been partial, each dealing with only one particular aspect of the transcendent Reality. What Sri Ramakrishna did was to retrace all those past experiences and bring them all together in one place—his own person—so that people could make a comparative study of them. Revelations of divinity had taken place at Kurukshetra, at Buddha Gaya, at Jerusalem, at Mecca, but nobody had attempted to integrate them all into one holistic religious tradition.

There are two main reasons why such an attempt had not been made before. One is that it involves the overcoming of deep-rooted and complex cultural differences. Sri Ramakrishna solved this problem by accepting these cultural differences but found out a way of converting those very differences into a means of getting transcendental experiences. What was that way that he found? The transformation of consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna showed that by suitably transforming human consciousness every person could get higher spiritual experience. Transformation of consciousness is what yoga really means, but nobody had applied yoga in the realms of other religious traditions. The application of yoga in the extremely complex field of interreligious understanding, and thereby converting yoga into a universally applicable psychological tool for the transformation of consciousness—this is one of the great contributions made by Sri Ramakrishna to world culture. It may be compared to Einstein's use of Lorentz Transformations in the formulation of his General Theory of Relativity.

The second reason why a holistic view of world religions had not been developed earlier is that it needs superhuman effort. Ordinary people can get at best only one type of religious experience. It takes the effort of a life time for a Christian to reach

2. Gita 3.22,23.

3. वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तमादित्यवर्णं

तमसः परस्तात् ।

तमेव विदित्वाऽतिमृत्युमेति नान्यः पन्था

विद्यतेऽयनाय ॥

Taittiriya Aranyaka 3.13.1

and retain the highest state of mystical experience known as Spiritual Marriage, for a Muslim to attain the highest flights of Sufi experience known as *fanā* and *anal haq*, for a Hindu yogi to attain *nirvikalpa samādhi* or for a Buddhist to attain Nirvana. Only a person with extraordinary spiritual prowess can gain all these experiences in one life. The master-yogi that he was, Sri Ramakrishna scaled peak after peak of mystical experience with incredible rapidity. About the uniqueness of this feat Sri Aurobindo wrote :

And in a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first driving straight to the divine realization, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realization and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of intuitive knowledge. *Such an example cannot be generalized.*⁴

Harmony of religions

Nowadays educated and cultured people know that it is impolite and barbarous to criticize other religions or cultures. They even know that to speak good of other religions, with a quotation or two thrown in to prove their knowledgeability, may make them look more cultured. There are sociologists and theologians who have adopted what is called the 'phenomenological' view of other religions: they hold that in order to understand another religion we must learn to look at it through the eyes of its followers.⁵ Then there are naive and

simplistic statements such as 'All religions are one', so often heard in India. All these amount only to a form of window-shopping in the real world of the Spirit. This was not what Sri Ramakrishna sought or taught. Religious harmony was for him not a mere doctrine or social principle but a vital need of his soul. He saw in it nothing but an expression of the plenitude of divine creativity and immense potentialities for the welfare of mankind. He felt that his own life would be incomplete unless he too shared that divine plenitude. It was not social compulsions that made him practise the disciplines of different religions but the desire to make his own life *pūrṇa*, complete or full, by having integral experience of the ultimate Reality. This fact was attested to by the Holy Mother herself who knew him more than anyone else. The Mother said :

It never struck me that he (Sri Ramakrishna) practised all the religions with the preconceived idea of preaching the harmony of all religions. He was always absorbed in divine moods. He used to enjoy the Divine Play through all those moods adopted by Christians, Mussalmans and Vaiṣṇavas for the realization of God. His days and nights passed in these alone—he had no other consciousness.⁶

Through his practice of different religions Sri Ramakrishna has taught the following principles of religious harmony.

1. According to Sri Ramakrishna, 'As many minds so many paths to the ultimate Reality'. This means that there cannot be a single religion for all people.

2. Each religion offers a distinct and unique way of experiencing the Ultimate Reality. This means that the differences among religions are real and have a definite

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1971) p. 36

5. The phenomenological standpoint, originally developed by Edmund Husserl, has become a part of the sociology of religion mainly through the efforts of Kristensen and Van der Leeuw.

See, G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1963).

6. *Śrī Śrī Māyer Kathā* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1385 B.S) Vol 2, p. 217.

meaning in the divine order governing the universe.

3. Spiritual experience must be the basis of true religious understanding, and not mere tolerance or social necessity.

4. As the parable of the chameleon which changes its colour and of the six blind men who went to see an elephant show, no man's knowledge of God is complete unless he gains some experience of Him through other paths besides his own. The more his experiences of God, the fuller becomes his spiritual life and the greater his contribution to the enrichment of collective life.

It is heartening to note that these principles of religious harmony taught by Sri Ramakrishna are gaining the acceptance of enlightened people all over the world. The implications of Sri Ramakrishna's practice of different religions for the modern man may now be briefly stated.

1. It has shown the modern man the right approach to other religions. Showing reverence to other religions or other prophets, or even practising other religious paths, does not mean disowning one's own religion. Just as a newly married woman serves her in-laws with love, without affecting her special relationship with her own husband, so also a person can accept the principles of other religions without diminishing his loyalty to his own religion.

2. Through his practice of different religions Sri Ramakrishna established the validity of those religions. This fact may not be acceptable to many of the faithful believers, but it cannot be denied that thousands of people, especially in the West, have regained their faith in their own religions after coming to know of Sri Ramakrishna's life and experiences. It has increased the faith of Hindus in Christ, Buddha and Mohammed—not to speak of their own divinities.

3. Sri Ramakrishna's life has given rise to a new conception of the perfect man.

Every religion has its ideal of the perfect man—the saint in Christianity, the Pir in Islam, the Bodhisattva in Buddhism, the Jivan-mukta in Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna's life has made the addition of one more dimension to the ideal of perfection necessary—experience of other religious paths and love for the followers of all religions. In the past saints could preach crusade, *jihād* or *dharma-yuddha* against heretics and infidels and still retain their sainthood; in future this will no longer be possible. Not only that, even those who have attained illumination in their own paths but have not had the experience of Godhead through other paths will not be regarded as having attained the fullness of perfection. A new universal ideal of spiritual perfection is evolving now. A similar ideal has already invaded the secular field. Joseph Royce, a modern writer, speaks of four approaches to reality and regards a person who adheres to only one approach as 'encapsulated'.⁷ The 'unencapsulated' man, who is perfectly at ease in all paths, is the ideal of the future.

4. Yet another implication of the Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of the harmony of religions is their mutual enrichment through individual or group dialogue and comparative study of doctrines. This enrichment can take two forms. One is based on the discovery of the inadequacies of one's own religion. Every religion has some defects or deficiencies. These can be removed by accepting some of the nobler attitudes and doctrines of other religions. For instance, Hinduism can adopt the attitude of equality from Islam and service to the poor from Christianity. In their turn Islam and Christianity can adopt the attitude of tolerance and mystical experience from Hinduism. The Hindu doctrine of the Atman can fill up a vital lacuna in Christian and Islamic theologies.

7. See, Joseph Royce, *The Encapsulated Man* (New York: Van Nostrand Co., 1964).

The second form of enrichment takes place when the study of other religions leads to the discovery of the wealth of life-giving principles in one's own religion lying buried under dogma, priestcraft and institutionalism. This possibility has been illustrated by Martin Buber with the help of one of the tales of the Hasidim. A poor Rabbi once had a dream in which a Jewish sage asked him to go to a certain bridge where he would find wealth. The Rabbi went to that bridge and found it guarded by a soldier. The furtive movements of the old man attracted the attention of the soldier who accosted him. On being told of the dream, the soldier laughed and derisively told of a 'stupid' dream that he had had in which a sage told him of gold buried under the stove in the kitchen of a poor Rabbi. The Rabbi hurried back to his house, dug the ground in his kitchen and found a big jar of gold coins. In the same way, a person may need the revelations in other religions to understand the transforming power of the principles in his own religion.

5. Lastly, Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of the harmony of religions has altered the very concept of 'universal religion'. Till now each religion—especially Christianity, Islam and Buddhism—has been claiming itself to be a 'universal religion'. It is on the basis of this claim that each of them has been demanding the allegiance of all people to its faith. It is also this claim that has led to interreligious conflicts and competition. Sri Ramakrishna has introduced a new concept of universalism. According to him, by 'universal religion' is meant the peaceful co-existence of all the religions in a spirit of mutual respect and acceptance. This is the only way religion can be made universal and made to play its constructive role in the present-day society

Unifying centre of Hinduism

Sri Ramakrishna has provided a unifying centre for Hinduism. Before his advent

Hinduism was more a cultural concept than a concrete social reality with a distinct profile. It remained broken into innumerable sects engaged in futile doctrinal controversies and institutional conflicts. Sri Ramakrishna followed the cultural traditions of different sects and showed the spiritual validity and social utility of all of them. This has made sectarian conflicts unnecessary. He worshipped and realized all the major avatars and deities of Hinduism. His identification with all of them has given him the status of the Universal Divine (*visva-devah* spoken of in the Vedas) acceptable to all Hindus. Furthermore, Sri Ramakrishna accepted and attained the dualistic, qualified-monistic and non-dualistic experiences on which the different schools of Vedanta are based. He did not accept Advaita as the final experience, and his doctrine of *vijñāna* cannot be categorized as dualistic or non-dualistic. The state of *bhāvamukha* in which he remained after the completion of his sadhanas was a kind of vestibule with doors opening to all the different levels of consciousness. Through all this he established the multidimensional and integral nature of religious experience, thereby eliminating the need for controversies regarding the relative superiority of dualism, non-dualism etc. over one another.

Thus, by eliminating the points of conflicts and by providing a common harmonizing centre, Sri Ramakrishna paved the way for a grand unification of Hinduism. The unification itself was effected later on by his disciple Swami Vivekananda. But without the unifying centre provided by Sri Ramakrishna and the universal dimension he gave to it, Hinduism would not have acquired the cultural mobility and power that it now enjoys. Sri Ramakrishna now symbolizes the unity of Hinduism. There is at present no other prophet-figure universally acceptable to all Hindus.

Making life meaningful

Joseph Royce, Viktor Frankle and several other modern thinkers have shown that the most characteristic feature of humanity is 'search for meaning'. Mere experience does not satisfy man; he wants to derive some ultimate meaning out of it. He does not look upon persons and things merely as objects of enjoyment but as doors to the meaning of life. All civilized people are constantly seeking a way of life which will make their life meaningful. Unfortunately none of the modern preoccupations of man—science, art, social life etc—seem to be helping him in this quest. As a result, millions of people are now suffering from the psychological malady known as 'meaninglessness'.

'Meaning' is an expression of the soul's self-fulfilment. The soul considers meaningful only those things which help it in attaining fulfilment. The soul has a higher dimension known as the Atman or the Self. This higher Self can attain fulfilment only by realizing the Supreme Self or God of whom it is a part. Therefore the striving for God realization alone can make life meaningful. Sense pleasure, intellectual satisfaction, social life—all these are within the reach of man but their attainment still leaves him unfulfilled. Higher striving, the struggle for God realization, is an existential need of man. This is one of the basic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He not only sought to create faith in the existence of God but imparted a tremendous urgency to the struggle for the realization of Him. He constantly exhorted and encouraged people to seek God, for he knew that there could be no other way of making life meaningful and worth living. The renewal of interest in mystical life and popularization of contemplative life now going on in many parts of the world are undoubtedly the direct or indirect result of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna.

Two types of karma yoga

If one's whole life is to be geared to the ultimate goal of God realization, then the question arises as to what one's attitude towards secular activities and responsibilities should be. Sri Ramakrishna's answer to this question makes him one of the great teachers of Karma Yoga in the modern age. He, however, taught two types of Karma Yoga: that done *before* God realization and that done *after* God realization. The vast majority of people have to live with their families, earn money and get involved in various kinds of activities. To them the advice Sri Ramakrishna invariably gave was to practise inner detachment and self-surrender to God. As a maidservant works in a rich man's house serving all and treating the children as if they were her own, but knowing fully well that none of them really belong to her, so should a householder discharge his duties remembering God all the time and knowing fully well that he belongs to God alone.

Two points should be noted in Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of the first type of Karma Yoga. What he emphasized was not work but love of God. He knew that most of the everyday routine duties could be done with a fraction of the attention and energy that people normally devoted to them. Giving the example of the woman who operated rice pounding machine the Master said,

This is called the 'yoga of practice'. Fifteen parts of her mind out of sixteen are fixed on the pestle of the husking-machine, lest it should pound her hand. With only one part of her mind she nurses the baby and talks to the buyers. Likewise, he who leads the life of a householder should devote fifteen parts of his mind to God otherwise he will face ruin and fall into the clutches of death. He should perform the duties of the world with only one part of his mind.⁸

8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*; the New York edition and also the new Madras edition, p. 367.

The second point to be noted is that what Sri Ramakrishna emphasized was not the purification of mind through Karma Yoga, as traditional Hindu teachers did, but the transforming power of Bhakti and the redeeming power of God. If a person remembers God constantly and loves Him intensely, God will directly intervene in his life's affairs, cut his bonds and give him spiritual illumination. Such a person does not have to wait for a long time until he attains complete purification of mind.

There always exist in every society small numbers of men and women, usually young and unmarried, who are not burdened with family and social responsibilities, and who are therefore free to devote their whole life to God. To them Sri Ramakrishna taught the second type of Karma Yoga. He asked them to realize God first through intense spiritual practices, then return to society and serve people as God. Milk mixes freely with water, but if it is allowed to set into curd and then converted into butter through churning, the butter will float on water. Similarly, said Sri Ramakrishna, after gaining knowledge through some years of intense spiritual practice if a person does work in society, he will remain untainted.

The two types of Karma Yoga that Sri Ramakrishna taught are linked to two important parts of his mission on earth : revival of the Vedic ideal and rejuvenation of monasticism.

Revival of the ṛṣi ideal

It was in the Vedic Age that the seeds of all subsequent spiritual attainments in India were sown. Apart from the pastoral simplicity of the people, that age was marked by a holistic view of reality and outlook on life. There was then hardly any distinction between the sacred and the secular, and all activities, including biological functions, were regarded as participation in cosmic

sacrifice (*yajña*). Since everyone's life was a total consecration to the realization of the transcendent Reality, the contradiction between renunciation and involvement in life was not felt. The subtle distinction between personal God and impersonal Absolute, between Bhakti and Jñāna, Karma and Yoga, etc. which were to plague Indian spirituality in subsequent ages, had not been formulated. The world was not looked upon as illusory but as an expression of the luminous Spirit. All these features of Vedic life were embodied in the *ṛṣi* ideal.

This ideal Sri Ramakrishna has revived for the modern man. Though modern life with its enormous complexity and sophistication may appear to be far removed from the pastoral simplicity of the Vedic Age, sociological studies reveal that the general trend of present-day attitudes, concepts and social orientations is towards homogeneity and integrality. Science as a search for truth has acquired the sanctity of religion, the discovery of the unity of matter and energy has reduced the differences between the sacred and the secular and, while monks now feel compelled to get involved in social life, lay people are gaining greater awareness of the need for detachment, restraint and contemplation. The modern man is in search of a holistic view of reality and an integral way of living. The ancient Vedic ideal of the *ṛṣi*, if adapted to the conditions of modern life, can meet the present need for a composite ideal. This was what Sri Ramakrishna did through his life.

His life was closer to that of Vedic *ṛṣis* than that of the other Avatars of Hinduism full of heroic exploits. His teaching of the harmony of religions is essentially a Vedic concept revitalized to suit modern conditions. The Vedic sages considered the cosmos to be in a state of flux ; Sri Ramakrishna regarded it as the *līlā* of the Divine Mother. Through his doctrine of *vijñāna* Sri Ramakrishna has recaptured the integral vision

of the Vedic seers who saw divinity shining through every object in the universe.

Swami Vivekananda looked upon Sri Ramakrishna not only as the supreme exemplar of renunciation and service but also as the embodiment of the Vedic ideal of life. That is why he declared Sri Ramakrishna to be the national ideal of India. Swamiji said :

In order that a nation may arise, it must have a high ideal. Now, that ideal is, of course, the impersonal Brahman. But as you all cannot be inspired by an abstract ideal, you must have a personal ideal. You have got that in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. The reason why other personages cannot be our ideal now is that their days are gone; and in order that Vedanta may come to everyone, there must be a person who is in sympathy with the present generation. This is fulfilled in Sri Ramakrishna. So now you should place him before everyone. Whether one accepts him as a Sadhu or an Avatara does not matter.⁹

Thousands of lay devotees have accepted Sri Ramakrishna as their ideal and are shaping their lives in the mould of his life.

Rejuvenation of the monastic ideal

The rise of Buddhist monasticism was the greatest challenge to the Vedic ṛṣi ideal. Śaṅkarācārya overcame the Buddhist challenge by establishing the Sannyasin ideal on a firm foundation, although this resulted in the eclipse of the ṛṣi ideal as well. It was, however, a historical necessity, and the Sannyasin has dominated the religious life of the Hindus for more than a thousand years. Renunciation, chastity and freedom constitute the foundation of spirituality, and no religion can maintain for long a high level of spirituality without a core of monks dedicated to these virtues. The rejuven-

ation of Hāinduism would have been impossible without the rejuvenation of its cadre of sannyasins.

Sri Ramakrishna knew this only too well. And, although he did not formally set up a monastic order in his name, he inaugurated a *new monastic tradition* and did all necessary spade-work for its perpetuation. He was an ordained Sannyasin, and he is the ideal for the monks of the Ramakrishna Order as much as he is for his lay devotees. The Order has tried its best to be true to the Ramakrishna ideal, and during the last hundred years no other religious organization has produced so many illumined souls as the Ramakrishna Order has done. It has given a wholly new orientation to the monastic ideal and has effected an all-round rejuvenation of monastic life in India. This has been admitted by the distinguished sociologist G. S. Ghurye.¹⁰

The Ramakrishna community

A segregated, autonomous monastic order, however necessary for the preservation of the purity of spiritual ideals, cannot survive or function effectively without the support of a lay community which shares some of its ideals in common. Even otherwise, a lay community is necessary to give identity, a sense of belonging and a measure of collective support to the non-monastic devotees of a cult. Even during his life time Sri Ramakrishna himself laid the foundation for such a community by sustaining through his boundless love a small circle of devotees. This circle has now expanded into the world-wide Ramakrishna community which holds together with the invisible cords of love, without the canonical rigidity of a church, thousands of people. Although numerically small, the Ramakrishna community forms a significant social presence

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972) Vol. 7 p. 414.

10. See, G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus* (Bombay; Popular Prakashan 1966) p. 235.

in several parts of India and a few other countries where it acts as a catalyst in the spiritual transformation of society. Such an informal collective source of spiritual support is a great blessing for many people, and its existence is yet another evidence of Sri Ramakrishna's love and concern for humanity.

Divinization of human relationships

Another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna is the development of a new attitude towards fellow-men, especially towards the poor, the fallen, the downtrodden and the wicked. Like Buddha and Christ, he too had deep compassion towards the outcasts of society. Among his close lay disciples Girish, Surendra and Kalipada had been bohemians before they came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna. Several actresses and fallen women were blessed by him. In the biographies of Sri Ramakrishna it is recorded that one night he cleaned the latrine of an untouchable with his long hair. That man was Rasik, the sweeper of Dakshineswar. Rasik used to observe the Master from a distance. One day he mustered enough courage to approach the Master and fall at his feet, crying, 'What will happen to me?' Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi and, while coming out of it, he blessed Rasik and assured him, 'You will get everything at the time of your death'. After the passing away of the Master, Rasik spent much of his time in prayer and bhajan in the Tulsi garden near his cottage (which still exists). As his last moments drew near, Rasik's face lit up with a beatific smile. Uttering, 'O Father, you have come', he breathed his last.

The conversion of Manmatha, a noted ruffian of Baghbazari, is still more remarkable. Though a Brahmin, Manmatha had become a wrestler and ruffian of whom even the hooligans of the underworld were afraid.

One day Hiralal, Yogin Ma's brother, who did not like his sister's going to Dakshineswar, asked Manmatha to be present when Sri Ramakrishna came on his first visit to Yogin Ma's house, so as to frighten the Master away. Sri Ramakrishna, as he got down from the carriage, just cast his glance on Manmatha who instantly underwent a transformation and fell at his feet begging his pardon. A few days later Manmatha accompanied Gangadhar (who later on became Swami Akhandananda) to Dakshineswar where the Master took him to the Kali temple and bestowed a special blessing upon him. Since then Manmatha began to practise intense spiritual disciplines and, after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, led a God-intoxicated life, often remaining absorbed in ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards these fallen people was based not merely on compassion but on a lofty vision. He saw God in all of them and did even his redemptive work as a form of worship. In the context of Indian culture this was indeed a radical departure from the traditional attitude. For centuries the downtrodden and the fallen had been treated with contempt or cold indifference as they were believed to be reaping the fruits of their own evil Karma. Sri Ramakrishna never encouraged discussions on past Karma and never regarded anyone as incorrigible or beyond redemption. He saw only the manifestation of the Divine and the potential for future development even in the most lowly people. He divided divine manifestation into three types: *sāttvic*, *rājasic* and *tāmasic*, and looked upon immoral and wicked people as belonging to the last category. In this way he divinized his attitude towards people and accepted them all. Whoever went to him got an infusion of faith, hope or spiritual power from him. As the great scholar Pramadadas Mitra has put it: 'That Being born on earth as Sri Ramakrishna was always

immersed in the nectar of supreme Knowledge, and whoever received the merciful touch of his hands had their minds at once freed from attachment to lust and wealth'.¹¹ It was the divinization of human relationships effected by Sri Ramakrishna that enabled Swami Vivekananda to deify humanism and spiritualize social service. The social orientation of the entire Ramakrishna Movement has been shaped by Sri Ramakrishna's conception of *Śiva-jñāne jīva sevā*, 'service to man as service to God'.

Worship of the Divine Mother

We now come to one of the most significant aspects—if not the most significant aspect—of Sri Ramakrishna's life : his worship of Mother Kālī. There are people who find Mother Kālī too 'terrible' and wonder why a gentle person like Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Her. But for Sri Ramakrishna Kālī was none other than the blissful Mother of the universe, the principle of Śakti, the very Matrix and Power of existence. Unlike traditional Advaitins, Sri Ramakrishna looked upon Śakti as the dynamic counterpart of Brahman. 'He who is Brahman is verily Śakti, the Divine Mother Herself'.¹²

Sri Ramakrishna's worship of the Divine Mother has manifold significance far beyond his personal act. This is a vast subject, and we can discuss here only the following aspects of it in a brief way.

1. *Awakening of cosmic kuṇḍalini.* Swami Shivananda, familiarly known as Mahapurush Maharaj, once stated : 'Swami

Vivekananda once said : In this age the *Brahma-kuṇḍalini*—the Mother who is responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe—has been awakened by the fervent prayers of Sri Ramakrishna'. Commenting on this statement, Mahapurush Maharaj remarked : 'No wonder the individual *kuṇḍalini* will be awakened now! That is why we see symptoms of a great spiritual upsurge everywhere. The Mother, the Primal Energy, is sporting for the good of the world using the body of Sri Ramakrishna. We need have no worry this time'.¹³ What he meant was that, on account of the general awakening that Sri Ramakrishna has brought about, spiritual practices and prayers would more quickly bear fruit in the present time.

2. *A saner way of living in the world.* Sri Ramakrishna has through his life taught us how to live in this world depending entirely on God. Very often the self-confidence, rationality and strength that people claim to have are based on their egoism. Egoism prompts people to scheme and plan endlessly, to manipulate other people to their advantage, and to disturb the existing order according to their whims. This kind of interference in the working of Prakṛti, in divine dispensation, is one of the chief causes of worry, confusion and suffering in life. A person who depends on the Divine Mother prays and waits until he sees his path clearly, and moves forward as circumstances unfold themselves. Such a person enjoys peace, and reduces the possibility of doing harm to himself and to others.

3. *Elevation of womanhood.* Sri Ramakrishna regarded the Godhead as feminine, identified the Divine Mother with the ultimate Reality known as Brahman, saw Her in all women and equated womanhood with motherhood. All this has elevated the

11. विज्ञानपीयूषनिमग्नमूर्तिः

पस्पर्शं यान् यान् दयया करेण ।

ते कामिनीकाञ्चनरिक्तचित्ताः

सद्यो बभूवुर्भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥

Pramadadas Mitra, *Ramakrishna-satkam*

12. *Jini Brahma, tini Śakti, tini ī Mā* is the basic formula in the metaphysical part of Sri Ramakrishna's message.

13. *For Seekers of God*, trans. Swami Vividishananda and Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta; Advaita Ashrama, 1975) p. 7-8.

functional status of women in society to the highest level and has necessitated rethinking on the role of women in society and on social attitudes towards women which form some of the most crucial issues of the present-day world.

Two important social changes that have taken place in the present century need to be noted here. One is the emancipation and rise of women. This in itself should have been a welcome development and should have posed no problem. But in fact it has led to the weakening of family ties and the virtual breaking up of social structure especially in the West. The reason for this state of affairs is clear enough: womanhood is not equated with motherhood in western society, and so the rise of women has not led to a corresponding elevation of motherhood. The existing patriarchal system is clearly inadequate as a cohesive force in the emerging social structure.¹⁴

The other change is the transformation of social attitudes effected by Marxism. It may be a coincidence, but a significant coincidence, that when Sri Ramakrishna was engaged in an intense effort to realize the ultimate Truth, Karl Marx was trying to find a pivotal point for the restructuring of society. Both of them ended their search in identical principle, namely, motherhood—Sri Ramakrishna discovering Divine Motherhood and Marx, human motherhood. Marx clearly saw the inadequacies of patriarchy which he believed to favour capitalism. It was when he was searching for an alternative model that Engels introduced him to the monumental work of the German anthropologist J. J. Bachofen.¹⁵

14. It may be mentioned here that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, with its insistence on the exclusion of women from public life, in Muslim countries is an autocorrective social process meant to strengthen the patriarchal system and defend it against the invasion of western liberalism.

15. Marx and Engels also thoroughly studied

Bachofen based his great work on the following fundamental theses. Religion provides the perennial springs of human culture, and religion is an essentially feminine attribute. According to him:

There is only one mighty lever of all civilizations, and that is religion. Every rise and every decline of human existence springs from a movement that originates in this supreme sphere.... If especially matriarchate must bear this hieratic imprint, it is because of the essential feminine nature, that profound sense of the divine presence which, merging with the feeling of love, lends woman, and particularly the mother, a religious devotion that is most active in the most barbarous times.¹⁶

Secondly, the bonds that hold the society together are maternal. Patriarchal set up produces divisions and conflict. Universal fraternity can be built up only in a matriarchal frame of society. Says Bachofen:

The relationship which stands at the origin of all culture, of every virtue, of every nobler aspect of existence, is that between mother and child; it operates in a world of violence as the divine principle of love, of union, of peace. Raising her young, the woman learns earlier than man to extend her loving care beyond the limits of the ego to another creature, and to direct whatever gift of invention she possesses to the preservation and improvement of this other's existence. Woman at this stage is the repository of all culture, of all benevolence, of all devotion, of all concern for the living and grief for the dead. Yet the love that arises from motherhood is not only more intense, but also more universal.... Whereas the paternal principle is inherently restrictive, the maternal principle is universal; the paternal principle implies limitation to definite groups, but the maternal principle like the life of nature, knows no barriers. The idea of motherhood produces a

the work of the U.S. anthropologist L.H. Morgan who had reached a similar conclusion as that of Bachofen through his studies on American Indians.

16. J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, Ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) p. 85.

sense of universal fraternity among all men, which dies with the development of paternity. The family based on father right is a closed individual organism, whereas the matriarchal family bears the typically universal character that stands at the beginning of all development and distinguishes material life from higher spiritual life. Every woman's womb, the mortal image of the earth mother Demeter, will give brothers and sisters to the children of every other woman; the homeland will know only brothers and sisters until the day when the development of the paternal system dissolves the undifferentiated unity of the mass and introduces a principle of articulation.¹⁷

The distinguished psychologist Eric Fromm on whose excellent study our observations here are based, has stated that European society could formerly maintain its cohesiveness because of the matriarchal nature of the Catholic Church. This social integrity was destroyed by Protestantism Says Fromm :

The Virgin Mary and the Church herself psychologically represent the Great Mother who shelters all her children in her bosom. Indeed, certain maternal traits are ascribed to God himself—though not in a conscious way. The individual 'son of the Church' can be sure of Mother Church's love, so long as he remains her child or returns to her bosom. This child relationship is effected sacramentally....

Protestantism, on the other hand, has done a thorough job of expurgating the matricentric traits of Christianity. Mother substitutes, such as the Virgin Mary or the Church have disappeared, as have maternal traits in God. At the centre of Luther's theology we find doubt or despair that sinful man can have any certainty of being loved. And there is only one remedy: faith. In Calvinism and many other Protestant sects, this remedy proves to be insufficient. It is complemented in a decisive way by the role assigned to the fulfilment of one's duty ('inner worldly asceticism') and by the necessity for 'success' in secular life as the only proof of God's favour and grace.¹⁸

17. Ibid pp. 79-80.

18. Eric Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (Pelican Edition/Penguin Books, 1973) pp. 145-146.

In his famous book *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the German sociologist Max Weber had earlier shown how economic prosperity came to Europe as a direct consequence of Protestant revolution.¹⁹ But, says Fromm, this prosperity was achieved through a tremendous drive towards success involving ruthless competition, exploitation and hoarding—all the evils of capitalism. This drive was supplied by the patricentric complex. It, however, led to personal isolation, incapacity for love, inner insecurity and, inevitably, to the disintegration of society.

Nor has communism succeeded in developing an ideal society. No doubt, Marx understood the importance of the role of the mother, but he wanted her to function as an independent unit unlimited by her personal family—for Marx wanted to reorganize society on a homogeneous pattern without familial divisions. This is an impossible and undesirable goal as it infringes the ideal of chastity which is vitally necessary for the dignity of womanhood and the sanctity of motherhood. Moreover, communism as a political concern is governed by the same ruthless patricentric drive that governs capitalism.

We have indulged in this lengthy discussion only to show the immense social possibilities implied in Sri Ramakrishna's worship of the Divine Mother and elevation of motherhood. It may be impossible to reconstruct human society even in India on strictly matriarchal principles. But if society is to achieve some degree of approximation to universal fraternity free from exploitation, injustice and violence, the maternal instinct must govern all departments of social life. The matriarchal outlook should be the basis of administration in offices, factories, educational institutions,

19. Weber also tried to prove that the poverty of India was caused by the influence of its world-negating religions.

even in business management. The Mother image once dominated human consciousness in primeval times, as it still does in tribal societies. What Sri Ramakrishna has done is to recover this primordial image for the sophisticated modern man. If men were to look upon the earth or the whole universe as the Divine Mother, they would not indulge in wanton destruction of forests and wild life, pollution of the environment or massacre and carnage. There would be lasting peace in the world.

It is, however, in the field of individual development that motherhood plays its most crucial role. Almost all the personality problems of adult life can be traced to faulty maternal care in childhood. Children who do not receive enough love and care from their mothers will develop distorted personalities. The great educationist Pestalozzi has shown that the mother is the ideal which determines a child's future relationships with the world. Alfred Adler, the distinguished psychologist and one-time follower of Freud, says: 'It is the function of the mother to develop the social feeling in the child. Eccentric personalities which we notice among children arise out of their relationships to their mothers, and the direction which this development takes is an index of the mother-child relationship'.²⁰ The most serious of the inner problems of man is existential insecurity. The constant feeling of insecurity and anxiety, without any external cause, which many people feel is caused by a deficiency in the input of love, usually in childhood. 'Inner security comes from knowing that one is loved unconditionally', says Eric Fromm.²¹ This kind of unconditional love only a mother can give. Mother's care of the helpless infant, especially in the first few years of its life

is not dependent on any moral or social obligations to be carried out by the child; there is not even an obligation to return her love.

Sri Ramakrishna's exaltation of motherhood should open the eyes of men and women to the crucial role of the mother in individual and collective life and to the need for the cultivation of unconditional love in inter-personal relationships. It points to the need for the reorganization of family life and a change in the attitudes of modern women in the present-day society.

4. *The highest form of sādhanā.* According to Sri Ramakrishna, 'This attitude of regarding God as Mother is the last word in sadhana. "O God, Thou art my Mother and I am Thy child"—this is the last word in spirituality'.²² Vaisnava scriptures speak of five spiritual attitudes (*bhava*) towards God: *śānta* (calm attitude), *dāsya* (attitude of a servant), *sakhya* (attitude of a friend), *vātsalya* (attitude of a mother) and *Madhura* (attitude of a lover). There have been several illustrious exemplars of these attitudes. But for the attitude of the child towards Mother, which Sri Ramakrishna regarded as the highest spiritual mood, an inspiring example capable of demonstrating the supremacy of this attitude over all the other attitudes was needed. By providing such an example through his own person, Sri Ramakrishna has fulfilled one of the great needs of spiritual aspirants all over the world.

Gift of himself

We have discussed some of the contributions Sri Ramakrishna made through his life and teachings for the welfare and progress of humanity. There are several more—such as the simplification of spiritual disciplines to aspiration (*vyākulatā*), establishing the truth of image worship, revival

20. Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature* (New York: Premier Book/Fawcett Library, 1959) p. 220.

21. Fromm, *op. cit.* pp. 142, 148.

22. *The Gospel*, p. 701.

of music and dance as aids to spiritual progress, and so on—which cannot be discussed here in detail.

His greatest contribution, however, is *he himself*. By the very birth of such a person of perfect purity, spiritual sublimity and all-embracing love, humanity has enriched itself and has its dignity raised to the highest level. The world would have been much poorer had he not been born. Leave aside his powers and contributions, he himself is enough. He may be adored as an Avatar, 'the door in the wall leading to the Infinite' as he put it. But, more than that, he is the embodiment of love. He is the most lovable person known to us. Has the world ever

seen a greater Lover? For many people life would be unthinkable or insupportable without him. His birth on earth is for them the greatest blessing that the Supreme Spirit has conferred on humanity.

As such, it would be appropriate to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna in a spirit of thanks giving rather than in a spirit of paying homage. He never sought, nor needs, honour. By honouring him we only honour ourselves. He stands in his own supernal glory. Let us rejoice in the blessing that we have received in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. And may this anniversary year be a year of grace for the entire humanity.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY MASTER*

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

1. [Sri Ramakrishna] came to live near Calcutta, the capital of India, the most important university town in our country which was sending out sceptics and materialists by the hundreds every year. Yet many of these university men—sceptics and agnostics—used to come and listen to him. I heard of this man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language, and I thought, 'Can this man be a great teacher?' I crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: 'Do you believe in God, Sir?' 'Yes', he replied. 'Can you prove it, Sir?' 'Yes.' 'How?' 'Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense.' That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to

go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life. I have read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed; about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, 'Be thou whole', and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside. It could be done; and my Master used to say, 'Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world.' Be therefore spiritual first; have something to give and then stand before the world and give it.

Religion is not talk, or doctrines, or

* Excerpted from 'My Master', *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978) Vol. 4, pp. 179-187.

theories; nor is it sectarianism. Religion cannot live in sects and societies. It is the relation between the soul and God; how can it be made into a society? It would then degenerate into business, and wherever there are business and business principles in religion, spirituality dies. Religion does not consist in erecting temples, or building churches, or attending public worship. It is not to be found in books, or in words, or in lectures, or in organizations. *Religion consists in realization.* As a fact, we all know that nothing will satisfy us until we know the truth for ourselves. However we may argue, however much we may hear, but one thing will satisfy us, and that is our own realization; and such an experience is possible for every one of us if we will only try. The first ideal of this attempt to realize religion is that of renunciation. As far as we can, we must give up. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God will never go together. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Let people try it if they will, and I have seen millions in every country who have tried; but after all, it comes to nothing. If one word remains true in the saying, it is, give up everything for the sake of the Lord. This is a hard and long task, but you can begin it here and now. Bit by bit we must go towards it.

2. *The second idea that I learnt from my Master, and which is perhaps the most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic.* They are but various phases of one eternal Religion. That one eternal Religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only the one. One infinite Religion existed all through eternity

and will ever exist, and this Religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can. Religions manifest themselves not only according to race and geographical position, but according to individual power. In one man religion is manifesting itself as intense activity, as work. In another it is manifesting itself as intense devotion, in yet another, as mysticism, in others as philosophy, and so forth. It is wrong when we say to others, 'Your methods are not right.' Perhaps a man, whose nature is that of love, thinks that the man who does good to others is not on the right road to religion, because it is not his own way, and is therefore wrong. If the philosopher thinks, 'Oh, the poor ignorant people, what do they know about a God of Love, and loving Him? They do not know what they mean', he is wrong, because they may be right and he also....

3. In the presence of my Master I found out that man could be perfect, even in this body. Those lips never cursed anyone, never even criticized anyone. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil, that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good. *That tremendous purity, that tremendous renunciation is the one secret of spirituality.* 'Neither through wealth, nor through progeny, but through renunciation alone, is immortality to be reached', say the Vedas. 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and follow me', says the Christ. So all great saints and Prophets have expressed it, and have carried it out in their lives. How can great spirituality come without that renunciation? Renunciation is the background of all religious thought wherever it be, and you will always find that as this idea of renunciation lessens, the more will the senses creep into the field of

religion, and spirituality will decrease in the same ratio.

That man was the embodiment of renunciation. In our country it is necessary for a man who becomes a Sannyasin to give up all worldly wealth and position, and this my Master carried out literally. There were many who would have felt themselves blest if he would only have accepted a present from their hands, who would gladly have given him thousands of rupees if he would have taken them, but these were the only men from whom he would turn away. He was a triumphant example, a living realization of the complete conquest of lust and of desire for money. He was beyond all ideas of either, and such men are necessary for this century. Such renunciation is necessary in these days when men have begun to think that they cannot live a month without what they call their 'necessities', and which they are increasing out of all proportion. It is necessary in a time like this that a man should arise to demonstrate to the sceptics of the world that there yet breathes a man who does not care a straw for all the gold or all the fame that is in the universe. Yet there are such men

4. *The other idea of his life was intense love for others.* The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it. People in our country have not the same customs as you have in visiting a religious teacher or a Sannyasin. Somebody would come to ask him about something, some perhaps would come hundreds of miles, walking all the way, just to ask one question, to hear one word from him, 'Tell me one word for my salvation.' That

is the way they come. They come in numbers, unceremoniously, to the place where he is mostly to be found; they may find him under a tree and question him, and before one set of people has gone, others have arrived. So if a man is greatly revered, he will sometimes have no rest day or night. He will have to talk constantly. For hours people will come pouring in, and this man will be teaching them.

So men came in crowds to hear him, and he would talk twenty hours in the twenty-four, and that not for one day, but for months and months until at last the body broke down under the pressure of this tremendous strain. His intense love for mankind would not let him refuse to help even the humblest of the thousands who sought his aid.

...Therefore my Master's message to mankind is: 'Be spiritual and realize truth for yourself.' He would have you give up for the sake of your fellow-beings. He would have you cease talking about love for your brother, and set to work to prove your words. The time has come for renunciation, for realization; and then you will see the harmony in all the religions of the world. You will know that there is no need of any quarrel. And then only will you be ready to help humanity. To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realized that in reality they are all part and parcel of the one eternal Religion.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA*

SWAMI PREMANANDA

In this Incarnation the keynote of Sri Ramakrishna's life is the complete absence of the expressions of supernatural powers or lordly qualities. In the life of all the previous divine incarnations we find, more or less, some expression of supernatural powers such as feeding five thousand people with only five loaves of bread, making rivers obey, going through the air, creating mango trees all on a sudden and feeding the fruits thereof to people, and the like. But this time we find their complete absence. It is a very interesting feature of this incarnation.

Then again all the other incarnations 'illuminated the world with the lustre of their beauty'; but this time the physical beauty is conspicuous by its absence. Girish asked, 'Why, sir, there's no beauty this time?' When the Master was engaged in spiritual practices, a unique lustre would emanate from his body, at which he implored the Divine Mother, 'What need have I of physical beauty, Mother? Give me spiritual beauty.'

Furthermore, most incarnations were great scholars, well versed in all the scriptures; but here is a different case. Śrī Caitanya defeated the all-conquering Pandits of the day and became famous as the foremost savant. What to speak of Śaṅkarācārya? Having learned all the Śāstras, Buddha despaired of Mukti (salvation). No doubt, he, like Śrī Kṛṣṇa, was the milker of all the Upaniṣads. But our Master? It is a wonderful affair—he could read and write somehow, that's all. But in philosophical discussions with him Pandits were confounded. How is that? There is a world of difference between understanding through discussion and knowing through direct perception or realization. How much knowledge of Benares can be gathered from

a map? People listen to him who had been to Benares. The Master had intuitive knowledge of even the innermost chamber of Truth. Once Swamiji was highly praising a man. The Master heard him a little and then passed his judgement on him, which, to the surprise of Swamiji, came out to be true. Our Master had a unique insight into things and persons.

Other Avatāras or incarnations preached their philosophies and doctrines. But Ramakrishna never did it himself openly. He would talk of them to those who had acquired love for him and would go to him for the purpose. Sri Keshab wrote about him in his paper; at that he said, 'If you do like that, don't come to me.' One night I woke up at midnight and found him walking in the room in a semi-ecstatic state and making sounds of spitting and saying, 'Don't, Mother, don't give me that hellish fame.' It appeared to me as if the Divine Mother was following him with a big basket of fame and saying, 'My child, I have brought name and fame for you; do take them', and the Master getting excited was walking about in the room and making sounds of spitting more and more loudly. And what signs of disgust did I notice in his face! He used to say, 'Let the bud open, bees will come of themselves. Let character be formed, the world will be attracted by its beauty.'

Everyone has said that his own doctrine is the best; and some have gone so far as to say that there is no salvation except through their religions. But our Master used to say, 'There are infinite ways of reaching the Infinite, and the doctrines are but the

* Translation by Swami Satswarupananda of a booklet in Bengali published in 1930 by Brahmachari Jnan Maharaj.

ways and not the goal.' One blind man touched the leg of an elephant and at once jumped to the conclusion that the elephant was like a pillar; another felt its ear and concluded that it was like a winnowing fan. Both were right and, again, both of them were wrong. All quarrels were due to this. None felt the whole of the creature. The Master demonstrated by his life that Truth can be reached through all the religions, which are but ways, and that there is no necessity for quarrels—all religions are right. Then again he used to say, 'The end of human life is to realize God.' Failing to realize Him, life is all misery. So we must get Him—anyhow. What is the use of being conversant with all opinions and doctrines? 'You have come to eat mangoes, take them. What is the use of counting leaves and branches? What will it avail, except loss of energy?' Dry ratiocination, endless discussions as to whether the Lord has forms or not, whether rebirth is true or not! If you want to know what road leads to Benares, you must have faith in the words of those who had gone there. Then you will have to go there yourself and see things there with your own eyes. But instead of that if you shut yourself up in a room and make your brain dizzy with constantly thinking that Benares is such and such, you will have no real conception of the holy city. And what is that to me if there be any rebirth or not? My business is to realize God in this very life.

'If anyone knows the Atman properly (i.e. realizes It), then the true significance of life is attained; if It is not known, then great indeed is the loss. Having realized the Atman in each and all beings, the truly intelligent become immortal by transcending this world (of Avidya)'.¹ So to realize

God in this very life is the aim of human existence. Doctrines and churches are no real help in our spiritual life, rather they bring in fanaticism and retard progress. Know Him by knowing Whom all else is known. That's all.

'That by hearing which everything unheard is heard, by discussion which everything undiscussed is discussed, and by truly knowing which everything unknown is truly known'.² Having realized God, having realized Atman, the book of infinite knowledge opens to one's view. For He who is knowledge itself is seated there in your heart. The Master became one with this Infinite Knowledge. Of what avail was book-learning to him?

He would say, 'What is required is heart, intense hankering, sincere longing for Him. When, without Him, life would become quite unbearable, then alone, He will reveal Himself to such a soul.' This is the essence of his teachings. During his Sādhanā days, when the day was drawing to its close and the sun was sinking down the western horizon he used to burst out in an agony of soul, 'Oh! Thou art going away, what hast Thou done for me; I remain the same as I was.' And in the intensity of his agony he would draw out his tongue perforce or rub his face on the ground. This life appeared to him to be quite useless, because the Supreme Self had not been realized. At the indefinite absence of the Lord, he experienced the burning pain of a venomous snake-bite. Just imagine the intensity of his dispassion: some grains somehow getting into the mass

भूतेषु भूतेषु विचित्य घौराः

प्रेत्यास्माल्लोकादमृता भवन्ति ॥

Kena Upaniṣad 2.5

2. येनाश्रुतं श्रुतं भवति, अमतं मतम्, अविज्ञातं विज्ञातमिति कथं नु भगवः स आदेशो भवतीति ॥

Chāndogya Upaniṣad

1. इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति
न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टिः ।

of his long matted hairs germinated, so oblivious was he of his body.

Other Avatāras represented particular ideals. Not that other ideals were absent in them; they had all the ideals in them but they publicly gave expression only to particular ideals. Lord Gaurāṅga was the incarnation of divine Love; he was love crystallized. Similarly, Śaṅkara was knowledge itself, Buddha was the embodiment of renunciation, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was of selfless work. Śrī Kṛṣṇa synthesized all religions and philosophies. He showed that Karma, Yoga, Jñāna, and Bhakti were components of one great Sādhana. To demonstrate this, he formed his life on the basis of selfless work. Selfless work purifies the heart, and in the pure heart comes renunciation. To teach this renunciation came Buddha. Nothing he did for himself not even for his own salvation; but everything for the good of others, for the suffering humanity. He would weep because he failed to discover the path to humanity's salvation. After renunciation comes Jñāna or knowledge. Knowledge is followed by Love Divine and this Love was distributed broadcast by Lord Gaurāṅga who was all love. But people came to think that all these paths were mutually contradictory. This apparent contradiction has been dispelled and all are brought under one grand synthesis by Sri Ramakrishna. The one grand austere Sādhana of India throughout the ages has thus fructified, has thus reached its highest fulfilment in this ocean of synthesis, which is Sri Ramakrishna.

He was mercy incarnate. I cannot conceive the limit of his mercy. On his way to Benares on pilgrimage he, seeing the poverty and distress of the people, said to Mathur Babu, 'Feed and clothe them well or else here stops my pilgrimage. I am not going to leave these people.' Even when he was ill-treated or was sick, he did not give up showing mercy to all who came

sorely distressed. If a day were about to pass without bringing in any new seeker after Truth, he would anxiously say, 'How is it? No one has come today to seek Truth!', and would cast longing looks over the road. Once Hazra took him to task and said, 'Why are you mad after Naren, always enquiring about him. What necessity have you of him and his ilk? You are not of this earth. Why should you bother yourself about them?' Like a simple child he believed Hazra, and thought himself to be wrong. Then he went to the Panchavati, the place where he had most of his visions. The Divine Mother said to him, 'What a fool are you! Have you come to the world for your own enjoyment? Shame!' Then replied the Master, 'What do you talk, Mother? If for the good of humanity I am to suffer million times greater misery, that will I do most gladly.' Six months hardly passed when he contracted cancer; he could only talk in whispers; he was suffering from hunger, but could not take anything. He felt no ease either in sitting or lying down. Day and night he felt a burning sensation all over his body. But in spite of all these terrible sufferings, this ocean of selfless mercy never stopped conferring his grace on whoever cared to come. This went on for a year and a half. If this be not crucifixion, I do not know what it is.

To while away time by sitting idle in the name of meditation and counting beads is a sign of Tamas. Sri Ramakrishna used to do much work. We have seen him with our own eyes doing the work of a gardener. Again, he could not tolerate doing work in a slipshod manner. He himself used to do every work with a nice precision and gracefulness and taught us to follow him. He did all these, but how inward was he all the time! If any one of us got cheated when buying articles, he ridiculed us and said, 'I have asked you to be pious but not

to be fools.' We have heard him repeating many times, 'Yoga is the skill in action'.³

He undertook all kinds of Sādhanā or spiritual practice and was blessed with the realization of God through all forms of Religion. Seeing God in all creatures, he remained above all aversion or hatred. He was always beside himself with divine Love, he was possessed with it, so to say. He had not the slightest desire for founding a sect or the like. What need has he of a wall or a fencing—he, who has transcended the bondages of conventional religions, who has realized the Atman, who is a paragon of Divine Love? Do you know when sects are created? It is when the heart is full of weakness, fear, and hatred. Know it for certain that the fate of our organization will be sealed when the idea of forming a sect will have crept into it. India has come to such a pass because of this sectarianism. The waters of little ponds and puddles become dirty, but the flowing waters of rivers are never polluted. Beware of fanaticism. It must not enter our organization. 'We are the followers of Ramakrishna', 'There is no salvation except through Ramakrishna', 'Hence you should worship Ramakrishna', 'Ramakrishna is the greatest of Avatāras'—never lay hands on another's faith by such nonsensical talks.

He did not have the slightest touch of egotism in him. Only Mother made him keep the pious 'I'. We have seen with these eyes of ours the incarnation of perfect humility. Just hear, the Master took away the leaves from which the beggars had taken food, on his own head. With his long locks he cleansed the filth of the servants of the temple. And all these, to drive away the least vestige of egotism from himself. Let this be an object-lesson to you to learn humility. One of his parables is: 'The

Guru asked the disciple: fetch the thing which you think is worse than you. The disciple, after considering various objects and finding nothing but filth worse than himself, was about to pick up some filth when it rebuked him saying, "Don't, don't touch me, you man; it is my contact with you that has made me so much degraded." Hearing this, whatever little egotism the disciple had was gone. He came to know that there was nothing worse than he.' By telling such parables he used to teach us humility.

The scriptures speak of 'absolutely unbroken continence'. We would not have believed it, had we not seen the Master. Through Brahmacharya he came to have wonderful control over every nerve and muscle of his body. He suffered terrible pain from cancer, but when the time for washing it came, he simply asked us to wait a little and the next moment said, 'Now wash'. Then he felt no pain at all. Do you know how is that possible? The Yogins can, at their will, have absolute control over the whole body; they can even stop the action of the heart. At their will they can take away Pṛāṇa or vital energy from any part of their body. Then that part of the body becomes dead to all practical purposes—it becomes dull to all sensations. If you drive a knife into it, it will not feel. These are not cock-and-bull stories, we have seen it with our own eyes.

But the incarnations, even though they always abide in the Self, keep a little portion of their mind on the body. Even that too they can take away whenever they like. But this is necessary, otherwise the body will cease to be. The Master used to say: The copra gets separated from the rest of the coconut; but so long it is not broken open, it must be somewhere in touch with its outer covering.

He would say about the caste system
The devotees form a caste by themselves

³. योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥

they need not observe the rigidity of the caste-system among themselves.' He could take food from men of pure heart even though they were born of low castes; but could not do so from men of bad character, though born of high castes. Not only that, he could not use even a seat if it was spread by one of the latter class. Once he took food from the same plate with another. The latter cried out, 'Hold, sir, what are you doing? I have eaten today what the orthodox would not touch.' The Master replied, 'What does it matter? Your mind is pure.' We have heard him say, 'The man who takes the purest food sanctioned by the scriptures but has no love for the Lord and is worldly to a degree—that man's food is as good as pork and beef. And the food of a man who has devotion for the Lord and has faith in Him, even if that be not sanctioned by the scriptures, is as good as the purest food praised by the scriptures.'

He was very strict regarding food and wouldn't accept it from anyone and everyone. If anybody brought him food with any selfish desire, he could not take it. If the food were touched by a man of undesirable character or if a portion of it were given to some one else before it was offered to him, he would at once detect it and could not take such food. Again, he would not allow devotees to take such food as would intensify desires or make for dullness. However, he would add, 'it would not affect the Jñānins; but the novice in spiritual practices must be very careful about food.'

The Master would poke fun at persons obsessed with a morbid mania for physical purity. He used to say, 'Such persons, in their very attempts to keep themselves off from all impurity, live in a constant fear of being contaminated and thus get their minds enmeshed in impurity. So it is very difficult for them to think of God.' From this you are not, however, to jump to the conclusion

that simply by flinging all rules of cleanliness to the winds one can realize the highest spirituality.

The Master lived the life of complete consecration at the feet of the Divine Mother, and as he used to say, he gave the power of attorney to the Mother. Girish Babu did it to the Master—he laid the whole burden of his spiritual progress on the Master's shoulders. It is a very difficult affair. One having the least touch of egotism cannot thus give power of attorney to another. The Master used to say, 'By this one is to live like a dry leaf at the mercy of the wind, or like kittens which remain wheresoever their mother pleases to keep them—sometimes on a bed, sometimes near the hearth, sometimes again on a heap of straw.' He who can keep his devotion fixed like the polestar in weal and woe, who in the midst of the most cruel heart-rending discharge of duty, can say calmly, 'I do, O Lord, that which Thou residing in my heart, dost engage me in'—he alone has consecrated his all and taken shelter in Him; He too takes the responsibility of such a soul and frees him from all sins.

The Master encouraged us to read scriptures and books dealing with holy topics. He kept some books such as *Mukti O Tāhār Sādhan* with him and asked us to read them to him. At least as long as we read holy books, our minds will dwell in Him. One cannot be meditating all day long. But then, such studies are but secondary. What is of primary importance in spiritual life is the descent of His grace. 'This Atman is not to be attained by mere hearing or committing to memory the Vedas or (by their understanding) with the keen intellect. It is realized by him whom it chooses—to such this Atman reveals Its real nature'.⁴ With the descent of His grace

4. नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो

न मेघया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।

infinite knowledge opens before the mind ; then books are redundant. There is a great difference between realization and mere book-learning. The Master would say, 'So long as the southern wind does not blow, there is need for fan.'

Pilgrimages stimulate holy thoughts. But the Master used to say, 'Whoever has not here (i.e. in the heart), has not there (i.e. in holy places) ; whoever has here, has there too.' Holy men impart holiness to those places. It is the good-will of these great souls that fills the atmosphere of these places with heavenly purity which soothes the

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य-

स्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनुं स्वाम् ॥

Katha Upaniṣad 1.2.23 ; Mundaka Upaniṣad 3.2.3

contrite hearts. It is man who makes places holy, and not vice versa. Again with the increase of the current of evil thoughts there, their holiness decreases. Easy conveyance has polluted the atmosphere of many places of pilgrimage. When their accessibility was very difficult, true devotees alone used to frequent them ; but now whoever has money goes there, whether for a change or for any other trivial reason.

So forget everything else and completely immerse yourselves in the thought of the Master. The Lord is not a subject for idle talks. He is to be realized. We must get Him anyhow. He must be made our own in this very life, at any cost. There is no other way to permanent peace for the suffering humanity except through God realization. He alone is the solace of our burning heart.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA-LILĀ-STOTRAM

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

लोकनावश्चिदाकारो राजमानः स्वधामनि ।
कलिकल्मषमग्नानामुत्तारण-चिकीर्षया ॥
मायार्शक्ति समाश्रित्य योऽवतीर्णो महीतले ।
नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

सद्ब्राह्मणकुले जातो दिव्यदेहं समाश्रितः ।
बाल्ये मो दिव्यभावेन वयस्यैर्मुदभावहत् ॥
विरक्तो मोवने तीव्रं मायापाशविवर्जितः ।
नित्यमुक्तस्वभावोऽपि लोकानुग्रहकामतः ॥
लोकानामेव शिक्षार्थं तपस्तप्त्वा सुदुष्करम् ।
निद्राशन परित्यज्य वर्षाणां द्व्यधिकान् दश ॥

1. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher, the Lord of the universe, the embodiment of consciousness who, although reigning in his own abode, incarnated himself on earth through the power of Maya, being desirous of lifting up those who are immersed in the darkness of this Age of Kali.

2. Salutation to Ramakrishna who was born in a virtuous Brahmin family and spent his childhood in a divine mood enjoying his play with his chums. In his youth, being free of the bonds of Maya, he was endowed with intense renunciation and, although eternally free, engaged himself in very difficult austerities, ignoring sleep and food for twelve years, in order to teach

स्वस्वरूपं समादाय सच्चिदानन्दविग्रहम् ।
 दयामूर्तिः सदानन्दो जिज्ञासूनुपदिष्टवान् ॥
 तेषामज्ञाननाशाय लाभाय च परात्मनः ।
 नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

सत्यबोधतया साङ्गान् सर्वधर्मान् समाचरन् ।
 धर्ममात्रन्तु सत्यं वै येन सम्यक् सुनिश्चितम् ।
 नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

यो भक्तान् भक्तिमार्गे तु निनाय लोकनाथकः ।
 आकृष्य मानसं तेषां भक्तिभावाद्भ्रंया गिरा ।
 दर्शयित्वा महाभावं परमानन्ददायकम् ।
 नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

ज्ञानिनो ज्ञानमार्गे च येन सम्यक् प्रदर्शिताः ।
 नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

यैर्मतैर्धार्मिका यस्मिन् धर्ममार्गे व्यदस्थिताः ।
 तेषां तन्मतमादृत्य भक्तिस्तत्र दृढीकृता ॥
 प्रोत्साहिता यथान्यायं येन तत् साधनेष्वपि ।
 नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

पूजिता येन वै शश्वत् सर्वेऽपि साम्प्रदायिकाः ।
 सम्प्रदायविहीनो यः सम्प्रदायं न निन्दति ।
 नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

शश्वल्लीला-दिलासेन येन विश्वमिदं ततम् ।
 लीलारूपं सदानन्दं रामकृष्णं नमाम्यहम् ॥

mankind. Being the embodiment of compassion, after realizing his true nature as *sat-cit-ānanda* he gave instructions to eager souls in order to dispel their ignorance and to enable them to attain the knowledge of the Supreme Self.

3. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher who, prompted by quest for truth, practised thoroughly every religious discipline with all its auxiliaries and came to the firm conclusion that spirituality alone is true.

4. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher, the leader of people, who guided devotees along the path of devotion, drawing their minds through devotional talks and by revealing the blissful state of divine inebriation known as *mahābhāva*.

5. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher who made the seekers of knowledge tread properly the path of knowledge.

6. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher who, accepting the various spiritual paths followed by the different seekers, strengthened their faith in their own respective paths and encouraged them to follow correctly the disciplines of those paths.

7. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher who, although independent of all traditions, always showed respect for all spiritual traditions and never criticized any of them.

8. I salute Ramakrishna who in his ever-blissful sportive form is perpetually engaged in *līlā* throughout the universe.

सर्वधर्मप्रणेतारं धर्मग्लानिविनाशकम् ।
साधुमित्रं शिवं शान्तं रामकृष्णं नमाम्यहम् ॥

अज्ञानतिमिरे यस्तु ज्ञानालोकप्रदीपकः ।
विमलानन्ददानाय प्रादुरासीन्महीतले ।
नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

संसारार्णवघोरे यः कर्णधारस्वरूपकः ।
नमोऽस्तु रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

त्वं हि विष्णुविरिञ्चिस्त्वं त्वं च देवो महेश्वरः ।
त्वं चैव शक्तिरूपोऽसि निर्गुणस्त्वं सनातनः ।
त्वां स्तोतुं कोऽत्र शक्तः स्याद् भावातीतमनामयम् ।
भगवन् सर्वभूतात्मन् रामकृष्ण नमोऽस्तुते ॥

सर्वाय सर्वपाराय सर्वभावस्वरूपिणे ।
सर्वभावविहीनाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

महामायास्वरूपाय महामोहविनाशिने ।
मायातीताय शान्ताय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

निरञ्जनं नित्यमनन्तरूपं
भक्तानुकम्पाद्घृतविग्रहं वै ।
ईशावतारं परमेशमीड्यं
तं रामकृष्णं शिरसा नमामि ॥

9. I salute Ramakrishna who is auspicious and calm, who is the awakener of all religions, the destroyer of moral degradation, and the friend of all virtuous people.

10. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher who manifested himself in the darkness of the earth as a lamp with the light of knowledge, in order to distribute the pure bliss of the Spirit.

11. Salutation to Ramakrishna the divine Teacher acting as the helmsman [of the ship of life] in the terrible ocean of transmigratory existence.

12. Salutation to you O Ramakrishna. O Lord, you are verily Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Śiva and Śakti, and you are also the eternal impersonal Reality indwelling all beings as their immutable Self, transcending all thoughts—who can praise you adequately?

13. Salutation to you O Ramakrishna, who is all, who is the transcendent goal of all and the embodiment of all moods, although devoid of all moods.

14. Salutation to you O Ramakrishna, who is of the nature of the great Maya but transcends it, who is the destroyer of the great delusion of life and is perfect tranquility.

15. I bow down to Ramakrishna, the adorable supreme Lord, the Incarnation of God who, although stainless, eternal and infinite, took the human form out of compassion for his devotees.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE IDEAL OF SEVA

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA*

To understand Sri Ramakrishna's ideal of service (*seva*) we should understand the difference between *seva* as service of God and Karma-yoga as it is traditionally understood.

It is recorded in the *Līlāprasāṅga* (translated into English as *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*) by Swami Saradananda that when Sri Ramakrishna was one day explaining the tenets of the Vaiṣṇava cult, he said that we should not speak of compassion in the context of man's relationship with his fellow-men. For compassion belongs to God alone. What, then, can man do? Man can only worship or serve others, regarding them as God Himself.

Now, this is a monistic standpoint, because no dualist or a qualified monist will admit that the *jīva*, the individual soul, and Śiva, God are identical. It is only the monist who does so. Hence the background of *Seva* (service to man as God) is monism. So far about the ideal set before us. Now we have to consider the people who serve and the nature of service. What do we mean by service, *Seva*? In this connection a well-known verse in the *Gīta* becomes significant. It states: 'The ladle is Brahman; the oblation is Brahman; the fire is Brahman; the man who does this offering is Brahman; and his goal is to reach Brahman by thinking of this act as Brahman Itself.'¹ Here we

see that, according to the *Gīta*, everything is to be considered a manifestation of Brahman

This is the ideal that is taken up in *Seva*. But you may say, this is too high an ideal which does not conform to the actual experience of the people engaged in *Seva*. Sri Ramakrishna also was a realist. He said that, so long as one had body-consciousness, one could not leave out Personal God or the world as non-existent, but had to admit God and the world as existing separately from himself. This state of knowledge, as you know, is a stage in spiritual progress. When we go through the different teachings of Sri Ramakrishna recorded in the *Līlāprasāṅga* and the *Kathāmṛta*, we find that he talked about not only monism but also of qualified monism and dualism as well. His idea is that one progresses vertically from dualism to qualified monism and then to monism, and through monism to identity with the Reality behind the world of manifested *Maya*. Again, after realizing the highest Truth, Incarnations and Prophets, and some divinely commissioned saints also, can come down to the lower planes; and they can move from one plane of consciousness to another just as they will. From dualism they can go to qualified monism, from qualified monism again to monism, and also from monism to dualism—and so on back and forth, as they wish. This accords with the attitude of Hanumān who, in answer to Rāmachandra's question as to how he thought of Him, said: 'When I think of myself as a body, I am your servant; when I think of myself as a *jīva* (as a soul living in a body) then I am a part of Yours; and when I think of myself as the Self, then I am one

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1. ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् ।
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥

with You.² This is the idea involved in the philosophy of Seva also. We proceed higher by stages, till we reach the ultimate Reality.

Now let us turn to Karma-Yoga. What does 'karma' really mean? To quote from the Gita again: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in oblation or in charity, and whatever austerity you undertake, you dedicate all that to Me.'³ All types of work are comprehended in this verse. Here Śrī Kṛṣṇa seems to have thought of work in a very wide sense. This view is held by Madhusūdana Sarasvati in his annotation on the Gita. But Śaṅkarācārya and some other commentators and annotators do not generalize in that way when writing on Karma-yoga. They hold that only the rites and duties sanctioned by the scriptures are involved in Karma-yoga. According to their view, in Karma-yoga you are to work without the idea of agentship and you have to offer the result of your work to God.

Next, what does 'yoga' mean? It literally means association or combination. Here it means the union of the individual self with God. So a dualistic conception of Reality underlies Karma-yoga—as they explain it. Through karma I become associated with God. But how? Śaṅkarācārya explains that karma only purifies our minds, and he is firm that this karma can never be combined with Jñāna, Knowledge.

But in Seva, or if I may call it 'Seva-yoga', we have seen that it is directly concerned with God, without the mediation

of earning some fruit and offering it to Him.

According to Śaṅkarācārya, karma purifies our minds and through that purification comes bhakti, devotion; and from bhakti comes jñāna, enlightenment; and through that we become freed from the world. These are the stages through which one has to pass in the practice of Karma-yoga. But he seems to stumble when he comes to explaining the first line of the Gita verse, *karmanāiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā Janakādayaḥ*⁴ (I shall explain the word *saṁsiddhi* later on.) 'Janaka and others remained poised in *saṁsiddhi* through karma or *along with* karma.' Both meanings are accepted by Śaṅkarācārya: *through* karma and *along with* karma. Śaṅkarācārya first explains *saṁsiddhi* as 'purification of mind'. Janaka and others remained poised in that state of purified minds, *karmanā*, through karma. Karma helped them to purify their minds, and they remained established in that state of *saṁsiddhi*, purified minds, through Karma-yoga. But the word *saṁsiddhi* literally means 'complete or full *siddhi*', full success, and not mere *siddhi*, success. So it should mean Liberation, full identification with the ultimate Reality. Accepting this alternative meaning, Śaṅkarācārya argues that in that context *karmanā* means *karmanā saha*, 'along with karma'. So Janaka and others remained poised in Liberation along with karma, along with work. That means, although they became liberated, and work should have dropped off from their personalities, still it somehow persisted—may be for the fulfilment of some purpose of God. In this way Śaṅkarācārya makes a sort of a compromise. He himself reconciles the apparent contradiction between his two interpretations by saying that when the idea of

2. देहबुद्ध्या तु दासोऽस्मि जीवबुद्ध्या त्वदंशकः ।
आत्मबुद्ध्या त्वमेवाहमिति मे निश्चिता मतिः ॥

3. यत् करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।
यत्तपस्यसि कीन्तेय तत् कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥

agentship and acquisition of any personal gain are knocked out of work then work itself ceases to be so in the ordinary sense. It then becomes equivalent to enlightenment. Janaka and others set an ideal way of life to be imitated by other people for their own good. Śaṅkarācārya says that the spiritual characteristics of the successful ones are placed before us for being imitated so that we may in that way go higher up.

In Seva we accept these ideals of freeing ourselves from egoism and hankering for personal rewards while doing any work for others. My knowledge of the ideal, my endeavour to attain the ideal—all these can somehow go along with my work. This is how I understand Śaṅkarācārya and Sri Ramakrishna together. It should be noted that in Seva there is no such thing as 'offering the result to God'. Because, God is directly worshipped in Seva; the person worshipped or served is God Himself. And what do I get through that worship? I get only spiritual benefit out of it. There is nothing to be *offered* to God. So no personal result accrues from my service to others which I can offer to God. This is how Seva differs from Karma-yoga.

There is one more difference. The Karma-yogin may not believe in God. Swamiji said Buddha was the greatest Karma-yogin. I do not know if Buddha ever believed in God or not; at least he avoided talking about Him. So, even a man who does not believe in God can become a Karma-yogin. The old Mīmāṃsakas also did not care much about God—not even the gods such as Indra, Rudra, Varuṇa and others. According to them what a man ought to do was to simply follow the Vedas, perform the rituals, and through that he would reach heaven. Heaven was the highest result that he could get. Karma-yoga for all the Mīmāṃsakas meant some rituals without

God, a Godless-work. But Seva is not Godless. We have to believe in God and that it is God Himself whom we are worshipping through our service.

Another beauty of Seva has been noted in the *Līlāprasaṅga*. Swamiji, on the very day he heard this utterance of Sri Ramakrishna—*Śiva-jñāne jīva sevā*—said, 'I have received a unique message, and if God gives me an opportunity I shall show the world what it means.' The result has been the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. And Swamiji also remarked that there, in that utterance, he found the reconciliation or synthesis of Jñāna, Bhakti and Karma. I shall also add that there is a synthesis of meditation, yoga, as well. And this is the natural way for man. We think, we love, we meditate, we work—we do all these things naturally. What is natural to a man in his ordinary life can be easily transposed to his spiritual field as well. There also we can serve others, do work, become active in the welfare of others. Why? Because we love them as forms of God. So Bhakti also comes in there. All these will lead us to the highest experience, identity with the highest Reality, through deliberation on the ultimate Goal. This, again, is Jñāna. And, when we are faced with any problem we cannot solve, we meditate and call on God to show us the path. Thus meditation also comes in. In this way, all the four paths become combined, associated together, in our progress through Seva. Therefore I say, 'Seva-yoga' is a unique message that Sri Ramakrishna has delivered for this age, which can be taken up not only by monks, but even by lay people. When they are engaged in their every-day household work, the lay people also can practise this Seva by thinking of their family members as representations of God Himself, and their families as trusts given to them for proper service.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO GOD REALIZATION ACCORDING TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA*

Before discussing Sri Ramakrishna's views on God realization and the practical steps to it, it is necessary to clarify what these terms really mean. First of all, the word 'God' conveys to us an ideal that we can frame in our mind as the highest expression of the qualities that we ascribe to a being whom we do not clearly understand. This view is contained in Rāmānuja's definition of God as *aśeṣa kalyāṇaguṇasāmpannaḥ nikhila heyaguṇavarjitah*, 'God is possessed of all good and auspicious qualities and free from all qualities which are to be shunned by a devotee.' This is a very simple definition which may be acceptable to most people who are not much attracted to theorization about God. Theories are often different from our practical understanding. We like to indulge in speculations, use words which we do not ourselves clearly understand simply because such words are found in our scriptures or are used by great teachers. Most of our conceptions of God are based on this approach. We are unable to conceive God truly because our minds are not pure. The simplest conception of God that we can have is as the embodiment of perfect purity. But since we are not ourselves pure, we cannot understand what perfect purity really means. However, as we go on following that ideal, by stages we become purer and purer. As Jesus said in the Bible, 'Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.... Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' We have to have godly qualities in the fullest measure, only then can we have realization of God.

This leads us to the next question, what does God realization mean? It means, God will be real to us, in the sense that divine qualities will be manifested in ourselves. That is, as we realize God, we become God-like. The more we proceed towards Him, the more we imbibe that ideal in our minds and, when we have fully achieved that state of perfect purity, we lose our individuality, our limitations, and become one with Him. Complete realization means complete identification with the Godhead, or elimination of the idea of separateness: this is God realization in the Advaitic sense. But there are various other systems in which the experience of God is understood differently. There are dualists who do not believe in the complete identity of the individual (*jīva*) with God. But there is unanimity among all schools regarding this fact: that the more we proceed towards God realization, the more we shall be God-like.

Moreover, as we advance along the path, our conception about divinity also advances. As we evolve spiritually, our conception of the ultimate goal in spiritual life also evolves side by side. Without our own growth in spiritual life, God as an ideal cannot be correctly understood and we cannot realize that ideal. The more we go towards the Ideal the clearer becomes our understanding of the word 'God'.

It is impossible to have a true conception of the ultimate Reality unless we are nearest to it or unless we are identified with it. I understand a person, only from my experience of the ideas that are common between us, otherwise I cannot have a real understanding of him. And to the extent we are close to each other we understand

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each other more clearly. God being so different from our limited impure individuality, we can never have a true conception of Him until we have transcended our limitations and have got rid of the impurities that we experience in ourselves

That we are limited, that we are impure, that we are being afflicted by miseries, that our joy is transitory—these are real experiences of our everyday life, every moment of our existence we are experiencing them. But at the same time we have a conception of an existence which could be higher, superior, nobler, purer than what we are at present; it is this idea which generates in us a feeling that there must be a Being superior to us who is not suffering from the limitations, the imperfections that we are subject to. That perfect, unlimited Being, is our goal, because we all tend to transcend our limitations. We are always suffering from our limitations and sense of imperfection, and we are always struggling to transcend them. Whether we believe in God or not, this urge to transcend our limitations is the basic urge that makes us go ever forward. Even an atheist has that urge, and so he too tries to improve himself in whichever way he can for the time being. The urge to transcend limitations is the common urge in all people and, when we make Divinity the goal of our effort to transcend, we are said to be religious. And to the extent we have integrated the divine Ideal in us and have been able to transform our consciousness in the mould of that Ideal, we may be said to progress spiritually. This understanding is not confined to any theory or system; both the nondualist and dualist accept it. It is only regarding how we transcend our limitations and attain closeness to God that there are different views which are shaped by the dominant tendencies in human mind.

There are people who understand that the limitations are not really present in us,

that we are suffering from a sort of misconception about ourselves, that we are suffering from a bad dream, as it were. Through the process of discrimination or self-analysis they try to wake up from that dream. This is the path of Jñāna. There are other people who regard the Ultimate Reality as the Supreme Person who listens to our prayers, and believe that through His grace it is possible to overcome their sufferings and limitations. This is the path of devotion or Bhakti. Then, there is a third path, known as the path of Karma which is also directed towards the attainment of the same goal but the process involved in it is different. According to the traditional view, Karma Yoga means the performance of rituals and sacrifices prescribed by the scriptures. But the basic process involved is to free the mind from selfishness. Through selfless work we transform ourselves, and when we become absolutely pure we acquire the nature of the Ideal. Then there is the path of meditation. Meditation is of course common to the paths of devotion as well as of knowledge. But a devotee does not consciously try to transform himself into the nature of the divine Person whom he adores. Nevertheless the more he thinks of his God, the more he becomes God-like. Śaṅkara explains the word *upāsana*, meditation, as *upagamyā āsanam, citanam*, 'approaching the Ideal, sitting near it, that is, to think of it.' As we mentally approach our Ideal we become transformed into that Ideal. How long shall we have to do *upāsana*? As long as we have not been transformed into the Ideal. Religion is not mere thinking, but being and becoming; we transform ourselves into the ideal state, whatever be the ideal state we may have in our mind.

From the foregoing it is clear that although there appear to be several paths to God realization, the basic process involved in them is the same, namely, transforming

one's consciousness and transcending one's limitations. The attempt to realize God has been going on from time immemorial, and as people began to conceive of it in rational ways, different systems of spiritual disciplines came into existence. But they all share a common ground. This is the insight that Sri Ramakrishna has brought to the modern world.

Sri Ramakrishna never claimed that he had any *new* message to give to the world which had never been thought of. He only tried to give special stress on certain fundamental spiritual attitudes. So when we speak of 'Steps to God Realization according to Sri Ramakrishna', we mean only the emphases that Sri Ramakrishna gave to certain steps to God realization. It is only in the way he stressed certain aspects of spirituality that Sri Ramakrishna differed from his predecessors. As a matter of fact, there is only one eternal spiritual path. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, *Sa eva ayam mayā te adya yogaḥ proktaḥ purāṇaḥ* 'The yoga that I have taught you now is very ancient.' (*Gita* 4.3). Nor was Śrī Kṛṣṇa the first teacher of yoga; it had been taught by several others in still earlier days. At each different period of history a great leader of spirituality has to come and remind men of certain particular points in the spiritual pursuit, certain ideals, attitudes, beliefs and practices which are more suitable for mankind at that particular time. This is the reason why the teachings of great religious leaders differ from one another. They are different only in the stress on certain points of spiritual life. Otherwise, the paths are in the last analysis found to be more or less the same, although known under different names. Like Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Sri Ramakrishna too did not claim to have discovered a new path. The world teacher that he was, Sri Ramakrishna taught the same eternal path but emphasized some particular aspects of it which are more

vitaly needed in the present age. Now we have to see what these points stressed by Sri Ramakrishna are.

In the present context we are concerned only with the practical steps in spiritual life. The term 'practical' is significant, for theoretical speculations are endless and may have no connection with our actual life. Speculations by themselves will not lead us anywhere. They become fruitful only when they are based on moral and spiritual training.

Our minds are differently constituted and therefore our conception of Divinity and the path we should follow must be different. Spiritual unfoldment in each person takes place differently in accordance with his own inherent tendencies. When large numbers of people think of Reality, there will naturally be some similarities in their conceptions. These similarities can be classified into groups, into systems of philosophy. Religious sects are based on this kind of classification.

Now, according to Sri Ramakrishna, these varieties in spiritual understanding need not be a confusing factor. He stressed actual living, not speculation. He asked people to pray to God to reveal Himself. In order to pray you need not have a complex metaphysical conception of God, or rational proof of its truth. Whatever be your conception of God, if you pray with all earnestness, He will reveal Himself to you—this assurance Sri Ramakrishna has given us. It is a very practical way of telling us that we need not be confounded by the variety of philosophical thought and the profusion of religious sects whose followers are constantly at loggerheads with one another, thinking that the system or sect to which they belong alone is perfect whereas the others are imperfect or wrong. Each man should first of all follow his own path and realize the Truth. A person, according to Sri Ramakrishna, has no right to pass

judgement on another path which he himself has not followed. We have no right to pass judgement on others, when we have not tested their views, tested their systems, especially when we have not tested even our own path. If you listen to popular discussions on religion you will find that each man is following an ideal or a line of thought which is peculiar to him, without understanding or trying to understand what others have to say. That is the dogmatic approach that we all suffer from. Sri Ramakrishna dealt a blow to this sort of dogmatism. He said in effect : even your own path you are not sure of ; what to speak of the truth or untruth of other paths ! So you have to be more humble. You have to be cautious in your statements about things concerning God and transcendental facts. Sri Ramakrishna used to compare worldly people's talking about God to children's swearing by the name of God which they had learnt from their elders.

There is, however, one important point to note : Sri Ramakrishna did not merely advise people to respect other faiths, but he himself practised them. Standing on his own practical experience, he could say that all those paths would lead to the same goal. This statement is not in itself an original one. For before Sri Ramakrishna the basic idea contained in it had been expressed by several other spiritual teachers in India. The *R̥g-Veda* says : 'Truth is one, sages call it by various names.' The *Bṛhad-āranyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.1) says: *sarvāsām apām samudra ekāyanam*, 'All waters lead ultimately to that one goal, the ocean.' The uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna lay in demonstrating this fact through his own life, through his own practical experience. In the history of the religions of the world we have never come across a personality who did this kind of experimentation with different paths as Sri Ramakrishna did. He followed the different paths as faith-

fully as the followers of those different paths do, and ultimately he came to the realization, 'As many faiths, so many paths leading to the Divinity.' When we reach Divinity, our quarrels stop. Sri Ramakrishna laid great emphasis on this point.

You may ask why this particular point had not been emphasized by the earlier teachers. The answer is, we do not know. Perhaps religious conflicts had not assumed such menacing proportions or had not such serious social consequences then as they do in modern times. The emphasis on harmony is needed particularly for the people of the present era in which violence and the power of destruction have increased enormously.

The second point Sri Ramakrishna stressed was the importance of spiritual aspiration. He emphasized the fact that God realization takes place not by merely following any particular path but through intense yearning (*vyākulatā*, as he put it) for God. This emphasis was derived from his own experience. In the beginning of his *sādhanā* he did not follow any systematic form of spiritual discipline. He simply followed the yearning of his heart and through the intensity of that yearning he shattered the veil of ignorance and obtained the vision of the Divine Mother. From that experience he came to the conclusion that mere hankering, mere yearning, longing for God, is enough—provided it is intense—to give you God realization. He gives the example of a child's desire to go to its mother. When the child is fed up with its play, it cries for its mother. Nothing else can then satisfy it. We must feel that kind of longing for God. When you feel that you cannot live without God, then you will have God realization. It does not matter how you seek, what path you follow ; if you have intense yearning, you will succeed.

Here we have to keep in mind one important fact : Sri Ramakrishna's thorough familiarity with different spiritual paths. He

did not merely have respect for the various paths, he was perfectly at home in each of them. We should also remember that the paths that Sri Ramakrishna followed were many. He was not in a habit of talking about himself much. So he did not mention all the paths that he followed. He has mentioned only those which were commonly known to the people around him. But he followed many other paths, some of them extremely difficult and needing super-human efforts, some of them very risky, even paths that might appear to be immoral or unsocial which he himself prohibited his disciples from following. However, he had sympathy even for those people who followed impure paths. Therefore they too could admire Sri Ramakrishna and accept him as their guide or supporter. This is the greatness that we find in Sri Ramakrishna, that even those people who are looked down upon by the society for their adherence to mystery cults and impure practices can find something in Sri Ramakrishna to commend their admiration, support and help. Sri Ramakrishna's uniqueness lies in this that everybody may find his ideal of perfection in him. Everyone finds in him at least a knowledgeable sympathizer. He could deal with all people at their own levels. If a person approached him with a particular difficulty, Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'I too had once that kind of difficulty and I worked in this manner to overcome it.' This sharing of his own experience would immediately create confidence in the devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna could be at ease with even rank atheists. He never tried to impose upon them what is called 'blind faith'. He simply asked them to go forward, to seek truth by stretching or enlarging their own convictions. He did not try to avoid even atheists. All people, whatever be their pursuit, got inspiration from him because he was the source of infinite

sympathy and inspiration. There was in him a Universal Light which helped them in seeing their own ways. It is this universality of his being that gives him his uniqueness.

We have seen that the most important practical step that Sri Ramakrishna stressed was the need for intense aspiration. Another practical point he emphasized was the non-essential nature of rituals. He had himself practised all kinds of rituals. But he never taught them to his followers. Of course he never said rituals were useless. Rituals may have their value during the early stages of spiritual life but one should not get stuck in them, one should go beyond them. Rituals are not the ideal or goal; they are just a preliminary means.

Yet another point Sri Ramakrishna emphasized was renunciation. *Tyāg chādā kichu hobe nā, bābā*, 'without renunciation nothing will happen, my child', he used to say. However, he never insisted that everyone who wanted to realize God must renounce the world. According to him, the householder's life also is capable of leading to God realization just as the Sannyasin's life is. The term 'renunciation' need not be understood in the old traditional sense of giving up the world. Mental detachment is enough for the householder. His advice to them is:

Do all your duties but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you. A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rama' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all.

Renunciation is primarily a state of mind. If the mind does not accept renunciation,

all your effort is useless, whether you are a monk or householder. But if you have an intense spirit of renunciation in your heart, you will be able to give your whole mind to God, concentrate all your mental energies on God wherever you are, whatever you do. You will then surely reach your goal, and no outer activity will be a bar to that.

Now, to sum up, Sri Ramakrishna emphasized that everybody is competent to follow his own path and through that reach the goal. There is no use quarrelling among ourselves as to which path is the best. Let each man follow the path that is best suited to him. There is no such rule that every-

one should follow one and the same path. What is really important are aspiration and true spirit of renunciation. And there should be respect for the views and methods of other people.

Let us hope and pray that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna will give us depth of vision, sympathy and respect for everybody, and for every system of faith, and will also give us the urge to realize the ultimate Truth. The acute moral crisis that the world is now facing could be solved if it followed his teachings and example. Through his blessings may our life become nobler, purer, more sympathetic and more akin to the ultimate goal that we are seeking.

THE PERFECT MAN IN THE LIGHT OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S SAYINGS

SWAMI TAPASYANANDA*

Attainability of perfection in this life

The idea of the perfect man is one of the hidden sources of inspiration for all religions. We say 'hidden source', because some religions relegate perfection to a post-mortem state merely to be aspired after, and not a state to be attained in the present life itself. But even in these religions, the faith of their followers rests on the life of a great man distinguished from the generality of men by such terms as the Prophet, Messiah and Incarnation. These exceptional men come to know the secret of existence through special divine inspiration and preach it to men at large who, however, have to wait till their bodies fall and their souls are transported to heaven for the attainment of the highest illumination and perfection.

Till then their convictions have to rest on mere faith.

In many of the Indian systems of religion and philosophy, especially in Advaita Vedanta, the attainment of perfection and the death of the body have no necessary connection. Ignorance being the cause of imperfection, the only condition for the attainment of perfection is the dispelling of ignorance. This can take place even when the body continues to live. The man who has thus attained perfection even in the embodied state is called a Jivan-mukta, and the possibility of Jivan-muktahood has always been pointed out as the experiential proof of the spiritual ideal in Hindu religious thought. If Vedanta comes nearer to the scientific standard than other religious systems, it is by virtue of this ideal, viz. that the central principle of spiritual life can be experienced as an indubitable fact even in this life.

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Sri Ramakrishna, true to the Hindu bent of his spiritual genius, insists upon this idea all through his teachings. 'He is born in vain, who, having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realize God in this very life'—this statement constitutes the very key-note of his teachings. And what makes his life most significant to us of modern times is the intensity of his aspiration for direct experience of the Divine and the certitude of the realization that unfailingly followed it.

Signs of spiritual perfection

We may first of all consider some of the general signs of spiritual perfection according to Sri Ramakrishna. No doubt, perfection in the sense of the dispelling of ignorance and the realization of the Divine is an inner state, and is, therefore, known directly only to the experiencing consciousness. What are called signs of perfection are just some external manifestations accompanying this inner illumination. They are found more or less in all men considered perfect, although with some variations accountable by differences in culture and individual development. They approximate to the highest ethical and spiritual values conceivable by the human mind. It is in this sense alone they are called signs of spiritual perfection, and it is to be remembered that where they appear in a steady and natural fashion, they give us an indirect hint regarding the illumined state of the mind concerned.

Some of the sayings of the Master on this question may now be summarized in brief. Unselfishness, purity and righteousness precede the advent of the Lord in the human heart, just as the glow of dawn precedes the rising of the sun. Before a king visits the house of a servant, he sends to him all the necessary requisites for

extending a perfect reception to him. So also, the Lord sends love, reverence and faith to the yearning heart before He manifests Himself there. An illumined man experiences within himself Ananda or perfect bliss, and is often intoxicated, as it were, with it. Just as vegetables get soft and pulpy when they become *siddha* (well-cooked), so when a man becomes *siddha* (perfect) he is all humility and tenderness. He is dead, as it were, in this very life, that is, his passions and desires are destroyed as in a dead body. He is free from all sectarianism and narrow love of groups and communities. He has no fears and worries from the thought of what might happen to his body; for, as the kernel gets separated from the shell in a dry nut, his inner essence has separated itself from the body and the ego. That is why one like Jesus could pray calmly for the good of his enemies even when nails were being driven into his body. Being above the qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, he becomes childlike in simplicity and in his attitude towards men and things. Like a child he does not care for the standards of high and low fixed by worldly wisdom. He lives in the world like the diver-bird. The bird dives into water, but the water does not wet its plumage; and even if a few drops possibly stick to its body, they are easily shaken off when it once flaps its wings. Thus the wise man remains untouched by the contaminations of the world. He can never be affected by lust and greed, even if he has perchance to live in the midst of evil associations.

He rises above the relative ideas of good and bad entertained by ordinary men. Not that he becomes immoral; in fact, his actions alone become the standard of morality for men and result in real good to the world at large. But, from the transcendent height of holiness he has reached, all our worldly values appear

trivial to him. When we are on the plains we see how small the grass is and how big the trees are; but when we look down from the summit of a high peak, the grass and trees lose their dissimilarities and become one indistinguishable mass of green verdure. So insignificant are all the worldly distinctions of good and bad, of high and low, of friend and foe, to the eyes of him who has risen to the dizzy height of God vision.

In a perfect man there is no ego. It has been burnt in the fire of God realization. What remains is only a semblance of it, like the burnt rope. The burnt rope may retain its shape but it cannot bind. In the same way, the ego of a perfected man is only a semblance, and is never capable of deluding his understanding and making him egotistic and self-centred like the worldly man. As a consequence, he neither works nor abstains from work, both of which, as ordinarily understood, are the result of the promptings of an unregenerate ego. He is poised in perfect self-surrender, and whatever work is performed through his person, is a spontaneous outflow of the Divine will, his ego being only its outlet.

Psychological basis of perfection

From these general considerations about the signs of a perfect man, we shall pass on to the psychological and metaphysical implications of Sri Ramakrishna's conception of spiritual perfection. One who has attained the highest spiritual perfection feels the Divine presence in everything and in all states of mind. Though he may pass into different forms of Samādhis or spiritual trances, his knowledge and experience of the Divine do not depend upon such transcendental states but persists in all states of consciousness. Nevertheless, according to Sri Ramakrishna, this permanent poising of the self in the Divine,

called Jñāna, cannot take place without the initial experience of Samādhi. Samādhi is not, as it is often described by modern psychologists, an attenuation of consciousness or a subliminal condition of the mind akin to sleep. It is a penetration into the deeper levels of one's consciousness and, through that, into the understanding of the secret of existence as a whole. The human personality has five sheaths or vestments (*kośas*). These are *annamaya* and *prāṇamaya kośas* (together forming the gross body), *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya kośas* (together forming the subtle body) and *ānandamaya kośa* (forming the causal body). Beyond all this is the Mahākāraṇa, the Supreme Cause or Pure Spirit. Man's consciousness ordinarily dwells in the outermost fringe of his being, the gross body, and sees only the external world. When it is indrawn and concentrated, it can pass into the deeper vestments of personality and occupy itself with the facts of existence corresponding to those levels. Only the greatest of aspirants pass beyond these different vestments and identify their limited consciousness with the Mahākāraṇa. This last attainment is Nirvikalpa Samādhi, in which consciousness becomes unconditioned and the Absolute is intuited. Samādhi of the relative nature (Savikalpa) is attained when consciousness dwells on one or the other of the inner vestments. Thus it will be seen that in Samādhi, whether it is of the Nirvikalpa or Savikalpa form, the mind does not degenerate or pass into the twilight of consciousness, but only shuts itself off from external contacts in order to pass progressively from the gross to the subtler planes until it attains the final causal state. It is always a state of higher concentration and illumination.

There are also certain other psychophysiological facts that distinguish Samādhi from mental degeneration and sleep. These relate to the part played by the power of

Kuṇḍalinī in causing Samādhi. Kuṇḍalinī, sometimes translated as 'serpent power', is the dormant spiritual energy located at the base of the spinal column. In the ordinary man it is asleep and, according to the Master, unless it is roused, spiritual awakening never takes place. This rousing can result only from deep concentration of the mind produced by intense love of God, or from keen discrimination accompanied with dispassion, or from the proper practice of Prāṇāyāma. When it is roused, the Kuṇḍalinī rises along the path of *sūṣumna* in the spinal column, passing through the six centres of consciousness until it reaches the seventh and highest centre in the brain. Along with this the aspirant's consciousness also passes from one 'vestment' of the Spirit to the other. As long as the energy moves only amidst the lowest three centres, those at the level of the navel, of the genitals and of the anus, man is absorbed in physical consciousness, in what Sri Ramakrishna calls 'woman and gold'. When the Kuṇḍalinī rises above these, the mind begins to dwell on the inner vestments and comes to have the experiences relating to Savikalpa Samādhi. New realms of being, progressively subtle, become open to the Jīva consciousness, as it ascends to higher centres, which are the portals to those realms. And when finally the Kuṇḍalinī reaches the highest centre in the brain, the aspirant attains Nirvikalpa Samādhi. In that state the mind becomes dead to the body and the external world. The ego is wiped off, and the spirit recognizes its eternal union with the Supreme Spirit.

In this connection, it may be specially mentioned that it is very risky to judge the genuineness of Samādhi from mere external signs. By breathing exercises and similar mechanical devices a sort of hibernation, accompanied by the stopping of the heart and the disappearance of external consciousness, can be brought about. This is

not real Nirvikalpa Samādhi; for it does not give Jñāna or inner illumination which accompanies real Samādhi. So also, there are states of emotional excitement which resemble the trance of Savikalpa Samādhi externally. But these do not strengthen the moral fibre of man or bring light, peace and bliss into the heart. Criticizing a man who had a tendency to fall into this kind of ecstasy, Sri Ramakrishna once said:

In real ecstasy one dives into the deeper realms of one's being and becomes perfectly still. But what do you find here! Be quiet and compose yourself. Do you know the nature of this ecstasy? It is like boiling one ounce of milk in a big pan. The pan seems to be full of milk, but remove it from the stove and you will not find a single drop. Even the little quantity that was there would all have stuck at the bottom of the pan.

Vijñāni: the highest ideal of perfection

In Sri Ramakrishna's teachings we find a distinction drawn between three types of spiritual men—the Bhakta, the Jñāni and the Vijñāni. The distinction between Bhakta and Jñāni is easy to understand. The Bhakta is one who follows the paths of devotion and attains to Savikalpa Samādhi. Generally he does not like to lose his individuality but wants only to keep a loving relationship with the Deity. He does not therefore aspire after Nirvikalpa Samādhi; but if, however, he seeks it and prays earnestly to the Divine for it, he will also be blessed with the realization of the Impersonal Absolute in Nirvikalpa Samādhi.

The Jñāni is a seeker who gains perfection through the path of knowledge. He does not care for Personal God and loving relationship with Him. Even if he gives a place for Personal God in his philosophy, it is mainly formal and theoretical; it is not a factor that moves him in his spiritual life. He is endowed with intense spirit of dispassion, and he relies on the power of analysis and discrimination to eliminate

the false values of the world and arrive at the sole Reality, the Impersonal Absolute or Brahman. At this stage discrimination stops and he attains Nirvikalpa Samādhi.

In contrast to these two types, Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the Vijñāni who combines in himself both Jñāna and Bhakti. And he also says that this state is higher even than Samādhi. When Swami Vivekananda once desired to remain always absorbed in Samādhi, he reprimanded him, saying, 'Can you be so small-minded as that? Go beyond Samādhi; Samādhi is a trifling thing for you!' Another day he said to him, 'I thought you were made of much better stuff. My strength is all-sidedness. I enjoy the Lord not only in this unconditioned state of oneness as unqualified Brahman in Samādhi, but also in His various blessed manifestations through sweet human relationships. You too do likewise. Be a Jñāni and Bhakta in one.'

As to what constitutes the realization of the Vijñāni and how it differs from that of the Jñāni, Sri Ramakrishna says:

Jñāna is the realization of the Atman in Samādhi by the elimination of the phenomena through discrimination. And Vijñāna means 'knowing with greater fulness'. Some have heard of milk, some have but seen it, while still others have tasted it. He who has only heard of it is the ignorant man. He who has seen it is the Jñāni. Only he who has tasted it has attained Vijñāna, that is, has known it in its entirety. To see God and have intimate relation with Him as with a near kinsman is what is called Vijñāna. First you follow the discriminative process of 'not this', 'not this'. He is not the senses, nor the mind, nor the ego. He is beyond all categories. To get up to the roof you have to leave below all the steps of the staircase one by one. Of course the steps are not the roof. But when you reach the roof, you find that the roof is made of the same brick, lime, sand, etc. as the staircase. That which is the Supreme Brahman, the same has become the Jīva-Jagat, the twenty-four categories of the philosophers. That which is

the Atman has become the five elements....Just as one may at first take the real bel fruit to consist of its pulp alone and reject the rest, but understands on reflection that to have the whole fruit one must take its shell and seeds and fibres too into consideration, so after having directly perceived God in his attributeless aspect, one realizes that the same Deity who is eternal by nature has assumed the form of the world in a playful mood.

This, then, is the realization of the Vijñāni. He has intuited the Absolute in Nirvikalpa Samādhi, and as a consequence he has realized that the Self is identical with non-dual Brahman, and that the world-phenomenon is a mere appearance with regard to Brahman—something experienced but not affecting the substratum. In this respect his realization is common with that of the Jñāni. With regard to the knowledge of the world of manifestation, however, there is a difference. The Jñāni has only an analytical understanding of its nature, i.e. that it is an appearance (*mithya*). The Vijñāni knows this, but in addition he has also a knowledge of its source, the Divine Maya. In other words, for the Jñāni, Maya signifies only an illusory manifestation, namely, the Power of Brahman, the Divine Personality, which is not different from Brahman. As a result, the Jñāni knows Brahman in transcendence and has only the aloofness and illumination of knowledge; the Vijñāni combines with this the knowledge of the Divine Personality, and the sweetness and exaltation of the purest devotion that accompanies it. The Jñāni knows only the Puruṣa, the Spirit; the Vijñāni knows both, the Puruṣa and Prakṛti, the Spirit and Its Power. The knowledge of the Jñāni is only analytic; the knowledge of the Vijñāni is both analytic and synthetic.

We have spoken above of the pure devotion of the Vijñāni. This must be distinguished from the devotion of dualistic Bhaktas who have had only the experience

of Savikalpa Samādhi. For them the object of love is something different from their own self. The Vijñāni, however, has realized non-duality in Nirvikalpa Samādhi and has thus come to recognize the basic unity of his own ego, the world and the Divine Personality in the transcendent Brahman. He alone can therefore have love in its intensest form, which can arise only from a sense of one's closest affinity with the Divine as 'one's own'. This in turn can come only when the feeling of separation in entity and of difference in quality between one's self and the Divine—the feeling that one is a mere 'creature', shuddering before Him in one's insignificance, helplessness and sinfulness, and that He is the 'Tremendous', infinitely great, powerful and holy—has been overcome by the realization of the unity of the Self with Brahman in Nirvikalpa Samādhi. The Vijñāni has achieved this, and hence he alone can have true fellowship, closest kinship with the Divine and feel himself to be not a mere sinful 'creature' of His, but His 'own flesh and blood' related to Him as a servant, son, friend and beloved.

In conclusion, we would like to remark that, beyond the quotations given in the previous section from Sri Ramakrishna's pronouncements on the Vijñāni, much of what we have said above is to be taken only as the implications of his pronouncement. But all these implications are corroborated by one important episode in his life. The readers of Sri Ramakrishna's life may remember Totapuri, the great Sannyasin who initiated him into the practice of Advaita Vedanta. Totapuri had attained Nirvikalpa Samādhi. He was a Jñāni established in the identity of the Self with Brahman and in the consciousness of the phenomenality of the world. But he had no knowledge of Śakti, the Divine Personality, and could not, therefore, appreciate the various devotional attitudes

manifest in Sri Ramakrishna. However, during the time when he was in Sri Ramakrishna's company, a complete revolution was brought about in his outlook. He got a severe attack of dysentery which gave him a gripping pain in the stomach day and night. The pain distracted his mind so much that even his life-long practice of discrimination and concentration failed to help him rise above the body-consciousness and get absorbed in Samādhi. He felt as if his Jñāna were slipping through his fingers. Thinking that the body was the cause of all this distraction, he wanted to put an end to it by drowning himself in the Ganges. But in an apparently miraculous way his attempt in this direction was foiled. In that moment of extreme physical suffering combined with the anguish of frustration and utter bewilderment of the mind, he felt a veil being lifted from his vision, and in a flash he understood the mystery of Divine Śakti. He realized that Maya is not only illusory manifestation but also the Divine Personality, the Power of Brahman, whose grace alone endows the Jñāni with the discriminative power that enables him to realize Brahman. He recognized what Sri Ramakrishna called the Divine Mother, as an indubitable reality, and realized that devotion to Her, broad-based on the knowledge of unity, is the highest achievement of spiritual life. In short, from a Jñāni he grew into a Vijñāni, endowed with insight into the nature of both Spirit and Its Power and possessing both knowledge and devotion.

An echo of this great idea embodied in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna we get in the ringing verses of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (13.2,23) 'That alone I consider to be true knowledge which consists in the knowledge of the *kṣetra* and the *kṣetraijña*. ...Whoever knows Puruṣa thus, as also Prakṛti along with the Guṇas, is never born again, in whatever way he may live.'

INFLUENCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA IN EUROPE

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

It is very significant to note that the first impact of Sri Ramakrishna in Europe came about through his disciple Swami Vivekananda. Two years after the Parliament of Religions in Chicago held in 1893, during which period he was engaged in the hectic activity of spreading Vedanta in the USA, Swami Vivekananda visited Paris and London. Again on his way back to India in the year 1896 he landed in London for the second time. The famous German savant Max Müller was then in London, and Swamiji had a pleasant meeting with him. In the year 1898, two years after meeting with Vivekananda, Max Müller published his work entitled *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*. This book made a great impact on the hearts and minds of the European people. The next landmark in the history of the impact is the publication in New York by E. P. Dutton & Co. the book entitled: *The Face of Silence* by the Bengali writer Dhan Gopal Mukherjee. That was in the year 1926. *The Face of Silence* is a remarkable work of art, depicting in a legendary manner the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Romain Rolland in the bibliography which he adds to his work *Ramakrishna's Life and Message* pays glowing tributes to Dhan Gopal Mukherjee. Let us quote his own words: 'I cannot say how much this book of Dhan Gopal Mukherjee has inspired me. It is to this beautiful work that I owe my first contact with Ramakrishna and my inspiration to write my book. I am deeply thankful to him.' He continues: 'What I admire is the way in which Mukherjee has brought to light those aspects of Ramakrishna's personality that can touch the minds and hearts of the European people without shocking them.' In the year 1929 came the

monumental work of Romain Rolland published from Paris.

Earlier in 1897 and 1914 came out from India *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* published by Ramakrishna Math, Madras, and in 1917 *Ramakrishna's Teachings* by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. All these Indian publications and specially those of Swami Madhavananda are listed by Romain Rolland in the bibliography he adds to his own work.

Before we go into details of the influence of Sri Ramakrishna on the European mind let us cast a glance at those aspects of his personality which acted as the sources of his power. First, Sri Ramakrishna's intense thirst for God realization which would not stop short of anything, even to the extent of giving up his life if he could not get God realization in this life itself. Second, the extraordinary faculty with which he could plunge into what the Hindus call Samādhi which the European people understand as 'God's profundity and the natural faculty to live in this profundity'. Third, his infinite love for man, especially for the lowliest and the lost. For Ramakrishna there was none who was lost; everybody could be redeemed through God's love for man and man's love for God.

Let us now have a look at some of the areas of encounter between the European mind and Ramakrishna's message which captivated and still captivates Europeans. I wish to list these under five headings: 1. The primacy of Advaita Vedanta or non-dualism which Ramakrishna marked as the summit of spiritual experience while respecting the contribution of the other two schools, namely Viśiṣṭa-Advaita or Qualified Monism, and Dvaita or pure dualism. 2. The parallels we find in Ramakrishna with

the Christian mystics like Meister Eckhart, the German mystic, and St. John of the Cross, the Spanish mystic. 3. Liberal Protestantism very popular in Europe, which holds that it is not by the miracles that Christ transformed the people but by his spirituality and his presence. 4. More than the simple term 'Harmony of Religions' Ramakrishna's message was the transcendent unity of religions. This summit can be attained by what is transcendent in man. 5. The general religious climate and a glance at the future of religion in Europe.

As regards the first point, the primacy of Advaita or non-dualism, in Sri Ramakrishna it was not a simple primacy. In him the advaitic Jñāna joins hands with the other two summits, Bhakti and Karma. The synthesis of three yogas, the joining of the three summits of spiritual life, is well brought out by Swami Vivekananda in a very authentic way at the end of the *Rāmakṛṣṇa Stotram*. Students of Ramakrishna literature and Hindu hymnal literature will remember the last stanza of the hymn which reads in Sanskrit:

*Advaya tattva samāhita cittam
Projjvala bhakti patāvṛta vṛttam
Karma kalevaramadbhuta cestam
Yami gurum saranam bhavavaidyam
Naradeva Deva
Jaya Jaya Naradeva*

It may be translated as follows:

I surrender myself to my Guru, the Man-God, the physician for the malady of samsara (relative existence), whose mind ever dwelt in the non-dualistic Truth, whose personality was covered by the cloth of supreme devotion, and who was ever active for the good of humanity.

Again, in the Ārātrika song (sung during the vesper service) Swami Vivekananda refers to his Master as *prāṇārpaṇa jagata tārana*, 'one who gave up his life to save the world', to elevate the world to spiritual heights.

These three summits Jñāna, Bhakti and Karma remind us in a very meaningful way of the three summits which the great Śaṅkarācārya some twelve centuries before Ramakrishna actualized in his life and teachings. Very often we are inclined to think, because of the dizzy heights of Advaita which Śaṅkara marked, that he was only a Jñāni. We forget that Śaṅkara was a great Bhakta as well, and has left for posterity many remarkable hymns on Śiva, Devi, and other divinities. He was also a Karma-Yogin because he spent his life travelling all over India preaching the tenets of Advaita.

The second point of encounter is the parallel with Christian mystics. We can easily emphasize the parallels regarding Jñāna in the thought of the German savant Meister Eckhart of the 13th century, and Bhakti parallels in the works and life of St. John of the Cross. To quote Meister Eckhart: 'I once said that wood is better than gold, which is a fantastic thing to say, and yet a stone, to the extent it has Being, would be better than even God and the Godhead without Being.' The 'dark night of the soul' spoken of by St. John of the Cross, which a spiritual adept or disciple should go through before he gets to God realization, can well mark the parallel which Sri Ramakrishna lived through before he had the vision of the Divine Mother and the *samādhi* which followed it. Even according to Sri Ramakrishna's testimony, he lived through days and nights of anguish which could have made him put an end to his life, but then the grace came.

The third point which captivates modern minds in Europe is Protestant liberalism. For instance, those of us who have read the life of Christ will remember the miracle which he performed at a marriage feast. When water was brought to him and the guests were waiting to be

served with wine, Jesus Christ looked into the jug of water and the water turned into wine. Protestant liberalists insist that this should not be interpreted literally. Christ had the power to dominate nature, outer and inner, and that he turned the water into wine only shows that he had the power to transform nature in the same way as he calmed the tempest on the lake of Tiberias.

Sri Ramakrishna looked upon miracles as deviations of or obstacles to spiritual practice. The following anecdote brings out the Master's attitude towards miracles. One day one of his young disciples Swami Yogananda (at that time Yogin) was coming in a boat to meet his Master in Dakshineswar. Yogin actually saw a person who had the power of levitation walking over water. He and the people in the same boat were amazed. Coming to Dakshineswar, Yogin could not contain his astonishment at this spectacle and told Ramakrishna what had happened. Ramakrishna asked Yogin, 'Did you really see it?' The disciple replied, 'Yes, not only I, but many others also saw it.' Then Ramakrishna made this significant comment. 'Poor man, to have spent his life mastering this art of walking over the water. I in his place would have given half a rupee and purchased a ticket in a boat, and would have spent my life practising spiritual disciplines and increasing my devotion.'

The fourth point we listed above is the message of harmony of religions. We said that the message of harmony of religions for Ramakrishna was more than a simple harmony; it was rather the capacity of man to climb to the summit of the transcendent unity of religions. How can we climb to the summit of

transcendent unity without passing through the planes and valleys which take us to the summit? There may be divergences and discussions in the valleys and planes, but on coming to the top, the *pāramārthika satya*, or transcendental truth, comes out. At the summit there is only unity and convergence. It is to this capacity of reaching the summit innate in man that Ramakrishna was referring to when he said that any sincere *sādhaka* or adept in religion, whether Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism or any other religion, is capable of bringing out this transcendent quality of his soul, of the Atman and affirming it. When he succeeds in this task, he will only love and admire the presence of God in all religions.

Now we come to the last point, namely the future. The present religious climate of Europe can be summarized in the following way: The more a person is cultured, the less he believes in dogmas, such as the belief that Christ will be in agony until the end of the world. The more a person is cultured, the more he wants to know about other religions and the ways of salvation taught by other divine incarnations and messengers of God. In this climate of liberalization should come also the liberalization of frontiers between religions. The belief that there is only one religion that can lead to the summit is slowly being abandoned. In this context is noticeable another tendency which believes that in the future there will be only humanism and no mysticism. The celebrated dictum of Sri Ramakrishna, 'To love man is not simply to love man, but to love God in man', places first mysticism and then humanism; this is a truth which has struck many hearts in Europe.

RAMAKRISHNA AND WORLD RELIGIONS*

FR. FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S. J.

Calcutta was the city of a remarkable Hindu holy man named Ramakrishna, who in an important way illuminates our present global situation by teaching us how to live among the many world religions. Since he is little known in the West, I wish to offer some reflections on his life and message, reflections especially timely because in 1986 we mark the 150th anniversary of his birth (February 18) and the 100th anniversary of his death (August 15).

It is difficult to portray any person in a few paragraphs, and much more difficult to portray an extraordinary person from a different century, culture and religion. I have therefore narrowed my task here to a few reflections on Ramakrishna's greatest achievement: his discovery within his own Hindu tradition of the resources and motivation for a positive experience of other people's religious traditions. His growth in this regard took place within a series of widening horizons that frame my description of him: his initial love of God as his Mother and his sense of Her presence everywhere; his encounter with two wandering ascetics who showed him new ways to look for Her, and his experience of non-Hindu religions as harmonious with his own.

Most of Ramakrishna's life was spent just outside Calcutta, at a large temple dedicated to the Mother Goddess (Kāh). He went there as a boy to help his elder brother who was a priest of the temple (and apparently to avoid going to school). In 1856, his brother died, and Ramakrishna, already noted for his piety, became the temple priest.

From the beginning, Ramakrishna exhibited an intensity of devotion to his Mother that was the basis for every later

spiritual experience. His relationship to Her was deep and all-consuming, one he was progressively less able to express in the traditional rituals and hymns of the temple. He came to find unbearable any distance at all from Her, and insisted (to himself and to Her) that they move beyond religious conventions into direct encounter.

He sought this intimacy in various unpredictable ways, upsetting the decorum of the temple with a variety of uninhibited ecstasies. He nearly ruined his health through penances and extreme shifts in mood, caused his family great anxiety and convinced many people that he was quite mad. One day, as a last resort, he grabbed a sword hanging in the sanctuary in order to kill himself, to see if by death he could reach the Mother. But, he later recalled, the Mother prevented his suicide by giving in to him. She crossed the distance between them in order to give him the direct experience he sought, and Ramakrishna was plunged into an 'ocean' of immediate divine presence.

But this encounter did not sate his desire. On the contrary, he concluded that his Mother was so great and all-embracing that he could not have fully experienced Her on that single occasion. He felt able and compelled to look elsewhere to find Her again and again in the rich variety of Hindu religions experiences. Every path, he decided, would be the path to Her.

* This article originally appeared in the 29 March 1986 issue of *America*, a Catholic journal with a fairly wide circulation in the United States, and is reproduced here by permission. The author, unknown to the Ramakrishna movement, wrote the article on his own initiative. Two lines have been omitted from the original version—*Editor, P.B.*

He looked for Her in two ways. First, he meditated on the holy stories he knew from childhood, taking parts in them and acting out the roles of various characters. For example, in meditating on the story of Rāma (the supreme Lord came down on earth as a perfect king), he 'became' one of the jungle monkeys who served Rāma in a great war. For a period of time he lived like a monkey, up in a tree, in order to understand what it must have been like to serve Rāma so closely. In addition, he saw the people around him as part of the same stories. For instance, he regarded even a village prostitute as really Sītā, the holy wife of Rāma.

His second method relied on the idea that the ways human beings relate to each other are the ways in which they relate to God. He practised five modes of relationship: the quiet reverence and worship one shows to a great potentate; faithful service toward a master and the master's family; friendship and relaxed companionship; 'parenting', being mother or father to one's child; marriage and the consummation of intimacy. He related to God according to each mode—my ruler, my master, my friend, my child, my beloved—and enjoyed the special graces appropriate to each. Consonant with his view that all the ways were truly human, he refused to identify any one as superior to the others.

Although Ramakrishna's lifelong spiritual journey was essentially an elaboration of his initial experience of the omnipresent Mother, he was helped significantly by two wandering ascetics who widened his horizons beyond those familiar from childhood. The first was a mysterious woman known as the Bhairavi Brahmani ('a Brahmin woman who worships the Goddess in Her "terrifying" form'). She appeared at the temple in 1861 and directed Ramakrishna for several years,

introducing him to the concept of Tantra and a variety of Tantric disciplines. According to Tantra, one must experience the divine in every person, thing, state and activity, including those one considers merely 'secular' or even 'unholy' (for Hindus, things like meat and alcohol). Discriminatory attitudes of approval and disapproval are obstacles to the realization that God is everywhere without exception, and Tantric discipline is the set of exercises by which one is trained to live according to that realization.

Ramakrishna, always the trusting child, did whatever the Bhairavi Brahmani asked. Her care and faith in him were a great support at a time when no one else understood him very well, and she managed to convince many people that Ramakrishna really was a great and unique holy man. But in the end he did not adopt her spirituality completely, for he found even the Tantric path confining. I suspect he felt that it did not reach deeply or explicitly enough into his Mother-experience and that it was unable to account for all that he already knew.

In 1865, Ramakrishna was visited by a 'naked ascetic' named Totapuri, a monk from the Punjab who had dedicated his life to the search for an unqualified unitive experience, in which all difference from Absolute Reality was overcome. Totapuri travelled a radical *via negativa*, unsatisfied with any spirituality in which the seeker remains distinct from God. Ramakrishna was reluctant to accept Totapuri's guidance, since the implication was that there was something ineffable beyond even his Mother. But relying on his conviction that She dwelt in every experience, he asked Her if he could put Her image aside in order to enter the nondualistic Absolute. He tells us that She readily granted permission.

Totapuri prepared Ramakrishna for the abolition of all separation from the

Absolute by having him perform his own funeral rites; if he was not dead to the world and caste and family, how could he get beyond interior distinctions? Through a series of strenuous meditations Ramakrishna outstripped his teacher and quickly passed over into a state of undifferentiated and simple 'oneness with the One'—the goal Totapuri himself had not yet reached. But Ramakrishna saw the lofty state not as superior to his Mother-relationship, but as an aid to deepening it by cutting away his hitherto limited image of Her. Moreover, his experience enabled him later on to impress upon his followers that even non-dualism was not the enemy of their God-oriented faith: It too was the Mother's gift.

Ramakrishna did not stop upon reaching these limits of the Hindu experience. In 1866, he was initiated into Islamic mysticism by a Sufi. He later interiorized in his own way the spiritualities of three other great religions: Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Most remarkable and provocative is his insistence that he entered the Christian mystery as well. He recounts that one day in 1874, his meditation on a small Madonna drew him into a luminous state in which he became for a time nothing but a devotee of Jesus. On the third day he saw walking toward him in the temple garden an exceedingly attractive young man and heard within himself a cry of recognition: 'Behold the Christ, who shed His heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of humans. He is the master Yogi, in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, love incarnate.'

Ramakrishna thus claimed a Christ-experience and was filled with love toward Him, without becoming a Christian or claiming that Jesus was merely the symbol of a Hindu deity or that the Mother and Jesus were merely appearances of an underlying primordial religion. He claimed

simply that his Mother was everywhere and that this enabled him to travel for a time the Christian path; he never made further equations or hypotheses unwarranted by his own experience. It might be added, too, that his experience was paradigmatic for his disciples in India and the West: they learned from him how to celebrate feasts like Christmas, without being uneasy at the foreignness of the religion involved, and how to praise Christ and learn from Him even if they had no intention of becoming Christian.

Ramakrishna's final years before his slow death from cancer were the years of gathering disciples. He attracted (more perhaps by his personality than by any particular idea he preached) all kinds of men and women who wanted to be near him, share his experiences and translate them into a way of life and program of action (culminating, at the turn of the century, in the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission, which now has ashramas, schools and hospitals all over the world). Most importantly, his example inspired Vivekananda, his greatest disciple, to journey to the West and the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Ill., in 1893. Although this was by no means the first such journey by a Hindu, it did constitute the real entrance of living Hinduism into the West.

What lessons do we learn from Ramakrishna? We have seen that the source of all his experiences was his unqualified, unlimited devotion to the Mother. There is no sign that he ever had doubts in this regard. Ramakrishna discovered in his relation to the Mother the motive and rationale for entering other religious paths; his experiences elsewhere simply enriched his appreciation of the source to whom he always returned.

This is the first lesson. In the face of the many religions of the world—a

plurality that is not about to go away—we may wonder if we can remain true to Christ and still learn from non-Christians. Ramakrishna teaches us that the very basis for meeting believers of other faiths is our own Christian faith. Devotion to Christ, not a vague theocentrism, is the motive and stimulus for reverence toward and interest in non-Christian religious experiences. Ramakrishna might say that the deeper we journey into Christ the more we will understand that He wants us to seek Him beyond the boundaries of our religion—or, as Gerard Manley Hopkins said, ‘in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs. and lovely in eyes not his....’

Ramakrishna likewise reminds us that our meeting with other religions is not simply a ‘problem’ or a ‘challenge’ or even a ‘dialogue’ It may be these, but it is something more. This joyful and tireless seeker tells us that experiencing other faiths and understanding their words and images illuminates our own faith and deepens our knowledge of the God we already know. In other words, the meeting of religions is itself a religious event, an encounter with God at the boundaries of our tradition.

Finally, we have seen that calling God ‘Mother’ stimulated Ramakrishna to reach out in every direction, peacefully and joyfully, neither tearing other ways down nor forgetting his own way home again. If there is a correlation between

his sense of the Mother and his openness to other religions, this should encourage us to reflect on the correlation between our experience of God as Father and the traditional Christian way of meeting other religions: preaching the Gospel to all nations. Is it because God is our Father that we have sent missionaries to believers of other faiths, to convert them?

Whatever our answer to that question, we are encouraged by Ramakrishna to contemplate Mother-images in the Bible, to allow their power to illuminate anew our relation to the world and its people and religions. The fruit of such meditation may be a new sense of being at peace in the world as our home, the graced place where God is always nurturing us.

A well-informed friend of mine read a draft of this essay and commented that it did not quite capture the joy and childlike attractiveness of Ramakrishna. But some of my readers will wonder, I suspect, why I have not been more sceptical and questioning in my portrayal of him. Both reactions are legitimate, and what is written here is not the ‘last word’ on the man. I have tried simply to say enough about Ramakrishna to encourage the reader to read more about him and reflect on him during his anniversary year: to enter faithfully into the kind of spiritual encounter that Ramakrishna exemplifies. It seems to me that this would be a fruitful spiritual endeavour, whatever judgements one might eventually want to make.

God does reveal Himself to man and speak. Only then may one receive His command. How forceful are the words of such a teacher! They can move mountains. But mere lectures? People will listen to them for a few days and then forget them. They will never act upon mere words.

Sri Ramakrishna

SRI CHAITANYA AND SRI RAMAKRISHNA

GOUR DAS

In the history of India's religious tradition Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu occupies a most important and unique place. Although the doctrine of Bhakti had been known and put into practice by hundreds of great saints from the Vedic period onwards, it was Śrī Caitanya who gave it the status of a completely independent, all-sufficient spiritual discipline. He separated pure love for God from the other aspects of Bhakti and converted it into an all-consuming passion of such magnitude and intensity that the superiority of Bhakti over all other approaches to God stood vindicated by its sheer power, without doctrinal disputations and dissertations. The world had never seen before such an awesome demonstration of the power and glory of Bhakti and, after Caitanya, the world had to wait for nearly half a millennium for an equally super-human demonstration in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

This, however, is not the only point of similarity between the two great personalities. Sri Ramakrishna has been compared to the Hindu Avatars and Buddha and Christ but he bears the closest resemblance to Śrī Caitanya. Before attempting a brief comparative study of the lives and messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Śrī Caitanya it is necessary to introduce the reader to the life of the latter.

Śrī Caitanya was born in Navadvip, a town on the bank of Ganges in West Bengal, on Dol Purnima day in A.D. 1486, as the youngest son of Jagannāth Miśra and Śachī Devī. The name given to him by his parents was Viśvambhar but he came to be known as Nimāi and, on account of his golden complexion, also as Gaurāṅga. He had an elder brother by name Viśvarūpa who renounced the world in youth and was

not heard of after that. Viśvambhar mastered Vyākaraṇa and other branches of traditional knowledge and, when he was hardly out of his adolescence, opened a Sanskrit school in Navadvip which was then the most famous centre of Sanskrit learning in Bengal. The fame of Nimāi Paṇḍit as a formidable disputant spread, and students flocked to him from far and wide. Early in youth Nimāi married Viṣṇupriyā who, after her husband's renunciation, lived like a nun with her mother-in-law. He showed little interest in spiritual life and led a happy-go-lucky life, proud of his scholarship.

Once Gaurāṅga had to go to Gaya to offer libations for his departed father. After his bath as he stood before the deity, he felt a sudden upsurge of devotion in him and was about to lose consciousness when an ascetic hurriedly came forward and clasped him. The very touch of the saint, who was none other than Īśvara Puri, a close disciple of the famous Vaiṣṇava saint Mādhavendra Puri, brought about a great transformation in Gaurāṅga. All his pride in scholarship and intellectual brilliance vanished for ever, and he entreated Īśvara Puri to show him the way to the realization of Kṛṣṇa. A few days later, the saint initiated him into the Vaiṣṇava cult with the ten-lettered Gopāla Mantra.

Gaurāṅga returned to Navadvip a thoroughly transformed person. He spent his time calling upon the Lord with his eyes filled with ceaseless tears and occasionally losing consciousness of the outer world. He disbanded his school and in the company of Advaita Gosvāmin, and Nityānanda, who were disciples of Mādhavendra Puri, organized *nāma-saṁkīrtana*, congregational singing in the houses of devotees—chiefly in the courtyard of Śrīvās. About a year after his

conversion Gaurāṅga left his home and went to a place called Katwa where he earnestly pleaded for and got initiation into *sannyāsa* from Keśava Bhāratī. He was given the name Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, and thenceforth came to be popularly known as Caitanya. He was then just twenty-four years of age.

At the suggestion of his mother, Caitanya then went to Puri and spent his days in ecstatic contemplation on Lord Jagannāth. He lived in a small room, now known as *gambhīra*, and occasionally joined devotees, who included the great scholar Sārvabhauma, in *saṁkīrtana* and discussions. After some months Caitanya went on a long tour of South India, visiting Rameswaram, Andhra, Karnataka, Malabar and Maharashtra. It was at Rajamundry, on the bank of the Godavari that he met the great devotee Ramānanda Ray who was then the governor of the place. The dialogue that took place between them, in which the main principles of Kṛṣṇa Bhakti are clearly formulated, is one of the important episodes in the biographical accounts of Śrī Caitanya. Soon after his return to Puri, Śrī Caitanya set out for Vrindaban visiting on the way Bengal (where he first alighted at Panihati, made famous later on by Sri Ramakrishna's last participation in a public festival). Vrindaban had been, before Caitanya discovered the actual spot of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, an obscure village of cowherds. At his command two of his disciples, Rūpa and Sanātana started living there, and later on four others (Jīva, Raghunātha Dāsa, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa and Gopāla Bhaṭṭa) joined them. These six disciples, known as Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins, laid the foundation of the Vaiṣṇava philosophy of the cult of Caitanya. One of the significant acts of Caitanya during the period was the popularization of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

After spending several days in ecstasies, congregational singing and dancing, Mahā-

prabhu went to Allahabad and Varanasi and returned to Puri which he never again left. The remaining eighteen years of his life were spent in a state of continual ecstasy. There is no authoritative record of how and where he passed away, at the age of forty-eight, probably in the year A.D. 1533.

Sri Ramakrishna's familiarity with Caitanya's life and teachings

That Sri Ramakrishna had an unusually wide and accurate knowledge of the *līlā* and teachings of Mahāprabhu is clear from M.'s *Kathāmṛta* (translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). There is hardly a chapter in that book in which Ṭhākur Sri Ramakrishna does not refer to Mahāprabhu Caitanya or his teachings. He used to advise his disciples to read the traditional biographies of Mahāprabhu such as *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* and *Caitanya Bhāgavata*. All through his life Sri Ramakrishna showed great respect even to the descendants of the followers of Śrī Caitanya. When a Vaiṣṇava scholar by name Radhika Gosvami visited him, Sri Ramakrishna saluted him on hearing that the scholar was a descendant of Advaita Gosvāmin, a close associate of Śrī Caitanya. The following quotations, taken at random from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* give an indication of Śrī Ṭhākur's familiarity with Mahāprabhu's life and teachings :

Caitanya once dressed an ass in a religious garb and then prostrated himself before it. (P. 537).

Therefore Caitanya and Nītāi, after some deliberation, made an arrangement to attract the worldly. They would say to such persons, 'Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have a delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman.' Many people, attracted by the fish and the woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God's hallowed name, they

would soon realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth. The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of divine ecstasy. (P. 146).

Caitanya said: 'The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles, and the seed falls on the earth, germinates, and at last bears fruit' (P. 146).

Once a man said to Caitanya: 'You give the devotees so much instruction. Why don't they make much progress?' Caitanya said: 'They dissipate their powers in the company of women. That is why they cannot assimilate spiritual instruction. If one keeps water in a leaky jar, the water escapes little by little through the leak.' (P. 414).

Once Caitanyadeva was passing through a village. Someone told him that the body of the drum (*khol*) used in the kirtan was made from the earth of that village, and at once he went into ecstasy. (P. 547).

Caitanya once said to Nityānanda: 'Listen to me, brother. A man entangled in worldliness can never be free.' (P. 435).

The fire of Caitanya's renunciation was so great that when Sārvabhauma poured sugar on his tongue, instead of melting, it evaporated into air. He was always absorbed in samādhi. How great was his conquest of lust! To compare him with a man! (P. 688).

Caitanyadeva set out on a pilgrimage to southern India. One day he saw a man reading the Gita. Another man, seated at a distance, was listening and weeping. His eyes were swimming in tears. Caitanyadeva asked him, 'Do you understand all this?'. The man said, 'No, revered sir, I don't understand a word of the text.' 'Then why are you crying?' asked Caitanya. The devotee said: 'I see Arjuna's chariot before me. I see Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna seated in front of it, talking. I see this and I weep.' (P. 105).

Caitanya used to shed tears of joy at the very mention of Kṛṣṇa's name...Caitanya embraced all, including the pariahs. (P.157).

Caitanya was intoxicated with the love of God. Still, before taking to monastic life, for how many days did he try to persuade his mother to give him her permission to become a

monk! He said to her: 'Mother, don't worry. I shall visit you every now and then.' (P. 424).

Sri Ramakrishna was fully conversant with the intricate doctrines of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. He might have learnt about them from such eminent adepts and scholars as Bhairavi Brahmani and Vaishnav Charan. But he tested those doctrines in his own life and therefore could speak about them with authority.

Similarities between the personalities of Mahāprabhu and Thākur

No one who is familiar with the lives of Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna can fail to notice the remarkable similarities between these two great personalities. Several of the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna like Mahendra Nath Gupta, Balaram Bose and Ramchandra Datta recognized these similarities. Both Caitanya and Ramakrishna were born in orthodox Brahmin families and retained their Brahmin identities all through their lives. If the birth of Sri Ramakrishna was preceded by the vision his father had had at the Viṣṇu temple in Gaya, Śrī Caitanya's conversion to spiritual life also took place at the same place. In their childhood both of them were fond of playing pranks, although it is true that Nimāi was a brilliant student and became a great scholar whereas Gadadhar was indifferent to studies. In their youth both mixed freely with the poor villagers, especially with the non-Brahmins. Gadadhar was worshipped by Srinivas, the conch-shell seller, and Nimāi was adored by Śrīdhar a poor vegetable seller.

In spite of their delicate appearance and graceful movements both Caitanya and Ramakrishna were virile, dynamic and free personalities, unflattering and fearless in dealing with rich and influential people. Caitanya incited mob fury against the Kazi (Muslim magistrate) of Navadvip; Rama-

krishna told a titled aristocrat that he couldn't call him a 'Rājā'. Caitanya once gave a thrashing to the venerable Advaita Gosvāmin who was old enough to be his father, Ramakrishna slapped Rani Rasmani, who was old enough to be his mother, when he detected her mind had wandered from spiritual thoughts. At the same time, they had great compassion for hoodlums and fallen men and women. Caitanya's redemption of Jagāi and Mādhāi compares well with Sri Ramakrishna's redemption of Manmatha, the ruffian engaged by Hira Lal, the brother of Yogin Ma, to frighten away Ṭhākur. Śrī Caitanya entreated even immoral people and untouchables to repeat the Lord's name; Sri Ramakrishna blessed and transformed drunkards like Surendra, actors like Girish, actresses like Vinodini and untouchables like Rasik, the sweeper of Dakshineswar temple. Both Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna attracted scholars and had similar ways of dealing with them. Caitanya discomfited Digvijayi Paṇḍit and Sri Ramakrishna silenced Gauri Paṇḍit of Indes. Caitanya converted the great scholar Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma of Orissa into his follower; Sri Ramakrishna converted some of the most erudite scholars of his day like Narayan Sastri and Sashadhar Tarkachudamani. However, both the *avatārs* enjoyed talking with pious scholars and listening to spiritual discussions.

Both the personalities had extraordinary charisma. Mahāprabhu attracted large crowds wherever he went. Śrī Ṭhākur too had that power but he used it only occasionally, as for instance at Syambazar, a village near Kamarpukur. They inspired total and life-long loyalty in their followers many of whom were men of high intellectual and spiritual attainments. Śrī Caitanya's relationship with Nityānanda is almost like Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with Swami Vivekananda. Nityānanda was originally an *avadhūta sannyāsin* just as

Swami Vivekananda was a *daśanāmi sannyāsin*; both of them were extremely generous and threw caste restrictions to the winds while admitting people into their folds; both were able organizers; the formation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community was chiefly the work of Nityānanda, and the organization of the Ramakrishna Sangha was chiefly the work of Vivekananda. Nityānanda, although a disciple or follower of Caitanya is regarded as an associate or inseparable spiritual counterpart of Caitanya; almost similar is Swamiji's position vis-a-vis Sri Ramakrishna.

Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were fond of congregational singing of divine names and songs and actively took part in them. Both of them had extraordinary devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and, apart from frequently losing themselves in divine ecstasies, had attained the superhuman state of devotional fervour known as *mahābhāva*. Viśvanāth Cakravarti, the great Vaiṣṇava philosopher of Bengal defines *mahābhāva* thus: 'That state of Bhakti is called *mahābhāva* in which a moment's separation of Kṛṣṇa is unbearable. When the bliss of crores of worlds is nothing compared to the bliss of union with Kṛṣṇa, when the separation of Kṛṣṇa is much more painful than the bites of all the snakes, scorpions, etc. existing on earth, it is the state of *mahābhāva*.' Under the influence of *mahābhāva*, which ordinary mortals never attain, Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna used to rub their foreheads on the ground until blood came out. Both of them often regarded themselves as Rādhā, the spiritual consort of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. When he was at Vrindaban, Caitanya jumped into the Yamuna in a state of ecstasy. In the same place Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed by the memory of Kṛṣṇa ran along the banks of the river crying aloud. However, both were very liberal in their religious views. Caitanya never allowed any of his followers

to be disrespectful to other Avatars or gods and, although he held the supremacy of and independence of Bhakti, he was not an opponent of Advaita. He approved of and popularized the commentary on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* written by Śrīdhara Svāmin who was a monist. As regards Sri Ramakrishna, he was as perfectly at ease with Advaita as with dualistic Bhakti. Caitanya might not have been a devotee of the Divine Mother (although on Sri Ramakrishna's own authority, he worshipped Śakti at least for some time) but the concept of Śakti forms an important feature of Caitanyaite Vaiṣṇava theology. Caitanya had a Muslim disciple (the famous saint Haridas) and some of his later followers were Muslims. Sri Ramakrishna actually practised Islamic spirituality; even during his life-time he had a few Muslim admirers and, now after his passing away, his Muslim followers form quite a large number;

Both Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were *sannyāsins* and observed the vows of renunciation of wealth and lust with uncompromising steadfastness. Caitanya prohibited his disciples from even looking at the face of a woman, and the rules he imposed on them in dealing with women were so strict that, it is said, 'they would not think of women even in dream'. Once his young disciple 'Chota' Haridas (to be distinguished from the famous Muslim disciple) begged for his master a little good quality rice from an old woman devotee by name Mādhavi, and, for this apparently harmless act, Caitanya ordered that 'Chota' Haridas should never come to his presence. Even the intercession of some of his foremost disciples did not make him relent and, when after a year of agony Haridas committed suicide, Caitanya remained unmoved. Sri Ramakrishna too took great care in protecting his young apostles from the snares of feminine charms. He never allowed them to sit in the company of

women and himself set an example in this regard. Caitanya lived in a bare room, sleeping on a mat (he was annoyed when somebody offered him a quilt) and owned nothing but a change of clothes. Sri Ramakrishna's living was equally austere except that he used a beadstead (cot) and mosquito-curtain and wore slippers. However, both of them were very careful regarding their food. Neither of them could take cooked rice from the hands of a non-Brahmin. Caitanya had a brahmin cook who accompanied him wherever he went. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother cooked his simple meals.

Both Mahāprabhu and Śrī Thākur were fully conscious of their true divine nature, inherent powers and mission on earth. Though they behaved like ordinary human beings most of the time, and kept their superhuman nature hidden, on certain occasions they demonstrated miraculous powers, such as materializing themselves at distant places and eating large quantities of food, which have striking parallels in the lives of both of them. Both of them became cult figures and were worshipped as deities even when they were alive. Their intimate disciples looked upon them not as ordinary teachers but as divine beings.

Ramakrishna's identity with Caitanya

The similarities briefly mentioned above suggest the possibility of the identity of the two personalities. This identity was first recognized by Bhairavi Brahmani. Sri Ramakrishna himself had direct experience of this identity through mystic visions. When he visited Navadvip (Nadia) in the company of Mathur he saw two boys of golden complexion racing towards him and merging into his own personality. Another day, he had the vision of Mahāprabhu dancing in ecstasy in the company of his devotees near the Panchavati at Dakshineswar, and Sri Ramakrishna recognized

some of his own disciples like Balaram and Mahendra Nath Gupta in Caitanya's party.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we find Sri Ramakrishna speaking of Caitanya's experiences on several occasions :

Caitanyadeva used to experience three spiritual states: the inmost, the semi-conscious and the conscious. In the inmost state he would see God and go into samadhi; he would be in the state of jada samadhi. In the semi-conscious state he would be partially conscious of the outer world. In the conscious state he would sing the name and glories of God. (P. 478).

But the nature of a Vijnani is quite different, as was the case with Chaitanyadeva. He acts like a child or a madman or an inert thing or a ghoul. While in the mood of a child, he sometimes shows childlike guilelessness, sometimes the frivolity of adolescence, and sometimes, while instructing others, the strength of a young man. (P. 493).

The other day ... I saw Satcidananda come out of this sheath [i.e. his own body.] It said, 'I incarnate Myself in every age.' I thought that I myself was saying these words out of mere fancy. I kept quiet and watched. Again Satcidananda Itself spoke, saying 'Caitanya too worshipped Sakti.' (P. 720).

It is quite obvious that in making these statements Sri Ramakrishna was identifying himself with Śrī Caitanya. Finally, we may quote a statement made by Swami Vivekananda himself. While talking to M. at the Baranagore monastery after the passing away of his Master, Swamiji said, 'But times without number the Master said to me: "In me alone are embodied Advaita, Caitanya and Nityananda. I am all these three."'

Teachings of Mahāprabhu and Thākur

A good deal of similarity in the teachings of Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna may also be noticed. This is not surprising in view of the similarities between their personalities. Moreover, it should be remembered that the social conditions in

which they lived were not very dissimilar, and the difference in time had not altered much their cultural backgrounds. It is beyond the scope of the present article to undertake a detailed comparative study of the teachings of the two great Masters. We can only point out some common grounds.

The central teaching of Śrī Caitanya was the supremacy and independence of Bhakti. He regarded it as superior even to *mukti*. However, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school accepts Jñāna Yoga and Karma Yoga also as means to salvation. Sri Ramakrishna too, while accepting all paths as valid means of attaining the Supreme Spirit, held Bhakti to be the best means in the present age of Kali. His conception of Vijnāna (which means a constant oscillation between the *nitya* and the *līlā*) as the highest state of realization is quite similar to the Supreme Bhakti of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. In his *Bhakti-sandarbha* (section 48) Jīva Gosvāmin has said: 'By saying that of the two routes which lead to the same goal one is difficult, its (Bhakti's) primacy is established.' Sri Ramakrishna says the same thing in the *Gospel*: 'Bhakti is the one essential thing. To know God through Jnana and reasoning is extremely difficult' (P. 94). He compares Jñāna to a male guest who can go only to the outer parlour of a house, and Bhakti to a woman guest who goes directly to the inner apartments. (P. 719). Jīva Gosvāmin begins his *Bhakti-sandarbha* by stating that although the Ultimate Reality is known as Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavat, Bhagavat represents the highest form. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'He who is Brahman is verily Atman, and again, He is the Bhagavan. He is Brahman to the followers of the path of knowledge, Paramatman to the Yogis, and Bhagavan to the lovers of God.' (*Gospel* P. 134).

Another teaching common to Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna is about the power of the Divine Name and the importance of

constantly chanting the names and glories of the Lord: According to both of them, there is no difference between *nāma* and *nāmin*, the Name and the Named. Śrī Caitanya originated and Sri Ramakrishna rejuvenated the institution of *saṁkīrtana*, congregational singing. Self-surrender to God and dependence on Him form the keynote of their teachings. Their endeavour was to evolve a form of religion which would meet the needs of common people.

Both Mahāprabhu and Śrī Thākura laid great emphasis on morality, renunciation and the strict observance of chastity. This point was mentioned earlier.

Another important teaching of theirs is about service to fellowmen. According to an oft-quoted saying attributed to Śrī Caitanya, the duties of a devotee are three : *Nārṇe ruci, jive dayā, vaiṣṇava-sevā* 'Delight in repeating the Name, compassion for creatures and service to devotees of God.' Sri Ramakrishna too approved of this scheme but enlarged its scope. 'Compassion for creatures' he changed to service (*sevā*) of God in man. Compassion implies a certain degree of superiority which Sri Ramakrishna wanted to be replaced with *sevā* implying greater humility. Apart from this general humble attitude towards creation in

general, he also encouraged the service of devotees. He himself often fed, with his own hands, pure-hearted devotees like Narendra, Rakhal, Purna and Narayan. Both Caitanya and Ramakrishna encouraged brotherly love among the devotees and succeeded in bringing them together to form closely-knit religious communities.

The greatest teaching of Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna, of course, is that God realization is the goal of life and all human thoughts and activities should be geared to this supreme end. It was in giving the assurance of God realization with incontrovertible authority, in demonstrating its possibility through their own endeavours, and in manifesting the glories of such realization in their own personalities that these two religious leaders made their greatest contribution to the spiritual heritage of humanity.

In conclusion we would like to state that even if the oneness of the two personalities might not be accepted by all, nobody can deny the fact that Sri Ramakrishna's life came as the greatest vindication of the avatarhood of Śrī Caitanya. By the same token, no one can deny that Śrī Caitanya's life provides an equally strong support for the avatarhood of Sri Ramakrishna.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HOLINESS

DR. JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM C.M.I.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is a remarkable phenomenon of India's traditional religious consciousness. He was truly a man of God, a human being permeated with the divine to such an extent that many consider him an *avatāra* of the Deity.

Sri Ramakrishna once described the ideal of holiness by defining the holy man as

one who has surrendered his body, mind and innermost self to God ; who does not regard woman with the eyes of a worldly person ; who never forgets to look upon a woman as his mother and to offer reverence to her if he happens to be near her ; who constantly thinks of God and does not indulge in any talk except about spiritual things ; and who serves all beings,

knowing that God resides in everybody's heart. This is clearly a universal description of holiness. There is, however, no uniform, strict definition of a saint, since as a participant in the life and reality of the Transcendent, he belongs to a level of being beyond all human conceptions. Still the saint is considered a model and pathfinder for others to imitate in their quest for intimate union with God. St. Paul in his letters to the Churches generally addresses Christians as saints or as those called to be saints, since they are intimately united with Christ and manifest in their lives the divine life received from him. But this is an ontological conception of holiness, since only those who are exceptionally holy in their lives and appear so to others to be models for them are canonized or officially declared as saints. Besides, sainthood and holiness are not terms reserved exclusively to Christians either. As Peter, the head of the disciples of Christ, tells the gentile Cornelius at Caesarea, 'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'. (*Acts of the Apostles* 10.34) There is a difference between sainthood itself and its official proclamation. Canonization does not make any one a saint, but only declares that some one has been a saint already. Only those whose extraordinary holiness of life is proved after a thorough investigation of credible witnesses and is divinely attested to by proved miraculous favours attributed to their intercession, are canonized as saints. Sainthood, however, is a reality independent of any such public manifestation or official proclamation.

What is remarkable from a Christian perspective in the life of Sri Ramakrishna is not his popular appeal, nor his catholic outlook experimenting with both the Islamic and Christian religious approaches, but his

earnest and authentic search for the Divine as the ground and source of all existence, his extraordinary efforts to realize that Divine in his own life. Even the fact that he was a Sannyāsin formally initiated into *sannyāsa* by Totapuri, and though he was married he did not use that marriage but chose to remain celibate, do not add anything special to his holiness in the Christian view. Holiness and intimate experience and realization of God are equally available to married people as well. Each state of life is best for those who are called to it. Though Sri Ramakrishna had a special consideration for a group of unmarried young men who gathered around him, he had also a large number of householder disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna recognized the infinitude and incomprehensibility of God: 'Many are the names of God, and infinite the forms that lead us to know Him. In whatsoever name or form you desire to call Him, in that very form and name you will see Him.'¹ He compares the differences in human perspectives on the Deity to four blind men's divergent characterizations of an elephant.² He recognized and realized in all things the divine immanence: 'As with one gold various ornaments are made, having different forms and names, so one God is worshipped in different countries and ages, and has different forms and names. Though He may be worshipped variously, some loving to call Him Father, others Mother etc. yet it is one God that is being worshipped in all these various relations and modes.'³ Though he acknowledged the presence of the Divine in all things, he also recognized

1. Prof. F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984) p. 99.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 100.

their distinction and diversity: 'All waters are brooded over by Nārāyaṇa, but every kind of water is not fit for drink. Similarly, though it is true that the Almighty dwells in every place, yet every place is not fit to be visited by man.... It is true that God is even in the tiger, but we must not go and face the animal.'⁴

Indeed, God is the source and fullness of all holiness. The wisdom and holiness of sages and saints do not add to the infinite consciousness of God or divine sanctity. But the unique role of saints is to express the divine holiness in great diversity and variety to make it relevant to the human existence. Each saint and sage manifests the divine in an unique way in his own time and place and particular circumstances. Each one of them was in fact an appropriate response to the crying need of the times, challenging the trend of corruption and the deviating tendencies that threatened the spiritual ideals.

Sri Ramakrishna had his unique life path mapped out for him by the Divine Spirit. After only three or four years of formal education he dedicated his life to the service of the Kālī temple at Dakshineswar. For twelve years he engaged in intense *sādhana*, learning to commune with God in various ways. After having realized the maternal aspect of the Divine he became a living expression of that unique realization and of that deep Bhakti in which he sought to renounce the world and surrender himself to the Divine and then look at all things in the light of that divine vision.

Though he was a Brahmin by birth, he realized that caste distinctions and privileges had no meaning in themselves. When asked whether it was proper to keep the

Brahmanical sign of the sacred thread, he answered: 'When the knowledge of self is obtained, all fetters fall off by themselves. Then there is no distinction of a Brāhmaṇa or a Śūdra, a high caste or a low caste. In that case the sacred thread, the sign of caste, falls away of itself. But so long as a man has the consciousness of distinction and difference, he should not forcibly throw it off.'⁵

But he had his own personal battles to wage. Once in his struggles he got word from the Divine Mother, 'My son, how could you hope to realize the highest truth, if you don't give up the love of your body and of your little self!'⁶ To get rid of his high caste feeling he went and cleansed with his own hands the latrines of servants and sweepers and he prayed: 'Mother, destroy in me all idea that I am great, and that I am a Brāhmaṇa, and that they are low and pariahs, for who are they but Thou in so many forms.'⁷ He overcame the temptation of money in an equally thorough-going manner. He would collect some silver and gold coins and also a heap of rubbish and, sitting on the bank of the Ganges taking both in his hands and mixing them, repeat to himself: 'Money is rubbish, money is rubbish'. Even later he could not touch money since it seemed to burn his body. Several cash offerings, intended to make his life secure, he refused. 'It increases vanity', he said. 'It can never help to realize the ever-existent Knowledge and Bliss, and, therefore, is no better than a piece of torn rag.' Though at the age of twenty-three, in obedience to the wishes of his relatives, he married a five year old girl called Sarada, he remained a celibate Sannyasin. When

4. Ibid., p. 101.

5. Ibid., p. 147.

6. Ibid., p. 41.

7. Ibid., p. 42.

she came of age and joined him in the temple he treated her as a mother and goddess and retained her as a disciple.

Totapuri, a wandering ascetic, found in Ramakrishna a great yogin and formally initiated him into *sannyāsa*. Contemplation is futile without holiness. Having attained the fullness of holiness, Sri Ramakrishna could quickly enter the highest state of *samādhi* when he was initiated by Totapuri. This non-dual experience did not, however, destroy his love for the Deity, and all through his life he was intensely devoted to the Divine Mother. Ramakrishna himself had something to teach Totapuri. When the latter was outraged at a man lighting his pipe from his sacral fire which he constantly maintained, Ramakrishna mildly scolded him: 'Is this the way that you look upon everything as Brahman? Is not the man himself Brahman as well as the fire? What is high and what is low in the sight of a Jñānin?' Totapuri acknowledged his mistake.

Sri Ramakrishna came at a critical moment in the renewal of Hinduism. It was a time when various reformers were working hard to correct the social and moral evils of Hinduism like idolatry,

infant marriage and widow burning justified as 'sati'. Raja Rammohan Roy preached moral reform. Keshab Chandra Sen inaugurated a New Dispensation calling for a religious revival on an interreligious and syncretist perspective. Several others attempted several other things calculated to improve the external image of Hindu society. Sri Ramakrishna's message was that such superficial changes were not enough. Change had to begin in the heart of man through an intense *tapasya* and an immediate and intimate realization of the Divine. Following his example and springing from his inspiration, the Sri Ramakrishna Sangha later took shape as an instrument of an ongoing religious renewal.

There is something remarkably similar in all the great spiritual leaders of mankind. They were all people who totally surrendered themselves to God, working intensely for the transformation of the world through the example of their own personal lives, though each of them had a personal style and unique way of approaching God and men. Sri Ramakrishna is a unique phenomenon of our Indian religious history for which all have to be grateful to Divine Providence.

RAMAKRISHNA AND 'SCIENCE'

DR. M. SIVARAMAKRISHNA

The Master's analytical mind

The title of this article is apparently heretical. One can think of Vivekananda in the context of science. In fact, the areas of approximation between his exposition of Vedanta and the implications of modern science—specially those of quantum physics

—are frequently noted, confirmed and commended. But to juxtapose Ramakrishna and science might make the author an overenthusiastic 'promoter', presumably a devotee, claiming too much for the Master; understandable, yes; but charmingly naive. This could, therefore, be seen, further, as blurring the distinctions between two

divergent epistemologies and consequently distorting both with denotative inaccuracy and semantic ambiguity.

But, then, we should go by the Upaniṣadic intuition: the God-realized—not to speak of an Incarnation—has known *that* by knowing which everything else is known. 'Everything else' obviously includes areas which are not 'mystical' or 'supersensuous'. But this does not imply that the God-realized will posit clear-cut theorems or streamlined, laboratory-tested, 'demonstrable' frames of predictable, empirical reference. On the one hand, he makes us aware that, to use Alan Watt's words, knowing everything, 'omniscience', 'is not to know everything but to understand the whole process of knowing'.¹ On the other, he does something infinitely more valuable: by emphasizing the holistic consciousness—the experience and awareness of which is the core of the religious temper—the mystic makes us more aware of the 'patterns that connect' than those which categorize coldly and logically. Therefore, mystics represent what William Irwin Thompson has called 'a contemplative culture based upon consciousness and ecological symbiosis' and, as such, their experience 'is an initiation experience for the entire human race.'²

This initiation is, in a sense, a reactivating of several centres of consciousness which eventually crystallize as powerful antidotes, checks and balances to a nascent sensate culture. The mystic—and an incarnation much more so—has access to these structures of consciousness—such as myth, literature and folklore—which emphasize holistic conjoining, rather than

analytic dissecting. But, paradoxically, he may also be illumining several patterns of thinking 'strictly' outside the domain of mystical consciousness. Just as we are familiar today with the phenomenon of 'smuggling' mythic and religious motifs in the sophisticated forms of science fiction, space movies, spoofs and fantasies, with the tacit assumption that 'the unconscious takes off the silly wrapper and recognizes the thing for what it is',³ so probably the mystic too offers insights which are relevant to science. If the wrapper of strictly theological idiom is peeled off, probably we arrive at several significant areas of approximation.

Today, the temper of science gives credibility to this kind of attempt. One reason is the greater humility of the scientist today induced by repeated frustrations of the empirical, experimental method in several areas of human experience. Instead of describing the uniqueness of the method of science—an alleged 'uniqueness' responsible for avoidable 'epistemological arrogance' on the part of the nineteenth century scientist—today many are inclined to regard it as *any other mode of perception*. Consequently, as Gregory Bateson puts it, the knowledge which it gives 'at any given moment will be a function of the threshold of our available means of perception.' In effect, based on available means of perception it could be the latest microscope, telescope or computer—'science probes; it does not prove.'⁴

It would be instructive, therefore, to probe the patterns which connect Rama-

1. Alan Watts, *Psychotherapy: East and West* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1975) p. 65.

2. William Irwin Thompson, *Darkness and Scattered Light* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977) p. 34.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

4. Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979) pp. 29-30. See also his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Chandler, 1972, paperback, Ballantine Books, 1972) for further discussion of the points raised in this essay.

krishna to modern empirical temper. To begin with, it is amazing to note the incredible flair Ramakrishna has for not only accurate, unerring observation but also for what certainly is the core of the scientific outlook: categorization. Even a random, cursory glance at the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* reveals a predictable penchant for categorization in virtually every context; and how many areas in which classification is instantly, almost instinctively, drawn, the entities described and expounded upon!: God, ignorance and knowledge, maya, ego, *guṇas*, *yogas*, centres of consciousness, varieties of mind, guru, householder, incarnation, *līlā*, reasoning, sin, *samskāra*, spiritual discipline, *vijñāna*, classes of women etc.

One is struck by the encyclopedic range of subjects covered: literally every aspect of spiritual and most aspects of secular life are discussed. From the transcendental problems of the nature of consciousness, God, details of *sādhana* down to the relatively 'trivial' details of diet, how to trim the wick of a lamp, how not to pay more, how to massage etc. Interestingly enough, Ramakrishna worked out even a chart of physical marks to identify the state of the devotee. The discussion, moreover, is total, comprehensive, subsuming all the facets. For instance, look at the following entries from the Index (page references have been omitted):

ego, the cause of suffering; is ignorance; different kinds of; difficult to get rid of; harmless ego; creates obstruction; after samadhi; 'unripe' ego.⁵

God: with and without form; longing for vision of; powers of; different seekers of; grace of; dwells in devotees' hearts; sanctity of the name of; how to see; can be seen; is unknow-

able by finite mind; signs of vision of; like a child; chanting the name of; power of name of; manifestations of; inscrutability of the ways of; names of; glories of; Impersonal; has become all; is Kalpataru; compassion of; manifestation of the power of; as Mother; under devotee's control; not partial; everything is possible for.⁶

Man, different classes of; nature of bound; different natures of; is God...⁷

Worldly people; are averse to spirituality; their conception of God; their duties.⁸

The mind and consciousness—for want of better idiom—capable of this kind of structuring should be in any sense of the word unerringly analytic, uniquely empirical. We notice the presence of the major items of any kind of analytic description: the nature, function, components of the thing discussed together with generic classification. Invariably, there is pinpointing of the 'symptoms or signs' by which the thing or experience can be recognized. Moreover, there is almost everywhere a 'causal' analysis: as, for instance, the cause of suffering, ego, ignorance etc.

In effect, as Bateson has noted, if there are two ways of organization of data, 'description' and 'explanation', then the Master's overall exposition reflects both these. 'A pure description', says Bateson, 'would include all the facts (i.e. all the effective differences) immanent in the phenomenon to be described but would indicate no kind of connection among these phenomena that might make them more understandable.'⁹ For the connection to be apparent, you require 'explanation' because 'description contains no logic and no information.'¹⁰ But sometimes a man can provide explanation totally without giving any information among the elements

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 1058.

8. Ibid., p. 1063.

9. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

10. Ibid., p. 82.

5. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Nikhilananda, tr., (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981) p. 1056. Hereafter *The Gospel*.

which constitute the phenomenon being explained. Science, according to Bateson, makes connections between description and explanation through 'tautology': 'an aggregate of linked propositions in which the validity of the *links* between them cannot be doubted. The truth of the propositions is not claimed.'¹¹

Ramakrishna's practice, from this perspective, seems to me to reflect definite freedom from the limitations of these three modes: 'description', 'explanation', and 'tautology'. He does describe, explain and 'make' propositions. But description and explanation are carefully seen for what they are: necessary modes in the case of knowledge of the physical world and its phenomena but sources of distortion in the world of spirit. However, while constantly questioning and discrediting mere 'reasoning'—the aggregate of explanation and description and the linking of the two through tautology—the Master is not unaware of its significance. But he draws a distinction between reasoning confined to seeking answers for the phenomenal universe and reasoning directed as a weapon to discriminate between the Real and the Unreal: in short, between knowledge which we get from 'patterns of limited threshold' and knowledge we get from 'metapattern' that connects all. He categorically pointed out, in one context, 'One cannot know the truth about God through science. Science gives us information only about things perceived by the senses, as, for instance this material mixed with that material gives such and such a result and that material mixed with this material gives such and such a result.'¹² Hence, also, his assertion: 'a man cannot comprehend spiritual things with his ordinary intelligence.'¹³ This is the reason

why while Ramakrishna gives explanations and descriptions of the different aspects of psychic and spiritual life, providing several patterns of thinking, when it comes to *verbalizing the experience of the universe as it is*—or of the 'simultaneity of opposites' which is probably its essence—he expresses inability, an inability rooted in the very nature of the experience which is, presumably, beyond all intellection.

Can we see here an incipient critique of the scientist's 'method' while not rejecting it totally? In fact Ramakrishna's idea would approximately be that descriptions of parts are useful if we keep sight of the whole. By implication, sight of the whole would prevent seduction to reductionism. To put it in his picturesque image: 'counting' of the mangoes *is* the only process for the scientist; but for those who have the eye of Śiva, it is *tasting* which matters, though they do not negate counting.

The relative and the Absolute

We have seen so far that the unique quality of Ramakrishna is his effortless capacity for analysis while retaining constant awareness of the Ground, the substratum of all analysis. Analogically it is simultaneous awareness of 'patterns' and the 'metapattern'¹⁴ that 'unifies and sanctifies' all that is.

One can, at this stage, argue that Ramakrishna's analytic perceptions 'confine' themselves basically to the world of psychic, ethical and spiritual phenomena—areas which, for the strictly empirical mind, are notoriously subjective, incurably impressionistic. Ramakrishna, peerless exemplar of the core of Hindu religious philosophy, probably anticipated this argument. Consequently he has reiterated the 'epistemological' distinctions of tradi-

11. Ibid.

12. *The Gospel*, p. 116.

13. *The Gospel*, p. 429.

14. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

tional cognitive maps. All knowledge which, according to Ramakrishna, stems from *Śakti*, 'the root of the universe', takes two forms: *vidyā* and *avidyā*.¹⁵ Though it is tempting to translate these words as 'knowledge' and 'ignorance', the implications cut deeper. The nearest equivalent to Ramakrishna's distinction is that of Bateson: 'knowing' (*avidyā*) and 'that wider knowing which is the glue holding together the starfishes and sea anemones and redwood forests and human committees.'¹⁶ (*vidyā*). *Avidyā* is 'knowing' what we call the analytic consciousness committed to pathological split off of entities. It 'deicides' through two modes: 'it conjures up', says Ramakrishna, 'woman and gold, which casts the spell. *Vidyā* begets devotion, kindness, wisdom, and love which leads one to God. This *avidyā* must be propitiated....'¹⁷ Elaborating the idea elsewhere, he says:

... (there is) the 'maya of knowledge' and the 'maya of ignorance'. 'Woman and gold' is the 'maya of ignorance'. Knowledge, renunciation, and other spiritual qualities are the splendours of the 'maya of knowledge'

Following the 'maya of knowledge' step by step one attains the knowledge of Brahman.¹⁸

In describing the nature of knowledge it is interesting that Ramakrishna ties down 'lower knowledge' to 'woman and gold'. These two are extremely significant, recurrent pointers in Ramakrishna and the significance lies in the fact that they are his emblems basically for the world of psychic and physical phenomena. 'Woman' can be taken as the apotheosis, the core and key to man's behavioural patterns, his emotional and psychic fixations. Gold, similarly, can be taken as commitment to

the physical as the enduring reality (since gold is the most enduring of metals). In other words, what we call 'science' proper is marked, if the extensions in meaning are made, by commitment to the behavioural and physical levels or patterns as the only truth. In this sense 'woman and gold' are Ramakrishna's approximations to the Freudian and the Marxian syndromes: both postulate determinism, behaviourism and materialism as the invariable components of the scientific temper. Has Ramakrishna identified the major limiting thresholds of science while, simultaneously, making us aware of their enormous psychic implications?

The behavioural world and the world of physical properties are controlled, for Ramakrishna—as for all Hindu mystics and thinkers—by 'Maya' and *maya* is translatable, according to him, as 'ego'. This is the individual self assuming a 'separate' world, out there, creating and participating in it. It is what Alan Watts calls 'unconscious ignorance', the 'habitual selective acts of consciousness which screen out "separate" things from their context.'¹⁹ Accordingly, 'Maya', says Ramakrishna, 'is nothing but egotism of the embodied soul. This egotism has covered everything like a veil.'²⁰ The result is perceptions of limited thresholds and the elevation of these to the level of the total truth. The error is rectified not by rejecting these as 'unreal' but by accepting both the 'patterns of limited threshold' and the metapattern. Imagistically, Ramakrishna would say the error is comparable to the pitcher and the ocean. The pitcher is surrounded by water yet 'it remains' like our limited perceptions. But if the pitcher is rejected you are left with the ocean, the 'metapattern'. The idea of

15. *The Gospel*, p. 116.

16. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

17. *The Gospel*, p. 116.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 943-44.

19. Alan Watts, *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

20. *The Gospel*, p. 168.

transcendence implicit here is beautifully expressed by Guy Murchie and this comes very close to what Ramakrishna suggests: 'Our earthly life is a tentative tuning in', 'a transcendent resonance of protein molecules with intangible awareness in an illusory space-time continuum—a harmonic, a geometric interval, a note in a song of eternal and incomprehensible mystery.'²¹

Ramakrishna's terms for the apparent disorder of limited perceptions in which we by-pass the fact that a "thing" is a unit of description, not a natural entity,²² and the overall view of harmony in the chaos of limited views—or what scientists call, 'the dance of interacting parts'—are *līlā* and *nitya*. *Līlā* corresponds to the parts and *nitya* to the interconnections—though the suggestion is obvious that parts have 'existence' only in the whole. By accepting, exclusively, 'parts' as real we negate the whole; paradoxically even when the 'whole' is accepted *generically* we still require to stub our toes on the *specific*. That is why Ramakrishna affirms unequivocally:

I accept both the Nitya and the Lila... If you accept the Nitya, you must also accept the Lila. It is the process of negation and affirmation. You realize the Nitya by negating the Lila. Then you affirm the Lila, seeing in it the manifestation of Nitya.²³

This is something unique not only in the evolution of Hindu philosophy but also in its implicit patterns which are remarkably comparable to the modern scientific temper. That a man of God spending almost his entire lifetime in nothing but an uninterrupted continuum

of divine consciousness oblivious of all the addictions which the human flesh and mind are heir to, should affirm the reality of the temporal universe is a unique, unprecedented phenomenon. This is in striking contrast to the (alleged?) illusionism of Hindu, *mayāvāda*. Moreover, the apparently real is not only affirmed but regarded as the *integral* component of whatever is the metapattern. Hence the apparently startling, yet to the modern temper, perfectly satisfying, affirmation by the Master: 'I too think of God sometimes as good and sometimes as bad...He wakes us up and sometimes He keeps us unconscious. One moment the ignorance disappears and the next moment it covers our mind.'²⁴

Ramakrishna's statement has at least two implications. First, by 'postulating' *nitya* and *līlā* as explicable in terms of each other—without pathologically dichotomizing them—he reflects one of the cardinal tenets of modern empiricism: that all energies are both generic and specific, above all, that they are 'mutually translatable'²⁵ (as Ramakrishna would say, 'Brahman is Śakti', 'Śakti is Brahman')²⁶. Second, the mutually translatable (transformable?) energies suggest that whatever exists *is: nothing has been added to or detracted from whatever is the Reality*. In effect, Brahman alone has become everything: not only the apparent polarities but also the simultaneity of polarities in a continuum of awareness. In effect, 'the attributes of matter are superimposed on Spirit, and the attributes of Spirit are superimposed on matter.'²⁷

Ramakrishna's mapping of levels of knowledge—or ignorance—is now clear:

21. Guy Murchie, *The Seven Mysteries of Life* (London: Rider/Hutchinson, 1979) p. 519.

22. Alan Watts, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

23. *The Gospei*, p. 477.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

26. *The Gospei*, p. 107.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 969.

the level of ignorance, the level of knowledge and the level which, while subsuming both, is beyond both: in effect, *ajñāna*, *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. This is Ramakrishna's statement:

The Jiva at first remains in a state of ignorance. He is not conscious of God, but of the multiplicity. He sees many things around him. On attaining Knowledge he becomes conscious that God dwells in all beings. Suppose a man has a thorn in the sole of his foot. He gets another thorn and takes out the first one. In other words, he removes the thorn of *ajñāna* or ignorance, by means of the thorn of *jñāna*, knowledge. But on attaining *vijñāna*, he discards both thorns, knowledge and ignorance.²⁸

If both our 'knowledge and ignorance' envelop the world, then all our patterns in science can extend only the boundaries of our enormous ignorance not of our knowledge. The more we know, the more we come to know that we have to know more. The final state beyond knowledge and ignorance is inexpressible. The attempt to measure, calculate, quantify is analogous, according to Ramakrishna, to the attempt on the part of the salt doll to measure the depth of the ocean. In terms of empirical analogies 'salt doll' is easily translatable as the intellect whose 'pure logic cannot tolerate paradoxes.'²⁹ The ocean is the complex of all kinds of knowledge. Therefore, the salt doll—the intellect—setting out to *know* does not solve the relevant problems but gets dissolved—a dissolution symbolic of the final frustration, through absorption, of the finite mind.

It would appear as though Ramakrishna was discrediting the role of intellect. If so, this is evidently un-Ramakrishna-like. For his consciousness is all-accommodating, affirming both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance. But one still has to validate

the relatively viable knowledge gained through analysis. This is done, it seems to me, through a curious vision which Ramakrishna had and in which the 'salt doll' figures again. The vision is thus described by him:

Still another day She (the Mother) showed me an ocean. Taking the form of a salt doll, I was going to measure its depth. While doing this, through the grace of the guru I was *turned to stone*. Then I saw a ship and at once got into it. The helmsman was the guru....³⁰

By-passing the extraordinary spiritual significance inhering in this vision, we can relate it to the pattern of knowledge and ignorance we have been discussing. Scientific patterns of perception are stable like the stone: relatively more stable than the salt doll which, by losing its identity, is unable to 'report' back. The transfiguration of 'salt' into 'stone' is an affirmation, as it were, of the relative validity and permanence of our phenomenal knowledge. Ramakrishna categorically affirmed the validity of this repeatedly: the 'awareness of distinction is' surely, 'due to God's *maya*', but, '*it is necessary for the purpose of running His illusory world.*'³¹ But even stone, we should remember, is subject to dissolution through the relatively longer process of erosion. The only way out, therefore, is to 'attain' (deceptive word, *qua* Vedanta) the niche in the boat: retain simultaneous awareness of both *nitya* and *līlā*, the 'metapattern' and the 'pattern'.

Mind and consciousness

We are now nearing the major complex of approximation. In the light of the above discussion, we are now better placed to understand the implications of the primary,

28. Ibid., p. 404.

29. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

30. *The Gospel*, pp. 376-77.

31. Ibid., p. 893.

cardinal insight underlying this area of approximation: the insight that all our perceptions are mind-generated; that, in effect, as Alan Watts puts it, 'the world is relative to our neurological structure and the ways in which social conditioning has taught us to see.'³² This is seemingly simplistic and in Ramakrishna's phrasing it is deceptively more so:

It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. It is like white clothes just returned from the laundry. If you dip them in red dye, they will be red. If you dip them in blue or green, they will be blue or green. They take only the colour you dip them, whatever it may be.³³

The basic idea suggested is familiar to scientists today, particularly to psychologists: that there is a distinction between mind and the contents of mind (or consciousness). Can we say, by extension, as Wilder Penfield does, that the mind is the programmer and the brain the computer which executes the programme (or in Ramakrishna's image, decides the colour the cloth of the mind has to take?) 'The mind directs and the mind-mechanism executes.'³⁴ In other words, since the mind is 'colourless', in the sense that it is independent of motor control or 'different from' the forms of 'neuronal potentials' it has 'a separate existence'³⁵ and, by implication, is the witness of all levels of consciousness. (Probably, the distinction or 'separation' drawn today by most neurologists between the cerebral cortex and the higher brain-stem is metaphorically expressed by Ramakrishna.)

32. Alan Watts, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

33. *The Gospel*, p. 138.

34. Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1978) p. 47.

35. *Ibid.*

Analogously, Ramakrishna is also implicitly referring to the fact that the 'colours' or objects symbolized by the 'colour' are the mind's creation. Therefore, the assumption that the experiences provided by sense-data, or our 'visual images of the external world' are objective is, as George Bateson puts it, the 'illusion on which our civilization is based.'³⁶ Elaborating this illusion, he says:

When someone steps on my toe, what I experience is, not his stepping on my toe, but my *image* of his stepping on my toe reconstructed from neural reports reaching my brain somewhat after his foot has landed on mine. Experience of the exterior is always mediated by particular sense-organs and neural pathways. To that extent, *objects are my creation*, and my experience of them is subjective, not objective.³⁷

Now, since pain—physical pain particularly—is what probably makes it most difficult to retain the distinction between experience and the illusion of experience, and, moreover, since all sensuous and neural data is regarded by Ramakrishna as mind-created, it is *only natural* that not only did he *postulate it as a premise but experienced the distinction as a glorious, live truth*. Stricken by cancer 'the Master's body', as per the authentic report from M., 'was being racked with indescribable pain. The devotees could not bear the sight of this illness...' The state of his mind, however, is different: 'He sat there, *his face beaming as if there were no trace of illness in his throat*.'³⁸ And the Master's assurance, against the background of this report, is all the more striking:

Do you know what I see now? I see my body as a frame made of bamboo strips and covered with a cloth. The frame moves. And it moves because someone dwells inside it.

36. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *The Gospel*, p. 969.

Again, I see the body to be like a pumpkin with the seeds scooped out.

Now I perceive only this: the Indivisible Satchidananda is covered with skin, and this sore in the throat is one side of it.³⁹

In effect, he draws a distinction immediately—a distinction underpinned by many today, but paraphrased in this context for us by M.:

When hot water scalds the hand, people say that the water scalds; but the truth is it is the heat that scalds.⁴⁰

Ramakrishna's total withdrawal of consciousness from the body as reported here is a phenomenon instinct with several implications of great interest. (A related experience often reported in Ramakrishna's life is the benumbing shock of his entire physical system in contact with metallic coins). Initially, the spiritual significance is unmistakable. The overall significance of pain and suffering in one's psychic and spiritual growth is manifestly clear. What Guy Murchie says on this issue approximates to what the Master's suffering suggests:

As to your own individual suffering, being human you'd naturally try to avoid pain and would reasonably dread any form of imminent agony. Yet, in retrospect, even though time and forgetfulness insulate your own pain from your own self, if your life had been devoid of all pain and suffering, you could be said to have missed much of life's richest experience. This I believe true. For pain often includes a goodly component of soul satisfaction and it surely has spiritual meaning. Also, impossible as it would be to prove it in this mortal phase of transcendence, pain may well, in fact, be the greatest language of the soul. Certainly Christ's message to the world would carry much less conviction had he not suffered on the Cross.⁴¹

Besides this kind of spiritual import, this also reflects a major discovery of neurological research today. Wilder Penfield, for instance, on the basis of very scrupulously observed cases—such as that of the famous Soviet scientist Lev Landou—has confirmed that 'the mind seems to act independently of the brain' and that 'in contrast to the other two (body and brain) the mind seems to have *no peculiar or inevitable pathology*. As the mind arrives at clearer understanding and better balanced judgement, the other two are beginning to fail in strength and speed.'⁴² In fact, Penfield 'hazards a further suggestion from the physician's point of view. It is an observation relevant to any enquiry into the nature of man's being and in conformity with the proposition that the mind has a separate existence. It might even be taken as an argument for the feasibility and the possibility of immortality!'⁴³

Though Penfield, and other neurologists, understandably, are reluctant to use the word 'spirit' or relevant religious idiom, it is obvious that they would not find Ramakrishna's total dissociation from pain and the existence of an implicit energy or spirit free from all dualistic experience incredible. In fact, this further clinches the argument being advanced all along: that pain and pleasure or any other data provided by the senses is a creation of the mind and since it is the creation of the mind it is possible—though not for all—to dissolve this creation at one's discretion. 'Bondage and liberation', in Ramakrishna, are *both* the colouring of the mind while the mind itself is nothing. It is 'the identification of' the mind (or spirit) 'with the body that creates the notion of

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Guy Murchie, *Op. cit.*, pp. 518-19.

42. Penfield, *Op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

43. Ibid.

duality.⁴⁴ It is 'reflection' which is 'by no means the real substance.' Therefore, it also follows that one cannot know anything in its essence except the projection of it created by the mind. As Gregory Bateson would say:

Mind is empty, it is no-thing. It exists only in its ideas, and these again are no-things. Only the ideas are immanent, embodied in their examples. And the examples are, again, no-things. The caw, as an example, is not the *Ding an sich*; it is precisely *not* the 'thing in itself'. Rather, it is what mind makes of it, namely, an example of something or other.⁴⁵

Though one can here notice definite parallels between Ramakrishna and the modern thinker, one should not by-pass an important difference. For Ramakrishna the ordinary mind is ever within the world of false perception. It does order the universe and undoubtedly it is part of what neurologists call the 'higher brain stem'. Yet the mind, *on its own*, cannot transcend the world of duality which, as we noted above, is necessary for our 'illusory' existence. Therefore, when Ramakrishna is seen as enjoying total freedom from pain, it is *not* a kind of trick of blunting the mind but an awareness beyond the state of dualistic existence, which is the peculiar creation of the mind. In effect, the ordinary patient can retain consciousness and the operative energies of the mind while still getting caught in mind-body dichotomy. But Ramakrishna's state is total freedom from duality. The ordinary patient's mind is still not free from the hankering after 'programs' planned 'continuously to suit his ever-changing purposes and interest.'⁴⁶ But Ramakrishna's

state, using the idiom of Zen, is 'like space with no mixtures, with nothing destructible in it; and it is like the great sun illumining the four worlds. When the sun rises, brightness fills the world, but space itself is not bright; when the sun sets, darkness fills the world, but space itself is not dark. Brightness and darkness are conditions, replacing each other; as for the characteristic vast vacuity of space, it remains ever unchanged.'⁴⁷ In the language of contemporary psychology, we can say that Ramakrishna's Mind represents 'fusion without confusion'⁴⁸ while the ordinary mind even when able to retain independent judgement in the midst of pain is still subject to schizophrenic 'fusion with confusion'.

A related uniqueness in Ramakrishna is his incredibly, graphic analysis of the planes of mind which create both 'fusion' and 'confusion'. In his charting, the subtle levels of the mind have, as in the Hindu theory of the chakras, their corresponding physical centres. 'Wordliness' is located in the three lower planes at the navel, the organ of generation, and the organ of evacuation. These are the centres crystallizing around 'woman and gold'. The higher levels begin with the heart and extend to the throat, forehead and the top of the head. In effect, this map confirms what psychologists today postulate as a counterpart to perennial philosophy: *psychologia perennis*.

(To be concluded)

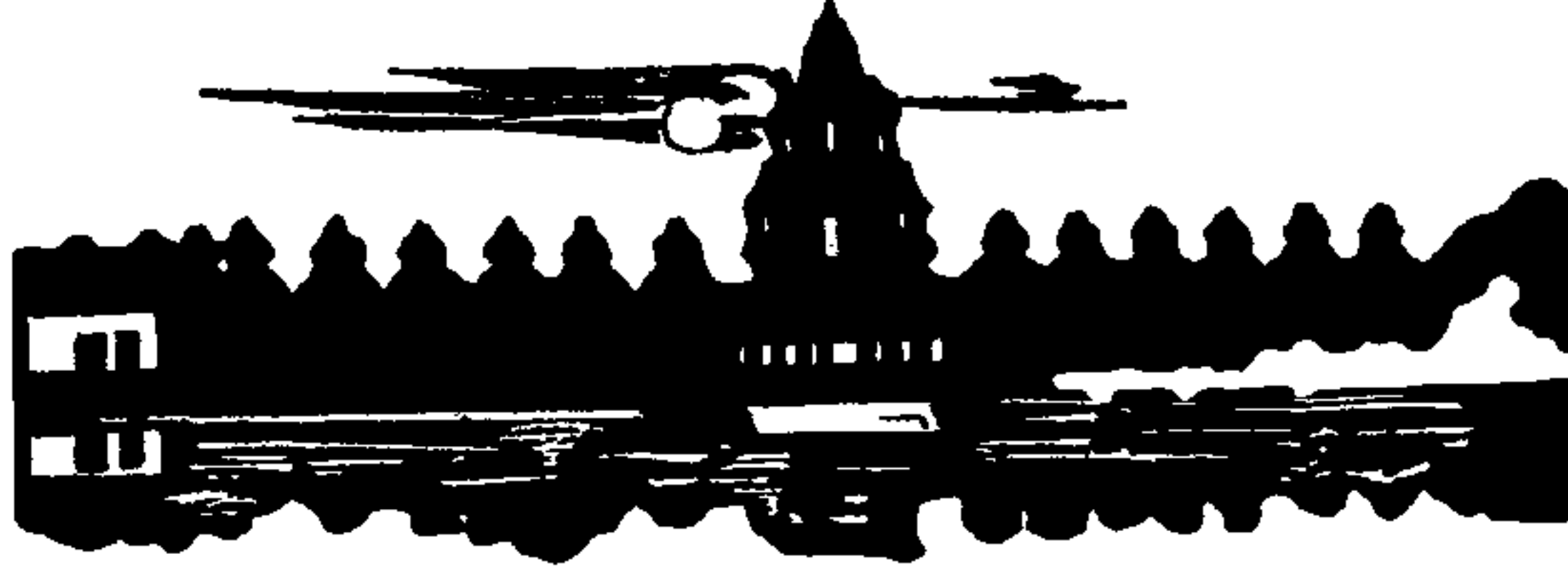
47. D. T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind*, ed. Christmas Humphreys (London: Rider & Company, 1979) p. 131.

48. Ken Wilber, 'Psychologia Perennis: The Spectrum of Consciousness', *The Meeting of the Ways: Explorations in East/West Psychology*, John Welwood, ed. (New York: Shoken Books, 1979) p. 21.

44. *The Gospel*, p. 138.

45. Bateson, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

46. Penfield, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.



SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HARMONY OF RELIGIONS

FR. IGNATIUS HIRUDAYAM, S. J.

A meditation on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya and the 100th anniversary of the passing of Sri Ramakrishna. The object of meditation is that phenomenon which lasted just fifty years. The subject, the meditator, is a Christian, a Catholic priest of the tradition of a religious Order, but one who has outgrown the dialectical attitude to religions and people and approaches them in a dialogical perspective. The goal of such meditations is the fond but well-founded hope in the future harmony of religions for the peace and happiness of humankind as spelt out by Sri Ramakrishna's beloved disciple at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The process of this meditation will be through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. But before beginning it, let me remind myself briefly of the history of this particular phenomenon of man.

Gadadhar was prone from birth to mystic trances and ecstatic raptures. At the age of six or seven in a rice field at the sight of the flight of snow-white cranes flying across a murky thunder cloud he fell into an ecstasy that lasted quite a long time.¹ Western scholars would call

it nature mysticism but, perhaps, it suggests a prophetic meaning to the whole life. He received *upanayana* (initiation of the twice-born) at the age of nine. He was a born artist with a passionate and instinctive love for the beautiful and ardent love for music and poetry. But he was lukewarm towards schooling, exhibiting an inborn *mumukṣuttva*, even a passionate impatience for God realization.

Just out of his teens, he became the chief priest of a new temple at Dakshineswar. His *mumukṣuttva* made him give one day an ultimatum to the Deity: 'Show Thyself or I put an end to my life'. And he ran towards the metal sword hanging near the basalt figure when the sword of knowledge overtook him. His irrepressible thirst to keep that rapture uninterruptedly urged him to have recourse to unguided feats of austerities.

The Panchavati, the grove of five trees that he himself had planted, came up as the symbol of the shade of world religions. Under it he gave vent to his aspirations in austerities and naive practices. And the illness that resulted from these took him back to his birth-place where, at the age of 23, he mysteriously chose his spouse aged five and was wedded to her ceremonially.

Returning to Dakshineswar and to his

1. *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1958) Vol. 4, p. 658.

austerities and the resulting physical afflictions, in 1862, he was assured by a Bhairavi that his ailments and experiences were the manifestations of true *mahābhāva* or the highest phase of ecstatic love for God. Initiated by her into Tantrika practices, he mastered them all. 'Carrion comfort' and filthy lucre were always revolting to him. His pure mind and heart entered the path of Vaiṣṇava bhakti and passed through the first three *bhāvas* (spiritual attitudes) of *śānta*, *dāsyā* and *sakhyā*. Then a Jaṭādhāri, a Vaiṣṇava pravrajaka, initiated him into the *bhāva* of *vātsalyā* (maternal love) with Rāma as the object of his adoration. After that he took up *madhura bhāva* (bridal love) installing Kṛṣṇa in his soul. Finally, the Nangta, naked monk Tota Puri, initiated him as Ramakrishna into Sannyāsa and into Advaita sādhanā in 1864.

With Sannyāsa he retained his celibate relationship with his spouse. Transported to the highest raptures, he nevertheless maintained himself in the state of *bhāvamukha*, the borderland of the Samādhis, for the sake of being of service to his disciples like a true Bodhisattva. Hence in him every possible experience of the Hindu faith remained alive and accepted till the end of his life. Besides these, we know how he hungered for and obtained the experiences of non-Hindu faiths like Islam and Christianity. Gradually, he came to be widely known as Paramahansa Ramakrishna. He had reached his 46th birthday when the recorder of his great message, Mahendranath Gupta, who had just finished his college studies, casually entered his orbit, immediately shrank his own name to a mere 'M' and reported every detail of his life and sayings for four years till 23 April 1886, about four months before the end of his earthly life.

From M.'s chronicle, known as *Kathāmṛta* or *The Gospel of Sri Rama-*

krishna, I am selecting a few gems of wisdom for my meditation.

Śravaṇa

At the very first meeting the recorder 'M' reports that Sri Ramakrishna said: 'The sandhyā merges in the Gāyatri and the Gāyatri merges in Om'. 'To fix the mind on God is very difficult in the beginning unless one practises meditation in solitude. When a tree is young it should be fenced all around; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle'. 'Longing is followed by the vision of God'.

'Pure Knowledge and Pure Love are one and the same thing. Both lead the aspirants to the same goal. The path of love is much the easier.' (19 August 1883).

'It is not given to me to bless any one... I never ask the Divine Mother to give me the power of healing. I pray to Her only for pure love.' (28 November 1883).

'Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious... Mother, I want to be merry talking about Satchidananda.' (30 December 1883).

'Mother, I don't want Brahmajñana. I want to be merry. I want to play. Mother, I don't know the Vedānta; and Mother, I don't even care to know. The Vedas and the Vedānta remain so far below when Thou art realized, O Divine Mother!' (31 December 1883).

'Prasanna asked me, "Who are you then?" Keshab looked at me to see what I would say. I said to him "I am the servant of your servant, the dust of the dust of your feet." Keshab said with a smile, "You can't catch him!"' (5 April 1884).

'I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another... They haven't the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Siva and the Primal Sakti, and that it is He, again who is called by different names.' (ibid).

Nityasiddha = souls eternally perfect.

Sadhanasiddha = those who have realized God through austerity, japa and other spiritual disciplines.

Kripasiddha = perfect through divine grace. (30 June 1884).

[Master to M.] 'What do people think of me? Do they think anything in particular about me when they see me in that condition [of ecstasy]?' (3 August 1884).

The Master (from below the altar of the Brahma Samaj temple): 'I was told that you had put up a "signboard" here that people belonging to other faiths are not allowed to come in. Narendra too said to me: "You shouldn't go to the Brahma Samaj..." But I say that we are all calling on the same God... one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him... Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Saktas, Saivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnanis of the time of the rishis and you the Brahmajnanis of modern times, all seek the same object... All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself.' (26 September 1884).

'One cannot realize God without the faith that knows no guile, the simple faith of a child.' (29 September 1884).

Sub-Judge: 'Sir I am a sinner. How can I say that God dwells in me?'

Master: 'That's the one trouble with you Brahmos. With you it is always sin and sin! That's the Christian view, isn't it?... One must have faith in the glory of God's name.' (19 October 1884).

'Mother, make me well. I shall not eat ice-cream any more.' (13 June 1885).

Master: '... I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure my illness...'

Girish: 'All depends on your will'.

Master: 'Shame! Never say that again. I look on myself as a devotee of Krishna, not as Krishna Himself...' (1 September 1885).

(At the garden house at Cossipore) 'Can you explain one thing? How is it that in spite of all these visions, all this ecstasy and samadhi, I am so ill?' (23 December 1885)

'My mood is changing.. People are so sinful in the Kaliyuga; if I awaken their spiritual consciousness I shall have to accept the burden of their sins.' (22 April 1886).

The *Kathāmṛta* ends with Good Friday, 23 April 1886, with M. receiving the garland from Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on Sunday 15 August 1886.

Manana

I have noted these and similar declarations of Sri Ramakrishna as they are of

the nature of self-revelations coming straight from his heart and impinging our hearts. Thus they give us a peep into his nature and make up. The first thing that strikes me is that his was a selfless Self, ripe for union with the Supreme Self and prone to *sahaja samādhi*. He was incapable of pride or arrogance. But at the same time he was devoid of self-consciousness, of any sort of inhibition of human respect or diplomacy or duplicity. Perfectly fit to be a prophet to the modern world.

Then his purity of soul that was blessed to see God (cf. Matthew 5:8). His insatiable thirst for God-experience giving him that spiritual violence which took by force the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Matthew 11:12). His impetuosity resulted from his impregnable hope of obtaining Divine union. Another ardent God-seeker 14 centuries ago had said, 'I sought some object for my love; I was in love with love' (*Confessions* 3.1.1) Augustine was an intellectual genius and a paragon of oratory, and for him to integrate great asceticism and knowledge of God with his secular learning was a miracle assuring credibility. However, for poor, unlettered but pure souls in the West and the East, including the young aspirant at Dakshineswar, visions and ecstasies and samādhis are the gifts which God lavishes on the 'poor in spirit'.

A Tamil treatise speaks of Paramahamsahood as the highest stage of a Jīvanmukta's life on earth before his *videha mukti*. And an apophthegm in Tamil declares: *Kaṇḍavar viṇḍilar viṇḍavar kaṇḍilar* 'Those who have seen have not spoken; those who have spoken (about it) have not seen (it)'. Sri Ramakrishna tried several times to describe to his disciples the highest stage of his experience but acknowledged with tears that he could not describe what that

nityaśuddhabodharūpam, the 'Eternal ever-Pure Consciousness' was like.

In his book, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message*, Swami Ghanananda notes: 'The turiya is often translated and understood as the fourth state, but it is not strictly a state at all. It is identical with Existence itself and it is this that appears as the three states.'² On the other hand, the Śaiva Siddhānta affirms a fifth state called *turiyāīta* and understands it as a richer vocative experience of a non-dual I-Thou relationship. Sri Ramakrishna's Samādhi seems to have been at various levels at various times. But he was 'in love with love' and he cried on 31st December 1883: 'Mother, I don't want Brahmajñana. ... Mother I don't know the Vedānta; and Mother I don't even care to know. The Veda and the Vedānta remain so far below when Thou art realized, O Divine Mother'.

Swami Ghanananda in Chapter IX of the same book speaks of the Harmony in Indian Thought, and in Chapter X describes what he calls the Sevenfold Harmony i.e. harmony of religions, harmony of systems of philosophy, harmony of paths of spiritual discipline etc. Now, harmonic analysis is a procedure of an intricate mixture of mathematics and mysticism from the days of Pythagoras to those of Wagner and later. I have neither the competence nor the call to enter into his procedure though I have been trained to appreciate harmony when heard. We have heard of the Celestial orbs 'quivering to the young-eyed cherubims', and Shakespeare has told us that 'such harmony is in immortal souls; but whilst this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it'. (*Merchant of Venice* V. 1).

2. Swami Ghanananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) p. 100.

The harmony Sri Ramakrishna heard was a supernatural sonata in the apex of his soul that had reached out to the further side of the 'Cloud of Unknowing' (*tamasah param uccyate*). That region, Nicholas of Cusa and St. Bonaventure, coming in the mystic tradition from Gregory Nyssa and Pseudo Dionysius, affirmed, is the region where opposites coincide (*coincidentia oppositorum*), and harmony reigns supreme.³ But on this side of the 'Cloud' is the region of concepts and systems of theology and philosophy. Here opposites remain opposites and contradictions do contradict. To deny this is to chop logic and leads to frustrating agnosticism, emaciating indifference or barren negativism.

The Christian lives by the fundamental faith in one God whom he addresses by three 'Thou's. The triple relationship this gives rise to constitutes the Christian spirituality. Unitarian mentality whether in the West or in the East like the Brahma Samajists is not able to accept this. Secondly, that God revealed himself as Jesus of Nazareth, died on the cross and rose again as the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one of God, was the original preaching of the Easter faith of the Christians. The Muslim brothers are not able to accept this, and they quote the Holy Qur'an for their rejection. Similar incompatibilities could be catalogued. How are we to harmonize such incompatibilities? This is the problem that faces us.

The Brahma Samaj at first rejected polytheism and idol-worship, but later on Keshab Chandra Sen took the several names of the Hindu deities and explained their meanings. Whether this was due to the influence of Sri Ramakrishna or not is not the point of discussion here. Writers

3. *Coincidence of Opposites in Bonaventure*, Ewert Cousins (New York: Fordham University.)

speaking of Ramakrishna's eclecticism.⁴ But if it is eclecticism, how does it harmonize? This is the problem that faces us. Choosing incompatible doctrines and heaping them? I would not say that Ramakrishna's attitude to his experiences in various religions was eclectic. The harmony which he heard in the fine fount of his soul in his ecstasies was the Light of lights beyond darkness, described in the *Gītā* (13.17). This 'beyond darkness' Bonaventure calls, *coincidentia oppositorum*. Now this Light of lights beyond the darkness is said, in the same *Gita* stanza, to be *hr̥di sarvasya dhiṣṭhitam*. This Light of lights beyond darkness is not out there or in here; both there and here are spatial concepts. The verse only means that the transcendent light or harmony is at the same time immanent light or *ānanda* in the sage's heart. A similar idea is found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.16, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.2.6 and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 3.8 and 3.13. This is the foundation for the harmony and coincidence of opposites in the heart of the *Jīvanmukta*, the fully liberated man—and not the doctrines, various formulations, philosophies and theologies. On that plane incompatible doctrines must be accepted as such and persons holding them respected and loved nevertheless.⁵

4. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984) Cf. pp. 293-294; In the appendices, note II (of the publishers) speaks of Ramakrishna's eclecticism.

5. A recent scholar has written: 'We may all believe that the harmony of religious traditions is a worthy goal, and that may be due in part to the influence of historical figures like Cusa and Bikshu, but how to accomplish such harmony and how to answer the issues raised by actual religious differences in doctrines and practices remain a dilemma for us.'

In *De Docta Ignorantia* (Learned Ignorance, 1440) Nicholas of Cusa has posited an absolute maximum which coincides with the absolute minimum (*purnam* and *sunyata*) and which is

the God of every nation. The restricted substances of all beings coincide with God. In *De Conjecturis* (1443-44): 'The human realm embraces God and the whole world through its human potential'. The coincidence of opposites is a synonym for the kind of unity surrounding God. It is a unity of convergence whereby the elements fall together without mingling to the point of losing their original identity. In *De Visionis Dei*, Cusa outlined the mystical ascent to God through the Coincidence of Opposites. For the Christian, the unity which is Christ is the central affirmation of the coincidence of opposites. Union...without composition or confusion. God as the enfolding inclusion and complexity of absolute unity, Cusa believed, has been worshipped implicitly by all peoples. 'All explicit names are indeed a complexity of one ineffable name; since the proper name is the infinite, so it involves infinite names of particular perfections'. Hence Keshab Chandra Sen examined what has been meant by these names and implied in these experiences and tried to return to the absolute God.

Cusa's *De Pace Fidei* dramatically describes an ecstatic meeting of representatives of the Greeks, Arabs, Indians, the Bohemians etc. and tries to bring concord. But it was in fact only a Christian interpretation of the proper relationship of other religious traditions. What is lacking in Cusa's work is a coincidence interpretation of Christianity among other traditions by a thinker other than Christian.

Vijñānabhikṣu emerged from the Bhedābheda Vedānta tradition in the 16th century. He held the difference-in-identity of the Vedānta, Sāṅkhya and Yoga, and also of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva. James Biechler ('The Religious language of Nicholas of Cusa,' *American Academy of Religion Dissertation Series* 8, Scholars Press, 1975) says that 'Coincidentia lies behind that indomitable urge to doctrinal reductionism which is *De Pace Fidei*'s most noteworthy characteristic.' 'Vijñānabhikṣu's position is not a flawless harmony either but he adds an insight on the nature of the concord of religions views based on coincidence.... True religions harmony should not only respect the differences of religions traditions but should also allow for the possibility that various traditions are dimensions of one another.' (John Borelli: 'Coincidence and Harmony of Religions in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa and Vijñānabhikṣu', *Bulletin, Secretariatus pro Non-Christianis*, 1986-XXI/1:61, pp. 36-46).

Discussions are possible on this plane provided this love and respect are maintained. This includes also the right of each individual person to correct, change his own opinions and adapt and adopt the opinions of others when he finds them reasonable and also to change his way of life. Our spiritual journey should consist of daily conversion from the evil to the good, from the wrong to the right, from the less pure to the pure. *Asato mā sad gamaya, tamaso mā jyotirgamaya, mṛtyormā amṛtam gamaya*, was the daily conversion Mantra of our forbears. The daily *śuddhi* rituals of our cultic life and the *pāvana tīrthas* of our country are expressions of this on-going conversion of souls. Conversion is liberation from perversion or diversion.

Chapter XII of Swami Ghanananda's book on the 'Practical Application of the Message' (of Sri Ramakrishna) contains many points which deserve deep consideration by everyone. The mature thinking of the Christian Church (Catholic) is officially expressed in two documents of the Second Vatican Council: (1) Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions and (2) Declaration on Religious Freedom.

The first, called *Nostra Aetate*, has among other things this to say:

'... in Hinduism men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myth, and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving trusting flight toward God... The Catholic Church... looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men'.⁶

6. *Vatican II, Nostra Aetate*, No. 2

As a consequence, the Church rejects as foreign to the mind of Christ any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition or life or religion.

The second document intends to develop the doctrine of recent Popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and on the constitutional order of society. Even in spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices, the document declares,

Every one ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonourable or unworthy especially when dealing with the poor or uneducated people. Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's own right and a violation of the right of others.⁷

We may add that even the decree on Missionary Activity no. 13 categorically states,

The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the faith or alluring or enticing people by unworthy techniques. By the same token she also strongly insists on a person's right not to be deterred from the faith by unjust vexations on the part of others.

These official documents of the church are not less strict than Swami Ghanananda's statement.

I would like to mention here Swami Ghanananda's reference to three types of contemplation: *sthūla dhyāna*, *tejo dhyāna* and *sūkṣma dhyāna*. In this context he casually mentions, 'St. Ignatius highly appreciated divine visions... whereas St. John of the Cross formally condemned such visions as impediments...'⁸ He does

7. *Vatican II*, 'Declaration on Religious Freedom', No. 4.

8. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message*, op. cit. pp. 49-50.

not give the source of this information which happens to be faulty. St. Ignatius had every possible form of mystic experience from concrete visions, lights, gift of tears, right up to what Christian spiritual writers call 'infused contemplation', like the 'Rapt' in the fields of Manresa and on the bank of the river Cordoner, and the great experience a few months before his death. But in his directions to others, as found in his *Spiritual Exercises* and other writings, he does not formally teach his disciples to try to obtain visions etc. But he certainly gives occasional hints as to how to lead one's meditation into the region of contemplation. This represents what is called 'acquired contemplation'.

'Infused contemplation', on the other hand, does not result from our efforts at all. It is a pure gift received from above as mentioned in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.23 and similar passages in *Bhagavad-Gītā* and elsewhere. In this pure gift of 'infused contemplation' or Vedantic *nirvikalpa samādhi* or Buddhist Satori, the *coincidentia oppositorum* may be experienced, and St. Ignatius even once mentions a divine 'harmony'. But since it is pure silence or 'contentless consciousness', when the privileged soul comes down to the 'market place' of this world, it cannot communicate anything to the profane or even highly spiritual world. But such a Paramahansa can evoke in his hearers a love for the harmony and peace that result from this experience. This harmony is not only in the high heavens but deep in our hearts (cf. *Gītā* 13.17). This is the true spirit of harmony which will respect and love even profound differences of opinions and doctrines and maintain a truly integrated

well-knit nation. But we must remember the great truth of Ramakrishna, 'All doctrines are only paths; but a path is by no means God Himself'.

We may conclude this *manana* exercise by saying that though the genius of Indian music has been concentrating more on the development of melody than of harmony, it has been inventing ever new instruments of music and has developed its symphony for orchestral concerts. Symphony means concord even of parts that may sound discordant, these becoming counterpoints and acting as complementaries. Understood thus, the record of 'M' covering the four last years of Sri Ramakrishna sounds as a magnificent orchestral overture of a delightful concert. But like a great composer, Sri Ramakrishna has given us an 'Unfinished Symphony'. It would be fruitless for us to endeavour to finish it, because, of this 'Unfinished Universe' the end is endless.

Nididhyāsana

I go back to the *mahāvākya* of the first recorded day of the *Kathāmṛta* or *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (ch. 1, p. 1) 'The Sandhya merges in the Gayatri and Gayatri merges in Om'.

Om

Santih Santih Santih

'The rest is silence'

But of this pregnant silence, is born the Word.

The Word that contains and communicates all Wisdom.

The Word which is not dialectical, polemical.

The Word which is Dialogical.

Which accepts the other as the other and loves the other as oneself.

Om tat sat

धमे समन्वय

A Forum for Inter-religious
Understanding

ISLAM : A TESTIMONY TO VEDANTISM*

MOHAMMEDANANDA

[The original name of the author of this article was Mohammed Sarfaraz Hussain. He met Swami Vivekananda at Nainital in May 1898 and became greatly attached to him. From then on he counted himself one of Swamiji's disciples under the name Mohammedananda. It was in his reply to a letter of this gentleman that Swami Vivekananda made the famous statement: 'For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body is the only hope...' (See, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* revised edition, 1981, vol 2, p. 333-334) The first instalment of the article originally appeared in the very second issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* after the journal had been taken over by Swami Vivekananda and its editorial office shifted from Madras to Almora in 1898. Since not more than a few rare copies of this issue are now in existence, we are reprinting the present article as the author's posthumous homage to the Prophet of Harmony—*Editor, P.B.*]

In dealing with the subject of 'Islam: as a mighty testimony to Vedantism', the writer ought to give a detail of the teachings of the two schools and then trace the similarities the one bears to the other. It would, however, be quite unnecessary for the readers of the *Awakened India* to have to be told the principles of the Vedanta, and the writer might therefore advantageously dispense with this branch of his task and confine himself chiefly to giving the rudimentary teachings of Islam. If it can be shown that a system inaugurated some 1400 years ago bears strong similarity to the one which has rightly been called the most ancient and possibly is *the ancient* system, it will be conclusively proved that the newer system is *for* and not *against* the older system. This also can be taken as sufficient proof that the newer system is also a true system and since it has been admitted on all hands that the newer system has not been influenced in the least by the older one, the professors of the newer system can be proud of and glory in standing, after the lapse of centuries and

perhaps ages, a witness to the real Truth promulgating system which can truly be called the 'only begotten' of Brahman itself. So much for the preface.

'He who exists is one, sages call it variously', might for the purposes of this article be taken as the starting point. In Islam it is very plainly said *Qul ho walla ho Ahad*, which is neither less nor more than the precept 'He who exists is one'. The very first article of Islamic faith is *La elaha illalla*, viz. 'there is none but one'. The whole mansion of Islam is built upon this foundation, the truest and the most concrete conception, nay feeling, of oneness. The following questions and answers, will, it is hoped, give the dear reader a clear idea of what Islam teaches or in other words how it corroborates the Vedantic teaching of oneness and harmony.

PART I: 'DUAL' SYSTEM

1. What is the meaning of word 'Islam'?
It is an Arabic word meaning 'bowing'.

* Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata* September and December 1898, and May 1899.

'submission', 'resignation', viz. dying in, in order to remain on, viz. to 'be', being absolutely free from all attributes and opposites.

2. What is one who professes Islam required to believe in order to attain this highest state of 'being'?

Yo-mi noona bil ghaib—believing in the 'Unseen'.

3. Where is that Unseen?

Wa fee anfosekum—in yourself.

4. What is that Unseen?

Alla ho Noorus Sama-wati, wal ard. He is the Light of heavens and earths, Light of every thing—Light, though not comprehensible by reason. *Sub hana hoo wa ta ala anma yase foon*—He is beyond (unbound) what could be said about him?

5. Can that 'Unseen' be realized by mortal man, reflected or represented by him?

Yes—*In ney Ja eloka-fil ard-i-Khalifa*—O man! we are making thee a representative.

6. Who will realize it and by what means?

Wallazeena Ja hadoo feena, la nahdiyan—na hum subulana. Those who 'try in us most assuredly' do we show them our path—viz. those who work for the Light, Light shines 'out' on them.

7. How to try?

A tee 'ulla ha, wa atee urrasoola, wa olil amr-i-minkum. Submit to what (Allah) the Light commands, and (Rasool: prophet) the fully enlightened commands, (*olil amr*) the Guru, spiritual guide—(Commander of the Order of Soul or Spirit) commands.

7 (a). And what is Soul or Spirit?

Qul-ir Ru ho min Amri-rabbi—Soul or Spirit is the 'order' or reason of God, and God is Light of heavens and earths, therefore the Soul or Spirit is the reason or order of the Light of heavens and earths, viz. Reason of Light, i.e. essence, substance or 'something quite indescribable of Light', which latter is also indescribable, therefore

it is the 'indescribable' of the 'indescribable'.

8. What does the Allah or Light command?

(i) *Wa ma Khalagtul-Jinna, wal insa, illa li ya budoon (au Ya'ri foon)*—All are to 'know'—to 'realize'.

(ii) *Wa yo Keemoona ssala ta, wa mimma razaqna hum Yunfiqoon.* Establish prayer—viz. have secret counsel with Light, *Ka anna Ka taraho*, as if thou art face to face with him and give away from what is given unto you, i.e. equalize comforts, or establish equality, universal brotherhood.

8 (a). Why prayer?

In nas Salata tanha anil fahsha-i-wal-munkar. Prayer keeps away (out of doors) alien principles, and preserves purity and purity alone.

8 (b). And giving away?

Lan tanalul birra, hattá tunfiqoo, mimma tuhibboon. You will not attain unto righteousness unless you give away what you love (or care for in the least).

9. What does the 'Fully Enlightened' command?

Yámoro kum, bil adli, wal ihsáni, wa eetái zil qurba, wa yanha 'anil fahshá-i-wal munkari wal baghyi, ya 'izukum la'alla kum tatta-qoon.

He teaches you 'equality, condescension and charity', and forbids objectionable things. He teaches you these, in order that you should become straight, i.e. harmonized, perfected.

Wa yozakkee him anfosahum, and he cleanses their hearts, purifies the mind, inaugurates true Yoga.

10. What does the Guru, or the spiritual guide command?

Mootoo qabla an tamootoo. Die before you die—i.e. kill your baser self, i.e. control your desires, regulate your mind, senses and body and kill 'that' which keeps you from so regulating them. *Ya bunaiyya fikroka feeka yakfeeka, dá un wa dawáun*

feeka, anta jismum sagheerun wa feeka 'alamun kabeerun, anta ummul ki tal. O my son, thine own meditation within thyself is quite sufficient for thee; both the disease and the remedy are within thine own self; thou art a small body, but within thee there is a large region. Thou art the mother of books, i.e. learning or knowledge.

Based on the spirit or gist of what has been very briefly and perhaps roughly described above, the theories of 'Islam', so far as they can be clothed in words by the humble writer of this essay, can be summarized as follows: (1) That there 'is' a self-existing 'something', a perfect whole, *A lasto bi rabbi kum, qá loo bala*—Am I not your God? They answered 'yes'—*Inney anallah*—I am Allah, the All or Self. *Howallá hullazee Lá ila ha illa wo.* He is such that there is none but 'He'. (2) That, that self-existing 'something' is manifested in 'everything' visible, conceivable and so on. That, that perfect 'whole' is 'wholly' manifested. *Alla ho noorus—samá wáti wal ard*—God is the Light of Heavens and Earths i.e. everything is His manifestation. *Howal awwaio wal ákhiro, wazzáhiro wal batin*—He is the Beginning, He is the Ending, He is the Evolution, He is the Involution—Is that not pure Vedanta? (See Swami Vivekananda's 'Macrocosm and Microcosm'). But for that 'involved' and self-existing 'something', nothing evolved and apparent could have been visible, conceivable, and so on. (3) That 'everything' which is thus the manifestation of that 'something' can realize that 'something'. *Wa má Khalaqtul jilna wal nisa illa li ya, bodoon (liya'r-i-foon)*—All are to know, to realize. (4) That the perfect state of realization is the complete absence of the conceivable difference of 'Everything' and 'Something' i.e. realization of a perfect 'whole'. *Wa yabqá wajho rabbika* and shall only remain the 'audience' of Light.

Guided by these theories, the practical instructions' in the dualistic school of thought in Islam begin thus:

1. That there is one Spiritual Being, Maker, Preserver and Destroyer of everything, *Inna Lilla hi wa inna elaihi rajioon.* Surely we are from Him and unto Him shall we return.

2. That the soul or spirit is like a mirror wherein 'He' is reflected—*Wa izá ardnal amánata' a lassam a wati, wal ardi, fa a baina aiyen ya'h milna ha, wa hamala hal insan.* And when we offered our 'Trust' to Heavens and Earths, they declined to take it up, but 'man' took it up, i.e. man is perfectly blessed with that Trust—which is all 'Light'.

3. That actions regulate 'life'—*In Ahsantum Ahsantum Li an fosikum, wa in a satum fa la ha.* If you do good, it is for yourself—and if you do wrong, it is also for yourself. *Man ih tada, fa innama yah tadi Li na fsih, wa man dalla, fa in nama ya dillo 'alai ha*—Whosoever took the right path, he certainly did good to himself—and whosoever took the wrong path, he certainly did wrong to himself.

This more or less represents the Karma Yoga of Islam—or the most elementary teachings for the masses. Appropriate and exhaustive instructions to guide and regulate actions are laid down in religious books and the professors of Islam are required to conform to them in their own interest, as well as in the interest of humanity. *Prayer, charity, fellow-feeling,* and *purity* of thought and action, have been encouraged in various ways—full practical instructions to guide all, are laid down, and to go by them is ordinarily considered to be very safe and sure. Similarly *absence* (as opposed to prayer), *selfishness, pride* and all *impurities* are discouraged and legislated for. Once thus disciplined, one at once stands on a vantage-ground, quite capable of receiving *finer* instructions as to 'Self'—

which is the aim—the *goal*. In Islam, primarily, very great importance has been attached to this *disciplining*. Control of body, control of senses and last, though not least, control of mind, have been throughout regarded as the first fruits and blessings of Existence, and have been very earnestly offered to Mankind by means of definite, easy and natural practical instructions. This is what is generally understood by the *Sharee'at* of Islam.

PART II: 'NON-DUAL' SYSTEM

The finer instructions as to Self, imparted to a disciplined student in Islam, are purely Vedantic in their effect, although the procedure varies in certain points. For instance, Islam does not recognize Moorti Pooja as a means of concentrating the mind and promoting Bhakti, but in some well-organized spiritual fraternities of Islam, the object served by Moorti Pooja is very well achieved by means of meditating on the Guru, who for the time being is regarded the disciple's all-in-all. The disciple is expected to lose his individuality, as it were, in that of the Guru, and become selfless, so to speak. Once thus divested of all ideas of his own separate entity, he is spiritually united, by means of further fixed processes of meditating on the Prophet, to the latter, and later on to

God When thus united to, or lost in the God-head, he is declared to be a *mowah-hid*, or the Master of Oneness. You may go by this way in Hinduism, or by that way in Islam, but the object, the goal is one and the same in both the systems, viz. the realization of Oneness. The Raja-Yoga instructions for the realization of Self, in Islam, are similarly only nominally different from those in the Mother System. In Islam six centres of Light are recognized in the body of man—as nuder.

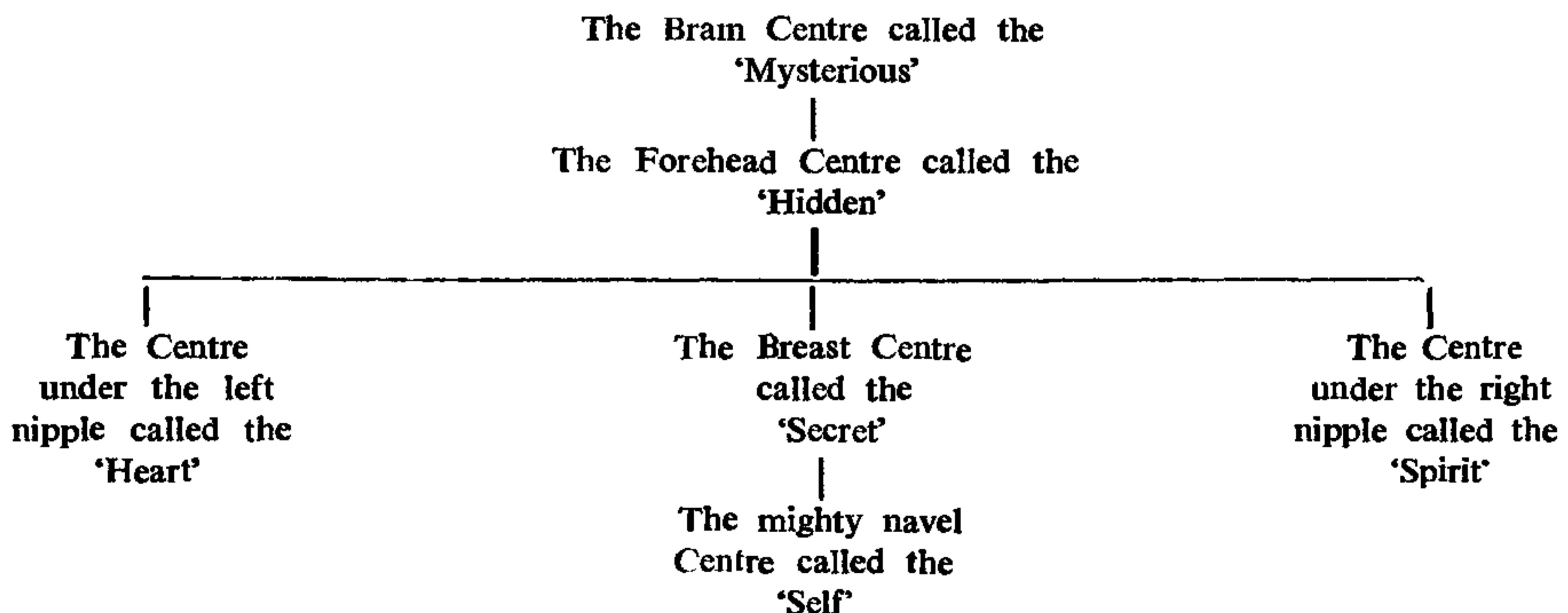
By means of fixed methods of practice these Centres are discovered and the inside of man becomes perfectly illumined. Later on the same illumination is discovered outside also, which results in the realization of the sameness and Oneness of Light or Illumination, completing the course of the student in becoming a *mowah-hid*.

For the disciplined student of a philosophical turn of mind, the solution of the single question,

'What am I?'

forms the basis of the realization of Self, the combined aim of Vedanta and Islam. The following mysteries are solved under the specific directions of the Guru:

I am not the body,
I am not the senses,
I am not the mind,
I am not this,



I am not that,
till at last the Reality is discovered, which
is in every 'I', in everybody, everywhere.
It is the Self. It is It.

It may be argued that many philosophical
discussions on the question of Oneness,
which have been so minutely gone into by
the early thinkers of India, have been
apparently left untouched in the Scriptures
of Musalmans, but it is distinctly to be
remembered that a line has been very
judiciously drawn in Islam, between the
subjects to be generally and publicly
preached and those to be confided to the
deserving and the chosen few. Almost all
the finer instructions as to the realization
of Self are embodied in what is called the
Ilmi-Seena, the Knowledge to be kept
within the breast. Such instructions are

imparted to the student by the Guru and
are regarded as a Trust. During the last
few centuries, however, some such instruc-
tions have been written under the category
of *Malfoozat*—sayings of saints, and
contain valuable stores of real Islamic
thought, which to any careful student,
will be proved to be purely Vedantic also.

The peculiarity alluded to above, of
reserving the finer instructions in the
manner indicated, has at least served one
purpose. It has made the general instruc-
tions of Islam much more practical than
would have been the case, had the *fine*
been mixed with the *gross*. This has been
the chief distinction in Islam.

It is my belief that Islam has amply
fulfilled the mission of Vedanta, and has
made *Religion* fairly practical.

धर्म समन्वय

A Forum for Inter-religious
Understanding

SIKHISM AND ITS PRINCIPLES

BAWA BUDH SINGH

In the following few lines I wish to
present to the readers of this valuable
journal the history and the principles of
Sikh religion within a short compass.

This grand religion or sect, whatever
you like to call it, was founded by Baba
Nanak in the reign of Babar, the first
Moghul Emperor of Delhi. The founder
of this religion preached Monism through-
out India, Ceylon, Afghanistan, Arabia
and many other countries—and many
became his followers. The same mission
was carried on by his successors, the nine

Gurus.¹ Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru,
collected the songs composed by the former
gurus, himself and other Bhaktas into one

1. The ten Sikh Gurus are:

1. Guru Nanak
2. Guru Angad
3. Guru Amar Das
4. Guru Ram Das
5. Guru Arjan Dev
6. Guru Har Gobind
7. Guru Har Rai
8. Guru Har Krishan
9. Guru Tegh Bahadur
10. Guru Gobind Singh.

volume, and named it *Adi Granth*, which has become the religious book of the Sikhs. Death was his reward for this labour from the Emperor Jehangir.

It was the tenth Guru, the great Guru Govind Singh, who transformed the meek and humble Sikhs—disciples,² into the brave and courageous Singhs—lions. Change was necessary to save the Hindus from the tyranny of the Moghuls, and it came on a grand scale. This change as usual was not without bloodshed and sacrifice. The Great Guru sacrificed his own father, his four sons, innumerable friends and disciples, and ultimately himself, in the cause of reformation and defence of Hinduism. I am not going to enter into details of the different enterprises and hardships which the great Guru and his followers undertook and suffered; I will only sketch briefly the principles of this wonderful religion. I am proud to say that this is the only existing religion on the face of the globe, according to which supremacy both in the physical and the spiritual planes can be attained hand in hand. To say a word about the physical supremacy of the Khalsas is useless, because their excellent military career is well known to everybody in the world. What we have now at hand, is to show the spiritual supremacy of the Khalsas.

I do not profess to show that there is anything in it other than the true Vedanta, but so much I dare say, that whatever is in the *Granth* has not been taken from the Vedas, because the early founders of this religion had no knowledge of Sanskrit; nor did they become the disciples of any Vedantist of the time, because Guru Nanak the founder of this religion was a born Prophet and was the disciple of no earthly man; and lastly because at that time the

study of Vedanta was in eclipse. Whatever is recorded in the *Granth*, is their own investigations on the spiritual plane. As truth cannot vary, so the teachings of the *Granth* coincide with those of the Vedas.

Again on the spiritual plane the teachings go on two parallel lines—Dualism and Advaitism. The main portion of the *Granth*, as is the case with the Vedas, is full of Dualistic teachings. This is because the Advaitic system is not understandable by the common people. 'It (Advaitism) is too abstruse, too elevated,' says Swami Vivekananda, 'to be the religion of the masses.' During the time when Baba Nanak appeared, religion in Punjab was in a degraded state; it was necessary to raise it to its natural level, and this could only be done by preaching Dualism to the masses.

DUALISM

According to Dualism, we are to regard God as a Personal Being but not as man—He (God) being infinite, beyond description, elevated, having no shape, colour, destiny, and free from all *gunas*. Guru Nanak says:

God is high, unfathomable, boundless, cannot be described, he is beyond description. Nanak says, Prabhu has the full power to take one under His protection³.

He has no shape, colour and destiny. God is free from three *gunas*. O Nanak! He can make Himself known to him with whom He is well pleased⁴.

This system also states that God is omnipresent. penetrating all things, etc.

3. ऊचा अगम अपार प्रभु कथन नजाई अकथ ।
नानक प्रभु सरणा गती राखन की समरथ ॥

Note: In the *Granth* the songs are in the Gurumukhi character.

4. रूप न रेख न रंग किछ त्रिह गुण ते प्रभु भिन ।
तिसेहबु कापे, नानका जिसहोवे सो प्रसन ॥

2. The word 'Sikh' is only a variant of the Sanskrit *sisya* which means 'disciple'.

The chief duty of a person is the total submission and resignation to the Lord. Many passages from the Granth may be quoted to this effect, but only one or two songs will suffice here. 'The Lord is penetrating all things. He is not unequal at any place. Nanak says He is with us in the outer as well as in the inner world.'⁵ Dualistic Bhakti or self-devotion is expressed in the following song (*Bilāvalu Mahalā*) by Guru Arjan Dev:

Keep me under Thy protection, O Lord! through Thy kindness. I know not how to serve Thee, I am quite ignorant, I boast on Thy account, O Beloved! We wicked, err many times. Thou art the forgiver. We sin millions of times. Thou art free from all *guṇas*. We live in the company of evil, and abhor Thy friendship, these are our acts. Thou givest everything through Thy kindness, and we are very ungrateful. We have fallen in love with the things given and have turned away our minds from the bestower. There is nothing outside Thee, O the Destroyer of sin! We are at your feet, save us, this is what Nanak says.

MONISM

Coming to Advaitism, we find the sublime teaching that everything in the world is Brahman. There is no duality; all is oneness, the greatest aim of existence is to realize the Self. Here a few pieces from the Granth may be quoted with advantage, as showing its affinity to the Advaita Vedanta. Guru Nanak says:

Omkar is pervading all things. In the heart dwells the pure Lord God. There is no difference between Iswara and Jiva, the saint as well as the thief are Brahman. From the mighty elephant to the tiny ant the one Brahman is pulsating. He is the sole cause and Himself is the effect, yet He does not do anything. He is like the sun by whose energy everything in the universe is done yet the sun is not the doer....He can know

5. बासदेब सरबत्रं में ऊननकतहुठाथि ।
अंतर बाहर संग है नावक काये दुरायि ॥

the arrangements of this universe who believes himself to be the pure Advaitin...One absorbed in Atman is not different from It. How can there exist distinction between two waters when mixed?...There is nothing except the Lord, O Nanak! Om Soham and Atman are the same Lord Brahman.⁶

In another place it is said: 'He who has known his own self, says Nanak, is the true knower'⁷; or 'See one in all',⁸ says Guru Arjan Dev. Here we find the highest idea of Vedanta before us. In order to realize this idea one must be raised to the highest stage of spirituality and this can only be done by passing through the intermediate stages. The attaching of the sole importance to one stage or another, has been the chief cause of many quarrels and fights among different religious sects. A seeker after truth has to pass through all these different stages, from the lowest to the highest, from the low humility to the high royalty.

PATH TO SALVATION

Now the path to salvation according to Sikhism may be briefly described. The first and chief thing in this path is to have a strong desire to obtain Mokṣa. Not every seed sown is always fruitful, nor is every desire fulfilled. The seed must be thrown into good ground and should be well cared for. Desire must be created in

6. ओंकार सरब प्रकाशी ।
आतम सुध अक्रे अबनाशी ॥
ईश जीव में भेध न जानो ।
साध चोर सभ ब्रह्म पछानो ॥

बासदेब बिन अबरन कौ ।
नानक ओं सोहं आतम सौं ॥

7. नानक परखे आपको ता पारख जान ।

8. सर्व नरं एके देख ।

a calm mind and must be strong, in order to bring forth any good result. Everyone may possess a desire to attain Mokṣa, but everyone's desire is not strong. The desire may be the strongest of all and yet not strong enough to equilibrate the opposite action of the sum total of other desires. To make the desire strong enough to subdue the other forces, help must come from outside. This is the kind of help which is got from the writings of the saints. A candle lights up a dark room where light is latent; thus the writings of the sages light up the dark minds with the light of a craving to obtain Mokṣa, the craving being already present in a passive state.

First of all, let worldly pleasures be shown to be fleeting and unreal, and one will be tired of enjoying these inconsistent joys. Let the idea of death be brought vividly before one's eyes, and one will be wearied of this life of sorrows. Then there will naturally spring up a desire to get perfect bliss and everlasting happiness.

No song puts before our mind's eye the false love of the world more vividly than this:

False love is seen in the world. Every one, be it a friend, or a relation, in this world is interested in one's own comfort. Every one says, 'It (the world) is mine, it is mine'; and every one has given up oneself to its charms. None is companion at the last moment, that is a strange custom. This ignorant mind (Manas) does not accept my advices, I am tired of advising it every moment. One who sings the praises of the Almighty, says Nanak, is beyond all these cares and anxieties.

How beautifully do the following couplets describe the mutability of the world:

Both Rāma and Rāvaṇa who had long lines of progeny have passed away from the surface of this globe. Say, O Nanak! there is nothing permanent, the world is like a dream. Everything that has come into existence will vanish today

or tomorrow. Nanak says, sing the praises of the Lord and leave all other bondages.

Desire having been created in the mind, now is the time for devising some methods to satisfy it. The spiritual Master, the guru can teach us these methods. It is of the greatest importance to take the advice of a guru before walking upon the road of spirituality. Once the royal road of Jñāna is known, one can reach the magnificent town of Mokṣa. None can reach the town without knowing the road which leads to it. Many roads may lead to one and the same town. It is the guru who points the proper road to an unacquainted person. It is not the duty of the person to question the accuracy of the guide's words. He who tries to find out the true way by himself will wander hither and thither in the wilderness without success. It is said:

If there be a hundred moons and thousand suns (of wisdom), even with so much light, it is all darkness without a guru.⁹

Some are of opinion, many among the Sikhs, that everything needed for a seeker after Truth can be found in the religious scriptures, hence there is no need of a living guru at the present time. No doubt everything is there. There is Bhakti for one, repetition of the holy names for another, Yoga for the third, Brahmajñāna for the fourth, and so on. But how can one know which of them suits one best? The religious scriptures are like a medical hall wherein are stored the medicines of all description. A patient cannot cure himself by taking any medicine without the doctor's advice. He ruins himself who does so. A good doctor's advice is necessary

⁹ जे सौ चंदा उगवे सूरज चढहे हजार ।

एते चानन हंदिआ गुरबिन घोर अंधार ॥

to get rid of a certain disease. A religious patient must find out some spiritual doctor who may, after examining him carefully, prescribe the proper medicine for him out of the very scriptures, the storehouse of the spiritual cures. The scriptures are like the books of music—wherein are recorded the different tones of the various notes; the different modes of singing different *rāgas*. Can a person learn music from these books? No, never. A master is required to teach the pupil, first by singing himself the true sounds. Thus the guru is essential to the path to salvation. Having found a guru, the *sikh* (disciple) must act up to his advice. A *sikh* must have the greatest regard for his guru, the greatest faith in him. Let the guru be for a *sikh* the representative of the Lord, nay the Lord Himself. Thus can a true *sikh* cross the ocean of Maya safely in the boat of his *prema* (love). The *sikh* must resign himself to his guru. It is said:

All actions of the *sikh* are useful who sells his mind to the guru. The *sikh* who by serving his guru becomes desireless finds the Lord. Transmigration of the soul ceases by the worship of the most high. Resign thyself to the protection of the guru. In this way can the pearl like life attain perfection.'

How to find out a guru is now the problem before us. A strong desire and prayers to the Almighty are sure to provide us with a guru. In the Guru Granth there are many prayers such as: 'If Thou be kind to me, help me, O Lord! to get a guru and repeat Thy holy name Hara Hara.'¹⁰ There are also given the distinguishing features of a guru. The definition of a Satguru as given in the Granth is, 'He who has known the *Sat*

Puruṣ is a Satguru'.¹¹ In another, 'He is Satguru in whose company our mind gets happiness, the restlessness of the mind vanishes and perfection is attained.'¹² Through the kindness of the guru—kindness which is the result of the *sikh's* own faith in and love for the guru—Brahmajñāna or the knowledge of Brahman is got and the *sikh* becomes a Brahmajñāni. It is said, 'One becomes a saint even if the guru casts a kind glance'.¹³ Then all duality ceases, the *sikh* becomes the guru, nay Brahman Himself, as is said, 'A Brahmajñāni is the Lord Himself'.¹⁴

The Sikhs in the time of the first five Gurus were naturally meek and humble like the ideal sheep of Christ. On the other hand, the Mohamedans were religious tyrants. To destroy the kafirs was their greatest aim. To a great extent they did succeed, as is proved by the fact that the main portion of the Mohamedan population in India consists of Hindu converts.

The great Sikh Gurus were worshipped by the Hindus as Avatars. All went well during the reigns of Babar, Humayun and Akbar, perhaps on account of political disturbances of the first two reigns and the reconciliatory policy of Akbar. But on the accession of Emperor Jehangir to the throne, the fifth Guru Arjan Dev, the compiler of the sacred Adi Granth, was tortured to death. The Sikhs were terrified at this horrible event. Their peaceful spirit

10. किरपा करै ता सत गुरु मेलै ।

हर हर नाम धियाई ॥

11. सत पुरख जिन जान या ।

सत गुरु तिस का नाउ ॥

12. जिस मिलये मन होए अनंद

सो सति गुरु कहिये ।

मनकी दुबधा बिनस जाए

परम पद लहीये ॥

13. अमत दिशट पेखे होए संत ।

14. बहम गियानी आप प्रमेशर ।

was not the only thing wanted at that time ; something more was needed.

The next Guru Hargovindji was a spiritual guide as well as a warrior, a Pir and a Mir. He was the first Guru who infused some of the military spirit into the Sikhs. But his successors were not warriors. Tyranny was at its zenith in the reign of Aurangzeb ; all India shuddered at his name. The Hindus were in the greatest distress ; their lives and property were not safe. The ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in cold blood at Delhi, because he refused to give up his own religion. A change was at hand. Guru Govind Singh the last of the Sikh Gurus appeared at this critical period on the stage, a sword in hand to annihilate the tyrants and rescue the oppressed.

With him came the long desired-for change. The meek sheep were turned into bloody wolves, the sparrows (to quote the Guru's words) killed the falcons. The humble Sikhs became great warrior Singhs. The form, the drees, the dialect of the Sikhs—everything was changed. A Sikh was reborn after being baptized in the new fashion. Shaving of the head and face was forbidden. A simple and most serviceable dress was introduced. Their language became a language of war and pomp. A single Singh was called a army of 125,000. Their salute became *Śri Wah-i-Guruji ka Khalsa, Śri Wah-i-Guruji ka Fateh* ; and their war cry *Sat Śri Akāl*. Insignificant things were given bombastic names in the khalsaized language.

The composition of the tenth Guru was of quite different material from that of the earlier Gurus. It was full of military spirit and vigour. Those very things which had

been taught in a peaceful manner by the nine Gurus were preached in a warlike tone by the tenth. The difference becomes quite clear by looking at the first stanzas of *Japji* of Guru Nanak, and *Japji* of Guru Govind Singh.

The tenth Guru introduced a kind of baptism—*Pouhal*. This baptism was really a charm. As soon as the Sikhs—Kshetries, Jats, Baniyas and men of other timid classes—who trembled from head to foot at the sight of a Moghul soldier, were baptized, they became transformed into warriors. Grand were their enterprises and works. It is the effect of this *Pouhal* that in the four quarters of the world the Sikh soldier is known.

This baptism is essential for a Singh. A baptized Sikh is ordered to carry five Ka's about his body, viz. (1) *Kaish*—hair, (2) *Kanga*—a comb, (3) *Katch*—a kind of breeches that do not cover the thighs, (4) *Karpan*—a kind of knife, (5) *Karra*—an iron bracelet. He is also required not to smoke or even touch tobacco ; to behave like a true knight ; to be pure and moral ; not to be overpowered by worldly desires and pleasures ; to defend the weak, etc. In this way a Sikh is the true type of a Kshatriya of yore. Universal fraternity is preached in Sikhism—no distinction of caste, all are one. Superstitions vanish here. All are free, no chains of any kind bind the Sikhs. They are free.

The leading star of a Sikh's life is that noble example set by the Guru Govind himself in sacrificing his property, his parents, his family, and ultimately himself for the sake of national good. Thus we see in Sikhism the two extremes—spiritual and material ascendencies—meet.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA SANGHA

(Illustrated)

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

None can deny that Ramakrishna Sangha as a community, and as the corporate corporeal body of Sri Ramakrishna, has become today a real source of power and glory. It stands out as a symbol of living Truth, of service and renunciation, of peace and harmony, in a world torn by hatred and discord. Naturally, it may be asked if this Sangha is a new shoot on an old tree or a new shoot on a new tree.

The establishment of the Buddhistic Order, known as Sangha and still worshipped by the Buddhists, was an important happening in history. The existence of corporate bodies of ascetics at the time of Gautama Buddha has led some scholars to conclude that Buddhist Sangha was not a new phenomenon in the society of India but represented a greater development of the Brahminical one.¹ Be that as it may, the Bhikku community became virtually one of the constituent communities of the body politic. Though at first a dispersed body of wanderers, the Bhikkus after a hundred years after Buddha's death constituted a well-organized community.² Dr. Satkari Mukherjee remarks, "The greatest genius of the Buddha lay in the organization of the ascetic order and the creation of a code of rules and regulations for the conduct of monastic life".³ During the long stretch of nearly seventeen centuries (500 B.C. to

A.D. 1200) when Buddhism had its place among Indian faiths, the Buddhist monks, organized in Sanghas, profoundly influenced India's traditional culture through their activities and achievements.

However, this rich coenobitic tradition of Buddhism was perhaps neither the precursor nor a direct stimulant to the founding of the Ramakrishna Sangha, although Swami Vivekananda held Buddha in high reverence.

In the Hindu tradition we find the ancient law-giver Manu mentioning *grāma*, *deśa* and *sangha*.⁴ Medhātithi, his commentator, explains Sangha as a group of persons of the same persuasion, belonging to different localities or of different classes, as for instance, the Sangha of Bhikkus, the Sangha of merchants, the Sangha of men learned in the four Vedas. Though the word 'Sangha' was used to denote a group of monastics, there was hardly any significant organized monastic community with a common law to guide them. On the other hand, from time immemorial monasticism among isolated individuals, in eremitical form, was quite popular. The *Dakṣa Smṛti* disapproves of *sannyāsi mithuna*, comprising two monks, *sannyāsi grāma*, comprising three monks and *sannyāsi nagara* comprising more than three. It commends a single monk.⁵ The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* too dis-

1. Dr. Haripada Chakravorty, *Asceticism in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustaka, 1973) p. 199

2. Dr. Sukumar Dutta, *Early Buddhist Monarchism* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1953) p. 143.

3. *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1958) Vol. 1, 2nd Edition, p. 587.

4. *Manu-Smṛti*, 8.219.

5. *Dakṣa-Smṛti*, 7.36-37 Quoted in *Mukti O Tahar Sadhan Sambandhe Hindusastrer Upades*, edited by Bipin Behari Ghosh. Sri Ramakrishna used to make his young disciples read this latter (Bengali) book Reference to it may be found in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York Edn., 1984) p. 985 and in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1974) 4th Edn., p. 77.

courages founding of a growing monastery.⁶

Seen against this background, the founding of the Ramakrishna Order was a unique phenomenon. It is an interesting and inspiring task to trace its history.

Hegel thought of history as an idea, 'the Idea' which, he said, struggles constantly to become the 'Absolute Idea'. In the religious history of India, 'the Idea' has made pilgrimage from Incarnation to Incarnation, everytime moving closer to the 'Absolute Idea' and manifesting more and more from the point of completeness in revelation, to squarely meet the challenge of the ages, till it came to Sri Ramakrishna, culminating in a boundless, harmonizing, all-embracing Idea, never seen before. It is in this context that Swami Vivekananda has called Sri Ramakrishna *Avatāravariṣṭha*—the greatest of all Incarnations.

Towards the close of his twelve-year-long period of spiritual practices, Sri Ramakrishna had some prophetic revelations, one of them being that a community given to 'the liberal faith revealed in his own life' was to be founded.⁷ The translation of this divine vision into practical form was one of the historic achievements of the world-teacher that was Sri Ramakrishna. In the last phase of his short earthly life, world-renouncing bright youths whom he called 'unpecked fruits' rallied around him and, before he passed away, he committed all of them to the charge of Narendranath, the most gifted among them, who later on became world renowned as Swami Vivekananda. However, Swamiji had at first some reservations about the need for an organization and about its nature and scope. His ideas in this regard got crystallized only after his visit to the United States. The power, organization, material

prosperity, the spirit of democracy, freedom and justice in the western society deeply impressed him. During that period he had, as he said, 'the greatest temptation in his life in America', by which he meant no other than 'organization'.⁸ He wrote to his brother-disciples in 1894, 'What is wanted is a power of organization—do you understand me?'⁹ And again in another letter to his foremost lay disciple Alasinga, 'Throw self overboard and work. Remember "The grass when made into a rope by being joined together can even chain a mad elephant"'.¹⁰ Later, Swamiji was to declare: 'To make a great future India, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power, co-ordination of wills. Organization, alone is the primary means for all progress and the only way for the conservation of energy.' He wanted some competent organization for the distribution and propagation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings which he believed to be the modern gospel for humanity, now almost drowned in rank materialism. Nonetheless, Swamiji took pains to convert his brother-disciples, clinging to the tradition-bound concept of Self-realization and Mukti, to the revolutionary new concept of organized religious life dedicated to the service of fellow-men, seeing God in them.

We may recall a homely scene at Dakshineswar. One day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room after his midday meal, with M., Hazra and others near about him. It was 5 October 1884. M. (Mahendra) held the belief that Sri Ramakrishna was an Incarnation of God like Caitanya. Now

8. See Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America, New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966) Vol. 1, p. 103.

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978) Vol. 6, p. 292.

10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 5, p. 34.

6. *Srīmad Bhāgavata*, 7.13.8.

7. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1974) 4th Edn., p. 300.

he said, 'It will be fine if a current flows from this place. Everything will be carried away by its force. Nothing that comes out of this place will be monotonous'.¹¹ In response, Sri Ramakrishna gave a smile of approval.

Quite significant in this context is a vision that the Holy Mother had at Kamar-pukur some time after the Master's passing. One day she saw Sri Ramakrishna coming from the direction of Bhuti's canal, followed by Naren, Baburam, Rakhal and other devotees. All on a sudden there sprang from the Master's feet a stream of water which flowed in front of him in waves. She immediately plucked flowers and offered handfuls of them into the stream. The noble wish of M. and the symbolic vision of the Holy Mother have already come true.¹²

As in the case of the glacier Gomukh giving birth to Ganga, there welled out of Sri Ramakrishna a spring tide of thoughts and a vast mass of spiritual energy. A new stream makes its way through a channel before it gains in volume and strength and makes its way across the plains. Ramakrishna Sangha has supplied that channel for the good of humanity. By virtue of the devotion, character, spiritual fervour, discipline, and brotherly cooperation of the original nucleus of sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the Ramakrishna Sangha has spread far and wide. Spiritually gifted and specially trained by the Master, each of them represented one aspect of the Power that was Sri Ramakrishna. Their dynamic leader Swami

Vivekananda, while delineating the Master's relation with his disciples, once said, 'Sri Ramakrishna is our Centre and each of us, a ray from that Light-Centre'.¹³

Rarely has so small a group achieved so much so rapidly. Never before had such a small religious community, committed to the ideal of catholicity, purity and selflessness, served so many people irrespective of religion, caste or creed. Year by year its prestige and influence have grown firing the imagination of great thinkers in different parts of the world and touching the hearts of innumerable people coming into contact with the community.

Sri Ramakrishna lived a unique life. 'His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere'. And it was left to the genius of Swami Vivekananda to correctly read its meaning. Observing in Sri Ramakrishna's life the convergence of the world's spiritual experiences of the millenniums and its redemptive implications in the context of problems of humanity in the present and the future, Swamiji garnered the spiritual harvest of his Master with his own hands and entrusted his brother monks and monastic disciples with the responsibility of preserving and disseminating the seeds of his Master's spirit. Swamiji believed that Sri Ramakrishna's advent was for the regeneration of the entire mankind. He did not stop with that belief. He dedicated himself heart and soul to the cause of his Master's mission. Explaining his role in this context, Swamiji wrote in a letter dated the 26th May, 1890, 'Now his behest to me was that I should devote myself to the service of the Order of all-renouncing devotees founded by him, and in this I have to persevere, come what may, being ready

11. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York Edition, 1984) p. 596.

12. Sri Ramakrishna himself told one of his woman disciples: 'Everything had been lifeless, but since this (referring to his person) came, all these have come to life again and a current of religion is now flowing just a little below the surface.' (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, p. 619).

13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 170.

to take heaven, hell, salvation or anything that may happen to me. His command was that his all-renouncing devotees should group themselves together and I am entrusted with seeing to this'.¹⁴

To understand how all this came about we have to look back at the period between 11 December 1885 and 16 August 1886, when Sri Ramakrishna lived in the Cossipore garden house at 90, Cossipore Road, Calcutta. The Cossipore garden saw the birth of the Ramakrishna Sangha; it also cradled for a while the new-born monastic brotherhood. Reminding his brother-disciple Swami Brahmananda of this, Swamiji wrote on 13 July 1897, 'All our associations centre on that garden. In reality that is our first Math'.¹⁵ Equally significant is the remark of the Holy Mother: 'At the Cossipore garden the Master spent the last days of his life. The place is associated with so much meditation. Samadhi and the practice of austerities. It is the place where the Master entered into Mahasamadhi. It is a place permeated with intense spiritual vibration. One realizes God-consciousness by meditating there'.¹⁶ Besides, here the disciples saw the Master giving away his spiritual treasures without stint to one and all. All these now remain in the bosom of the Sangha. Spiritual values attached to Cossipore garden apart, the history of this period is very important. The facts, legends and forces which constitute that history need to be analysed in order to understand the processes involved in the growth and development of the Ramakrishna Sangha. Such an analysis reveals the following significant points :

14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 6, p. 239.

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 411.

16. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984) p. 154.

1. During this period the Master revealed to the devotees his true identity by declaring himself a divine Incarnation. At Cossipore his disciples saw the greatest manifestation of his spiritual powers. Although he remained merged most of the time in the ineffable bliss of communion with God, he moved forward to the actualization of his divine mission of 'the turning of this mighty wheel of new dispensation'.

2. During this period the devotees of the Master were sifted into inner and outer circles like the inner and outer pillars of a hall. After this sifting the Master began to take special care of the devotees of the inner circle. Here the Master also 'predicted that a band of young disciples, with Narendra as their leader, would in due course renounce the world and devote themselves to the realization of God and the service of humanity'.¹⁷

3. Though the Cossipore garden was hired primarily for the medical treatment and nursing of the Master, it turned into a centre for the training of selected youths who were to serve in the vanguard of his noble mission. While the young disciples gave themselves to loving and devoted service to the Master, the latter here breathed the spirit of renunciation into their burgeoning vigorous minds. He also infused into their minds the necessary drive and skill to implement his ideas. Years later, on 9 August 1895 Narendra wrote to E.T. Sturdy: 'But Ramakrishna had given us one great gift, the desire, and the life-long struggle not to talk alone, but to live the life.' As the last days were approaching, the Master with redoubled energy set to mould the spiritual life of his disciples, particularly that of Narendra.

4. The charge of some Brahmo leaders that Sri Ramakrishna lacked organizing faculty proved to be baseless, for the Master successfully organized a cohesive group of

17. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 931.

dedicated souls who later constituted the core of the monastic brotherhood.¹⁸ Some day in the second week of January 1886 the Master distributed ochre clothes and *rudrākṣa* beads to eleven of his disciples and thus laid the foundation of the Ramakrishna Sangha, although it was not given formal recognition until after his death. At the Master's behest, they begged food in the neighbourhood and the Master partook of it. These events only suggest that Cossipore garden should be recognized as the first Math of the Order in a virtual, if not conventional, sense.

5. The Master organized the world-renouncing disciples under the leadership of Narendra. In a very systematic way the Master prepared him to take up the responsibility. On Saturday, 11 February, the ailing Master wrote on a piece of paper: *Jai Rādhe Premamayi. Naren śikṣā dibe yakhan ghare bāire hāk dibe. Jai Rādhe* ('Victory to Rādhā, Love personified, Naren will teach others when he will call out inside and outside the country'). (See photo). Narendra rebelled and said, 'I won't do that!' But the Master said firmly, 'Your very bones will make you do it'. Then, one evening in May, Narendra, as he was meditating, attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi. His soul was bathed in ineffable peace. His heart was full to overflowing with joy. When he presented himself before the Master the latter said, 'Now the Mother has shown you everything. But the realization, like the jewel locked in a box, will be hidden from you. I will keep the key with me. When you have finished doing Mother's work on earth, then the box

will be unlocked, and you will know everything you did just now.' And three or four days before the dissolution of his body the Master mysteriously transmitted his power to Narendra. Endowed with spiritual omnipotence, Narendra was now getting prepared to fulfil the Master's mission he was entrusted with. Every evening the Master would call Narendra to his room and for two or three hours would instruct him on various topics. Thus it was during the Cossipore period that Narendra was securely placed as the leader of the holy brotherhood.¹⁹

6. Sri Sarada Devi had come there to nurse the ailing Master and prepare his diet. These services apart, the Master during this period commissioned her to carry on the spiritual ministration he had started. Gradually, it dawned on the brotherhood that she was the embodiment of his Śakti. She, too, rose to the occasion and proved herself to be the 'Mother moulder'²⁰ of the Sangha. Recognizing the significant role she had played during the formative period of the Order, Swamiji in his lecture on 'My life and Mission' said, 'Who would sympathise with the imaginations of a boy—imaginations that caused so much suffering to others? Who would sympathise with me? None—except one... Well, that lady,

18. In 1910 Swami Shivananda explained to Lady Minto, the wife of the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, that it was not Swamiji or any other disciple but Sri Ramakrishna himself who founded the monastic Order that later on bore his name, during his last illness at Cossipore. See Swami Vividishananda. *A Man of God* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1968) p. 86.

19. J. J. Goodwin, learning from Swamiji, or from one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote to Mrs. Ole Bull on 23 May 1897, 'When the Paramahansa was passing away he called in all his disciples but Swamiji (Naren) and gave them an express command that they were always to pay every attention to Swamiji, and never to leave anything undone that could add to his health or comfort. Then sending them out and calling in Swamiji (Naren) he committed all his other disciples into his charge'. (Quoted in the *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Vol 1. p. 182.

20. Cf. Swami Budhananda, *The Ramakrishna Movement—Its Meaning for Mankind* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980) p. 13.

his wife was the only one who sympathised with the idea of those boys'.²¹

7. Another impressive episode was the Master's revelation to the householder devotees. On the afternoon of 1 January 1886, the Master blessed them, saying 'Be illumined!' Its effect was marvellous. It revolutionized the minds of all present. Swami Saradananda, explaining the significance of the episode, wrote: 'The Master, by revealing his true nature to the devotees, set them free from fear.' Everyone of them in later life served as a model householder with his mind fixed at the lotus feet of God.

8. Some householder devotees once took the all-renouncing devotees to task for their alleged extravagance. This incensed Narendra and other young disciples and the Master sided with them. But, thereafter, the Master pacified them. The two parties were reconciled with each other but, since that event, each group has upheld its distinctive status thus maintaining a dignified difference between each other.

Thus, laying bare the major strands of events associated with the birth of the Ramakrishna Sangha, we can see for ourselves the divine enterprise in which the Master and his disciples had been engaged together and also the all-comprehensive preparations the grand architect Sri Ramakrishna had made. But, though the ground had been prepared, seed sown and water given, a fencing for the protection of the new plant was wanting still. This want was fulfilled by the formal starting of the first Math or monastery popularly known as the Baranagore Math. The factors which worked leading to the founding of the Math deserve mention.

The curtain on the great life of the Master fell two minutes past one in the early hours of 16 August 1886. The sacred remains of

the Master's body, kept in a copper urn, served as a symbol of the immortal presence of the Master. Caught almost unprepared, the young disciples were too dazed and bewildered to think what they ought to do. But a chain of events showed them the way. When, as a mark of her widowhood, Sarada Devi started removing gold bangles from her arms, the Master appeared to her and said, 'I am not dead. I have only moved from one room to another'. Immediately the disciples took steps for worshipping Sri Ramakrishna in the urn containing his holy relics, later called 'Sriji'. Within a week after the Master's passing away, Narendra one evening saw him as a luminous being. When these episodes were giving the young disciples faith and reassurance and the strength to withstand the pressure exerted on them to go back to their homes, they had to sorrowfully see off Sri Sarada Devi on 21 August. Balaram Bose took care of her and arranged for her pilgrimage to Vrindaban. A big portion of the Master's relics which had been secretly transferred to a pot by the young disciples was sent to Balaram Bose's house where it was worshipped daily, as the living presence of the Master. It was later taken to Baranagore monastery.²² The remaining portion was taken in a procession and ceremoniously interred at the retreat of Ramachandra Dutta at Kankurgachi on 23 August.²³ And the budding monastery at Cossipore had to be disbanded by the end of August, 1886.

22. The details of the episode were recorded by Swami Saradananda in an article published in *Udbodhan*, Śrāvan, 1322, B.S. p. 439-41.

23. 'The Statesman' dated August 25, 1886 published a detailed report. Therein it was announced, 'The procession was in every sense a representative and nnmerously attended one; throughout the road, a distance of 3 miles, the ashes which had been collected and put in a copper *ghatta* were reverentially carried by the followers of the Paramahamsa (all graduates and

21. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 81-82.

Besides the clash with the householders over the Master's relics, some deep-rooted ideological differences between the householders and the all-renouncing devotees made the situation for the latter difficult. Senior householder devotees led by Ramachandra Dutta did not even lend credence to the young disciples' claim that the Master had planned to create an order of monks. Some of the young ones had virtually snapped family ties and they had no place to live in. But who was to provide shelter to them? They had no money, they had very little support. Nine years later, recalling these difficult days, Narendra was to write to Swami Brahmananda: 'You remember, I suppose, how after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, all forsook us as so many worthless, ragged boys. Only people like Balaram, Suresh, Master and Chuni were our friends at that hour of need'.²⁴

But imbued as they were with the Master's indomitable spirit and courage, they did not despair of their monastic future. Narendra who was their main source of encouragement was waiting for an opportunity. And the opportunity came most unexpectedly. According to the first, one evening, when Surendranath Mitra, a well-to-do lay devotee of the Master, returned home from his office and sat for meditation in his shrine, Sri Ramakrishna appeared before him in a vision and said, 'What are you doing? My boys are roaming about, without a place to live in. Make immediately some arrangement for them'. So Surendra hurried to Narendra and said, 'Brother, fix an abode where the Master's ashes and other relics can be kept and worshipped regularly and where some of you can live. We householders shall visit you from time to time to get spiritual solace. Whatever I used to

spend for the Master at Cossipore, I shall give it now for your expenses'.²⁵ On hearing this, Narendra was overpowered with emotion. After some search with the help of Bhavanath, he chose a dilapidated house at a low rent.

According to the second version, some days earlier Surendra had procured an oil painting of Mother Kālī, his chosen deity, but senior members of his family resented his idea of putting the fierce-looking Mother Kālī's picture in the house. To solve the problem Surendra got it hung in the Master's living room at Cossipore. When the Cossipore house had to be vacated, the problem with the oil painting cropped up again. At about this time Surendra learnt that two or three disciples of the Master had no place to go and needed immediate shelter. He thought that if a house could be got for them, the worship of the Master's relics could also be continued. To solve all the three problems at one stroke, he rented one old deserted house.²⁶

Dreary and dilapidated, the old building located at 125/1 Pramanick Ghat Road, Baranagore, midway between Dakshineswar and Calcutta, [see area map] had the reputation of being haunted by spirits. The rent was fixed at Rs. 11 per month inclusive of tax, and Rs. 6 went to the cook. In all probability, one Sashi Ganguly who had worked at the Cossipore garden took up the cook's job here. In the beginning Surendra contributed Rs. 30 for a few months. As the number of inmates increased, he doubled and tripled the amount and finally it was raised to Rs. 100 monthly.

undergraduates of the University) with solemn songs and music'.

²⁴. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 6, p. 342.

²⁵. Years later Swamiji told a disciple at Belur Math, 'You have heard of Sureshbabu's name, I dare say. Know him to be the source of this Math.' *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Vol. 1, p. 203.

²⁶. Sashibhushan Ghosh, 'Sri Ramakrishna Deva' in *Udbodhan*, 1332 (B.S.)

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna describes the monastery house as follows :

The southernmost room of the first floor was used for meditation, contemplation, and study... North of this room was the worship room, and north of that, again, was the room where the offerings for the worship were prepared... North of the 'offering room' was the room of the 'danas', a very long hall where the members of the Math used to assemble... North of this hall was a small room where the devotees took their meals. East of the worship room...ran a long verandah, at the southwest corner of which was the library²⁷ of a society of Baranagar.²⁸

Swami Virajananda's memoirs provide yet another authentic picture of the monastery :

At the back of the house, there was a vegetable garden with drum-stick trees, a Vilwa tree, a few coconut trees and a mango tree. There was also a pond. Greens and vegetables were not grown much in the garden... The interior of the Math's ground floor, having been unoccupied for a long time, was full of wild plants and shrubs. It had become a haven for jackals and reptiles, and no one would go there out of fear.²⁹

Gopal Junior brought there the Master's bed and other articles which had so long been stored at Balaram Bose's. Gopal Senior became the first permanent member. At Narendra's behest, Taraknath returned from Benaras and joined there. Narendra, Sashi, Sarat and other young disciples used to visit the Math now and then. Kali joined within a month, Rakhai after a few months. Yogin and Latu after a year. In the worship room Sri Ramakrishna's portrait was placed on a bed ; the Master's slippers were kept at the foot of the bed ; flowers were offered and incense burnt. The Baranagore Math, as the new monastery was called, was

27. South Baranagore Public Library, established in 1882.

28. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 991.

29. See Swami Sraddhananda, *The Story of an Epoch* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1982) p. 19,

inaugurated on 19 October 1886.³⁰ It is usually regarded as the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Sangha.

As mentioned earlier, the Ramakrishna Sangha was a unique innovation in the social traditions of Bengal. The vision of the Vaiṣṇava monks and nuns living in monasteries in Bengal had been too limited to enable them to exert considerable influence on society. In the Indian context, except during the rise of Buddhism, there never existed a monastic institution with such strong social commitment and sense of spiritual mission. The mode of life idealized by the Ramakrishna monks was a unique one inasmuch as it aimed at a rational synthesis of Jñāna, Yoga, Karma and Bhakti for the first time in religious history. Describing this multi-dimensional nature of the Ramakrishna monks' life in those days, a western writer observes : 'The monks live like children in the mother's house—going off for long periods in solitary wanderings or in loving service to others, then coming back at intervals to rest and pray at the Divine Mother's feet'.³¹

However, the life in the monastery did not attain full integration and identity till there happened an incident which hastened the process. At the invitation of Matangini Devi, mother of Baburam, Narendra and eight other young disciples went to the village of Antpur to spend a few days there. They turned the visit into a spiritual retreat. They devoted many hours everyday to meditation. Here they felt more deeply than even before a deep sense of brotherhood and cohesiveness bringing closer together their minds and hearts. This reached its height one night when they were meditating before a *dhuni* (sacred fire) in the courtyard. Over-

30. For details see, the author's *Brahmānanda Carit* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1982) p. 91.

31. Sister Devamata, *Days in an Indian Monastery* (La Crescenta, California: Ananda Ashrama, 1927) p. 15.

head was the clear night sky and the stillness was unbroken only when Narendra began to tell them the story of Jesus, with emphasis on his great renunciation. He exhorted them to live like Christ, who had no place 'to lay his head'. Inflamed by renewed idealism, they took the final vows of renunciation before the sacred fire and one another. Soon thereafter they discovered that all this had happened on Christmas Eve, and felt blessed. Years later, Swami Shivananda (Taraknath) recalling this incident said, 'As a matter of fact, our resolve to become organized became firm at Antpur. The Master had already made us sannyasins. That attitude was strengthened at Antpur.'

After their return from Antpur, the disciples finally renounced home one after another and became permanent inmates of the Baranagore monastery. Solidarity was achieved further when sometime in the third week of January 1887, the disciples under the aegis of Narendranath performed Viraja-homa (a special kind of fire ritual) and adopted monastic names. Thus Rakhai became Brahmananda, Baburam Premananda, Shashi Ramakrishnananda and so on. Sri Ramakrishna had already given them ochre clothes at Cossipore, and the Viraja ceremony served as the traditional confirmation of their sannyasa.

Behind these forms and formalities, the fire of renunciation threw them all into hard austere life which formed a wonderful saga of spiritual discipline. All of them were consumed by a passion for God realization. Years later Swami Vivekananda one day gave his disciples a glimpse of those blessed days when he said :

We used to get up at 3 a.m., and after washing our faces etc.—some after bath, and others without it—would sit in the worship-room and become absorbed in Japa and meditation. What a strong spirit of dispassion we had in those days! We had no thought even as to whether the world

existed or not. Ramakrishnananda busied himself day and night with the duties pertaining to Sri Ramakrishna's worship and service, and occupied the same position in the Math as the mistress of the house does in a family. It was he who would procure, mostly by begging, the requisite article for Sri Ramakrishna's worship and our subsistence. There were days when the Japa and meditation continued from morning till four or five in the afternoon. Ramakrishnananda waited and waited with our meals ready, till at last he would come and snatch us from meditation by sheer force...Owing to want of funds I would sometimes fight for abolishing the Math altogether. But I could never induce Ramakrishnananda to accede to the proposal. Know Ramakrishnananda to be the central figure of the Math. There have been days when the Math was without a grain of food. If some rice was collected by begging, there was no salt to take it with! On some days there would be only rice and salt, but nobody cared for it in the least. We were then carried away by a tidal wave of spiritual practice. Boiled Bimba leaves, rice and salt—this was the menu for a month at a stretch. Oh, those wonderful days! The austerities of that period were enough to dismay supernatural beings, not to speak of man.³²

There were days when their only clothes were the loin cloth and, as a common possession, a few pieces of ochre cloth; a mat on the floor was their bed. Swami Saradananda once remarked³³ that it was the 'intense spirit of sacrifice and love for the ideal' which held them together during these hard days. True it is that such strenuous circumstances helped to bring out their inner strength which they had in abundance.

At times they would spend hours in the study of philosophy, religion, history, sociology, literature, art and science. At other times some of them would plunge into devotional music or dance into devotional rapture. Occasionally they relaxed by indulging in light-hearted and

32. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 248-49.

33. Report of 'The Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention, 1926', p. 20,

witty talks. Above all, they were filled with the spirit of the Master and were full of yearning for God realization. A fire of intense renunciation raged in their hearts. They would practise austerity, sometimes alone under trees, sometimes in a cremation ground, sometimes on the bank of the Ganga, sometimes again they would spend the entire day and night in the monastery in Japa and contemplation. The atmosphere was charged with spiritual fervour. Those who had the eyes to see could perceive the Master's spirit working in a living form in the life of the monastery.

Nevertheless, some members of the monastery became restless and took to the life of a wandering monk with no possession except a staff and a begging bowl. Some wanted to visit the holy places where the holy atmosphere could give an added impetus to their spiritual striving. Some, again, left the monastery to lighten the financial burden of the monastery. The Math was undergoing extreme hardship, particularly after the passing away of Balaram Bose and Surendranath Mitra in 1890. Their leader, Narendra, too felt a strong urge to stir out. He contented himself occasionally with short trips to Deoghar, Benaras, Allahabad, etc. But finally in July 1890 he left the monastery again and did not return till February 1897, as the triumphant hero who made history in Chicago in 1893. However, Sashi was a solitary exception, for he clung to his self-chosen duty of worship at the monastery and kept the memory of the Master ablaze.

Almost unknown and unsung remains the vital role Sri Sarada Devi played in the life of the Math during those early days. As subsequent events were to show, it is literally true that her prayers and tears paved the way for the growth of the Sangha. During her visit to Bodh-Gaya in 1890, the contrast between the affluence of a well-known monastery there and the wretched

life of penury at the Baranagore monastery afflicted her heart. Later she said :

Ah, how much I wept, how often I prayed to the Master for my children! That is why you see all these monasteries established by his grace. Immediately after his passing away, the children renounced the world and sought out a temporary shelter. But soon after, they began to wander about independently. I felt very sad and prayed to the Master: 'Oh, Master you came down to earth, had fun with a few companions, and then departed in a happy mood. Was that the end of everything? If so, what was the need of assuming a human body and going through all this suffering? I have seen many sadhus at Benaras and Vrindaban who live on alms and seek shelter under trees. There is no dearth of sadhus like them. I cannot bear the sight of my children, who have renounced everything in your name, going from door to door for a morsel of food. I fervently pray to you that those who give up the world in your name may not lack simple food and clothes. Let them live together, with you and your teachings as their centre. Those who are afflicted with the sorrows of the world will come to them and obtain peace by listening to your teachings. That is the purpose of your advent, isn't it so? I cannot control myself when I see them drifting about helplessly.³⁴

Her prayers were answered, though after some more tribulation. While the Master provided the ideal, she demonstrated it in her life. Moreover, her guidance stimulated an aspirant's devotion to the ideal and helped him to deepen his love for it. The Master set down the principle, she took up the protective care. Because of her motherly love, her self-denying service, her boundless compassion, her profound wisdom and deep concern for the Order, she is adored as the Mother of the Order, *Saṅgha-janani*.

The leader's preaching in the West had its reverberations in India and the Rama-

34. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963) p. 241.

krishna monastery reaped a good harvest in the form of new vocations. A group of young men—Sudhir, Kalikrishna, Kánai, Khagendra, Jogendra, Govinda, Haripada and Sushil—joined the Order. Dinanath, initiated into Sannyasa by Swami Saradananda came from Benaras. Earlier still, Saratchandra (Gupta), a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, came from Hathras. Soon after the leader's return Ajayhari and Surendra joined. They were followed by Kedarnath, Motilal, Krishnalal, Dakshinaranjan, Krishnamurti Naidu, Asutosh, Sureshchandra and Suraj Rao. These young men constituted the second line of the brigade of the Sangha.

Meanwhile, in the first part of February 1892 the Math had been shifted to another house, which was also a haunted place but in much better condition than the previous one. The new monastery was located at Alambazar³⁵ between Baranagore and Dakshineswar. 'It was a two-storeyed, big house in two sections—outer and inner—which was situated on a lane off the main road... Upstairs of this outer apartment, there were verandas on two sides, on the northern side was a long hall, used as a parlour in the day time, and at night eight or ten persons... would sleep side by side there. As one entered the inner section of the house, the shrine was to the left and three bedrooms were to the right...' ³⁶ Its monthly rent was Rs. 10.

While the flow of life at the Alambazar Math was at a low ebb, its leader Narendranath had been passing through a whirlwind of experiences; as an outcome of these, Narendra emerged as Vivekananda who ever afterwards 'felt, moved and worked like a prophet'. As an itinerant monk he

travelled all over India, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, coming in close touch with people of all classes and ranks. He discovered that religion was the life blood of the nation; it was the religious impulse which supplied the cohesive force that unified Indian culture. But his heart bled at the sight of the abject poverty and ignorance of the masses; he was disgusted by their silly superstitions, inspired by their genuine faith; and their petty jealousies and feuds made him sad. He saw a great people degraded, but also saw the vast potential strength of that people. He pondered if there could be a solution to this problem. Could the spirituality of India and the material prosperity of the West cooperate for the betterment of humanity? While he meditated sitting upon a rock at Cape Comorin, he hit upon a plan. The answer to the above question and the solution to the problems of India became clear to him. Soon there arose an occasion to put into practice this solution. His disciples urged him to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions to be held in connection with the World Fair at Chicago in September 1893. 'An Orator by Divine Right', Swamiji proved himself to be the most popular and influential man in the Parliament. After three and a half years of hard labour in America and Europe Swamiji's mission, being the mission of his Master, assumed a definite shape. It had two-fold significance, national and universal. It envisaged national reconstruction based on the spiritual consciousness of her people, and also the spiritual awakening of the whole world. Deeply involved as he was in his work in India, Swamiji had been writing to his brother disciples regarding the organization of the monastery. In his letter dated 27 April 1896 he emphatically said, 'He (the Master) gave me the charge of you all, and you shall contribute to the great well-being of the world—though most

35. Located on the right side of the road from Alambazar to Lochan Ghosh's *ghat*. Its municipal address was 95 Deshbandhu Road.

36. *The Story of an Epoch*, op. cit. pp. 35-36.

of you are not aware of it'.³⁷ On his return to India in January 1897 Swami Vivekananda proceeded from Colombo to Calcutta, awakening the sleeping leviathan that was his countrymen, by his soul stirring addresses.

The leader's return, welcomed with an outburst of joy and pride by the inmates of the Alambazar monastery, created a powerful current of enthusiasm and fervour. But some of his brother disciples could not at first appreciate the leader's new ideal of social service. Swamiji's broader ideal of renunciation and service was to them incompatible with the Master's ideal of total renunciation. Swamiji took pains to reorient their outlook, to bring home to them his view, 'To strive only for one's own liberation is unworthy of a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna'. Swamiji wanted to create a new band of monks who would take not only the traditional vow of personal salvation, but also a vow of service to the poor, the sick, the hungry and the ignorant. The brother disciples finally accepted his ideas, as they gained the perception that Sri Ramakrishna was certainly working through him.

More than anything else, the training of monastics, particularly those educated young men who had recently joined the Order, engaged his special attention. He wanted to form their character in a new mould. He wanted his disciples to be robust personalities. He did not like the idea that his monastic order should be filled with feeble-hearted men who needed a series of concessions made for them. Swamiji said, 'My mission is not Ramakrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything but simply to bring manhood to my people'.³⁸ Drawing up a comprehen-

sive programme of training, he gave personal instructions to the novices and held classes for them. He also initiated worthy young men into sannyasa.

In response to Swamiji's loving request, Swami Ramakrishnananda left the Alambazar Math in March 1897 for Madras with Swami Sadananda as his assistant. At Madras he started a monastery in a rented house in Triplicane, paying Rs. 30 a month. It opened a new chapter in the history of the Sangha.

At the suggestion of some inmates, Swamiji dictated to Brahmachari Sudhir (Swami Shuddhananda) a short set of rules for the guidance of the novices. Later, at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden, Swamiji formulated an elaborate set of rules for the conduct of the monastery. It came to be known as 'Belur Math Rules'. The main object of the rules, Swamiji emphasized, was to help the followers to transcend all rules and regulations.

From a letter dated 9 May 1897, written by Swami Premananda to Swami Ramakrishnananda, we get a graphic picture of the life at Alambazar monastery. He wrote :
The day begins with meditation in the morning from six to seven. Then chanting of the praises of the Lord. The boys take turns to do the chanting. Afterwards some physical exercises according to Delsarte. Then halwa for breakfast. I take my bath early in the morning and perform the ritualistic worship in the shrine... Brother Hari takes the Gita class from five to six in the afternoon....After vesper service, there is meditation for an hour and then a question and answer class. Often disciples tell their memories of our Lord. Singing is held one evening a week. On the whole, the work in the monastery is running smoothly.

The Madras centre too was being run in accordance with the same set of rules. Soon after, Swami Atmananda and Mr. Goodwin joined to assist Swami Ramakrishnananda. From a weekly report³⁹ for July 1897 we

37. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 479.

38. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda, His Second Visit to the West* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982) p. 602.

39. Every branch centre had to send to the headquarters a weekly report of its activities.

get an idea of the daily life at Madras monastery :

At 5 a.m.: Self-study, on Saturdays only; at 6 a.m.: Leaving the bed; between 6 and 7 in the morning: Reading from the Ramayana; between 7 and 9 in the morning: Meeting the visitors; between 9 and 10: Readings from Swamiji's works and discussion; between 10 and 11.30: bathing and noon-meal; between 11.30 to 1: Rest; between 1 and 4 in the afternoon: Self-study; between 4 and 7: Meeting the visitors.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was found busy taking as many as eleven classes a week distributed over a vast area, covering Saidapet, Triplicane, Mylapore, Purasavalkam, George Town and Chintadripet. But 'the real life of the monastery circled round the shrine', writes Sister Devamata.

On 1 May 1897 Swami Vivekananda called a meeting of the monastics and lay devotees at the house of Balaram Bose and formally established the Ramakrishna Mission Association. The Association aimed at spreading the truths that Sri Ramakrishna had, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated through the example of his own life, and to help others to put them into practice for their physical, mental and spiritual advancement. At its second meeting on 5 May the Association adopted resolutions laying down its aims and objects as well as the 'methods of action'. Swami Vivekananda, the General President of the Association, appointed Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda the President and Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta centre. The Swami's spirit inspired his brother monks to take up immediately various projects. Akhandananda fed and nursed the victims of famine at Murshidabad. Trigunatitananda opened a famine relief camp at Dinajpur. Similar centres were established at Deoghar, Dakshineswar and Calcutta. In 1899 flood-relief was conducted at Ghogra (Bihar), landslide-relief in

Darjeeling, plague-relief in Calcutta, and famine-relief at Kishengarh (Rajputana). Next year famine-relief was given at Kishengarh and Khandwas (Central Province), flood-relief at Behala-Vishnupur (Bengal), and plague-relief was organized in Calcutta. Observing this encouraging beginning, Swamiji on 9 July 1897 wrote to Mary Hale: 'It would have made your heart glad to see how my boys are working in the midst of famine and disease and misery... I feel my task is done—at most three or four years more of life are left.' Also, in the same letter, we have an inkling of the leader's mind, when he wrote, 'I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing for sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next.'

Himself an ardent admirer of democracy, Swamiji was bent upon introducing democratic system in the Sangha, but observing that the ground for it had not been prepared yet, the responsibility of running the monastery was entrusted to 'the President⁴⁰ and his assistants'.

Before we proceed further let us have a look at the Sangha at the ideational level. If the Sangha is compared to the earth, then Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda—one spirit in three forms—may be compared to the effulgent sun. As the sun appears differently at sunrise, noon and sunset, so does the selfsame Spirit appears differently in these three personalities. Sri Ramakrishna may be said to represent the principle, Sri Sarada Devi its application, and Swami Vivekananda its propagator. As the sun is the source of the earth's power and light, so are Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda the source of the Sangha's power

40. Swami Brahmananda, the then President of Calcutta Centre.

and glory. As the earth circles round the sun, drawing all its strength and sustenance therefrom, the Sangha revolves round the trinity,⁴¹ Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

On 6 February 1898 while consecrating amidst great rejoicing the shrine in the newly built house of Navagopal Ghosh, in Ramakrishnapur, Howrah, Swamiji composed extempore the mantra, now well-known as *praṇāma-mantra* :⁴²

*Sthāpakāya ca dharmasya sarvadharmasvarūpiṇe
Avatāra-varisthāya Rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ*

In November of that year he composed a beautiful Sanskrit hymn in praise of Sri Ramakrishna. Both these are chanted every day in all monasteries of the Order.

On 13 February 1898 the Math was shifted to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house⁴³ in Belur, across the Ganga. The awful damage in the old building of Alambazar monastery caused by earthquake on 12 June 1897, and the need for being near the plot of land meant for the permanent site of the monastery forced this change upon the monks. The plot for the future monastery admeasuring over seven acres, right on the Ganga, had a one-storeyed building for dwelling and was purchased for Rs. 39,000 with the help of a generous donation from Miss Henrietta Muller, on 4 March 1898. Fortunately, Hariprasanna, a disciple of the Master, had by then resigned from his service as an executive engineer under the Government of North-western Provinces, and had joined the monastery as a

Brahmacharin.⁴⁴ Assisted by Swami Advaitananda, Brahmachari Hariprasanna remodelled the main building by adding an entire upper storey, with a veranda facing the Ganga. Another building, with a couple of rooms above to serve as a shrine and prayer hall, and with a kitchen, store, and refectory below, was also completed. (See photo). Technical advice was obtained from engineer Rai P.C. Banerjee of Ariadaha and Mrs. Ole Bull's financial assistance made the construction possible. All this took about a year.

In the meantime Swami Saradananda, who had been sent to America as Vedanta teacher, was recalled to India to share the responsibility of running the new organization. He arrived at Calcutta on 14 February 1898. Preparations were made for Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebrations, which fell on 22 February. Extract from an English rendering of Swami Premananda's Bengali letter gives us some glimpses of the celebration :

On the tithipuja day Sushil and Sudhir acted as the priest and tantradharak respectively. More than one hundred persons partook of prasada that day. Narendranath has composed a beautiful aratrika song which runs as follows: *Khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana, jagavandana vandi tomāya / Nirāñjana nararūpadhara nirguṇa guṇamaya / Namō namō prabhu vākya manāṭita / Manovacanaikādhār / Jyotir jyoti ujala hridi-kandara / tumi tamabhañjanahār / Dhe dhe langa ranga bhanga, bāje anga sanga mridanga / gāiche chanda bhakatavrinda, āratī tomār.*⁴⁵ In the evening we all joined in the āratrika song. Narendranath had a wig with matted locks, ring on his ears and ashes besmeared over his body and looked exceedingly beautiful. Many of us too dressed like him. Worship with homa continued until midnight. That day Ganga (Akhandananda) and Suren (Nityananda) had

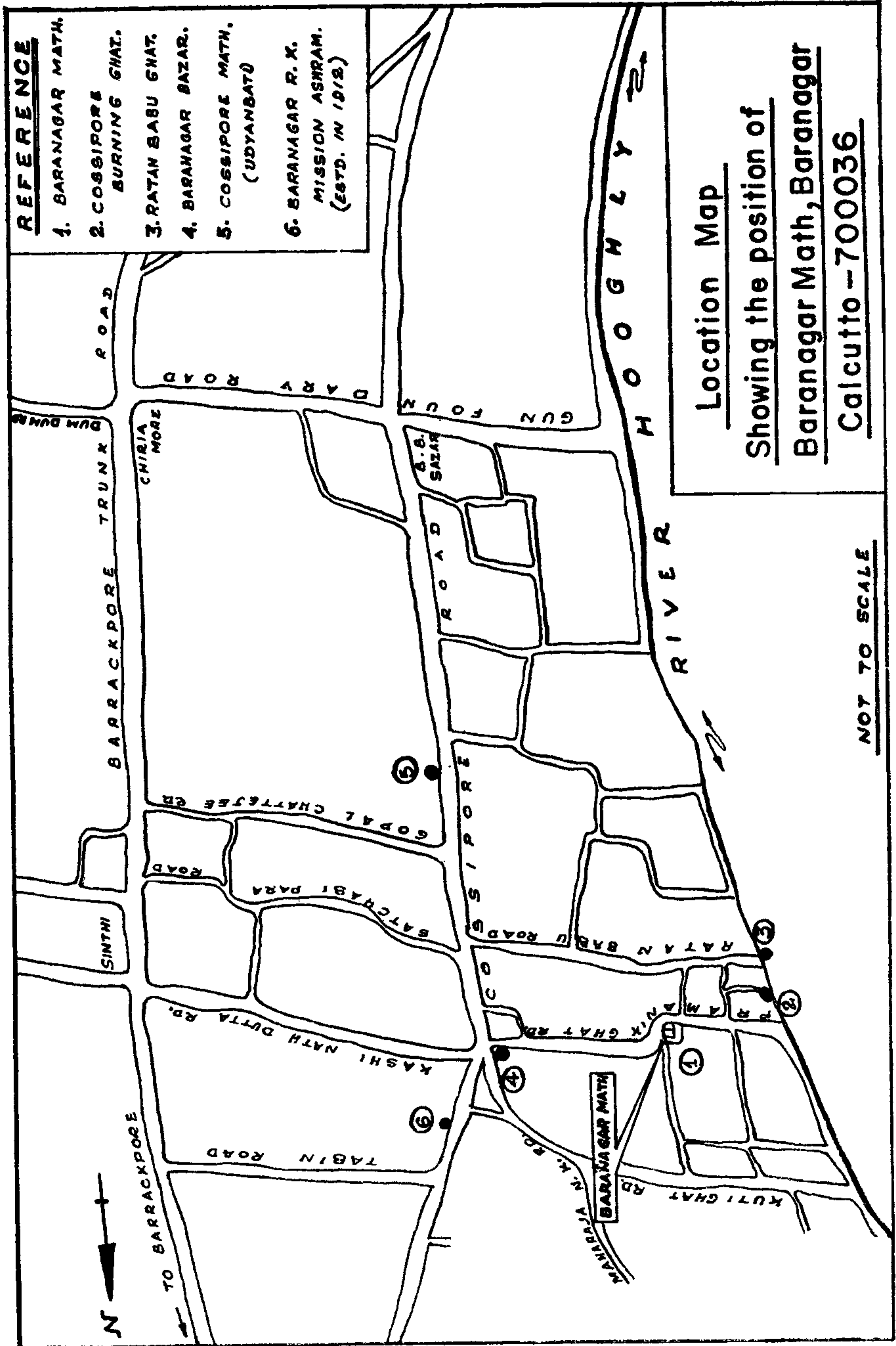
41. In the beginning, only Sri Ramakrishna's picture was placed on the *vedi* (altar) of the shrine. After Swamiji's passing away, his picture was installed there by Swami Brahmananda and after the Holy Mother's demise, her picture was placed there by Swami Shivananda.

42. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 6, p. 513.

43. Its municipal address is 48 Lalababu Shire Road.

44. Later in August 1899 he took the vows of Sannyasa and came to be known as Swami Vijnanananda.

45. The other stanzas were added by Swamiji himself at Belur Math.



come from Mahula with two *chanabaras*⁴⁶ which weighed one maund.

On this occasion 'about forty to fifty' non-brahmin devotees received Gayatri initiation from Saratchandra Chakravorty and were invested with the holy thread.

Next Sunday on 27 February 1898, the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was held at the Radha Ramanji Thakurbari of Purnachandra Daw. On that morning Swamiji consecrated the grounds which had been acquired for the Math. The details can be obtained from the following two letters. In the first dated 25 February 1898 Swamiji wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda, 'Today we take possession of the land we have bought, and though it is not practicable to have the Mahotsava on it just now, I must have something on it on Sunday. Anyhow, Shriji's relics must be taken to our place for the day and worshipped'.⁴⁷ In the second letter dated 6 March 1898 Swami Premananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda, 'Last Sunday the public celebration in connection with Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was successfully held. It was almost like every other year. On that day Narendra himself carried Thakur⁴⁸ to the new land and worshipped him and performed homa. And *payasanna* (pudding of milk and rice) was offered'.⁴⁹ Again on 9 December 1898, when the

construction of the new monastery was nearing completion 'Shriji' was carried to the new monastery. The entry in the Math diary reads; 'Thakoor was taken to the new Math and the new Math was consecrated'. In all probability 'Shriji' was installed in the newly built shrine on that day and worshipped. It is worth remembering that on 12 November 1898 the Holy Mother visited Belur and sanctified the new Math premises by worshipping the Master there in the picture taken from her own shrine.

Though Swamiji made trips to Darjeeling, Almora and Kashmir in 1898, he paid special attention to the training of the sannyasins and brahmacharins of the monastery. Classes on Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, western science, history of the world, etc. were conducted. Swamiji himself taught for a time Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Swami Bodhananda, who had joined the Order about this time, recorded in his reminiscences, 'Swami Saradananda had just returned from America. He used to take two classes, one on the Gita and the other on Bhashya. Swami Nirmalananda was holding Upanishad classes. The classes were held very regularly'.⁵⁰ Throughout the year of 1898, everyday after the noon rest, one hour was devoted to 'Class Study' followed by one hour of private study. Again after spiritual practices in the evening a class was held. The morning classes were held on scriptures and the evening class was given to 'question answer session' or lectures on subjects such as physiology, anatomy, physics, history of philosophy and so on. One day the class was on the 'science of photography'. Dr. Nitai Chandra Haldar used to take classes on physiology and anatomy. It seems the 'question class' participated by Swamiji and other direct disciples of the Master became very popular.

46. A sweetmeat made mostly of fresh cheese fried in ghee and soaked in syrup.

47. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 443.

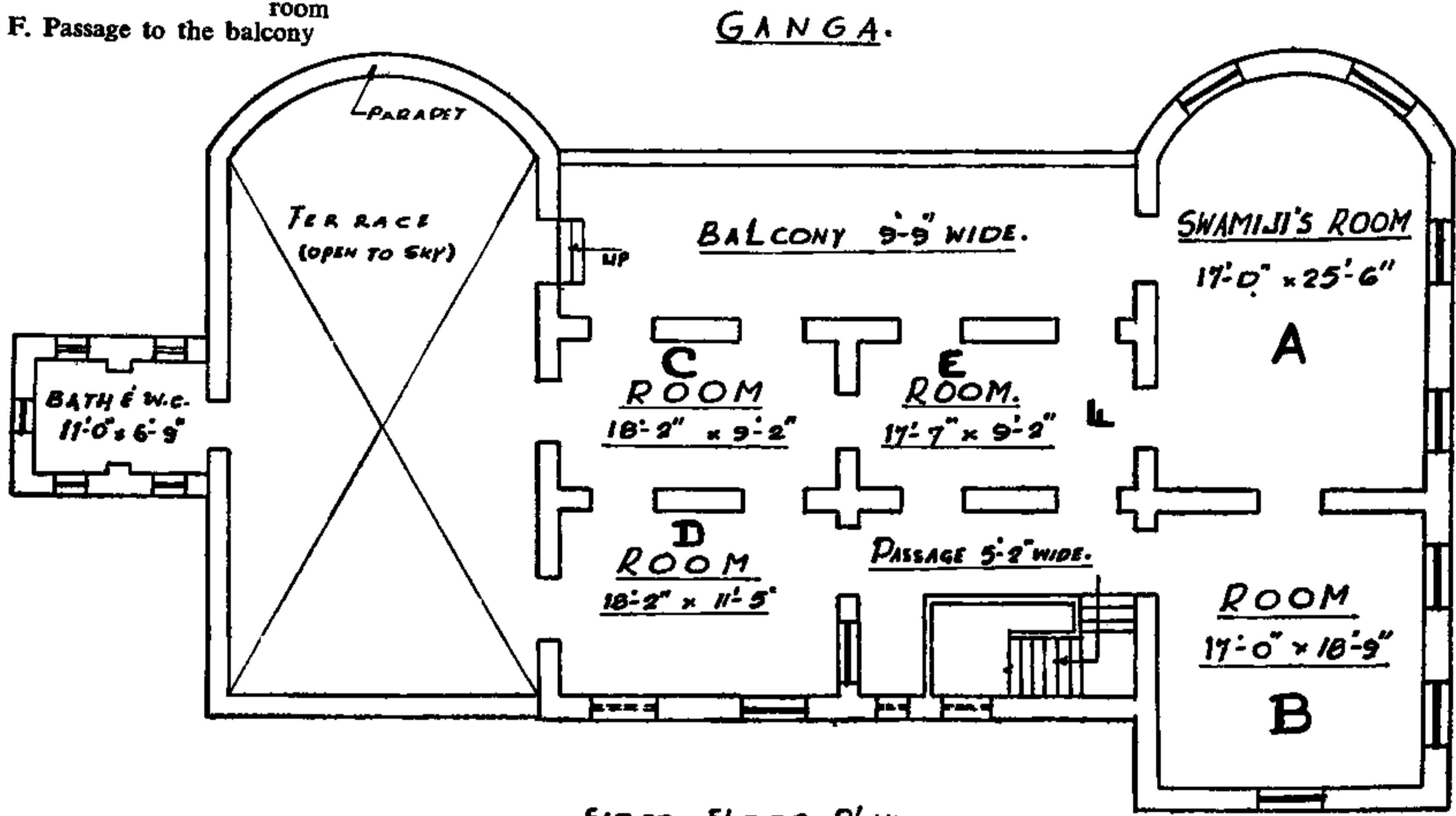
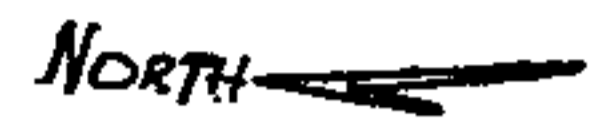
48. Referring to the sacred urn containing the relics of Sri Ramakrishna, usually called 'Shriji'.

49. In our considered opinion the description of installation of Sri Ramakrishna on the new site of the Math, described in the diary of Sarat Chandra Chakravorty (see *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 7, p. 113-116) refers to this incident and not to what happened on December 9, 1898, as made out in the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, pp. 398 ff.

50. *Vedanta Kesari*, September 1972, p. 310.

- A. Swamiji's room
- B. Library
- C. Swami Brahmananda's room
- D. Swami Premananda and Swami Shivananda's room
- E. Swami Vijnanananda's room
- F. Passage to the balcony

FIRST FLOOR PLAN OF OLD MONASTERY BUILDING AT THE TIME OF SWAMIJI (1902). AT THE RAMKRISHNA MATH. BELUR MATH.
 Scale - 8'-0" = 1" inch.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN.

NOTE - ALL WALLS ARE 1'-6" THICK.

The business side of running the Math was entrusted to the younger members, with one elected superintendent from among them as their immediate leader.

The Math diary discloses that the Math was entirely shifted to the new site on 2 January 1898. It took some time to get the Math life settled in the new premises. Swami Vivekananda, on his return on 22 January 1899 from Vaidyanath, addressed himself with all his soul to the task of training the monastic members. He wanted to build a cadre of 'sappers and miners in the army of religion'. He wanted them to try to mould their lives after the perfect ideal of Sri Ramakrishna's character, imbued with the ideals of knowledge, devotion, work and yoga. Swamiji laid emphasis on the balanced culture of the head, the heart and hands. He also reminded them that it was through the members of the Math that people would judge of Sri Ramakrishna. To infuse in the inmates the spirit of monastic independence, Swamiji, one day in May 1899, thundered, "The men of the world should have no voice in the affairs of the Math. The sannyasi should have nothing to do with the rich; his duty is with the poor. He should treat the poor with loving care, and serve them joyfully with all his might. To pay respects to the rich and hang on them for support has been the bane of all the monastic communities of our country".⁵¹

Dissemination of ideas adds to the vigour and vitality of an organization. Keeping the guideline of Swamiji in view, the Sangha started several journals. On 14 January 1899 the Bengali fortnightly *Udbodhan* made its appearance under the editorship of Swami Trigunatitananda. The English monthly *Prabuddha Bharata*, which was being published from Madras since July 1896, had ceased publication with the death

of its gifted editor, B.R. Rajam Iyer in May 1898. Swamiji took over the journal which began its new career at Almora in August 1898. Its editorial office was permanently shifted to the newly founded Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, in the Kumaon region of the Himalayas, in March 1899. Swami Swarupananda became its new editor, and Captain Sevier, its manager. Earlier still a fortnightly magazine in English, called *Brahmavadin* had been started on 14 September 1895 with Dr. M.C. Nanjunda Rao as its editor. Despite various handicaps, Swamiji made it a point to lay special emphasis on preaching Vedanta in India as well as outside. He sent Swamis Abhedananda, Turiyananda and Saradananda to America; and Swami Shivananda to Ceylon. Some other brother-disciples were sent over to Gujarat, while Swamis Virajananda and Prakashananda went out to preach in various places in India. Swamiji's American disciple Swami Abhayananda's preaching of Vedanta in India created a stir.

Another notable event of the period was the coming of Swamiji's Irish disciple Miss Margaret E. Noble into the fold. Swamiji initiated her into Brahmacharya on 25 March 1898, changing her name to Sister Nivedita. The starting of a school for girls by Nivedita in November 1898, and her participation in the Calcutta plague-relief added a new dimension to the Sangha's activities.

On 20 June 1899 Swamiji, under medical advice, left for Europe and America and took with him Sister Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda. Though Swamiji had not set forth from India this time 'with a definite idea of giving a message to the West',⁵² yet the world teacher that he was, he eventually preached some 'smashing truths' that 'man is the Pure One here and now'.⁵³

51. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (1981), Vol. 2, p. 422.

52. *Swami Vivekananda, His Second Visit to the West* op. cit. p. 598.

53. *ibid.*, p. 605.

Simultaneously, his mind was always upon further consolidation of the Sangha. One outcome of his thinking during this period was the creation of a significant emblem for the Order, symbolizing the Order's ideal of the synthesis of yogas. Explaining his vision, Swamiji in a letter dated 24 July 1900 wrote to Miss MacLeod, 'The sun = Knowledge. The stormy water = Work. The lotus = Love. The serpent = Yoga. The swan = the Self. The Motto = May the Swan (the Supreme Self) send us that. It is the mind-lake'.⁵⁴ Thus the picture indicates that, by the synthesis of Karma, Jñāna, Bhakti and Yoga, the vision of the Paramātinan can be obtained.

Swamiji returned to Belur Math on 9 December 1900. Coming to know of the passing away of his British disciple Mr. Sevier at Mayavati, where an Ashrama had been started on 19 March 1899, he almost immediately left for Mayavati to console Mrs. Sevier. Two of his European disciples, Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Sevier had already laid down their lives for the Sangha's cause. Swamiji wrote to Miss MacLeod on 26 December 1900, 'The Mother is watering the plant of future India with the best blood of England. Glory to Her!' After his return from Mayavati on 24 January 1901 he lived more or less a relaxed life in the monastery. Though his body was wearing away, his mind was as luminous as ever before. The future of the Sangha was the ever-recurring theme of Swamiji's thought. As was his wont, he continued guiding with a firm hand the daily life of the monastery. He was giving finishing touches to his grand creation, the Ramakrishna Sangha. Even when he could not attend to every detail of the Sangha the policy and perspective always came from him. During the latter part of 1901, Swamiji introduced important religious festivals like Durgā-pūjā, Lakṣmī-

pūjā, and Christmas-eve in the religious life of the Sangha.

On 20 June 1899, Swamiji had, before he left for Europe, bequeathed the properties of Belur Math to Swami Brahmananda.⁵⁵ Later on Swami Brahmananda through correspondence persuaded Swamiji to revoke his decision. Subsequently, Swamiji considered several alternative plans and finally decided to make a trust of the Math. Accordingly, on 30 January 1901, a trust-deed was executed and through it Swamiji vested all the Belur Math properties in a board of Trustees consisting of twelve monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The trust was formed primarily for the 'seva and worship of Thakur Paramahansa Ramakrishna' and the 'propagation, advancement and furtherance of the cult of Thakur Paramahansa Ramakrishna'. Swami Brahmananda was elected the first President of the Math, and Swami Saradananda its Secretary.

Soon after the final shifting of the Math to its present site, the Ramakrishna Mission Association ceased to retain its independent entity. But in May 1909, this nucleus was developed and given a legal status. A society named the Ramakrishna Mission was registered under Act XXI of 1860. Its management was vested in a Governing Body consisting of the Trustees of the Belur Math. The principal workers of the Mission are the monks of the Math. Both have their headquarters at Belur Math. Administered by two separate sets of rules,

55. The bequest read: 'I, Swami Vivekananda of Belur Math, Dist. Howrah, Bengal, herewith bequeath all I possess in land, Buildings, Governmental securities, cash or otherwise to my Gurubhai, Swami Brahmananda of the Belur Math, Howrah District, Bengal.

Also, this revokes and nullifies all my will and that have preceded this my last dated the 20th June 1899.' Witnesses: Swami Saradananda, Shivananda, Turiyananda, Sadananda, Trigunatitananda and Hariprasanna Chatterjee.

54. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 526.

the two organization keep their funds and accounts separate.

The Math and Mission, like the two wings of a bird, are impelling and directing the Sangha along its course through history. While membership of the Math is confined to monastics, the Mission comprises monastics as well as lay devotees and friends. Through its Math wing the Sangha harnesses spiritual power and preserves the glory of the monastic ideal, and through its Mission wing it directs that power into channels of social service and creativity.

Thus during the formative period in the history of the Sangha, its great leader provided a firm foundation to the Order by laying down its objective and method of action, training a group of dedicated young monks, creating its two wings—the Math and the Mission—establishing its headquarters at Belur, and setting up a model monastery at Belur centred on the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna where his holy relics were worshipped. Swamiji also gave the Sangha its motto, *Ātmano Mokṣārtham, jagadhitāya ca*—‘For one’s own salvation and for the good of the world’. The vows of poverty, continence and obedience, and study, preaching and service of human beings as veritable manifestations of God, are the obligation of the community of monks. More important than the doctrinal niceties and organizational procedures was the lamp of spirituality lighted by the Master, assiduously maintained by his disciples, and still burning bright as the living tradition of the Sangha.

The Ramakrishna Sangha is a non-sectarian sect, open to all religions, castes and creeds. It is built on the bedrock of pure spirituality, and scrupulously avoids politics. Committed to the practice and propagation of the harmony of religions, it is most catholic in character. Truly said Swami Shivananda, the second President of the Order, ‘Love, catholicity, purity and

selflessness are the corner-stones of our organization’.⁵⁶ The Sangha which forms the hub of the *navayuga-cakra*, ‘the mighty wheel of new dispensation’, the spiritual renaissance, set in motion by Sri Ramakrishna is acting as a powerful lever for humanity’s all-round welfare. There is at present no other religious order so much rooted in all aspects of India’s ancient culture and is yet so universal in its outlook and so full of possibilities for the future.

We have rightly emphasized Swamiji’s great contribution to the growth of the Sangha, but it will be wrong if we fail to take note of the valuable contributions made by his monastic brothers. Sister Nivedita very correctly remarked, ‘Meaningless as would have been the Order of Ramakrishna without Vivekananda, even so futile would have been the life and labours of Vivekananda, without behind him his brothers of the Order of Ramakrishna’.⁵⁷ These stalwarts as well as the disciples of Swamiji were on their mettle when the great leader passed away on 4 July 1902, and so that event did not cause any visible set back to the young organization. Notwithstanding the tests and tribulations that appeared on the way in the succeeding years, the Sangha made phenomenal progress in the great leader’s footsteps. In fact, the Sangha has been growing from strength to strength.

By the time Swamiji entered *mahāsamādhi*, the Sangha had to its credit several branch centres. Under the leadership of Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Akhandananda the Madras Math and the Mohula orphanage, respectively, were thriving. Swami Shivananda started on 4 July 1902 Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Varanasi. While Swami Kalyanananda started the Kankhal branch in June 1901, Swami Swarupananda

⁵⁶. Report of the ‘Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention, 1926’, p. 35.

⁵⁷. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I saw Him* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966) p. 84.

made remarkable progress at Mayavati. In the West, Swamis Turiyananda and Abhedananda were conducting Vedanta Centres in San Francisco and New York respectively. The progress made by the Sangha in the vertical and horizontal dimensions is a remarkable story of success.

The birth and growth of the Ramakrishna Sangha, pregnant with great possibilities, have drawn the attention of great thinkers all over the world. We may quote two typical views, one from the pen of a westerner and another from an Indian. The French savant Romain Rolland in his article 'The Ramakrishna Math and Mission' observed,

It (the Sangha) seeks to create a new human type wherein the highest powers, at present scattered and fragmentary, and the diverse and complementary energies of man shall be combined—the heights of intelligence towering above the clouds, the sacred wood of love, and the rivers of action....As it is possible in spite of difficulties to attain the ideal in the case of a single man, the Ramakrishna Mission⁵⁸ is trying to realize the same ideal in its Universal Church—the symbol of its Master—his Math, which represents the physical body of Ramakrishna.⁵⁹

In a similar strain the Indian philosopher Brajendranath Seal observed,

But we seek in religion a meeting ground of Humanity. What we want is not merely Universal Religion in its quintessence, as Rammohan sought it in his earlier days, not merely an eclectic religion by compounding the

distinctive essences, theoretical as well as practical, as Keshabchandra sought, but experience as a whole as it has unfolded itself in the history of man, and this can be realized by us, as Ramakrishna taught, by systematic practice of Religion by being a Hindu with the Hindu, a Moslem with the Moslem, a Christian with the Christian and a Universalist with the Universalist, and all this as a stepping stone to the Ultimate Realization of God-in-man and Man-in-God.⁶⁰

Behind all these ever-changing kaleidoscope of events, the great flame of divine Power, Sri Ramakrishna, was burning, and it found its reflection in the sensitive mind of the Holy Mother. On a full moon night, as she was sitting above the steps leading to the Ganga in Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house, she saw all on a sudden, Sri Ramakrishna climbing down the stairs and getting down into the Ganga when his whole body dissolved into its waters. There then appeared Narendra who took that water in his hands and started sprinkling it on innumerable people with the cry 'Glory unto Ramakrishna', and they became at once liberated. To her mind, this was symbolic of the wide dissemination in future of the spiritual power ushered in by the Master. This vision indicated to her the great redemptive role the Ramakrishna Sangha has to play in the future. It corroborated and supported the prophetic declaration that Swami Vivekananda made on the occasion of the consecration of Belur Math: 'The power that will have its rise from here will flood the whole world...' This prophecy is in the process of being fulfilled.

59. This is the popular name applied to the whole Sangha.

59. *Prabuddha Bharata*, December 1930, p. 604.

60. In *The Religions of the World*, (Calcutta. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1938) Vol. 1, p. 114.

MADAME CALVE'S VISIT TO BELUR MATH*

KUMUD BANDHU SEN

Madame Calve visited Calcutta in 1911. Upon her arrival, a local newspaper, *The Englishman*, printed her life story as well as an interview Calve had granted to a reporter. In it, Calve revealed the reasons that brought her to India. She said she had pictured India as a dream land, a true holy place, and she had come as a pilgrim to pay her homage to the land and to realize her cherished dream. When the reporter asked her why she had such love and adoration for India, Calve replied, 'I got it from Swami Vivekananda. When I listened to him speak about the glorious heritage of India, an intense desire arose in my mind to visit this blessed land. Today, by God's grace, my desire has been fulfilled.'

After reading the article on Calve in *The Englishman*, we held a meeting at our Vivekananda Society to discuss her visit. The Society was then situated at 1/4 Shankar Ghosh Lane, opposite the Metropolitan College—now called Vidyasagar College. Purna Chandra Ghosh, a beloved disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was then the Secretary of the Society. It was decided that we would meet Madame Calve at the Grand Hotel the next day between three and four p.m. We planned to tell her that we would be happy to arrange her visit to Dakshineswar and Belur Math, places hallowed by the memories of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Purna Babu suggested that, on behalf of the Society, we should offer Calve a present of small pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

On the next day, Purna Babu, Dr. Jnanendranath Kanjilal, Surendranath Sen, Sarat Chandra Mitra, Kalipada Banerjee and myself (Kumud Bandhu Sen) went to the second floor of the Grand Hotel,

announcing ourselves as representatives of the Vivekananda Society. We were asked inside a gorgeous waiting room. A European gentleman received us cordially and offered us chairs, saying, 'Madame is pleased to hear that you've come to see her. Please wait here a few minutes'. Shortly after, Madame Calve came out from her inner apartment with two gentlemen and smiled at us. We immediately got up and greeted her. She touched one finger to her lips and said, 'No English'. Then she said something to one gentleman in French which we didn't understand. He turned to us and said, 'Madame is sorry that she doesn't know English.¹ Since she can't express herself to you adequately, I shall act as her interpreter'.

Our representative, Purna Babu, began the conversation and presented the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to Calve. She smiled and accepted them. Then she touched Ramakrishna's picture to her head and placed it on the desk. Intently looking at Vivekananda's picture, she seemed overwhelmed, and pressed it to her heart. Her eyes and face expressed extreme delight, and with a voice choked with emotion, she

*From *Udbodhan*, Bhādra, 1335 B.S., pp. 482-493. Translated by Swami Chetanananda. For an interesting account of the first meeting of Madame Emma Calvé, the celebrated opera singer, with Swami Vivekananda, see *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Revised Fifth Edn., Vol 1, pp. 449-451.

1. This statement is not wholly correct. Although Calve was not fluent in English, she knew how to speak this language. She had had an interview with Swamiji in America in 1894 during which she must have communicated with him in English. Miss Katharine Whitmarsh, who personally knew Calve, also recalled Calve speaking English.

said in broken English, 'Oh! I'm very, very happy!' Calve then spoke in French, and we could tell by her expression that she was sorry not to be able to tell us how much joy she truly felt. Seeing Calve's intense feelings, the interpreter knew that even the best translation would be inadequate. He just said with humility, 'Madame is very much touched and feels overwhelmed. Her old memories of Swami Vivekananda have come back. Swamiji's picture has made her feel that he is alive.'

Calve continued to express her feelings in an outburst of French words. We all stood spellbound. Then again, she tried to speak in English, 'Swami Vivekananda was like Jesus Christ. He was simple, pure and all-loving—like Christ.' Again, she began to speak in French, and her interpreter translated: 'It was a glorious moment in my life when I first met Swami Vivekananda. He was pure like a five-year-old boy. Those who lived with him were able to imbibe his purity. He was the embodiment of divine power, a tremendous magnetic power. I have never before felt such attraction in my life. Many times I was so absorbed in listening to his talk that I missed my special train. I had to pay penalties a number of times because his enchanting holy association made me forget everything. Of course, I was delighted to pay these penalties. Oh, what a loving heart—what an unsullied purity—what a charming personality—what an inspiring message—what a childlike simplicity—what a majestic bearing—what large, beautiful eyes!' At that moment, even the interpreter's eyes became moist.

Purna Babu addressed Madame Calve through the interpreter, 'If you want to visit the Belur Monastery which was established by Swami Vivekananda, we would be happy to arrange it for you'. Calve asked, 'Where was Vivekananda's body cremated?' 'At Belur Math', answered Purna Babu. Calve wanted to visit Belur Math and asked to be

picked up on the next day at 2.30 p.m. Purna Babu pointed to me and said, 'He will come tomorrow and be your guide.'

We said good-bye to Madame Calve. The interpreter followed us into the hall and asked, 'How far is Belur Math? Can we go by taxi? How long will it take?' After Purna Babu answered all these questions to his satisfaction, we shook hands with him and left.

Dr. Kanjilal immediately rushed to the Udbodhan Office and informed Swami Saradananda of the good news. The Swami was delighted to hear about Calve's visit and sent a message to Belur Math at once. Another messenger was sent to the famous flutist Habu Babu, requesting him and his accompanists to come to Belur Math the next day.

The next afternoon punctually at 2.30 p.m. I arrived at the Grand Hotel. The interpreter received me cordially and took me to the waiting room. Madame Calve greeted me, bowing her head. A few Western ladies entered the room, and I was told that they had come from Chandanagar and were to accompany Madame Calve to Belur Math.

We hired two taxis, and I rode in the car occupied by Calve and two other ladies. They talked rapidly in French. Madame sat quiet and serene. When the taxi reached Belur Math, the Swamis and devotees all came to receive Calve. Swami Saradananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, was among them. He had been in America preaching Vedanta during Swami Vivekananda's time and had met Calve before. 'Madame, do you recognize me?' he asked. Both started to converse with the help of the interpreter and walked toward the monastery. All others followed them.

Calve first wanted to see the place where Swami Vivekananda passed away. Swami Saradananda took her to Swamiji's room

and pointed to the place. Calve entered the room with deep respect. Her companions came out after a while but she stayed on. Glancing into the room, we observed her kneeling before Swamiji's picture. All were silent, and the atmosphere was serene. The Ganga was flowing by with a murmuring sound. Fifteen minutes passed and Calve was still kneeling in the same position. Tears rolled down her cheeks, and we felt privileged to witness the moment.

When Calve slowly came out of Swamiji's room, Swami Saradananda led her and her friends to the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna. The other devotees and visitors followed in procession. There also, Calve knelt down and paid homage to the Master. She asked Swami Saradananda, 'Do you know a Vedic prayer Swamiji used to repeat—"Lead us from darkness to light?" If you know it, please repeat it for me. I would love to hear that prayer.' Swami Saradananda immediately began to chant in his melodious voice :

*Asato mā Sad-gamaya,
Tamaso mā Jyotirgamaya,
Mṛtyormā Amṛtam gamaya².*

Hearing this Vedic hymn, we were transported into a mood of meditation. Swami Saradananda turned toward Calve and asked, 'Madame, will you not sing a song to Sri Ramakrishna?' She smiled and agreed. Calve sang in French. We didn't understand the meaning of her song, but it didn't matter. Her sweet voice sounded like a choir of a thousand skylarks. It vibrated the atmosphere of the monastery and created a current of joy in the minds of the audience. She sang two songs.

After we left the shrine, a reception was held for Madame in the courtyard. While

devotees and visitors sat on chairs around tables, Habu Babu and his musical party occupied a carpet. Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and other senior monks sat on the western veranda of the monastery building. Swami Saradananda introduced Madame Calve, and she shook hands with Swami Brahmananda. Then Swami Saradananda asked Calve and her friends to sit down, and he offered sweets and fruits to them as prasad which they accepted graciously. While refreshments were being served, Habu Babu played an enchanting melody. His flute concert interested and impressed Calve so much that she asked him to play an Indian musical scale. Habu Babu was delighted.

When Calve bade farewell to the Swamis, she noticed Mahendra Nath Datta and asked Swami Saradananda; 'Who is he? I notice some similarities between him and Swamiji.' Swami Saradananda replied, 'He is Swamiji's younger brother.' Mahendra Nath was introduced to Calve, and she asked him, 'Were you in Constantinople when I was there with Swamiji?' 'No', replied Mahendra Nath. 'Unfortunately, I had left before you arrived.' Calve asked him to meet her the next day between 3 and 4 p.m.

We returned to the Grand Hotel by taxi in the evening. When I said good-night, Madame Calve said, 'Please come tomorrow between 3 and 4 p.m. with Swamiji's brother. I shall give a musical performance.'

I went with Mahendra Babu to the Grand Hotel on the next day. The interpreter received us and informed us with remorse that Madame was sick. While returning from the monastery, she had caught a cold, and a physician had to be called. Madame's illness made her cancel the musical performance, and she had requested that all money should be returned. 'We are leaving Calcutta tonight', said the interpreter.

2. Lead us from the unreal to the real,
Lead us from darkness to light,
Lead us from death to immortality.

Mahim Babu replied, 'We are sorry to hear that Madame is not well. We shall go now.' The interpreter hesitated. 'Please wait for a minute', he said. 'The news of your arrival has been sent to Madame. Please don't go before you've heard from her.' A French lady entered the room and relayed a message to the interpreter. He looked at us and said, 'Madame is in bed and is sorry that she couldn't come to greet you. Please meet her in the bedroom.'

As we entered Calve's bedroom, she was lying on her bed. We shyly greeted her. She said to Mahim Babu in broken English, 'I'm pleased to see you. I caught a cold while returning from the monastery and will have to leave Calcutta tonight.' While she was reclining against a pillow, I noticed the pictures of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna we had given her. They were by the side of the pillow on the bed. I was surprised that she kept these pictures with her even when she was sick in bed. What a deep love this famous foreign singer had for Swamiji! Seeing me stare at the pictures, Madame smiled and held them to her heart. She said, 'What a nice

time I had at Belur Math! What joy! Yesterday was a memorable day in my life, a day I shall never forget.'

I could not help but say, 'Madame, if you had left a little earlier, perhaps you wouldn't have become ill.' Calve replied, 'I'm not sorry about this cold at all. I saw the place where Swamiji merged into mahāsamādhi. What a holy, peaceful place!' She then reached under her pillow, took out a closed envelope and gave it to Mahim Babu. 'This is for the Swamis', she said. 'Please give it to the monastery.' Mahim Babu immediately handed it to me and said, 'Please, give this envelope to Swami Saradananda.' We said good-bye to Calve. 'I'm extremely happy', she said. 'What more shall I tell about Swamiji? A person can build a new life meditating on Swamiji, on his message. What an unbounded love he had for the fallen, the weak, the poor, the downtrodden, and the sufferers of the world! What a compassionate heart! Like Christ, he is a saviour of mankind. He is a founder of a new era.'

We paid our respects and left.

THE RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA MOVEMENT

DR. V.K.R.V. RAO

Foundation in Vedanta

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda have spread far beyond the confines of the Ramakrishna Mission, have made an impact on the development of many intellectual disciplines and pursuits, have inspired many people in different parts of the world, changing their ways of life in the process, and constitute a significant part of a global influence for spiritualizing human activity. In other

words, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda message has become a world-wide Movement.

The underlying truth behind this movement is the Vedanta. With their highly developed intuitive faculties stretching beyond intellect and reasoning the ancient Indian sages and saints saw, in supersensuous vision, the one Universal Consciousness that underlay all phenomena and manifesting itself as the Self in all human beings. They called this Consciousness Brahman or God,

felt its reality, and sensed its presence as the latent divinity in all human beings. Development of this consciousness became their most important objective; and when they succeeded in it, they found themselves and their individual identities merging into the one universal identity, which brought within it an ineffable bliss and peace beyond all human experience and description. Having seen God, they proclaimed their finding in ringing tones, calling upon human beings to make God realization their life's quest. They did not, however, spell out the practical implications of this One Universal Reality and the absorption of individual human identities into that one Reality for men living in society. Instead, they retreated from society to caves, forests and mountains, to live in solitude and meditation, developing their supersensuous perception. But the truth they proclaimed of unity in diversity, divinity in man, and God as the one supreme consciousness in both man and Nature and the only Reality, became the Vedanta, the religio-philosophic base of the Hindu religion.

There is no doubt that during the early years of the history of this country Vedanta made possible the emergence of a single religion known as Hinduism, absorbing within its fold all the pre-existing religions, leaving intact their individual gods and their individual legends, myths and methods of worship, but unifying them under one God and one universal Reality. The truths of Vedanta led to the development of the human personality and the creation of a great and rich culture and civilization. With the passage of time, however, the Vedantic truths went into the background, and legends, myths and rituals became the dominating factor; and the diversities that had enriched the unity brought about by Vedanta tended to lose their unity and to get ossified in their separate sectoral identities. Hindus became fragmented,

divided and ceased to be one Society, without fraternity or equality or compassionate concern for one another binding its members.

The theoretical affirmation of the one God in whom all Hindus believe has not also led to the equal treatment of all Hindus, even in matters of worship or access to spiritual knowledge. And Hinduism in practice has had to carry the burden of Brāhminical exclusiveness, differentiation on the basis of hereditary castes, and the dreadful scourge of untouchability. Theory and practice had certainly not gone together among the practitioners of the Hindu religion; and is largely failing to do so even today. Apart from the multiplicity of gods, rituals, legends, and methods of worship, Hinduism has also suffered even in its theoretical foundations because of metaphysical differences on the nature of God—whether He is personal or impersonal, *saguna* or *nirguna*—on the nature of the individual soul, and on the nature of the relationship between the soul and God. Even though these differences have had no visible impact on the practice of Hindu religion, the difference in the nature and conception of the one God does make for intellectual confusion and is promotive of scepticism, especially among the young and those who want reason and intellectual conviction to accompany faith in God. Thus India, itself the home of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Gita, lost its sensibility to enjoy the benefits of their teachings even in spiritual matters, let alone their application to social and economic life.

Nor did Vedantic ideals influence the basic perspectives of other practising religions that either emerged in India or came from outside. Although Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, it coexists with several other religions such as Islam, Christianity and Sikhism with their followers numbering millions. And

these religions are functioning as exclusive groups each of which believing that its religion is the only true way to reach God and that the others are outside the pale of divine dispensation. Such a creedal approach makes for separatist human groupings that live without any real harmony, and just coexist largely because of social, economic and political compulsions. This disharmony and exclusiveness is not only true of India but also of other parts of the world where different religions coexist among their peoples.

The place of Sri Ramakrishna

Both the world and India, especially India, badly needed a revival of Vedantic truths and ideas. They also badly needed a revival of real religion and belief in the one God, in view of the waning belief in God and religion brought about by the extension of secular education, reasoning and intellectualism, and the conquests made by science and technology. It was at this stage that Sri Ramakrishna took his birth in India on 18 February 1836 for the restoration of the pristine purity of Vedanta and the unfolding of its implication in actual life and human behaviour not only in his own country but in the rest of the world as well. He did not bring his Vedantic message merely on the basis of scriptural authority or past revelations of prophets and sages. He realized the great truths of Vedanta in his own personal life and experience, and was able to demonstrate that he had done so in a recognizable form. And he lived in this world as a human being among fellow human beings not long ago but in the nineteenth century. How he lived, what he did, and what he spoke are a matter of recorded history in the faithful and, almost day-to-day diary that Mahendra Nath Gupta kept, from a Sunday in March 1882 when he first met Sri Ramakrishna to the Sunday in August 1886 when the

Master left this world of mortals. And it has been published in its English version as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This authentic record of seen human spirituality is one of the main sources of inspiration for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement.

As Vivekananda has pointed out, 'Sri Ramakrishna had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence of India'. He experimented with all the traditional religious elements, experienced their reality, and discovered for himself the unity that underlay their diversity and the harmony they found in the supreme consciousness of universal and individual Reality. He could tell people that he had seen God, as tangibly as he saw human beings or the material world; and he lived in an almost continuous state of God consciousness, from which he returned from time to time to convey his spiritual message of unity in diversity. And this message he conveyed in simple and homely language, with parables and illustrations, but with the authority born of actually experiencing and realizing these spiritual truths. He could say to his disciples :

I have practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and I have also followed the path of the different Hindu sects...I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. Wherever I look I see men quarrelling in the name of religion—Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmins, Vaishnavas, and the rest. But they never reflect that He, who is called Krishna, is called Siva, and bears the name of Primordial Energy, Jesus, and Allah, as well—the same Rama with a thousand names.

Thus he sought no converts to his own traditional religion, but gave equal respect to all religions, and hailed them all as but different paths leading to the same goal. All that he insisted on was sincerity in the quest for God, refashioning one's life and acquiring control over the baser aspects of

one's own nature, persistence in the effort, and understanding the true nature of God as love and compassion for all human beings. From his own personal experience, he could affirm that God is within and without, personal and impersonal, with form and without form, with attributes and without attributes, and is the only Reality which embraces all other aspects of observed reality. He could thus also resolve the differences between the different schools of Vedanta by his own realization of God in the image he worshipped at Dakshineswar as the Divine Mother, and of God as the featureless Brahman in his *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He asserted, 'The Divine Mother and Brahman are one'. As Swami Nikhilananda points out :

He (Sri Ramakrishna) gently oscillated back and forth across the dividing line between the Absolute and the Relative. Ecstatic devotion to the Divine Mother alternated with severe absorption in the Ocean of Absolute Unity. He thus bridged the gulf between the Personal and the Impersonal, immanent and transcendental aspects of Reality

Thus, with the authority given by his realization, understanding, and experience, he broke the barriers between the personal and impersonal aspects of God. It is this which lies behind the claim of Vedanta to be treated as the Mother Church not only of all sects in the Hindu religion but also of all non-Hindu religions most of which are based on the concept of a Personal God or His Prophet. Besides preaching the harmony of all religions, Sri Ramakrishna also taught and showed through his own life that aspirants for spiritual development have to cultivate purity, freedom from lust and greed, tolerance, compassion, fraternity and make them a part of their way of life

The work of Swami Vivekananda

While Sri Ramakrishna was the fountain-head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

movement, Swami Vivekananda acted as the main channel for the flow of the water of life for the welfare of mankind. He popularized the ideas and lessons he had learnt from the Master and made their influence into a national and world-wide movement. With his Master's help and his own efforts, Vivekananda had himself realized God consciousness both in the Impersonal and Personal aspects. He had learnt from these experiences that different religions were but different paths to the same goal and that the relation between them should be one of harmony and mutual respect and not of rivalry or conflict. He had also become conscious of the presence of divinity in every human being and therefore considered the service of man as the worship of God. He had also realized the need for making deliberate efforts to make human beings conscious of their inherent divinity and make them go all out to develop this potential so that ultimately they would realize God and merge their individual identities with Him. And he made it his life's mission to do so.

It was not only his discipleship under Sri Ramakrishna that made him a great missionary and builder of human welfare, or an awakener of spirituality in individuals. Though a great intellectual, philosopher and metaphysician himself, his strongest point was the largeness of his heart and its sensitivity to human suffering. As a wandering monk who, after the passing away of his Master, had travelled the length and breadth of his country, he had come into personal contact with the poverty, misery, ignorance, illiteracy, superstition and fatalistic helplessness in which the masses of his countrymen were living, in spite of the fact that they were living in a country which was the home of the Vedanta. As he told one of his brother-monks Swami Turiyananda about what he had learnt of religion during the course of his wanderings :

'Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded very much and I have learned to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed'. He said of himself later, he was only outwardly a Jñāni but inwardly he was really a Bhakta. Love for his fellow human beings overflowed his heart and he could not accept the dichotomy that he saw between the sublime teachings of the Vedānta and the miserable condition of his fellow countrymen. He was no longer bound by the ineffable bliss of the *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* which he had begged of his Master. The monk's traditional desire for getting away from the maddening crowd and seeking personal salvation left him. Search for Mokṣa did not mean abandonment of fellow-men, nor was it a personal quest divorced from society. No wonder that he wrote to an American friend in 1897 in words, that sent an electric shock through me when I first read them : 'May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls ; and above all, my God the poor of all races and species, is the special object of my worship'. He wanted a Practical Vedānta that would descend from its transcendental heights and help in the material and spiritual development of the masses of the people.

The pure Vedānta realized by Sri Ramakrishna and the Practical Vedānta preached by Swami Vivekananda constitute the basic forces of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. Practical Vedānta and the preaching of and working for its implication should be the main aim of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. The major implications of Practical Vedānta are the following :

1. Positive secularism
2. Development of spirituality or the potential of divinity present in the

human being.

3. Work ethic as an approach to God realization.
4. Education as a means for the integrated development of man.
5. Service of Man as worship of God.

Positive secularism

'Positive secularism' does not mean denial of religion. On the contrary, it means the acceptance of all religions as different methods of reaching God or obtaining God-consciousness, and promoting not just co-existence but mutual respect and harmony among them, irrespective of differences in their beliefs and methods of worship. Asserting that the Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but so many pages in the unending book of man's spiritual history and development, Swami Vivekananda proclaimed :

I believe in acceptance. I accept all the religions that were in the past and worship them all. I worship God in every one of them in whatever form they worship Him. Not only shall I do all these things, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future—I take in all that have been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of my heart to all that may come in the future.

After all, every religion preaches the supremacy of the one God either as goal or consciousness ; they all advocate the development of spirituality ; and the basic values they proclaim are all the same—love, compassion, fraternity, unselfishness, purity, and service. The differences that they have are superficial ; the identities they possess are real. This is the connotation of 'positive secularism'.

It should be a part of the task of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement not only to preach positive secularism but also devise practical ways and means for making it a part of social reality.

The human divinity potential

This is an essential part of the Practical Vedanta expounded by Vivekananda. He believed that every individual has in him the potential for not only material but also spiritual development and need not feel helpless. The religion he preached was meant to stimulate self-confidence, self-reliance and self-effort. The latent divinity in man can be realized by the cultivation of spirituality. But spirituality comes not by just wishing for it or seeking it as a gift, but by working for it. And it comes from self-effort, avoidance of the lure of sense-objects, not spending one's life in trying to keep up with the Joneses, control over selfish desires, sensitiveness to the sufferings of others, willingness to share what one has with others in need, and working not only for oneself but also for others which means working for their own higher selves. Unselfishness emerges from the recognition of the divinity inherent in all human beings. Vivekananda told Sister Nivedita : 'My ideal of life can be put in a few words and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every moment of life'. This means, as Sister Nivedita pointed out, the abolition of the distinction between the sacred and the secular. Sri Ramakrishna did not prescribe for every one the hard path of total renunciation. He told people that they could live in this world as householders and perform their worldly duties for the satisfaction of material needs; but while doing this with one hand, they should hold God with the other, thus integrating the secular with the spiritual in daily activity.

Recognition of the presence of God within should help the individual to act more vigorously on his higher impulses, while recognition of the divinity in others could promote respect for their dignity and for an egalitarian outlook. Vedanta, if

taken as a practical influence on one's life, can make for a better social order by providing a spiritual motivation for individuals instead of solely relying on institutional and legislative channels to do so.

Practical Vedanta should also draw attention to the different disciplines or Yogas prescribed in ancient Indian scriptures for the cultivation of spirituality and its culmination in God realization. These different methods of self-control were actually introduced by Vivekananda for the first time to western audiences. Now of course the practice of Yoga has become popular both in the West and in our own country, but more stress should be laid on its use as an instrument for the cultivation of spirituality rather than merely for bettering one's health or even intellectual ability. It should be a part of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement not only to encourage the practice of Yoga, but also to emphasize its original purpose of helping in the development of the individual's potential of divinity. Yoga training should be treated as a part of the training for acquiring spirituality.

Work ethic

Most of us cannot avoid living in society. Nor can we refrain from spending the bulk of our time in some kind of work or activity. Karma yoga wants to use work as an instrument for the development of spirituality. I know that most of us are motivated by monetary considerations and attachment to results. Attachment to results is both common and natural, and is used by the economic system for functioning with efficiency by the rewards and punishments—the carrot and the stick—that attend the performance of work. But even the most selfish of us do not work from purely selfish motives or exclusively for material

rewards. The attitude to work is also influenced, at least in part, by such non-monetary factors as pride in the quality of one's work or its impact on social betterment or its ethical fall-out or the relation between means and ends in one's work performance. Quite often, work itself constitutes its own reward. Thus the foundation is already there in human nature for giving an ethical orientation to one's work. In fact, I suppose it is a part of the divinity inherent in man asserted by Vedanta.

Work ethic can become real Karma yoga. As Swami Vivekananda has said :

Karma Yoga is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good work. The Karmayogi need not believe in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realizing selflessness; and he has to work it out himself. Every moment of his life must be realization, because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory, the very same problem to which the Jñāni applied his reason and inspiration and the Bhakta his love.

The Vedantic work ethic has been spelt out by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the Gita where Karma Yoga is identified with skill in work or work as perfection, non-attachment to results or work as peace, and surrendering the results of one's work to God or work as worship and fulfilment. It is the knowledge and practice of this work ethic that makes for the development of spirituality; and it is Karma Yoga.

Practical Vedanta stresses the importance of Karma Yoga as the work ethic for the modern world, which should not only make for the development of spirituality but also for the maximization of work efficiency. In this mundane and materialistic world where men have to live in society, work for most of the time and face the lure of the unethical and selfish living that surround them, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement should

pay particular attention to the propagation of the work ethic as a way of Karma Yoga and a path to God realization. As Swami Vivekananda told Sister Nivedita : 'Salvation is nothing in itself; it is only a motive. All these things are nothing except as motives. It is the man they form that is everything'.

Education

This takes me on to role of education in Practical Vedanta. Vivekananda was a great believer in education as the primary means for human betterment. He was himself a great teacher; and he had been the pupil of a great Master in spiritual education. He had seen during his visits abroad and his long stay in the West how scientific and technological education could act as a powerful instrument for material development. He also knew hunger and involuntary poverty were no soil for spiritual growth, and that a reasonable measure of material resources was a necessary condition for men to heed the call for spiritual development. He knew at the same time that education aimed solely at material development would fail as a means for freedom from internal fears or the building of character or the curbing of selfishness or the nurturing of an ideal of service. He was therefore for a proper blend of the secular and the spiritual in education that would enable people to develop integrated personalities. He wanted a man-making, character-building and intelligence-using education that would lead to a control of both external and internal forces and result in both material progress and spiritual awakening. He wanted an educational system that would dispel the superstition and obscurantism that stalked his land, favour the application of science to industry and agriculture for increasing production and removing mass poverty, do away with the darkness induced by ignorance and

illiteracy, and develop a healthy feeling of national pride, self-confidence, and self-reliance. He wanted education to become an instrument for the implementation of Practical Vedanta, to make the youth feel that God is in man, awaken their latent power, rouse their social conscience, make them aware of the poverty and misery of the bulk of their country-men and stimulate them into taking up appropriate activities for the service of the masses. He wanted his people to have an education that would enable them to stand on their own feet, functioning as free men and women, proud of their past, sure of their future, with integrated personalities, and devoting themselves to work for their own material and spiritual uplift and the service of the nation.

A major part of the work of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement lies in the efforts it can make to reorient the Indian system of education on the lines indicated by Vivekananda. This it can do largely by influencing our educational policy makers and the parents whose children are the clientele of the system, and also by starting educational institutions and hostels and by organizing courses of instruction and extra-curricular activities outside school hours or on Sundays. Particularly important for progressive educational activities is the area of children, especially of pre-primary-school-going children. The Ramakrishna Mission has been doing some good work in this direction all over the country, but much more is needed; and this can be done only by the lay devotees who could make this and other welfare activities a part of the Movement.

Service as worship

Knowing that poverty, misery and ignorance were no suitable soil for spiritual development, Vivekananda coined the phrase 'Daridra Narayan' to designate the poor masses, and advanced his conclusion that

the service of the Daridra Narayan was no more or no less than the worship of God, who was latent as Narayana in all human beings. In a letter he wrote in 1894, he decried the confining of religion to books, dogmas and philosophy and declared :

I cannot believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. Where should you go to seek God—are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak Gods? Why not worship them first? I believe in God and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe in going to hell to serve others.

In his hands, religion went a long way from the worship of God by rituals and austerities to the worship of God through the service of fellow-men. He was not doing this merely on the basis of compassion or human sympathy, although it did have its influence, but on the basis of the Vedantic truth that both his Master and he had actually realized, that there is only one Reality which is God and that God is latent in all human beings. If spirituality was to be developed in man, then obstacles in the way such as poverty, ignorance, superstition and helplessness had to be removed, and removing them became a path to God realization both to oneself and to other human beings. Thus he gave a firm Vedantic foundation to the service of man and converted it into worship of God.

Conclusions

Swami Vivekananda gave a socially and spiritually richer connotation to the Hindu religion and in fact to all religions. The Practical Vedanta that he preached has given India, and indeed to the whole world, a new perspective of the goal of life and ways of achieving it, making religion and life interchangeable terms. There is no doubt that some aspects of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda teachings have had consider-

able influence on Indian thinking and action, especially after the attainment of independence. But this has been mainly at the governmental level in the action taken for economic development, encouragement to science and technology, spread of education, and programmes for the alleviation of poverty. But there has been no popular participation or a reorientation of the people's thinking or feelings in the direction of Practical Vedanta. Even what little has been done in economic or social development has been based on political compulsions and electoral considerations rather than on a popular urge for the cultivation of spirituality or an ethically regulated and value-oriented way of life. We have not succeeded in getting the new life for our people that we had dreamed of as the dividends of independence. Poverty, illiteracy and ignorance continue to exist in massive dimensions and, with it, superstitions and violations of human dignity. We find in our country not only an unequal and exploitative society with consumerist life-styles of the affluent and conspicuously miserable standards of living on the part of the masses, but also communal conflicts, social disharmony, erosion in national unity and emotional integration, a fall in moral standards, and neglect of the basic values of religion. The Practical Vedanta that could have given our people a spiritually richer new life has been missing in our political, social and economic development. There can be no hope of bringing in the new India of our dreams unless the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda influence permeates the people at large, both the upper classes and the masses, bringing about the needed change in their intellectual and emotional make-up and their patterns of life and behaviour. The influence has to become a movement. This cannot be done by the monks and life members of the Ramakrishna Mission alone. The Ramakrishna-

Vivekananda influence can become a movement only through the efforts of the lay devotees and believers in their teachings. The time seems to be ripe in India for the building up of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement on a vast scale

It is good that for the first time in our post-independence history, the role of Swami Vivekananda in national regeneration has been officially recognized by the declaration of his birthday as the National Youth Day. I hope this will be followed up by the setting up of a Vivekananda University which will pay special attention to research and training in his teachings and his Practical Vedanta. I also hope that appropriate selections from his writings and speeches and a condensed biography will become a part of the reading material for all school students and made available in different Indian languages. Every college should have in its library a complete set of his works and his biography by his eastern and western disciples, and offer optional courses in Practical Vedanta. Practical Vedanta should also become a part of the syllabus in the training of both primary and secondary school teachers so that they will become imbued with Vivekananda's ideas and impart its influence to their pupils. Attempts should be made to hold internal seminars in schools and colleges on Vivekananda's teachings and organize voluntary groups of students who would undertake some practical work in implementation of his programmes. These groups can call themselves by whatever name they like, although many of them may like to bring in the name of Vivekananda, as he accepted all religions, saw unity in diversity, and was above all things that make for divisiveness and conflicts in human society. Groups could be formed not only of students but also of youths teachers, householders, and housewives, professional men and women, industrial and rural

workers and persons in other walks of life ; and they could get together to learn about Practical Vedanta and undertake any social work of their choice for the implementation of what it teaches.

Any work that takes one above oneself, any non-self-centred or unselfish work, is social work ; and its contents could vary with individuals and groups, the special problems that rouse their emotional fervour, and the circumstances that would facilitate

or circumscribe their activity. What is needed is a basic understanding of Practical Vedanta and the spiritual motivation behind social work. Only then can the Rama-krishna-Vivekananda influence grow into a mass movement. Such a movement will make India not only a better place to live in and enable her people to have a better life of peace and harmony, but also make India lead the world in the promotion of spirituality and give a spiritual orientation to all human life and activity.

24 DECEMBER 1886

SWAMI ANANYANANDA

Exactly a century has elapsed since 24 December 1886, a red-letter day in the history of the Ramakrishna Order. On that day it was that the monastic order bearing the hallowed name of Sri Ramakrishna was ushered into existence by some of the young disciples of the Master *formally* at Antpur. *Formally*, because in the beginning of the same year, Sri Ramakrishna himself, while staying in the Cossipore garden-house for the treatment of the cancer of his throat, had *informally* banded together his young disciples under the leadership of Narendra Nath (later, Swami Vivekananda), and given ochre cloth to them.

The story of the founding of the Ramakrishna Order commences at Cossipore, continues through Baranagore, and culminates at Antpur. The beginning at Cossipore came about like this :

In January 1886 Gopal Senior (later, Swami Advaitananda), who had returned from a pilgrimage, wanted to present ochre cloth and rosaries of *rudrākṣa* beads to some monks passing through Calcutta. But the Master said, pointing to Narendra and others, 'Here are boys full of renunciation. You won't find better

monks anywhere. Distribute the cloth and rosaries to them'. Gopal had twelve pieces of cloth and as many rosaries, which he handed over to the Master. One evening the Master called the boys, the future apostles of the Ramakrishna Order, put them through a certain ceremony, gave the pieces of cloth and rosaries to them, and declared that thereafter they could take food from all, irrespective of caste and creed. The fortunate ones that day were Narendra, Rakhal, Jogindra, Baburam, Nirajan, Tarak, Sharat, Shashi, Gopal Senior, Kali and Latu. The twelfth piece was reserved for Girish Chandra Ghosh.¹

A few more notable events that took place in the Cossipore garden-house during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna serve as pointers to the date given as the caption of this article. These episodes also indicate how the Master prepared Narendra to become the leader of his young apostles and converted the group into a well-knit brotherhood. The Master's approximately

1. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) Third Edn. pp. 28-29.

eight months' stay at the Cossipore garden-house, from 11 December 1885 to 16 August 1886, is full of spiritual import to humanity at large. That period constituted the last chapter of his earthly existence when, with redoubled energy, he set himself to complete the work that he had commenced long ago at Dakshineswar. Here he gave the greatest manifestation of his powers, and the devotees saw the fulfilment of his prophecies regarding his own end: 'I shall make the whole thing public before I go'; 'When people in large numbers will know and whisper about (the greatness of) this body, then the Mother will take it back'; 'Devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles towards the end'; and so on². His predictions as to the renunciation of Narendra Nath and other young disciples were verified later, as we shall see. The closing scene was full of pathos and sublimity. His pure love and benediction flowed unrestrained towards those chosen by him. His one concern for the spiritual welfare of the devotees, individually as well as collectively, increased tremendously. His frail frame, afflicted with the fell disease, became weaker day by day.

Three weeks after the Master was shifted to the Cossipore garden-house came the first of January 1886—now celebrated as the 'Kalpataru Day'. On that New Year's Day, Sri Ramakrishna felt much better and wanted to take a walk in the garden on the open ground below. It was about three in the afternoon. Being a holiday, many of his lay disciples had come and gathered in the house. When the Master came down from the first floor of the house, where he had been laid up, and was proceeding towards the gate, he noticed Girish Chandra Ghosh and others sitting and chatting under

a tree. Suddenly, he turned towards Girish and said:

'Well, Girish, what have you found in me that you proclaim me before all as an Incarnation?' Girish, not at all taken aback by the question, knelt before him with folded hands and said in a voice shaken with emotion, 'What can an insignificant creature like me say about One whose glory even sages like Vyāsa and Vālmīki could not measure?' Hearing these words, Sri Ramakrishna was deeply moved and said, 'What more shall I say? I bless you all! Be illumined!'³

Hearing these words, the assembled household devotees knelt before the Master one by one and received his benediction which immediately brought about profound spiritual changes in them.

Soon after this event, Narendra, burning with a tremendous hankering for God-realization, approached the Master and requested him, 'Everyone has been blessed with realization. Let me, too, have something. When all of them have got it, shall I alone be left without it?' To this request, the Master's response was: 'Just make some arrangement for your family, and you shall get all.' 'What do you want?', the Master asked Narendra, and his reply was: 'I wish to remain immersed in *samādhi* for three or four days at a stretch, breaking it only for food.' The Master was amused and told Narendra: 'You are a fool. There is a higher state than that even. Don't you sing—whatever is, is Thyself? Come here after making some provision for your family, and you shall get a higher state than even *samādhi*.'⁴

Another day the Master wrote on a piece of paper, 'Narendra will teach others'. Narendra hesitated and said, 'I won't do that'. But the Master replied, 'You shall

2. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977) p. 438.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 444-446.

have to do it'.⁵ On another occasion, he expressly commissioned Narendra to be the leader of his young disciples, saying, 'I leave them to your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises and do not return home'.⁶ The young men were being silently trained by the Master to lead a monastic life of total renunciation and complete dependence on God. He even asked them one day to go and beg their food in the streets, after he had given them the ochre cloth. The proposal was hailed with delight by the youngsters, and they went out with begging-bowls. The raw food articles received by begging were cooked by them. A portion of it was offered to the Master who partook of it and said, 'Well done. This food is very pure'.⁷

Śivarātri, the sacred night of Śiva, when one fasts and keeps vigil, arrived in due course. The young group of disciples led by Narendra kept vigil and spent the night in chanting and meditation. Narendra's austerities and the purity of his soul were opening up new sources of spiritual power in him, and he felt a desire to test that power. That night he asked Kali (later, Swami Abhedananda) to touch him, and became absorbed in meditation. The touch had the effect of throwing Kali also into a deep meditation. The Master somehow came to know of it and admonished Narendra 'for frittering away his powers before they were accumulated, as well as for his imposing his ideas on another'.⁸ Narendra learned a valuable lesson which he needed for his future work as the awakener of souls in the East and the West.

During this period Naren, Tarak (later,

Swami Shivananda), and Kali went to Buddha Gaya, fired by the spirit of renunciation of Buddha and to taste the nectar of 'Awakening' the Blessed One had attained there under the Bodhi tree nearly 2,400 years back! Their conspicuous absence was quickly noticed by the others and promptly reported to the Master, who calmly and coolly assured them that Narendra and others, 'convinced of the futility of searching here and there for religion',⁹ would return soon. True to his words of assurance, the three young men came back to the Master after a couple of days. The event shows that the monastic spirit had already struck roots in the minds of the young disciples.

Narendra's aspiration to have the highest experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* was fulfilled quite unexpectedly at Cossipore. One evening, as he was meditating in one of the rooms of the house, he felt at first

as if a light had been placed behind his head. Then he passed beyond all relativity and was lost in the Absolute. He had attained *nirvikalpa-samādhi*! When he regained a little consciousness of the world, he found only his head, but not his body. He cried out, 'Ah, where is my body?' Hearing his voice, Gopal Senior came into the room. Naren repeated the query. 'Here it is, Naren', answered Gopal. When that failed to convince Narendra, Gopal was terrified and hastened to inform the Master. The latter only said, 'Let him stay in that state for a while! He has teased me long enough for it!' When Narendra returned to normal consciousness after some time, an ineffable peace possessing his soul, he came to the Master. Seeing him, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Now the Mother has shown you all. But this realization of yours shall be locked up for the present, and the key will remain with me. When you will have finished doing Mother's work, this treasure will again be yours.'¹⁰

The event and the Master's statement are significant, inasmuch as they indicated what

5. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama 1979) Revised Edition, Vol. 1, p. 182.

6. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 446.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 447.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 450.

10. *Ibid.*

later on became the basic approach of the Ramakrishna Order—the blending of contemplative and active life.

In spite of the best medical care bestowed on him by eminent physicians, and despite the devoted care of his householder devotees and the personal service of his young disciples, Sri Ramakrishna's physical health deteriorated. His last days were fast approaching. Only a few days before he entered *mahāsamādhi*, the ailing Master called Narendra to his bedside. No one else was present in the room at that time. He made Narendra sit before him and, gazing at him, fell into *samādhi*. Narendra Nath felt a subtle force like an electric shock penetrating his body. Gradually he, too, lost outward consciousness. He did not remember how long he sat there. When he came to normal consciousness, he found Sri Ramakrishna weeping. On being asked why he wept, the Master said, 'Today, I have given you my all and have become a Fakir! Through this power, you will do immense good to the world, and then only shall you go back'.¹¹ It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna passed on his powers to Narendra. Thenceforth Ramakrishna and Narendra, the Master and the disciple, became, as it were, one spiritual entity.

Rakhal, Sarat, Shashi, Jogin, Niranjana, Baburam, Latu, and other young men, as well as Gopal Senior (so called because he was older than the Master himself) were similarly prepared and trained by the Master for leading a monastic life dedicated to God, which fully blossomed after his *mahāsamādhi* in August 1886.

The inevitable day arrived at last. Sri Ramakrishna entered *mahāsamādhi* on 16 August 1886 at 2 minutes past 1 a.m. One can only imagine the immense void created in the hearts of the Master's devotees and disciples, but that was no time for despair. There was work to be attended to. His

mortal remains were consigned to the holy fire on the bank of the Ganga, at the Cossipore burning ghat that very evening. A calm resignation descended over the minds of the devotees, as they left the cremation ground. They collected the sacred relics of the Master's body in an urn, and returned to the Cossipore garden-house. With heavy hearts the householder disciples wended their way to their respective homes. But the young disciples, who had left their homes and studies to come and serve the Master in his last days, had no place to go. They wanted a place where they could enshrine his sacred relics, worship them daily, and live a life of devotion and renunciation, meditation and spirituality.

Our story now moves on to the Baranagore Math, the First Home of the Ramakrishna Order. How this Home came into being is indeed moving. Surendranath Mitra, a devotee of the Master who used to bear a part of the expenses at the Cossipore garden-house, one day saw Sri Ramakrishna appear before him during meditation in his shrine. Addressing him, the Master said: 'Oh! What are you doing? My children are wandering in the streets. Look at their sad plight! Make some arrangement for them without delay'.¹² At once Surendranath Mitra rushed out in search of the young men and told them: 'Brothers, where will you go? Let us hire a house where you will live together, and where we householders shall find a temporary refuge from our worldly cares. I used to contribute a trifle towards the expenses of the Cossipore garden. I shall gladly continue that bit of help, and you can at least have a roof over your heads and lead a simple life'.¹³ The offer was accepted by the brother-monks. After an energetic search, a 'haunted house' which was cheap and close to the Cossipore

¹¹. Ibid., p. 455.

¹². *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, p. 193.

¹³. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 458.

burning ghat could be rented at Baranagore.

Another spiritual personality, with a maternal heart and concern, was invisibly working from behind the scenes to knit the Brotherhood into a loving fraternity. It was Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna. She provided spiritual support to the Brotherhood from its very inception and nourished it for more than three decades after the Master's physical disappearance. She was looked up to for guidance and help by the disciples of the Master, monastic and lay. All of them respected and revered her as 'next' only to the Master. Coming to know of the hardship of these young renunciants, the Holy Mother prayed to the Master in 1890, when she visited Buddha Gaya and saw the creature comforts provided to the monks at the monastery there, thus :

O Lord, you came in human form sported with the devotees, and went away! Should everything end with that? What then was the need to come and undergo so much suffering? I saw in Varanasi and Vrindavan many *sādhus* who get their food by begging, and shift their residence from the shade of one tree to that of another. There is no dearth of *sādhus* of that type. I cannot any more bear to see my children, who have given up everything for your sake, going from door to door for food. I pray that those who renounce the world in your name may never be in need of at least coarse food and clothing. They will live together, taking your name and holding to your ideas and ideals; and people afflicted with the sufferings of the world will resort to them and get relief by hearing your teachings from them. Was this not what you really came for? I am greatly pained at heart to see them wandering about like this!¹⁴

Such a great prayer that welled forth in such a great mother-heart couldn't—didn't—go unanswered.

Finally the scene shifts to Antpur. Came December 1886. During the latter part of

the month, the mother of Baburam (later, Swami Premananda), a devotee of the Master herself, invited some of these young disciples to her village house at Antpur, a few miles north-west of Calcutta. Narendra Nath, the leader, was of course there in the party which included Baburam, Sharat, Shashi, Tarak. Kali, Niranjana, Gangadhar, and Sarada. They were received by Baburam's mother 'warmly as though they were her own children'.

In the calm and serene atmosphere of the village, the spiritual fire that had been lighted in their hearts by the Master blazed into a conflagration. Narendra Nath's enthusiasm fanned the flames, and all were engulfed in them. For the time being, it seemed as though the Master himself spoke through his chief disciple, who was intensely possessed by the vision of the *sannyāsin's* life and cried out :

Let man-making be the goal of our lives! Let us make this our only spiritual discipline! Away with vain learning! Let not the glamour of the world captivate our minds even for a moment! Realization of God is the one and only thing in life! That is what Sri Ramakrishna's life represented! We must realize God!¹⁵

The spiritual fervour and earnestness of the young monks came to full bloom in Antpur, and the bond of brotherhood and fellowship was firmly sealed once for all. On a particular night, their enthusiasm attained great heights. Narendra Nath and his brother-monks kept vigil around a fire (*dhuni*) they had lighted, talking fervently about the life of Christ and the glories of renunciation. Well past midnight and into the small hours of the morning they continued their talk, quite unaware of the time that had passed. It was later discovered that it happened to be the Christmas Eve—24 December 1886. Standing there

14. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, pp. 192-93.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-96.

before the sacred fire, they formally took the vows of renunciation before God and one another and assumed their new monastic names. Thus the informal grouping of these monastic disciples by the Master at the Cossipore garden-house became formally organized and firm at Antpur and brought into being the Ramakrishna Order of monks.

Ever since then, that day of the year holds a special significance to the monks of the Order. The Christmas Eve is observed in all the centres of the Order with due solemnity. Usually, the function takes the form of decorating the portrait of 'Madonna and the Child' in or near the main shrine, reading from the Bible, singing of Christmas carols wherever possible, lighting candles, worshipping Christ in the Indian fashion, offering of fruit and sweets, *ārati* or waving of camphor light before the portrait, and discussing the life and teachings of Christ by competent persons.

Returning to the Baranagore Math from Antpur, the young monks applied themselves assiduously with greater conviction and zeal to their spiritual pursuits and scriptural studies, caring little for food and clothing. Their meagre fare consisted of 'rice, with or without salt, and boiled Neem or Bimba leaves... Sometimes, they could not procure even these'.¹⁶ The daily routine of the Math was regular and strictly adhered to. 'They would shut the door and spend day and night in song and prayer. One piece of cloth and two pieces of loin-cloth were all that they could boast of in the way of clothing. Satisfied with such food and raiment, they practised devotional exercises either in the Math premises or in the adjoining cremation ground, where they would go at dead of night and pass hours in prayer and meditation. The curious

part of it was that the more numerous the obstacles, the greater was their zeal for realization.'¹⁷

Shashi (later, Swami Ramakrishnananda, the name so aptly given to him) took charge of the worship of the Master's relics in the Math shrine and served his brother-disciples. That was his entire *sādhanā*. Referring to him later, Swami Vivekananda said : 'He (Shashi) was the main pillar of the Math. Without him, life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation, with no thought of food ; and Shashi would wait with their meals ready, or even drag them out of their meditation.'¹⁸

Rakhal (later, Swami Brahmananda) was the 'Rājā' of the Brotherhood. He was looked upon as the 'Spiritual son' of the Master, and every one showed him due respect as such. Kali (Swami Abhedananda) was the most serious student at the Math. Apart from his rigorous spiritual exercises, which earned him the epithet *tapasvī*, he would shut himself in his room and pore over his books. He mastered Sanskrit as also the philosophies of the East and the West. Other brothers, too, worked hard in their search for spiritual jewels, each in his own way and according to his individual taste. Not a moment was spent for anything other than the main purpose of their lives—God-realization.

In spite of all the great changes that have taken place in the administration, activities and conditions of life in the Ramakrishna Order during the last one hundred years, the fire of renunciation set ablaze at Antpur on 24 December 1886 still continues to burn brightly in the heart of the Sangha, in the heart of every individual member of it.

16. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 462.

17. *Ibid*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 463.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, HUMAN AND DIVINE

MARIE LOUISE BURKE

[The reader is referred to the 'Rededication' on the opening page of the latter section of this issue. None can understand the ideals and activities of the Ramakrishna Order without understanding the life and work of Swami Vivekananda. We are therefore publishing as a centennial tribute to Swamiji the following article written by one of the foremost living authorities on Swami Vivekananda—*Editor, P.B.*]

A year or two ago a revered swami in India said to me with some exasperation that most Western devotees (and he of course included me in this generalization) were always exclaiming over how *human* Swamiji was. 'But don't you see,' he said, 'the important thing about Swamiji is not that he was *human* but that he was *divine*!' I replied rather feebly in defence of Western devotees that Swamiji's human nature was endearing and important to us because it made him seem accessible; it was something we could relate to and understand. But I felt there must be more to be said than this, and ever since that revered and beloved swami accused us, and perhaps some Indian devotees as well, of liking Swamiji for the wrong reasons, I have been thinking off and on about his 'humanity,' and wondering why we are so taken with it—as I believe most of us are. This paper is a result of my thinking on the subject. I don't imagine that it is by any means the final result; there is no end to thinking about Swamiji.

But however that may be, one has to begin, so let me plunge into this subject. First of all, what *is* Swamiji's humanness? What do we mean when we say he is human as distinct from divine? In fact, what do we mean when we say he is divine? By the latter, I think we mean that he manifested divinity to an extraordinary degree such as in our present state of existence we cannot even begin to comprehend. We are stunned when we learn

that he could enter into samadhi at a moment's notice, that sometimes he had to make an effort *not* to enter into samadhi; we are awed by his power, by his ability to alter the thought currents of an entire nation, to bless people and to profoundly transform them; we are deeply moved by his same-sightedness, his vastness of heart, his unconditional compassion. Such characteristics as these, which spring directly from his knowledge of Brahman, are, to be sure, the most important things about Swamiji; if he did not possess them, we would not be thinking about him at all. But most of us cannot relate to them; there is very little in our experience that enables us to know how Swamiji *felt* when he entered into samadhi, what he perceived exactly when he saw the hardened criminal as God, what he meant when he said he had hugged the form of Death. Most of us simply do not share such experiences with him.

But there are experiences that we do share with him—or, rather, that he shared with us, or seemed to. He had many characteristics that we recognize and can relate to, and it is these that we are pleased to call human. Of course, he had a human form; his genetic material was no doubt one hundred per cent identical with ours. But this is not really what we mean by his being 'human.' I think what we mean is not that he *looked* human, but that in some respects he *acted* human, felt as we feel in our present state of human existence, reacted

as we react, enjoyed as we enjoy, suffered as we suffer.

There are many incidents in Swamiji's life in which he indeed seems to have been human in the sense that we are human. For instance, he could grow thunderously angry, furiously impatient; he could be deeply personal in his love, establishing a closer relationship with some than with others; he could be keenly hurt by betrayal and grieved by the loss of someone close to him; he could laugh uproariously and be extremely witty; he could be disconcertingly changeable, altering his plans at a moment's notice; he had decided likes and dislikes—he had a great fondness for chocolate ice-cream and Tabasco Sauce, (presumably not together), and he disliked guavas. Those are a few of the traits in Swamiji that seem human to us and that we find so endearing—and sometimes heartbreaking.

In this paper, I cannot go into all these apparent 'humannesses' of Swamiji. So I shall take up just three, and these briefly: the pain he could feel through the defection of a disciple; the human relationships he formed; the delight he could experience through common, everyday things.

First, his pain. There was a period of some two years (between the end of 1897 and the end of 1899) during which defections and betrayals seem to have come upon him fast and thick. One cannot say why it was so. Some said it was in his horoscope; but perhaps it was even more inevitable than that. Being Swamiji's disciple at close range involved the destruction of old and accustomed tendencies of mind; it quickly brought about the cracking of a long-cherished shell, so that a new and transfigured person might emerge. This process was not always smooth; in a flawed personality it could cause all sorts of tensions, aberrations, resentments, and almost frantic resistance.

Swamiji was of course aware of these hazardous gyrations of spiritual growth and knew quite well what was the matter with those of his disciples who seemed to go berserk. Nonetheless, we know that each time a beloved disciple stabbed him, he felt what seems to have been the pain of a father or a mother whose child has turned away.

Among those who defected—in some instances noisily and publicly—there was Leon Landsberg, or Swami Kripananda; there were Henrietta Muller and Mme Marie Louise, or Swami Abhayananda; there was Mr. Edward T. Sturdy, and during this same period there was a brahmacharini who quietly went back to a worldly life. Swamiji loved them all very much indeed. It is of course not possible to judge how deeply he felt in connection with the betrayal of any one person, but perhaps the long-harboured, suddenly revealed antagonism of Edward Sturdy hurt him more than all the other defections put together. Mr. Sturdy had his personal problems, but he seemed eminently sane. As is well known, he was in charge of the London work during Swamiji's absence in India. But he was not in charge of it for long—for quite soon there was nothing to be in charge of. Within a few months after Swamiji had left England at the end of 1896, the whole edifice of the work collapsed, and with a strange, self-serving logic, Mr. Sturdy blamed what he called Swamiji's lack of renunciation, of true sannyasa, for this debacle.

Sturdy's incredibly insulting letters to Swamiji that he wrote in the fall of 1899 have been published along with Swamiji's replies¹—a correspondence that probably

1. See Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda, His Second Visit to the West* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982) 3rd edition, pp. 71-93.

forms one of the most painful and absurd examples in all English literature of a small mind attempting to measure, assess, and judge a vast one. Finally, Mr. Sturdy far overstepped his bounds, and Swamiji, forbearing up till then, set him straight in no uncertain terms.

It is not possible to imagine that Swamiji did not suffer heartache when his beloved disciple's long-hidden resentments, grievances, and hostility suddenly surfaced. Nor can one think that his pain was not personal. True, one might say that his feeling was more for his mission than for himself; for Sturdy clearly had thrown over the London work and taken many with him in his desertion. But Swamiji knew that his work was part and parcel of Sri Ramakrishna's advent on earth. No number of Kripanandas or Miss Mullers or Sturdys could alter so much as a ripple of its destined course. I do not think, therefore, that Swamiji worried over possible harm to his work. He was wounded in a very human way; he grieved for a love betrayed. Writing in the fall of 1899 to Miss MacLeod from Ridgely Manor, Nivedita spoke of his suffering:

[The other evening] Swami came down for a cigar or something and found Mrs. Bull and myself in earnest talk. So he sat down too—of course. One could see that he was troubled and for the first time he talked of the two years foretold to him, of defection and disease and treachery—and of how it was growing thicker today than ever....He spoke of E. T. S[turdy] and of the Indian troubles—and he said he found himself still a Sannyasi—he minded no loss—but he *could* be hurt through personal love. Treachery cut deep. S. Sara had almost tears in her eyes when she came into my room after, and sat talking of it for an hour....He had said something to S. Sara...in that night's talk of the fact that he is guided and protected in his work, but all that is personal turns to ashes.²

2. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, ed. Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) 1:225.

This certainly seems to have been human suffering, intense and real. Indeed, the two years Swamiji spoke of had for a number of reasons been a period of physical and mental anguish. He often referred to it as two years of hell. In a sense his pain was perhaps far more intense than that of an ordinary person, for everything about him was on a grand scale. Still, it seems to have been something we can understand. Those who loved him were as heartbroken to witness his suffering as they might have been over the torture (in Nivedita's case) of a beloved father, or (in Mrs. Bull's) of a son.

But was his suffering really all that human? Can we really say we know how Swamiji felt? Somehow I suspect that his 'humanness' was as different from ours as day is from night. The form of pain was there; but the quality of that form translated the very form itself. It was as though the sun shone brilliantly through a stained-glass window, on which were depicted homely, familiar scenes, rendering those scenes incandescent. There is no memoir of Swamiji, no confiding letter from one of his disciples to another (such as from Nivedita to Mrs. Bull or to Josephine MacLeod) that does not speak of his radiance whatever his mood might seem to be—dark or bright. Whether he spoke of treachery as though his heart were broken—as it was—whether he held an infant on his lap—as he did whenever there was an available infant around—whether he tried his hand at golf or railed furiously at his brother disciples, however 'human' his actions seemed to be at any given time there was always that radiance visible just beneath the surface, sometimes bursting out into full view for no apparent cause. This was the difference between Swamiji's humanness and that of the ordinary person.

In what did that radiance consist? The answer is simple: it consisted in the Spirit

shining unobstructed ; Swamiji had not so much as a wisp of ego to dim that light. In a way this is like saying that he was not human at all, for the traits that we ordinarily think of as human are inextricably tied up with our ego, they are spawn of our ego, even as our ego itself is spawn of our sense of limitation and insufficiency—the sense out of which has come our present state of human consciousness, the sense that we are finite, separate beings, needing to swallow, to possess, the outside universe in order to fulfil ourselves. If we are in some way thwarted in this endeavour, we harbour in dark places of our minds—or perhaps wear openly on our sleeves—such emotions as fear, greed, hatred, resentment, self-pity, regret, need for attention, hostility, dependence, attachment, wounded pride—and so on and on. Even in a serene, satisfied state, such as we all know from time to time, when our desires are momentarily quiescent, having been momentarily gratified, we are still victims of our ego—because ego is not simply a matter of gross desire or self-assertion ; it is a matter of false identification. When consciousness, the pure conscious principle, shines upon and somehow becomes mixed up with that which is not conscious, when the knot of self and not-self is somehow firmly tied, then the ego is born, as it were, and one says ‘I am the body’ or with equal conviction, ‘I am the mind.’ And from these identifications with matter, gross or subtle, follows the whole gamut of human idiocy, which we accept as our normal state.

The ego, of course, is not all bad ; perhaps each of its dark aspects has a silver lining : where there is hatred, there is somewhere love ; where there is greed, there is somewhere generosity, and so on. Every human being makes an effort in greater or lesser degree to control his grosser impulses, for he has good impulses, too. Were it not so, we would not be human beings at all, we would not even be animals ;

we would be dead, extinct. But on this level, our good is, alas, also of the ego, and therefore limited and unstable. Our Vedantic teachers tell us that we will continue in this present state with its good and its evil until we discover that there is no real knot, no real connection between our true identity and the changing conditions of body and mind—until we discover, in other words, that the conscious part of our being, our Spirit, has never been mixed up with anything at all, that it is always shining in unalloyed glory and that its infinitude is what we really are. In that state one observes the conditions of the body and mind ; one does not become identified with them. A senior Swami of the Ramakrishna Order once said out of his own experience that that extremely high state of realization (which is not quite the highest, of which nothing can be said at all) is like seeing heavy rain falling at a distance, while all around the place where one is sitting the air is sunny and serene. The connection between consciousness and matter—the knot upon which the ego depends—has been severed. All the emotions and thoughts bred by the ego, or coexistent with it, have fallen away ; and those impulses that lead us toward unselfishness, which I mentioned above, have become strengthened, transformed ; they are associated now with the Spirit, rather than with the body or the mind. There is no effort now to be either moral or holy—questions of morality or holiness do not arise ; there is only love, there is only goodness, there is only joy.

This was Swamiji’s natural state. He was, as he himself said, ‘born free’ and, as Sri Ramakrishna often said of him, ‘eternally perfect’. In short, there was no shred of self in his pain. Never was there a word of anything but effortless love for those who had hurt him. In a sense, there was not even hurt, for he watched as from a distance

the deepest cuts, the most deadly treachery. Can we—you and I—really relate to that kind of suffering; can we call it human in the sense that we call our own experience human; have we any idea what it was like? Speaking for myself, the answer is no.

But let us look at some of those other human characteristics of Swamiji's. During his two visits to the West, he formed relationships with different individuals of brother, of son, of father, and of friend—all of them as strong, as warm, as permanent as any human bond could ever be.

There were, for instance, the Hales, whom he looked upon as his own—even as they looked upon him as a beloved son of the family. In a letter to Mary Hale he once wrote, 'By the by, Mary, it is curious, your family, Mother Church [his name for Mrs. Hale] and her clergy, both monastic and secular, have made more impression on me than any family I know of. Lord Bless you ever and ever.'³ Like an elder brother, he was on informal terms with the two Hale sisters and their cousins, Isabelle and Harriet McKindley. He joked with them, teased them, received their confidences, argued with them, gave them advice, and they, in turn, felt entirely free with him, never awed or shy, always adoring. But of the four 'sisters' Mary Hale, a gentle, warm, and loving person, seems to have been the closest to him, and was recognized as such by the others—even by one of his 'daughters', Nivedita, who, accordingly, called her 'Aunt Mary.'

To Mrs. Hale Swamiji's relationship was that of son. She did all sorts of motherly things for him. She bought his shirts and worried over the right shade of silk for his new robes; she attended to things like lading bills, which in his hands became a tangle, she always had a place for him in

her home and did not mind when he practised roller-skating in the living room. He in turn always kept her in touch with what he was doing, with the state of his health, with at least something of his thoughts, and he assured her that he was taking good care of his collars and cuffs. He addressed her always as 'Mother', and this not merely by way of respect or reverence in Indian style, but because she was his mother; he loved her as such.

With Mrs. Bull Swamiji also had a close mother-son relationship, with its own flavour. 'I love that woman,' he once said of her, 'more perhaps than my own mother. Every drop of my blood I would give for one hair of her head—so good she is and brave.'⁴ But Mrs. Bull had her hands full, for Swamiji was an intractable son. He was in an almost constant state of rebellion against her, and she, in turn, was for ever admonishing and advising him. Many of us have read with delight Swamiji's thunderous letters to her, in which he asserted his independence of all social conventions and forms, throwing her gentle reproofs and suggestions to the winds. 'Truce to this "right sort of presentation,"' he wrote to her at the beginning of his American teaching mission, 'Thou art my right, Thou my wrong, my Shiva.'⁵ And toward the end of his mission, he would sometimes complain furiously to her of his lot on earth. When, for instance, she once counselled him to be more tender in dealing with his brother disciples (whom he loved, in fact, more than anybody on earth), he came back with a blast: 'How I hate love! Would I had never had any Bhakti! ... It is the weak heart that has driven me out of India to seek some help for those I love, and here I am! Peace

3. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta. Advaita Ashrama, 1971) 8:474.

4. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 1:182.

5. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 6(1972):303.

have I sought, but the heart, that seat of Bhakti would not allow me to find it. Struggle and torture, torture and struggle! Well, be it then, since it is my fate, and the quicker it is over the better.”⁶ Mrs. Bull quietly bore it all, perhaps now and then with tears for this son of hers, who seemed so headstrong and so vulnerable.

Josephine MacLeod was not as maternal as Saint Sara. Her relationship with Swamiji was that of a friend. She was able to talk to him in an open, forthright way that cheered his heart. She was, as Nivedita said of her, his ‘Good Star,’ always shining, always auspicious, and she would, he knew, stand by him till death. This relationship of friendship with Josephine MacLeod did not, of course, preclude his friendship with uncounted others; there was, indeed, no one to whom he was not a friend. But this was a special bond, even as his sonship to Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Bull and his brother-ship to Mary Hale were special.

What about his fatherhood? Here again one could say that Swamiji was father to all his disciples. But toward at least two he seems to have felt an extra fatherly affection and concern. There was Nivedita, his English disciple, toward whom he now and then revealed himself as the loving father rather than the impersonal and sometimes stern guru. And there was Sister Christine, whom he seems never to have exhorted or scolded. His many letters to her were always tender, always soothing. Often he sent money to her from his own small personal account. He advised her to rest, to take leave from her job of school-teaching, to visit Mrs. Bull in Cambridge, to come to India. He worried when he did not hear from her, writing sometimes several letters to her before she replied. At the end of his Western mission, he went

far out of his way to visit Detroit, solely to see her. In short, if anyone was Swamiji’s daughter in a very human sense, I think it was Christine.

So we find that during his life on earth (and particularly during his Western mission) Swamiji developed with various people almost all the main human relationships: that of parent, child, brother, friend—and each flowered into a perfection of its kind. Many incidents in his Western life show him to have been in each of these modes supremely lovable, supremely approachable, supremely, let us say, human, and his charm in any one of those roles is endlessly endearing to us.

But, again, *was* Swamiji all that human in his love? Not, if we take an ordinary view of what it means to be human. I have already said enough about the human ego and his total lack of it. His love was one hundred per cent free of attachment and of all that goes with it. It was love for the divinity he saw so clearly in others. If this is so, one might ask why he did not love all equally; why should he have loved some more than others and in a special way? I would say in answer to this that wherever there is form there are bound to be differences and relationships. Even the love of the Personal God for man and of man for the Personal God involves one relationship or another. I would say that the relationships Swamiji formed on earth with a few chosen people exemplified the different modes of God’s love for man, and His infinite approachability. He loved as God loves—simply, without strings, without fuss, without demands—and he was approachable as God is approachable—open armed. Although he did indeed seem to be closer to some than to others, I do not think there was anyone he did not love, and I think that if his life had been extended, if he had more time, more scope, then surely he would have formed a deeply loving

6. Ibid., 2:420-21.

relationship with everyone on earth. Perhaps that is what he is doing now.

But here we have got around again to saying that Swamiji was not human as we are human, that we cannot really relate to him on our accustomed level of feeling and thinking, that if he was human, then our idea of humanity has to undergo a radical change, has to reach upward into the divine.

Still, what about the chocolate ice-cream? Here, surely, is outright sense-enjoyment the same as that of anyone on this plane of existence. And there were other things, too. Swamiji cooked marvellous curries and ate them with relish. He doused his food, as we have noted earlier, with Tabasco Sauce; on occasion he ate meat (though, being a Hindu, never beef); he smoked cigars and a pipe, and he was filled with glee when one of his doctors told him that smoking was good for his health. He went to the opera and in time came to enjoy Western music. He went also to the theatre and laughed uproariously at the somewhat corny comedies of that era. At one such farce, his host remarked with obvious gratification that he had never seen anyone laugh so hard or so much. Another comedy, 'Charley's Aunt,' he saw twice, once in Chicago, when, as he said, he nearly killed himself laughing, and again in London, when he laughed as hard as he had the first time. Telling Miss MacLeod of this second occasion, his disciple Josiah Goodwin reported, 'I am sorry to say the Swami laughed most at the wicked parts.'⁷

According to all accounts, Swamiji was tremendous fun to be with; he could be hilariously witty, sometimes at expense of others—but never with malice; always with affectionate, though side-splitting humour.

He was of course funny at his own expense, too. For instance, he wrote to Mary Hale, 'Tell Woolley [Harriet Hale's new husband] he has got the sister but has not paid the brother yet. Moreover, it was the fat black queerly dressed apparition smoking in the parlour that frightened [off all other suitors]; ... therefore I want to be paid for my great share in the work.'⁸ He liked to go boating, and more than once accidentally and to his vast amusement capsized the boat. He performed acrobatics with the dignified Mr. Leggett, balancing him on his feet; he pilfered the breakfast cream from the Home of Truth ice-box and drank it all, and when he ate sweet pickles, he licked his fingers unabashed. He would return full of eager expectation to the dinner table at Ridgely Manor, from which he had arisen to go out for a stroll, when Mrs. Leggett casually remarked that she believed there was to be ice-cream for dessert—perhaps chocolate. Such small, human incidents and traits provide some of the great charms of Swamiji's biographies, and one wishes we knew more of them. They are, indeed, primarily (but not entirely) what give rise to the enchanted exclamation, 'Swamiji was so human!'

But there is one thing that should lead us right off to question this judgement, and that is that we find these acts so exquisite. If you or I stole the cream, people would not smile over it for generations thereafter. A hundred years from now nobody will care in the least whether or not we like ice-cream; our tastes will not go down in history, even if we do. In my opinion, whatever it may be worth—these small 'human' likes and dislikes of Swamiji, his human laughter and his human foibles were similar to ours only in appearance; they were not human in an ordinary way. I am reminded here of the illustration Sri Rama-

7. J. J. Goodwin to Josephine MacLeod, November 20, 1896. Papers of Sara C. Bull.

8. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8(1971):463.

krishna once (or perhaps more than once) gave of a length of burnt rope—it is the same in form as new rope, the same twists, the same minute details—and yet if one should touch the burnt rope, it would crumble to nothing. So it was with Swamiji's humannesses—they lacked the energy and the binding power of sense desire, there was nothing there, it was all burnt away. Not that Swamiji did not *really* like ice-cream; I think he sincerely did; his senses were not atrophied; but he was not *dependent* on ice-cream. Neither are we? Well, let us go on a hunger strike for several weeks, or let us be without food for whatever reason and then let us see what our minds will do. I have heard that most healthy people who are deprived of food for any length of time can think of nothing else at all; they become literally possessed by food. Swamiji's liking for ice-cream—to use that as an example—had nothing of that underlying bondage in it. One remembers here how Sri Ramakrishna said of him when he was a boy, 'He daily cuts to pieces Maya's bondages with the sword of knowledge.'⁹

It is said that desire not only gives energy to our perceptions but clouds them as well. When that taint of desire is burnt or washed away, our vision of the world becomes clarified, and another kind of energy empowers our senses. Those who know say that then everything—all form—seems exquisite; colours are luminous, sound—even the most raucous of noises—are beautiful; tastes and smells are ambrosial; every touch is the touch of God; all laughter is His. The purified senses of a knower of God are not less keen than ours; rather, they convey infinitely more beauty to consciousness than do ours, because they

perceive a divine light shining through everything. Or, to put it another way, they perceive that everything is a manifestation of that Light and nothing other than that. So it was that everything was full of joy to Swamiji; he laughed because joy was his nature; he played in this world like a child. He wanted nothing of the world as such, he knew nothing in it could add one drop to the ocean of riches within himself, and nothing could take away from his fullness. He sought nothing, avoided nothing. It was not that he saw everything as equally good in a relative sense, not that he lacked ordinary discrimination, but that he saw everything to the furthest depths of its being. Once in southern California after he had given one of his superb lectures, a man stood up and said, 'Well, then, Swami, what you claim is that all is good?' 'By no means,' Swamiji answered. 'My claim is *that all is not—only God is!* That makes all the difference.'¹⁰

The fact is, even Swamiji's smallest act—even his jokes or his play, were based on an entirely different perception of the world than ours, they had a different motivation, a different basis, a different source of energy. As one of his great disciples once said of him, his psychology was totally unlike the psychology of a human being in the so-called normal state. When he enjoyed ice-cream he enjoyed it as a god—naturally enough it was pure nectar, and naturally enough his enjoyment of it was a delight for us to see and hear about—not because it was the same as ours, but because it wasn't.

Is there, then, no way we can relate to Swamiji? Must we say he was not, not even sometimes, human as we are human?

In answer to this question, I would say

9. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1952) 2nd edition, p. 762.

10. Josephine MacLeod to Alberta Sturges (Countess of Sandwich), 16 March 1914, kindness to Lady Faith Calme-Seymour, through Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, England.

that if by the word *human* we mean solely our ordinary state—then no, Swamiji was never human. But if by *human* we mean that there are infinite depths within us, that we are not bound to this present state by some mysterious knot, but that *as human beings* we can attain to the level on which Swamiji lived in this world ; if we recognize in him our human potential for untarnished joy, for selfless love, for grace of action, then yes, he was human. He was us at our highest, most complete, and most extended level of being. He came to the world in response, as it were, to the cry of the human soul for its own perfection. That is why, it seems to me, we are enchanted by his ‘humanness.’ He was, as Sri Ramakrishna said of him, the Incarnation of Man ; he enveloped in his own being the full greatness and range of humanity—the greatness and range we long for.

One remembers that after Swamiji had attained the infinity of nirvikalpa samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna told him that there was something more to be attained, more to be done. Can we not say that ‘something more’ was his return, as it were, to the world of form, the acceptance again of a

human mode of consciousness, the acceptance of the role of World Teacher, of a touch of rajas to enable him to be active here, of a thin veil of ignorance to hold him ? It was a most tenuous veil ; ‘I am,’ he once said, ‘like a bit of glass in an ocean of light.’ In some sense, he barely touched the earth. And yet he lived among us ; he took us on as his own, all of us and in toto, understanding our moods, our thoughts, our joys and sorrows, showing us by his daily life and by his ‘human’ ways, so full of grace, that our own humanity can be divine, transmuted. He lived and worked and played among us because he cared with his whole heart for our welfare. Yes, we can surely relate to him, and this on every level, for he touches us where we live, and then he lifts us, gradually or in a leap, to his own abode in Infinity, which is, and has always been, *our own abode* as well.

So what would I say now to the revered swami ? I think I would still say yes, to most of us the most important part of Swamiji is that he was human, but that he was human in the truest possible sense of the word—which is no different from saying that he was divine.

THE MOTHER I ADORE

SWAMI ASESHANANDA

[If Sri Ramakrishna is the *adhithatri-devata*, Presiding Deity, of the Ramakrishna Order, the Holy Mother is its *adhara-sakti*, Power Foundation. It is the great Mother Power embodied in Sri Sarada Devi that holds the brotherhood together with cords of universal love, neutralizing divisive forces and accommodating diversities. For the monks of the Order adoration for the Holy Mother is far more than a formalized part of the cult of Sri Ramakrishna ; it is the primary determinant of their attitude towards Reality and social orientation. It is therefore only in the fitness of things that this Souvenir which began with homage to Sri Ramakrishna should end with homage to the Holy Mother—*Editor, P.B.*]

An English poet has said :

Through winds and tides
One compass guides.

That compass, that eternal guide of my soul, is the Holy Mother. I met her for the first time at the office of *Udbodhan*, Calcutta, in 1917. At that time I was

studying in St. Paul's Cathedral Mission College in Calcutta. I used to visit Swami Brahmananda at Balaram Babu's house almost every week in the company of Swami Akhilananda, who was also a student of the same college. I was drawn to Swami Brahmananda by his magnetic personality mingled with sweet humour and by his love for me and Swami Akhilananda, which is beyond my words to express. One day Swami Brahmananda was away to downtown Calcutta visiting a devotee of our Master. I waited for some time but Maharaj did not return. I came to know from one of his attendants that Maharaj would come late after finishing his dinner with the family that evening.

Time passed. I saw some devotees talking among themselves on the porch close by in Balaram mandir. One of them came to me and said, 'Holy Mother has come to Udbodhan from Jayrambati. We have planned to go there and salute her. Would you like to accompany us?' I replied, 'I would like to talk to Swami Akhilananda and let you know.' I went to the adjacent room where Swami Akhilananda was talking with a senior Swami of our Order and consulted with him. He approved, but he himself could not go on account of some other engagement. I walked the short distance in the company of the devotees and came to Udbodhan within fifteen minutes, and I felt a peaceful atmosphere charged with the power of the Spirit. There I was seated in the office room. I met Swami Dhirananda whom I knew and who was always very kind to me. He started enquiring about my health and my studies and was satisfied with my positive reply. All of a sudden he said to me, 'I am pleased with your answer. But one thing I would like to know : who will take your responsibility in your spiritual life?' [In Bengali, *Bhār nebe ke?*] I was a college student and proud of my western education.

I replied, 'Swami, I can take my own responsibility. It is a weakness of the mind to give the responsibility to others.' Hearing my reply, he was not angry but with a smile on his face said, 'You are a mere child in the field of religion. You should listen to those who have travelled the path of spirituality for a long time. Suppose you go to see the deity in a cave temple which is completely dark inside. You will bump your head from wall to wall and come back bruised and wounded. But suppose somebody carries a flashlight in his hand and shows you the way, then you will be able to see the deity and return safe and sound with a bright smile on your face.' Hearing these words of the holy monk, I pondered and soon the pride of my sophisticated knowledge vanished from my heart. I became humble and felt the need of a guru, a real torch-bearer in the arduous sojourn of my life.

It was a *darśan* day. Hundreds of people assembled downstairs in Holy Mother's house for the *darśan* of the Mother. Swami Dhirananda suggested to me, 'When you go to see the Mother, request her to bless you out of her unbounded grace.' But when I was ushered into the Mother's presence, I was forbidden to speak at all by the Brahmachari who was one of the guides. After having Mother's *darśan*, I reported to Swami Dhirananda that I was not allowed to speak to the Mother. At this the Swami called Swami Arupananda, who again took me upstairs to the very presence of the Mother. This time Mother had no veil on her face. She heard from Swami Arupananda that I visited Swami Brahmananda quite often. She said to Arupananda, 'Rakhal is quite competent to give him initiation. Let him ask Rakhal.' To this I said very humbly, 'Mother, it will be a great good fortune (*mahāsaubhāgya*) for me if you kindly initiate me and bless me.' Mother agreed. She fixed a date, and asked

me to fast, take my bath in the Ganges and wait patiently, downstairs. I followed her instructions with meticulous care. Mother, after finishing her worship of the divine Master, called me through a monk. I was asked to sit on a seat next to her in the shrine. She asked a few questions about my spiritual life to which I replied correctly. After deep meditation Mother imparted to me the sacred mystic Name (*bīja-mantra*). I felt the power of the mantra as a vehicle of *guru-śakti* at that moment. The previous night I had been wondering whether Mother would be able to choose the *Iṣṭa* (Chosen Deity) for whom I had shown reverence from my boyhood. To my great surprise she chose the *Iṣṭa* whom I liked very much. I did not say anything. Mother knew my heart, for she is *antaryāmini*. Through her grace I have come to realize that one can get direct experience of God in this life if one is earnest, sincere and whole-hearted.

Today, nearly seventy years later, I feel vividly that Mother is alive in my consciousness, that Her divine hand is on my head to carry me across the ocean of *Samsāra* to the realm of eternal Light and Felicity. Here is my humble attempt to express what can never be fully expressed :

In the holy sanctuary of my heart
My beloved Mother has come.
What shall I offer Her ?
Precious things I have none.
I lay at Her feet
My lonely soul
And my contrite heart.
May She accept my gift
And bless me out of Her unbounded grace.

I am eternally grateful to Swami Saradananda for opening my eyes to the majestic divinity of Holy Mother.¹ One day

1. Interested readers may refer to the author's *Glimpses of a Great Soul (A Portrait of Swami Saradananda)* published by the Vedanta Press, Hollywood.

when I was with him as his private secretary, I asked him to give me a method which Holy Mother had not given me at the time of initiation. He reprimanded me, 'You are the greatest fool to ask me to add something to what Holy Mother has given you. She is not only *saṅgha-janani* (Mother of the Order) but also the great Mother of all mankind. Stick to the mantra given by her, meditate on the meaning of the mantra. Hold to the feet of the Divine Mother. Through Her grace you will realize God if your yearning is deep and profound.'

This is the 150th birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. I have not seen Sri Ramakrishna with my physical eyes, but I have seen Holy Mother with these eyes of mine. Not only have I seen her but I have heard with my ears the sacred Word imparted by her. By repeating the mantra, not only with the lips but also with my heart, I have found light in the midst of darkness, hope in the midst of despair and calmness of mind in the midst of the trials and tribulations of life. Holy Mother has been a tower of strength and an unfailing source of inspiration to me since I came to America in 1947. She has protected me from all dangers and difficulties, like a mother-bird protecting her fledgling when a storm assails her frail nest. A few years ago I had to undergo a major surgical operation. All came out well through her grace. Before the operation her image flashed before my inner vision and I heard in my heart these vibrant words : 'Don't be afraid. I am *abhayā*—giver of fearlessness. Himalayan difficulties will pass away and you will be all right, because I am looking after you with the same concern as a Mother has for her own child.' The Jewish doctor who attended on me was amazed at my miraculous and quick recovery.

I have this firm conviction that Holy Mother is holding our hands and leading

each of us slowly and steadily towards the goal, our cherished destination. As Holy Mother has blessed me, may she bless all the readers of *Prabuddha Bharata* with unstinted devotion, unwavering faith and abiding love for God, the indwelling Spirit of our essential being. May she forge an indissoluble unity between the East and the West on the solid foundation of mutual help, fraternity and love.

May good betide all.

May happiness come to all.

May all see the face of Truth and be fortified by the armour of wisdom, goodwill and understanding.

This is my prayer to her, whom I adore, worship and cherish in the silent sanctuary of my heart.

Om. Peace. Peace. Peace.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE UPANISADS AND MODERN THOUGHT: BY V. RAMAKRISHNA RAO. Published by Mittal Publications, B-2/19-B, Lawrence Road, Delhi 110 035. 1986. Pp. 140. Rs. 65.

Several attempts have been made to bring out the similarities and parallels between ancient thought and the findings of modern science. *The Tao of Physics* and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* may be mentioned as two notable examples. The Upaniṣadic seers clearly distinguished between 'science' (*vidyā*) and nescience (*avidyā*). Their chief concern was with the source of existence, usually known as Brahman which is of the nature of consciousness. Modern physics has changed its earlier materialist outlook and is now inclined to acknowledging energy as the basis of existence rather than matter.

Dr. V. Ramakrishna Rao, retired professor of applied physics, Andhra University, has made several attempts to find out the similarities between Indian thought and modern physics. His work under review is a collection of his papers published during the past six years in this field. The seven chapters of the book deal with Upaniṣadic speculations on Prāṇa, the Self, etc. and their similarities with modern findings. According to him the Upaniṣadic seers performed thought-experiments (similar to the 'Maxwell's demon' well known to physicists) and formed conclusions after careful observations. The supremacy of Prāṇa (vital force) over other faculties, established in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chandogya* and *Kausitaki* Upaniṣads may be taken as an instance of such thought-experiments.

The primacy of 'will' in the Upaniṣads

(especially in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*) influenced the thinking of Schopenhauer who clearly acknowledged this fact in his book *The World as Will and Idea* (cf. the preface). Prof. Rao has devoted one chapter of his book to a discussion of this theme. However, the most significant similarity between the Upaniṣads and modern physics is found in Erwin Schrodinger's writings (especially in *Mind and Matter* and *My Views of the World*). One of the founders of Quantum Mechanics, Schrodinger (1887-1961) believed in Indian metaphysics. At Zurich and Vienna he became familiar with Upaniṣadic literature in addition to the works of Samkhya and Buddhism. His theory of wave-mechanics is said to have reduced the last building-stones of the universe to something like a spiritual throb that comes very near to the concept of pure thought. For him the world is a mental construct. He treated consciousness as singular and accepted Maya as the only possible way to account for the plurality of the objective universe. He suggested a bit of blood-transfusion in the present way of thinking in western science from eastern thought.

This and several other concepts have been elucidated by Prof. Rao in the present book which will be welcomed by all those who are interested in harmonizing the thoughts of ancient seers and those of modern physicists like Schrodinger.

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: By A. R. MOHAPATRA. Published by Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., L-10 Green Park Extension, New Delhi 110 016. 1985. Pp. 200. Rs. 25.

Religion is universally associated with the history of man. It is found in primitive as well as modern societies. Religion deals primarily with the experiential aspect of human life. But the rational in man also tries to find harmony with his varied experiences. The rational analysis of our religions experiences forms the subject-matter of Philosophy of Religion.

In the modern period it was Hegel who tried for the first time to present a systematic philosophical analysis of religion. In the Indian context the religions pursuit and system-building have been nothing but the development of the philosophy of religion in a broader sense. However, books on the subject have been written mostly from the European point of view. Even the Indian writer on the subject normally takes the occidental standpoint in discussing the subject.

The book under review is an analysis of religious phenomenon from a balanced stand-point. It discusses the tenets of religion from the western as well as the Indian viewpoint. The over-emphasis on the Indian side might lead the reader of the book to conclude that it is, in a way, Philosophy of Hindu Religion. It discusses the doctrines of Karma, soul and God in detail from the Indian stand-point.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I discusses philosophical problems of religion, and thus constitutes philosophy of religion proper. But Part II of the work deals with the history of world religions. A brief historical account of Semitic, Iranian, Indian and Sino-Japanese religions is found in this part. Thus the work satisfies the requirements of the students of History of Religions as well.

The work has been produced with the students of philosophy of our universities in mind. It is undoubtedly very useful for them. It can also serve as a good introductory reader to all who are interested in the subject.

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NEWS AND REPORTS

THE GENERAL REPORT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

(FROM APRIL 1984 TO MARCH 1985)

(We are presenting here a brief summary of the latest report of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, which will give our readers some information about the activities of these twin organizations. The report was issued by the General Secretary in November 1986 from the Headquarters at Belur Math, Dist. Howrah, West Bengal 711 202, India.—Ed.)

History

Shortly after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of harmony of all religions, in August 1886, a monastic Order bearing his name was organized in pursuance of his own instructions with a monastery (Math) at Baranagore, a northern suburb of Calcutta, by his Sannyasin disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda. It gradually set up a twofold ideal before it: To create a band of Sannyasin teachers of Vedanta as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his

own life; and in conjunction with the lay disciples to carry on missionary and philanthropic work, looking upon all, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, as veritable manifestations of the Divine. For some time the latter work was carried on through an association called the Ramakrishna Mission Association, started by Swami Vivekananda in May 1897, shortly after his return from the West. In 1899 he transferred the Math, which had changed places by now, to its present site at Belur, across the Ganga, about six kilometres north of Calcutta, where it set itself more vigorously to the task

of training a band of monks inspired with the twin ideals of Self-realization and service to the world. Soon after this, the Math authorities took upon themselves the work of the Mission Association.

Though the Ramakrishna Math was registered as a Trust in 1901, for the efficiency of the work of the Mission Association and for giving it a legal status, a society named the Ramakrishna Mission was registered in 1909 under Act XXI of 1860. Its management vested in a Governing Body. Both the Math and the Mission gradually extended their spheres of activity as a result of which a number of branches in different parts of the country and abroad came into existence.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Though Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, with their respective branches, are distinct legal entities, they are closely related, inasmuch as the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math; the administrative work of the Mission is mostly in the hands of the monks of Ramakrishna Math, and both have their Headquarters at Belur Math. The Math organization is constituted under a Trust with well-defined rules of procedure. The Mission is a registered society. Though both the organizations take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the former lays emphasis on religion and preaching, while the latter is wedded mainly to welfare service of various kinds. This distinction should be borne in mind, though 'Ramakrishna Mission' is loosely associated by people with Math activities also. It is necessary, moreover, to point out that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not necessarily imply that it is affiliated either to Ramakrishna Math or to Ramakrishna Mission.

The Math and the Mission own separate funds and keep separate accounts of them. Though both the Math and the Mission receive grants from the Central and State Governments and public bodies for their social welfare activities, the other activities of the Math are financed from offerings, publications, etc., and the Mission is supported by fees from students, public donations, etc. Both the Math and the Mission accounts are annually audited by qualified auditors.

Summary of Activities

The following notable developments took place in the Ramakrishna Mission during the year under report:—

The Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house of sacred memories and associations was acquired and taken possession of along with a part of the adjoining land.

Foundations were laid for a prayer hall and shrine at Chengalpattu, for an office building at Jamshepur, for an auditorium block at Vidyapith, Madras, for a primary school at Mission Ashrama, Madras, and for a new institution named 'Samaj Sevak Shikshana Mandira' for training youths in rural development work, at Saradapitha campus, Belur.

The new prayer hall of Tattwamandira, Saradapitha (Belur), was consecrated. The newly built auditorium along with the booksales counter at Worli under Bombay Mission and the first floor of the newly built annexe to the boys' hostel of the computer section for the vocational course of the Main Higher Secondary School there, were inaugurated.

During the same period the following important developments took place in the Ramakrishna Math:—

The newly constructed temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Contai Ashrama was dedicated.

Sri Vivekananda Society, Pune, and the Ramakrishna Shivananda Ashrama, Barasat, were affiliated to the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, and formally inaugurated. The new centres were christened 'Ramakrishna Math, Pune' and 'Ramakrishna Math, Barasat' respectively. The first official centre of the Ramakrishna Math in Japan came into existence with the affiliation of the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (Vedanta Society of Japan).

The newly built first floor of the Indian guest house and a spacious new cowshed of the dairy at Belur Math were inaugurated. The newly constructed two-storeyed building at Pungkunnam, Trichur, and the monks' quarters, kitchen-cum-dining hall and shrine store at Bankura Ashrama were declared open.

A marble image of the Mother Sri Sarada Devi was installed and unveiled in the dining hall of the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore.

Highlights of the Year

Our Along school was given the 'National award for the best institution for children's

welfare 1984' by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India.

In a highly acclaimed BBC television series titled 'The sea of faith', and telecast nationwide in U.K., some of the activities of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, London, were shown, to highlight the impact of Swami Vivekananda on western religious thought. A seminar on the role of religion in national integration was sponsored and organized jointly by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture and Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

The headmistresses of two schools under the management of the Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya, Madras, were selected by the Tamil Nadu Government for 'best teacher award'

The academic results of our educational institutions were brilliant as usual. Our students secured the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th & 8th positions in the Madhyamik Examination 1984 and 2nd, 5th & 6th positions in the Higher Secondary Examination 1984 in West Bengal. The 2nd and 6th positions in the High School Examination 1984 of the Uttar Pradesh Board and the 10th position in the H.S.L.C. Examination 1984 of the Meghalaya Board were also secured by our students.

Centres

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, there were in March 1985, 122 branches in all, of which 52 were Mission centres, 22 combined Math and Mission centres, and 48 Math centres. These were distributed as follows: two Mission centres, five combined Math and Mission centres and three Math centres in Bangladesh; one Mission centre each in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius and France; one Math centre each in Switzerland, England, Argentina and Japan; 12 Math centres in the United States of America, and the remaining 45 Mission centres, 17 combined Math and Mission centres and 29 Math centres (91 in all) in India. The Indian centres were distributed as follows: 30 in West Bengal, 11 in Uttar Pradesh, 11 in Tamil Nadu, seven in Bihar, six in Kerala, four in Karnataka, three each in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Maharashtra, two in Meghalaya, and one each in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh. Moreover, attached to some of the branches, there were over twenty sub-centres where monastic workers resided more or less permanently.

Types of Work

Medical Service: The Math and the Mission institutions under this head served the public in general, irrespective of creed, colour or nationality. Prominent of these are the hospitals at Calcutta, Kankhal, Lucknow, Itanagar, Ranchi, Trivandrum, Varanasi and Vrindaban. In 1984-85 there were altogether 13 Hospitals with 1,798 beds which accommodated 52,946 patients, 81 Out-patient Dispensaries which treated 43,23,330 cases including the old ones and 15 Mobile Dispensaries which treated 4,69,744 cases, mostly in rural and tribal areas. Besides, some centres had emergency or observation in-patient wards attached to their dispensaries. The Veterinary section of the Shyamala Tal Ashrama treated 55 cases. The Sanatorium at Ranchi and the Clinic at New Delhi treated T.B. cases alone, while large sections of Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, and the hospital at Trivandrum were devoted to maternity and child-welfare work. At Trivandrum there was also a department of Psychiatry. Research in different branches of Medical Science as also Post-graduate degree and diploma courses were conducted at Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta.

Educational Work: During the year the twin organizations conducted 5 Degree Colleges of general education, at Madras, Rahara (24 Parganas), Coimbatore, Belur (Howrah), and Narendrapur (24 Parganas), with 4,957 students on their rolls. The last two were wholly residential, and the colleges at Madras and Coimbatore had attached hostels for residing students. In addition, there were 3 B. Ed. Colleges at Belur, Coimbatore and Mysore with 398 students; one Basic Training School at Coimbatore with 34 students; one Post-graduate Basic Training College at Rahara with 100 students; a Sanskrit College at Trichur with 45 students; 4 Junior Basic Training Institutes at Rahara, Sarisha and Sargachhi with 305 students; a College of Physical Education, and an Institute of Agriculture with 116 and 88 students respectively at Coimbatore, 4 Polytechnics at Belur, Belgharia, Madras and Coimbatore with 1,367 students; 10 Junior Technical and Industrial Schools with 772 students; 6 Vocational Training Centres with 287 students; 94 Students' Homes and Hostels, including some orphanages with 11,719 boys and 1,824 girls; 42 Higher Secondary, Secondary and High schools with 24,022 boys and 11,577 girls; 25 Senior Basic and M.E. Schools with 5,018 boys and 3,231 girls; 43 Junior Basic, U.P. and Elementary Schools with

6,965 boys and 3,622 girls; and 768 L.P. and other grades of Schools with 31,126 boys and 4,877 girls; 152 Adult Education and Community Centres with 4,434 students; A Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences with 24 students, was conducted by the Seva Pratishthan of Calcutta. Training of Nurses and Midwives was undertaken by Seva Pratishthan of Calcutta, Sevashrama of Vrindaban and also the Math Hospital at Trivandrum, the total number of trainees being 251. Two Schools of Languages with 3,487 students, for teaching different Indian and foreign languages were conducted by Institute of Culture, Calcutta, and Hyderabad Math Centre. The Ashrama at Narendrapur conducted a Blind Boys' Academy, an Institute of Commerce and a Village-Level Workers' Training Centre with 162, 173 and 5,085 students respectively. The centre at Ranchi (Morabadi) ran a training centre in farming (Divyayan) with 3,437 (773 in-camps) students. The centre at Rahara conducted a Rural Librarianship Training Centre (residential) with 31 students. Thus there were altogether 1,02,682 boys and 26,852 girls in all the educational institutions run by the Math and the Mission in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Fiji and Mauritius.

Recreational Activities: Some of the Math and the Mission centres have been providing scope for recreational, cultural and spiritual activities for youngsters at stated periods outside their school and college hours. *The Vivekananda Balaka Sangha* of the Bangalore Ashrama has a building of its own. The Ashrama has started a Yuvaka Sangha for youths. At the Mysore Ashrama also a number of boys take advantage of the various kinds of facilities provided for them, and the youth section of the *Janashiksha Mandir*, Belur, is engaged in similar activities. The Hyderabad and Salem Centres also conduct similar programmes for boys.

Work for Women: The organizations have ever been conscious of their duties to the women of India. Typical of the work done for them are the Maternity Sections of the Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, and the Hospital at Trivandrum, the Domiciliary and Maternity Clinics at Jalpaiguri and Khetri; the Invalid Women's Home at Varanasi; the Sarada Vidyalaya at Madras; the Girls' High Schools at Jamshedpur; the Sarada Mandir at Sarisha and the three Training Schools for nurses at Trivandrum, Vrindaban and Calcutta. The Madras Math also conducts a High School and a Primary School for girls.

Rural Uplift and Work among the Labouring and Backward Classes: The twin organizations have all along tried their best to serve the unfortunate countrymen who have fallen back culturally or otherwise. These services are done in three ways: (a) By bringing them from rural areas to our urban centres; (b) By sending our dedicated workers to rural areas; (c) Through centres located in rural areas. In addition to the more prominent village Ashramas like those at Cherrapunji, Sarisha, Ramharipur, Manasadwip, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Chandipur, Sargachhi, Along, Narottam Nagar, Chengalpattu, Kalady, Trichur and Nattarampalli, a number of rural sub-centres—both permanent and semi-permanent—are run under the centres at Belur, Rahara, Sarisha, Trichur, Malda, Ranchi, Narendrapur and Cherrapunji besides one under Madras Students' Home. Of these special mention may be made of the numerous village sub-centres started for educating the hill tribes in Meghalaya and a farming centre at Ranchi, specially meant for Adivasis and scheduled castes. Welfare work of various kinds was done among the Nagas, Kukis and Mizos etc. by the Silchar Ashrama. Our educational, medical, and cultural activities in Arunachal Pradesh are also proving very useful and popular. During the year, the organizations ran in the rural and backward areas 19 Secondary or High Schools, 46 Senior Basic, Junior Basic, M.E. and U.P. Schools, 55 Primary Schools, 56 Night Schools, 5 Vocational Training Centres, a Rural Librarianship Training Centre, a Village-Level Workers' Training Centre, a College, 3 Schools, a Chatuspathi and a Pathashala, all for Sanskrit study, and an Institute of Agriculture, 152 Adult Education and Community Centres, 633 Non-formal Education Centres, and an Institute (Divyayana) for training village youths in farming—with a total of 57,830 students. The organizations also conducted 3 Hospitals treating 1,498 cases, 39 out-patient Dispensaries treating 10,37,336 patients and 6 Mobile Dispensaries serving 1,52,221 patients, besides running 154 Milk-distribution centres and a number of libraries with 4 mobile units all located in the rural and backward areas. In addition to such varied activities, preaching and educative tours, screening moviefilms and slides and such other efforts were also undertaken. The statistics given in this paragraph form part of the figures furnished under 'Medical Service' and 'Educational Work'.

Pallimangal (Integrated Rural Development):

The Math and the Mission Headquarters directly conducted Pallimangal activities, as Pilot Project, in 17 villages in and around Kamarpukur, Jayrambati and Bali-Dewanganj (West Bengal). Its day-to-day field works are being conducted with the help of trained young men called Pallimangal cadre under the supervision of monks.

The following programmes were implemented by the Headquarters during the year 1984-85 with a total expenditure of Rs. 6,28,091.

Agriculture: (i) Soil analysis for 324 plots was done in the soil testing laboratory at Kamarpukur and accordingly farmers were advised about the right type and quantity of fertilizers to be used; (ii) Agricultural inputs worth Rs. 77,600 were given on credit to 180 farmers; (iii) Facilities for producing more Sannhemp (a kind of fibre plant), which has a ready market for sale were provided to 120 farmers.

Pisciculture: Composite pisciculture was undertaken by 32 persons under expert guidance and also demonstrated in one pond at Kamarpukur.

Artificial Insemination Centre (with frozen semen) It served 92 cases.

Cottage Industry: 177 trained persons are running independently a number of cottage industries such as tailoring and incense sticks manufacturing unit.

Educational: 60 non-formal schools run by Kamarpukur Math centre were supervised by Pallimangal cadres.

Mobile Medical Service: (i) 37,424 cases were treated in and around Kamarpukur, Jayrambati, Koalpara and Bali-Dewanganj; (ii) Free eye operation camp was conducted at Kamarpukur and 89 cataract cases were operated and given spectacles.

The following programmes were implemented by the branches: (i) 5 mobile dispensaries (Mission) were run and 2,33,506 cases [Bombay 87,055; Kankhal (2 units) 54,412; Raipur 46,476 and Vrindaban 45,563] were treated; (ii) vocational training was given, distribution of nutrition-food and clothing programmes were undertaken and financial assistance was given to needy persons by the Bombay centre; (iii) 3 mobile dispensaries were run by Math centres at Madras (through Nattarampalli centre), Hyderabad and Bangalore; cases treated 46,593 in more than 150 villages.

Mass Contact: From the foregoing account it will be evident that the organizations' activities

are not confined to or concentrated in urban areas alone; they are spread over other fields as well. The message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is steadily spreading in all parts of India, which is evident from the participation of innumerable people in the annual celebrations. The Ashramas and temples also draw thousands of people throughout the year. Over and above these, there are a number of medical institutions where lakhs of people get free medicines and thousands are treated in the in-patient departments. In the educational institutions also a considerable number of poor students get free education, board and/or lodging. The organizations are also running a good number of free libraries in rural areas. The publication centres, sometimes, bring out subsidized edition of select books to enable the masses to have access to them.

Spiritual and Cultural Work: Both the Math and the Mission centres laid emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideals of India, and through various types of activity tried to give a practical shape to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna that all religions are true. The centres established real points of contact among people of different faiths through public celebrations, meetings, classes, publications, etc. More than 130 Libraries containing a large number of books and journals were conducted by them. Attached to the libraries, Reading Rooms were maintained in many places. A college, a Chatuspathi and a Pathashala, for Sanskrit studies were run. At least ten centres published books on religious subjects and 12 journals in different languages. Special mention should be made of the Institute of Culture, Calcutta, which has published *The Cultural Heritage of India* (5 Volumes so far) and which has been trying to bring together eminent men and women of India and other lands in cultural fellowship. The Math centres at Mayavati, Baghbazar (Calcutta), Madras, Nagpur, Mysore, Rajkot, Trichur and Bhubaneswar, in particular, have to their credit a considerable number of useful publications. Some of our foreign centres too are publishing valuable books. It may not be out of place to tell here of the continuous preaching of Vedanta through classes and lectures for quite a few years now, being carried on by Swami Nihshreyasananda in Africa (Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, 35, Rhodes Avenue, Box BE 128, Belvedere, Harare, Zimbabwe)

Relief and Rehabilitation Work: As usual the

Mission and Math undertook relief operations and rehabilitation projects. The Headquarters as well as some of the branches were involved in these works.

The following Relief Works were conducted in India:

Disturbances Relief: Through New Delhi centre in 5 areas.

Earthquake Relief: Through Silchar centre in 9 villages of Cachar district.

Flood Relief: (i) Assam floods: In 42 villages through Karimganj centre; (ii) Bihar floods: In 28 villages of Saharsa district by the Headquarters, in 15 villages of Katihar district through Katihar centre and in 3 villages of Samastipur district through Deoghar centre; (iii) Orissa floods: In 25 villages of Cuttack district through Bhubaneswar centre; (iv) Meghalaya floods: In 3 villages through Cherrapunji centre; (v) Tripura floods: In 45 villages of Kailasahar, Dharmanagar and Kamalpur subdivisions by the Headquarters; (vi) U. P. floods: In 16 villages of Gorakhpur and Deoriah districts through Allahabad centre; (vii) West Bengal floods: This relief was conducted in three phases. In the first phase cooked food and dry doles were supplied to the flood victims. The second phase consisted of distribution of clothing, blankets, domestic requirements and agricultural inputs. Rehabilitation projects were implemented in the third phase as detailed under the Rehabilitation section. In all, 476 villages in 13 districts were served by the Headquarters, Kamarpukur, Saradapitha and a few other centres.

Cyclone Relief: (i) Andhra Pradesh cyclone: In 144 villages in Vakadu Naidupet and Sullurpet taluks of Nellore district through Rajahmundry centre; (ii) Tamil Nadu cyclone: In Pulicat and 11 coastal villages around Madras city through Madras Mission Ashrama.

Medical Relief: At Gangasagar Mela and Chemaguri through Seva Pratishthan, Manasadwip and Sarisha centres.

Refugee Relief: At Mandapam camp near Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, among Sri Lanka refugees and repatriates, through Madras Mission Ashrama.

Riot Relief: In 14 areas of Thane and Bhiwandi in Maharashtra through Bombay centre.

Winter Relief: Through Rahara centre in 5 villages and 4 colonies in and around Rahara, 24 Parganas.

The expenditure of the Primary Relief work

alone in cash and kind was Rs. 41,24,921 benefitting 3,83,740 recipients of 63,475 families belonging to 991 villages. The materials distributed were as follows:

11,770 Food Packets, Rice 72,812.5 Kg. Dal 21,999.9 Kg, Wheat 4,011 Kg, Potato & Onion 17,041.5 Kg, M. Oil 828.5 Kg, Salt 3,208.5 Kg, Spices 765.9 Kg, Molasses 1,553.1 Kg, Milk Powder 72 Kg, Chira 828 Kg, Fuel 48,654.9 Kg, Dhoti 23,070 pcs., Sari 26,629 pcs., Children's garment 1,14,068 pcs., Adults' garment 2,310 pcs., Woollen Blanket 10,307 pcs., Cotton Blanket 590 pcs., Cotton Chaddar 5,237 pcs., Lungi 4,726 pcs., Shirting 537 pcs., New Woollen Sweater 1,064 pcs., Old Woollen Sweater 4,095 pcs., Old Clothing 29,598 pcs., Lantern 943 pcs., Utensils 9,046 pcs., Plastic Glass 182 pcs., Plastic Bati 300 pcs., Tarpaulin 300 pcs., Soap Cake 500 pcs., Seeds 10,042.5 Kg, Fertilizer 30,300 Kg, Text Books 660 nos. and Exercise Books 768 nos. Besides these, 4,280 patients were treated at Mandapam Refugee Relief Camp, Rameswaram and at Gangasagar Mela in Sagar Island.

The following Rehabilitation works were conducted:

(a) By the Headquarters: (i) Rebuilding of one wing of Thakurnagar Girls' High School in Gaighata block of 24 Parganas, West Bengal, is continuing. (ii) Construction of 68 houses and repair of 15 houses for 83 tornado affected families of Shimultala, Deypara and 3 other villages around Krishnanagar in Nadia District were completed and handed over to the beneficiaries. (iii) 53 houses were constructed and 14 houses were repaired for 67 flood affected families in Laudaha, Jahanabad, Bejra and 4 other villages in Singhee Anchal of Birbhum district. Moreover, 55 houses were constructed and 8 houses were repaired at Charki under Ketugram Block II of Burdwan district. Both the projects were conducted under 'Build your own house' scheme.

(b) By the branches: (i) Roofs of 17 fire devastated houses at Rangametia and Basudevpur villages in Bankura district were reconstructed with C.I. sheet through Bankura centre. Also two houses were reconstructed at Vivekananda Palli in Bankura Sadar sub-division through the same centre; (ii) Houses of 6 flood affected families were reconstructed at Pataghat in the foot-hills of Meghalaya through Cherrapunji centre; (iii) 17 fire devastated houses were reconstructed with C.I. sheet roofing at Shella

Bazar of East Khasi Hills district through Shillong centre. Also arrangements were made to economically rehabilitate the fire victims, so that they might resume their respective means of livelihood; (iv) Construction of 120 houses and 3 primary schools, each with a headmaster's quarters, all of them being pucca buildings, were completed at Itala-patapur, Anandpur and Kerala villages of Junagadh district and handed over to the beneficiaries through Rajkot Math centre. Besides, two wells and two tube-wells were sunk in the villages. At Anandpur a pucca dispensary building along with doctor's quarters was also constructed. Under economic rehabilitation programmes 29 families were rehabilitated. Moreover, 838 cows and 27 camels were distributed among the flood victims of 90 villages in Saurashtra. On the eve of camp closure 1,912 sets of uniforms were distributed to all the students of the three above-mentioned schools.

The total expenditure of the above-mentioned Rehabilitation Projects during the year was Rs. 32,84,249.

Annual Celebrations: Most of the Math and the Mission centres appropriately observe the days sanctified by the advent of great saints and prophets. The general features of the celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi (the Holy Mother) and Swami Vivekananda are: Special worship, *Homa* (offerings in the sacred fire), chanting of scriptural texts, *Bhajan* and *Sankirtan* (often in chorus), distribution of *Prasad* (sacramental food) to the devotees, feeding of the poor in large numbers, and lectures by eminent speakers, including the Swamis of the Order. Thus the message of Sri Ramakrishna and his direct associates is steadily spreading, and many young and ardent souls are coming into closer touch with the ideals of the Math and the Mission. In co-operation with the local public, a few centres celebrate some of the popular Hindu festivals, accounts for these being maintained separately.

RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA

BHAVA PRACHAR

Under the auspices and direction of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Committee, constituted at the close of the grand Second Convention 1980 to fulfil the need for spreading the inspiring message of Swami

Vivekananda, particularly among the younger generation, and for spreading the life-giving message of Sri Ramakrishna, the following centres conducted youth conventions where the participants exhibited tremendous enthusiasm and keen interest in the proceedings: Bangalore (Math), Bombay, Institute of Culture (Calcutta), Kalady (Math), Morabadi (Ranchi), and Mauritius.

The first 'National Youth Day' on the 12th January, 1985, was very enthusiastically and solemnly celebrated at Belur Math and in almost all our centres. A large number of youths participated in the celebrations, which included processions, symposia, elocutions, debates, recitations, physical feats and distribution of folders and brochures containing Swami Vivekananda's message.

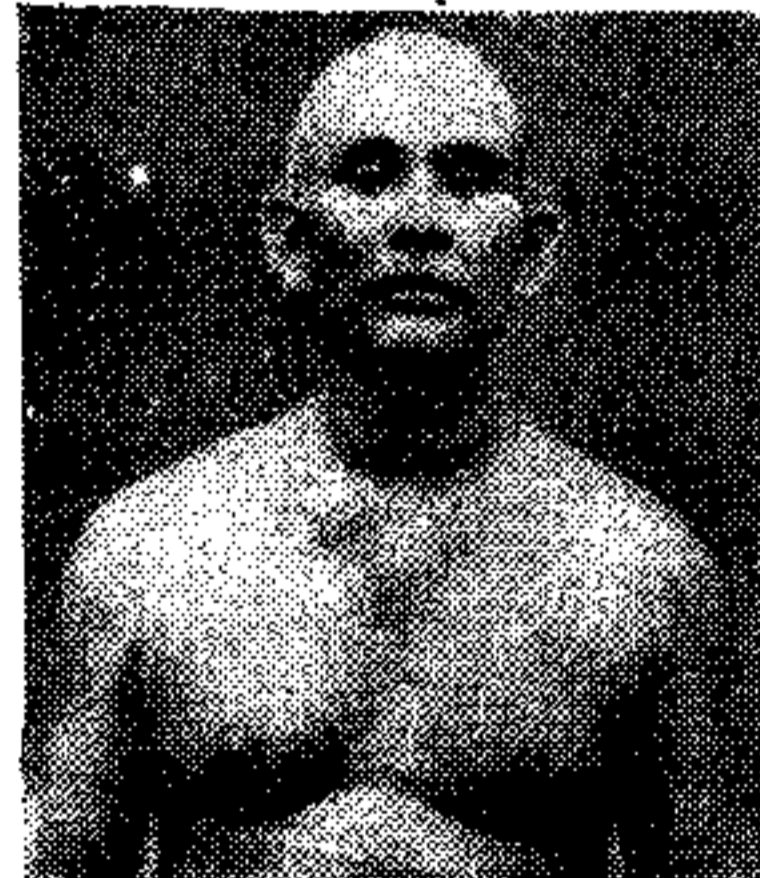
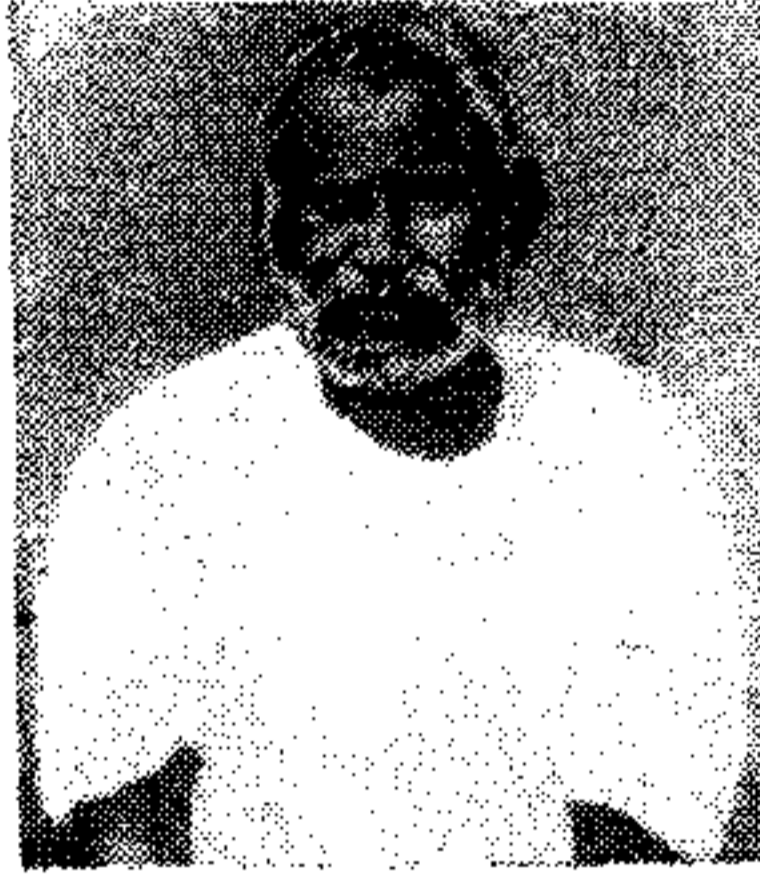
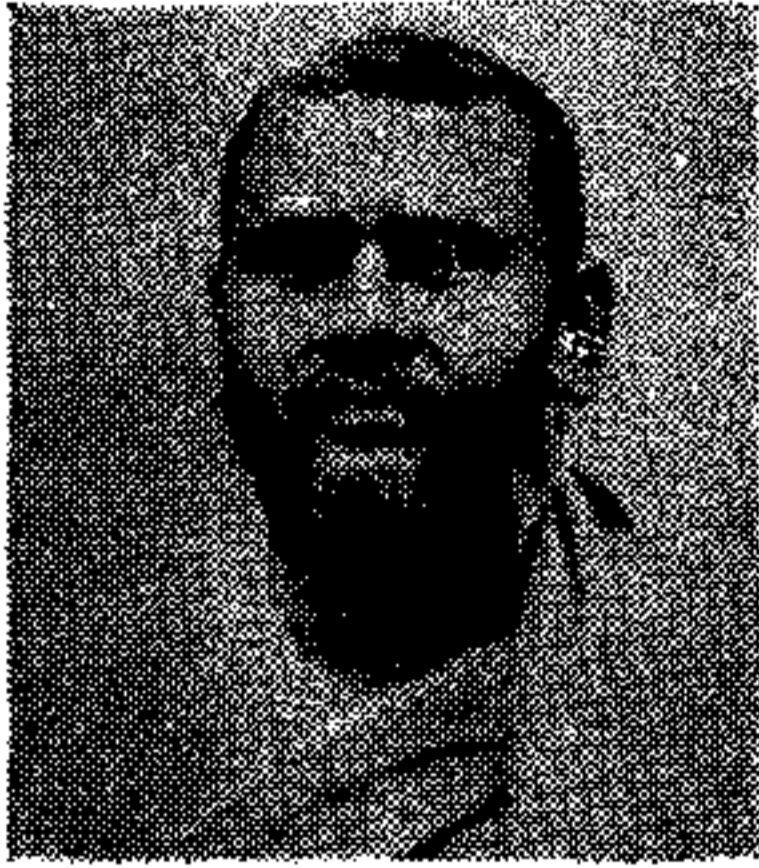
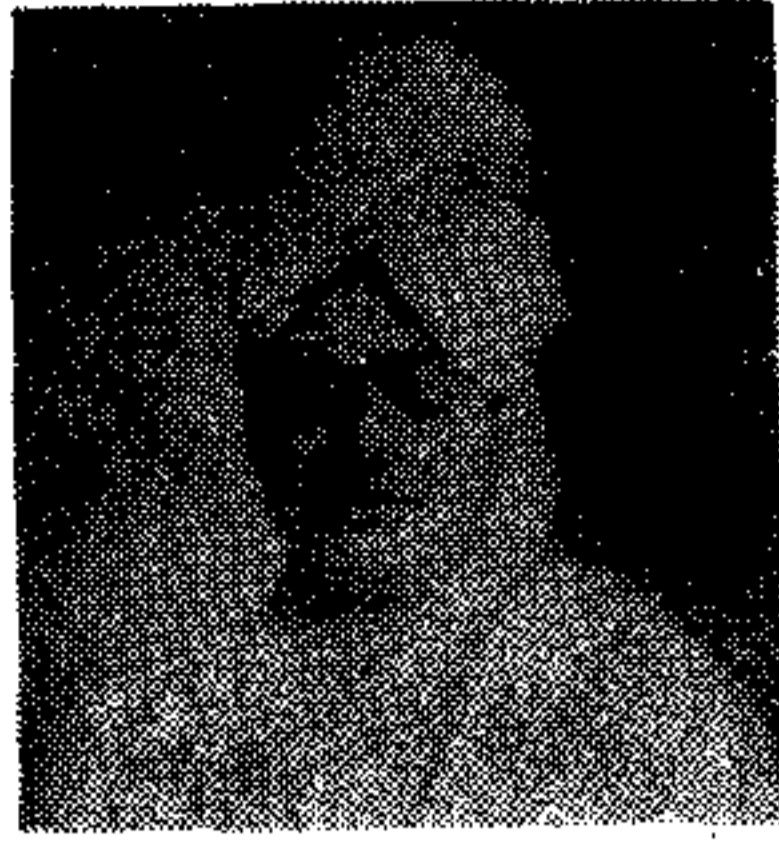
The All-India Youth Convention (Boys and Girls) of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math from the 24th to 30th of December, 1985 in which about 11,000 people including around 8,000 youths from all over the country participated. Nearly 400 monastics from different centres attended the functions. The programmes included panel discussions, question and answer sessions, symposia, talents display and speeches by monks, eminent scholars and youth delegates. Every evening there was an entertainment programme. On the 25th about 3,000 resident delegates went on a pilgrimage to Kalighat and our centres at Narendrapur, Rahara and Golpark. An impressive and colourful procession to Dakshineswar, stretching nearly to 2 Km length, was taken out on the 29th morning. The convention, which was a grand success, came to a conclusion on the 30th afternoon. In this connection an exhibition and a Youth Fair were organized at Saradapitha, Belur. A commemorative souvenir to mark the occasion was also brought out.

RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA

MOVEMENT

Under the guidance of 'The Committee for the comprehensive study of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement' regional seminars were organized by Bombay, Salem, Patna, Madras Vidyapith and Bangalore (Math) centres. Eminent educationists and scholars participated in these conferences, which were well attended.

RAMAKRISHNA SANGHA



First Row : Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi.

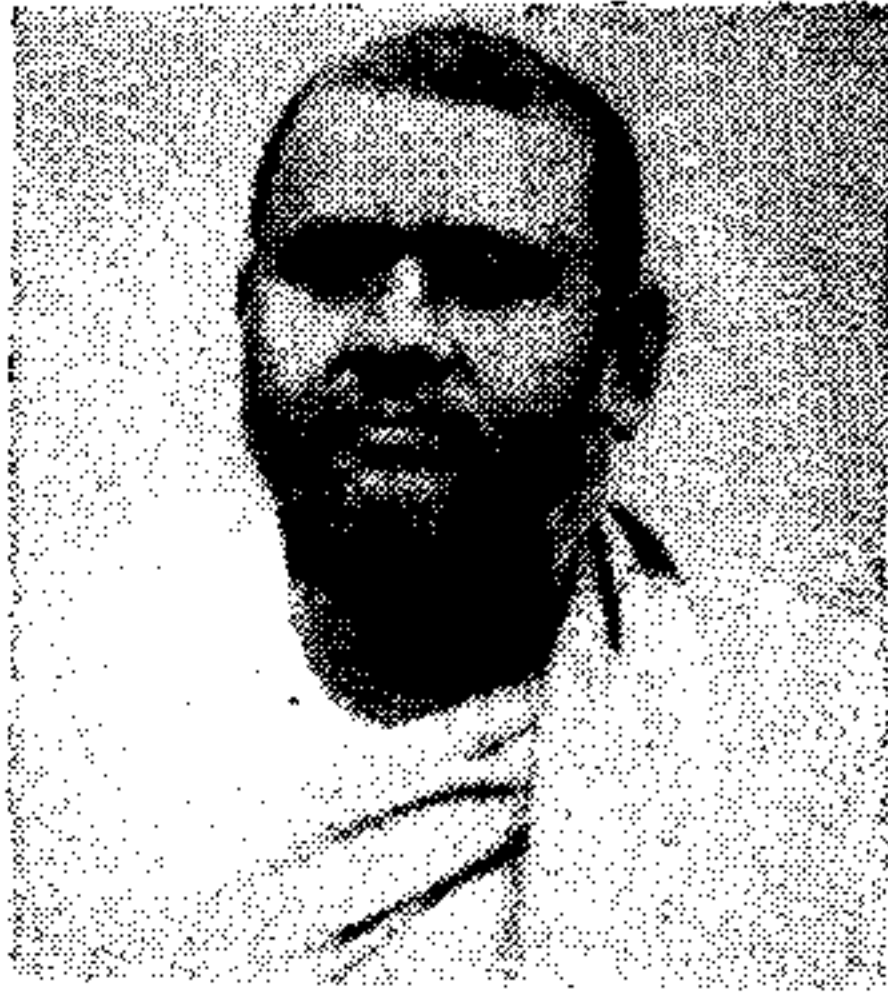
Second Row : Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Yogananda, Swami Niranjanananda.

Third Row : Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swami Saradananda, Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Shivananda.

Fourth Row : Swami Abhedananda, Swami Advaitananda, Swami Turiyananda, Swami Akhandananda.

Fifth Row : Swami Trigunatitananda, Swami Subodhananda, Swami Vijnanananda.

PRESIDENTS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER



Swami Brahmananda
First President
Feb. 10, 1901—April 10, 1922



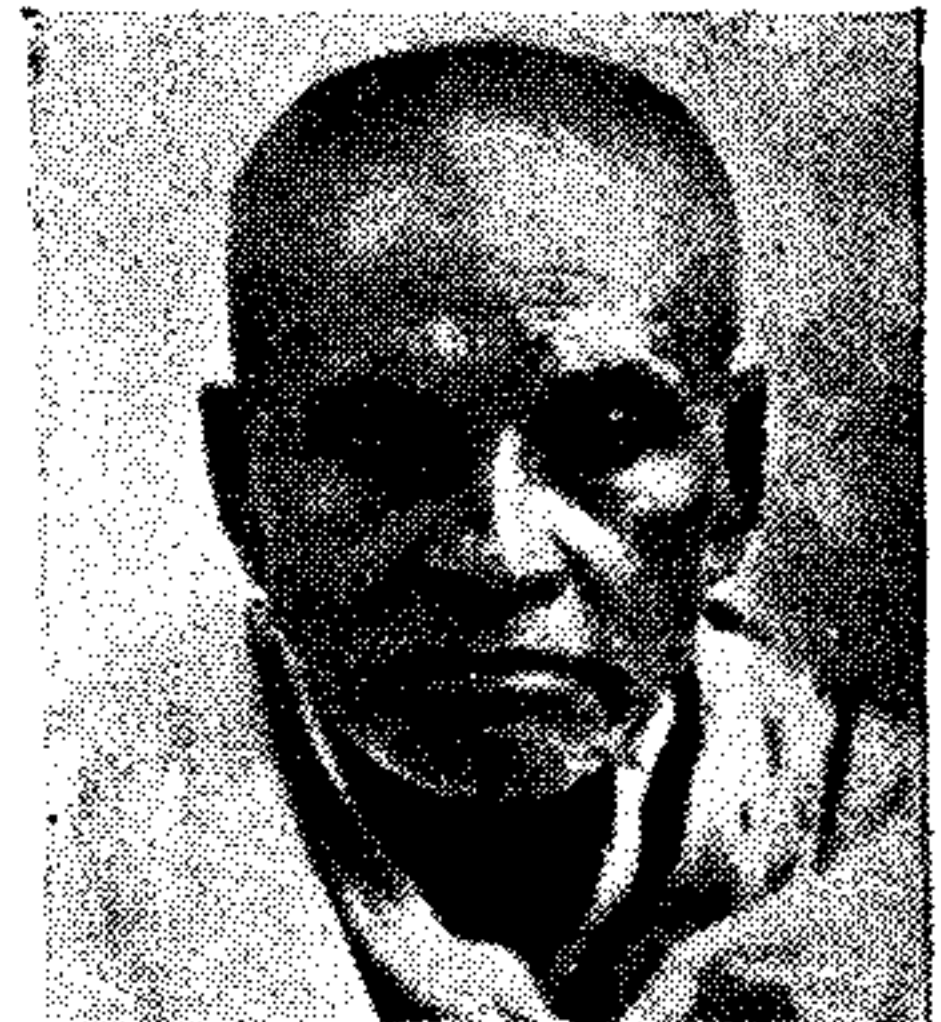
Swami Shivananda
Second President
May 2, 1922—Feb. 20, 1934



Swami Akhandananda
Third President
March 13, 1934—Feb. 7, 1937



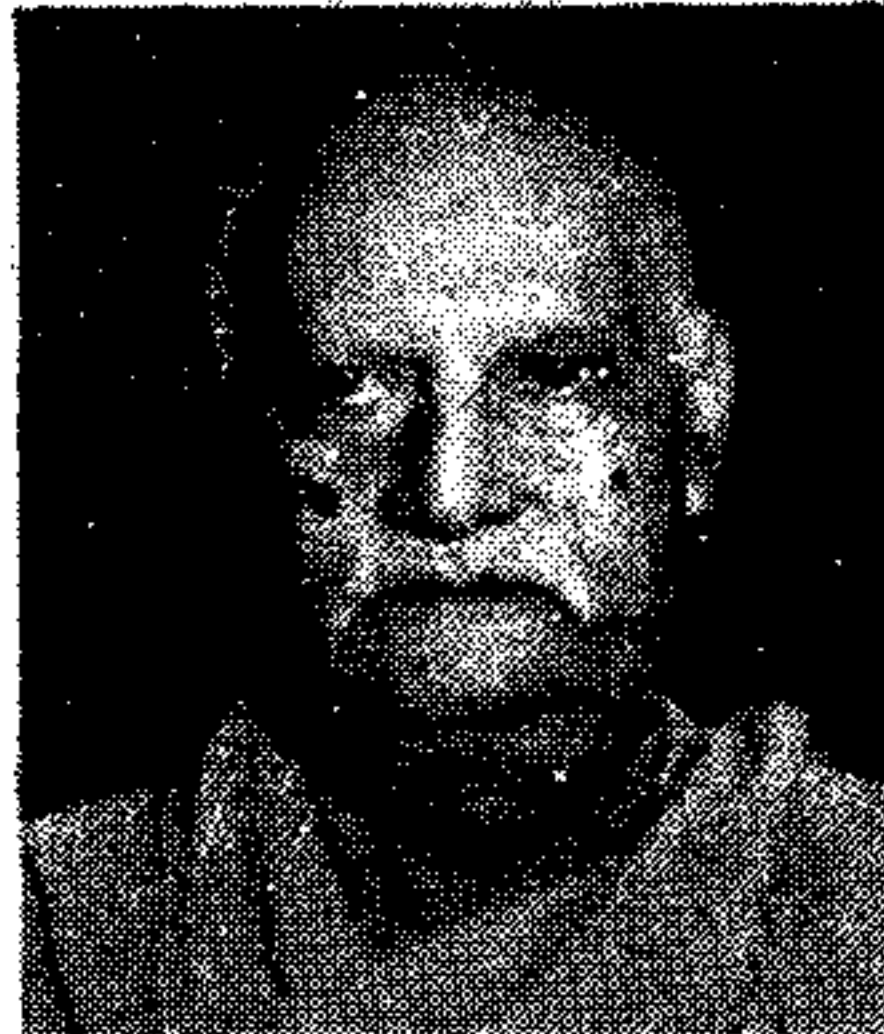
Swami Vijnanananda
Fourth President
March 5, 1937—April 25, 1938



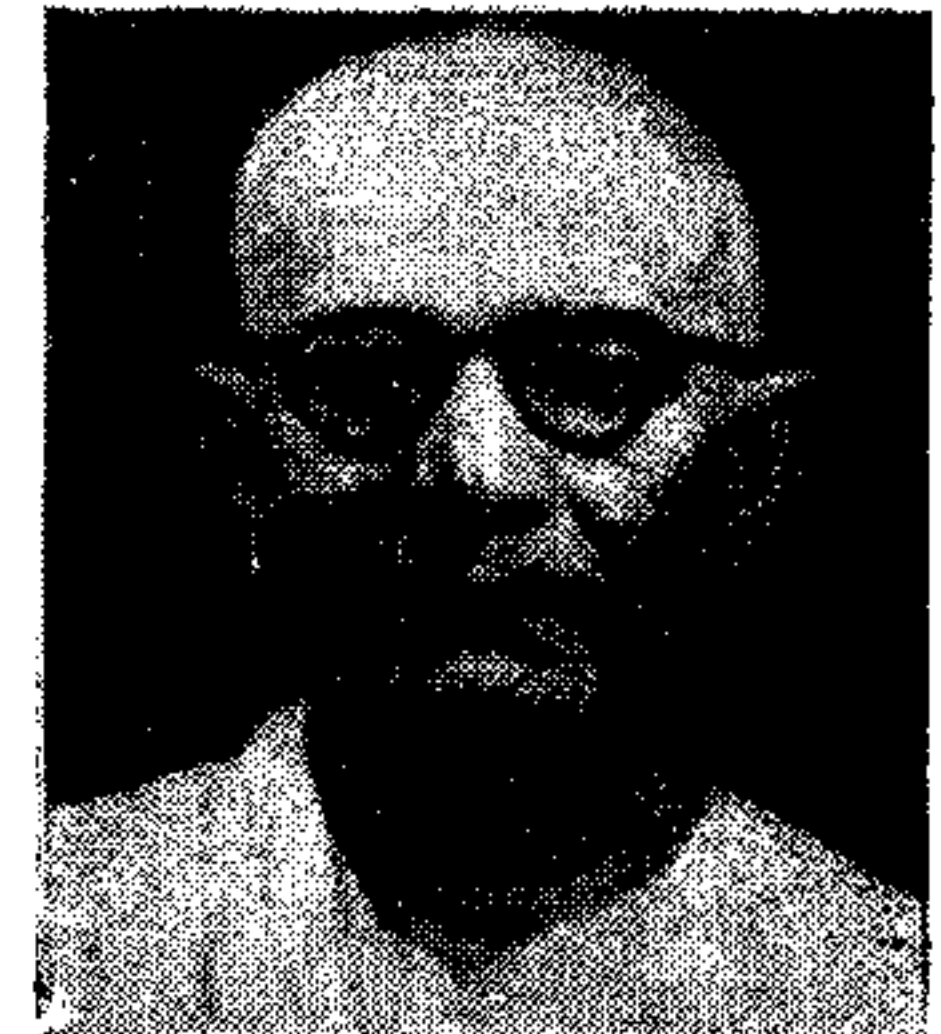
Swami Suddhananda
Fifth President
May 18, 1938—Oct. 23, 1938



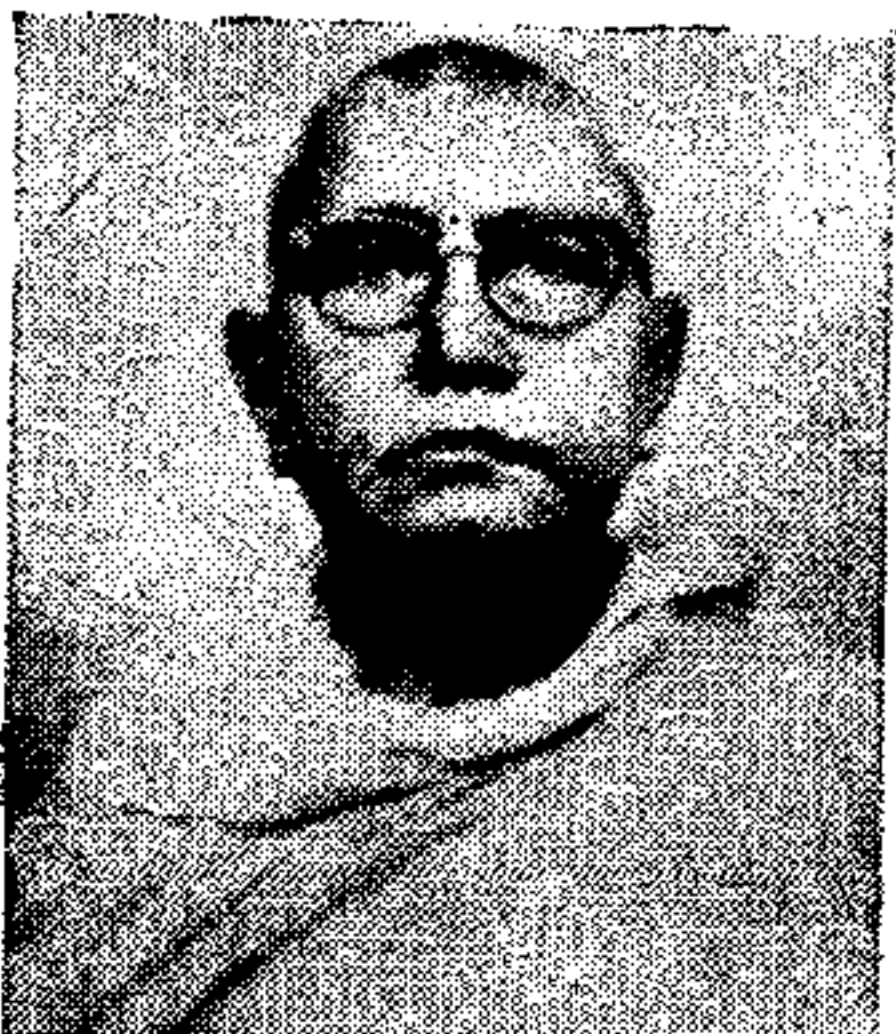
Swami Virajananda
Sixth President
Nov. 19, 1938—May 30, 1951



Swami Sankarananda
Seventh President
June 19, 1951—Jan. 13, 1962



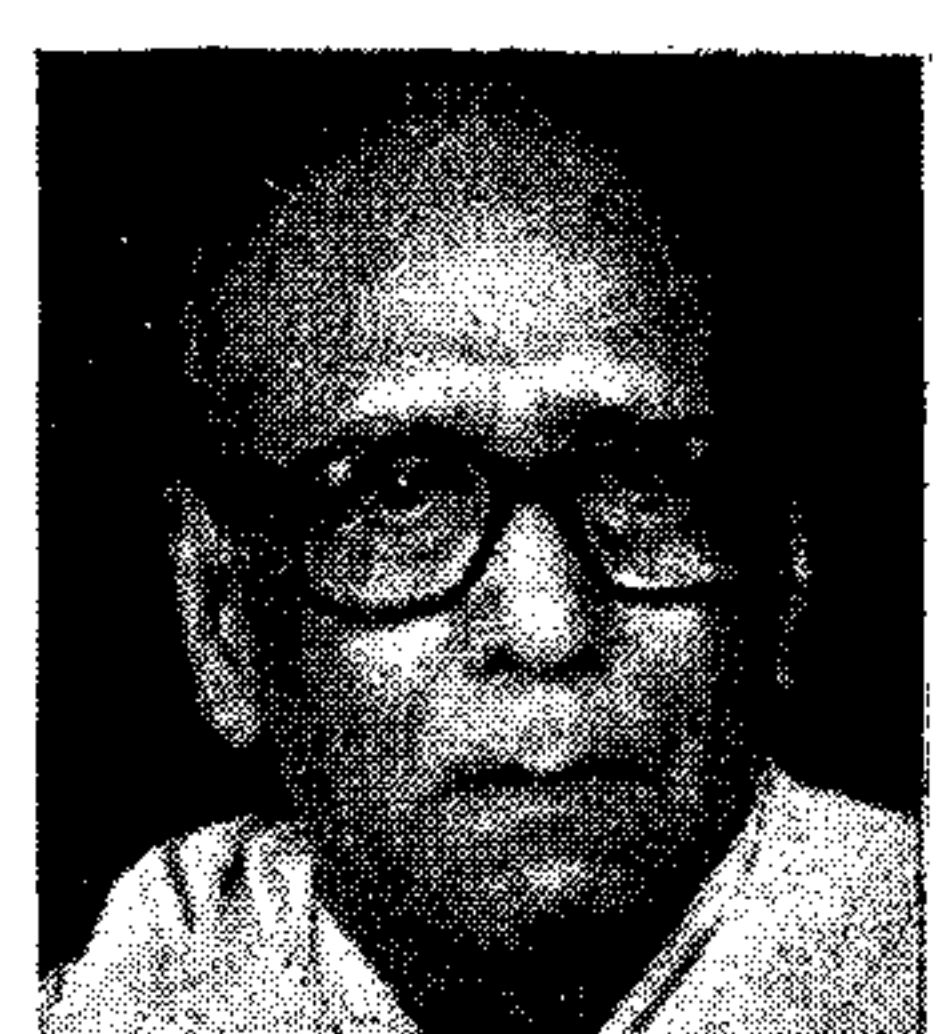
Swami Vishuddhananda
Eighth President
March 6, 1962—June 16, 1962



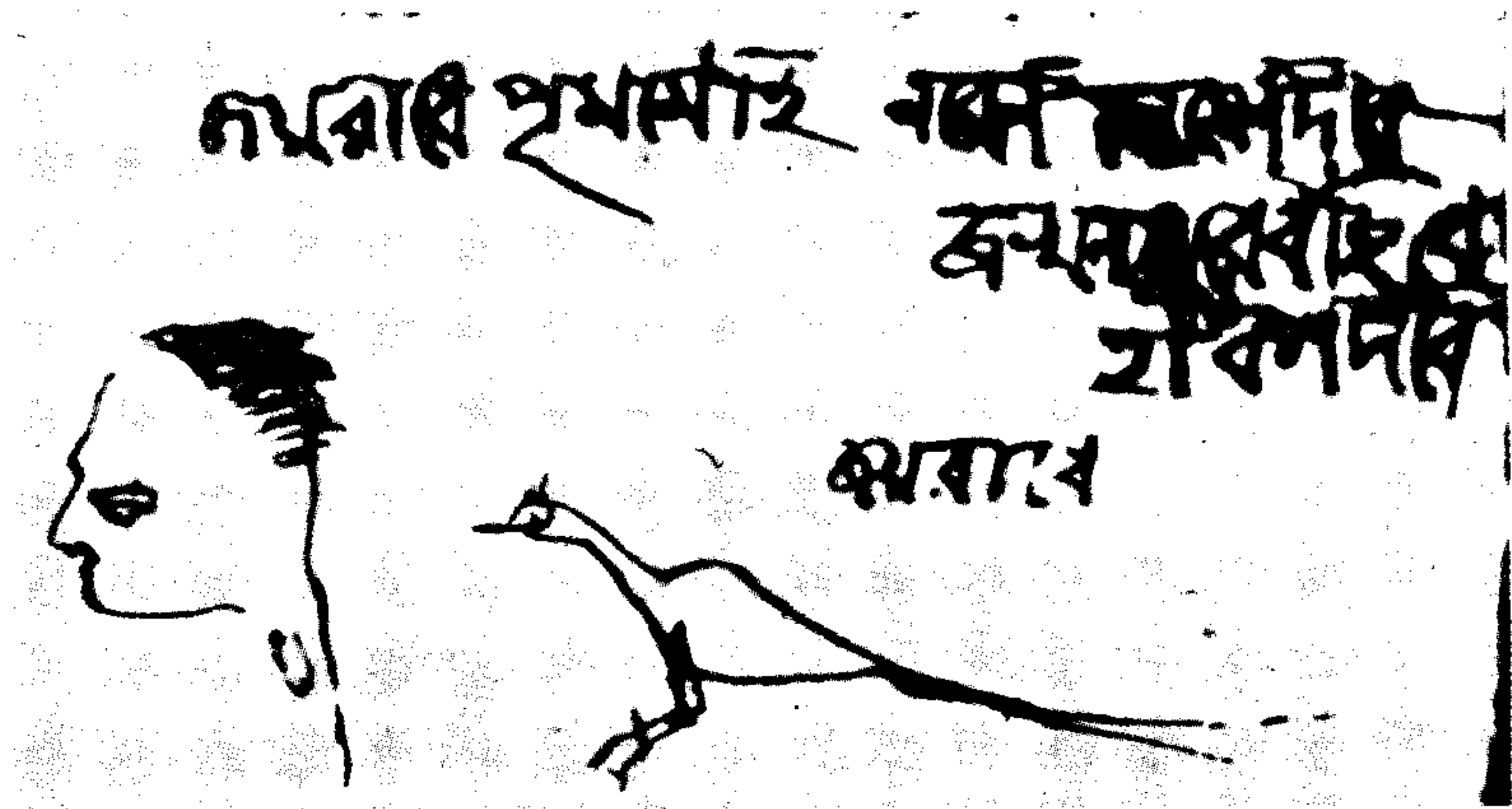
Swami Madhavananda
Ninth President
1962—1965



Swami Vireswarananda
Tenth President
1966—1985



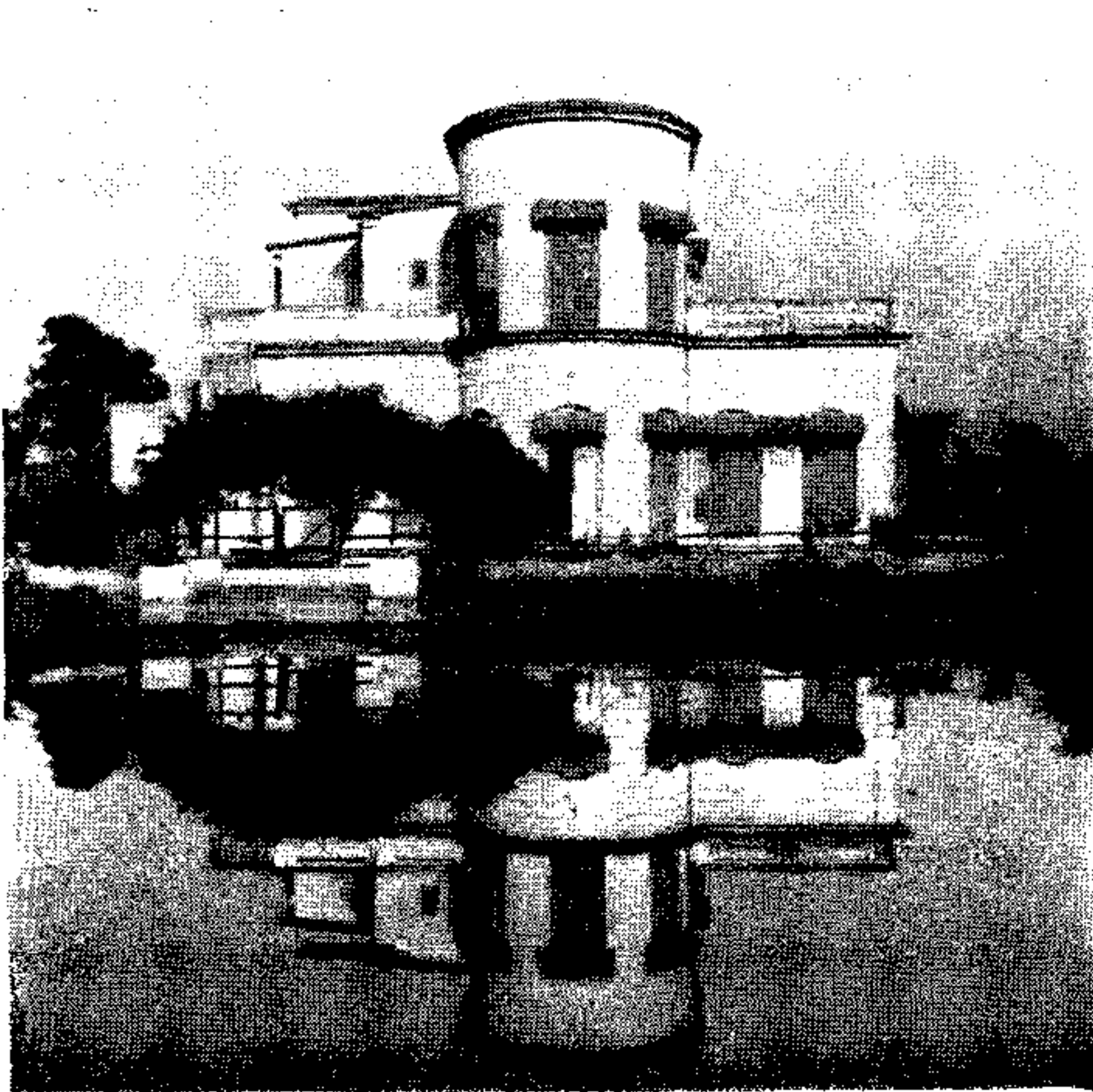
Swami Gambhirananda
Eleventh President
From April 1985



Facsimile of Sri Ramakrishna's mandate to Narendra :

Jai Radhe Premamayi. Naren siksa dibe yakhan ghare baire hak dibe. Jai Radhe 'Victory to Radha. Love personified, Naren will teach others when he will call out inside and outside the country'.

The sketches, made by the Master himself on the same piece of paper, show a human head, believed to stand for Naren, and a peacock, believed to stand for Sri Ramakrishna.



Outhouse where the first Math was started.

Cossipore garden-house where the Ramakrishna Sangha had its birth and where eleven of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples received ochre robes from him.



Antpur : the stone slab marks the place where the disciples took their first (informal) vow of renunciation standing around a *dhuni* (sacred fire) on 24 December 1886.



Baranagar Math : the dilapidated building which housed the first monastic community.



Baranagar Math—group photo of monastic and lay devotees taken in 1887.

Standing (left to right)

Swamis Shivananda, Ramakrishnananda, Vivekananda, Premananda, Deben Majumdar, Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.), Swami Trigunatitananda, Mustaphi (maternal uncle of Deben Majumdar).

Sitting (left to right)

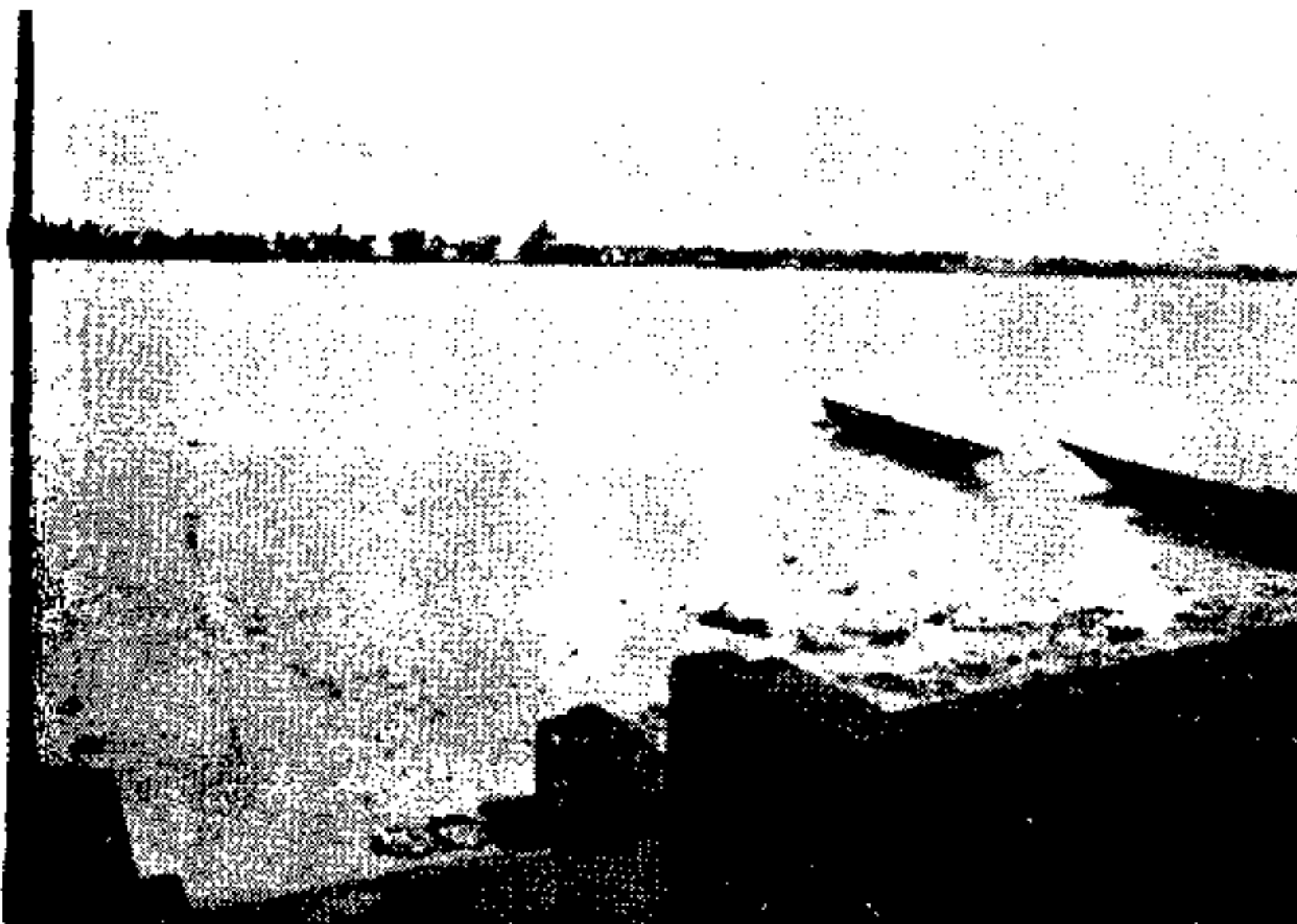
Swamis Niranjanananda, Saradananda, Brahmananda, Abhedananda.



Baranagar Math : ruins of one of the two pillars at the entrance to the old monastery which no longer exists.



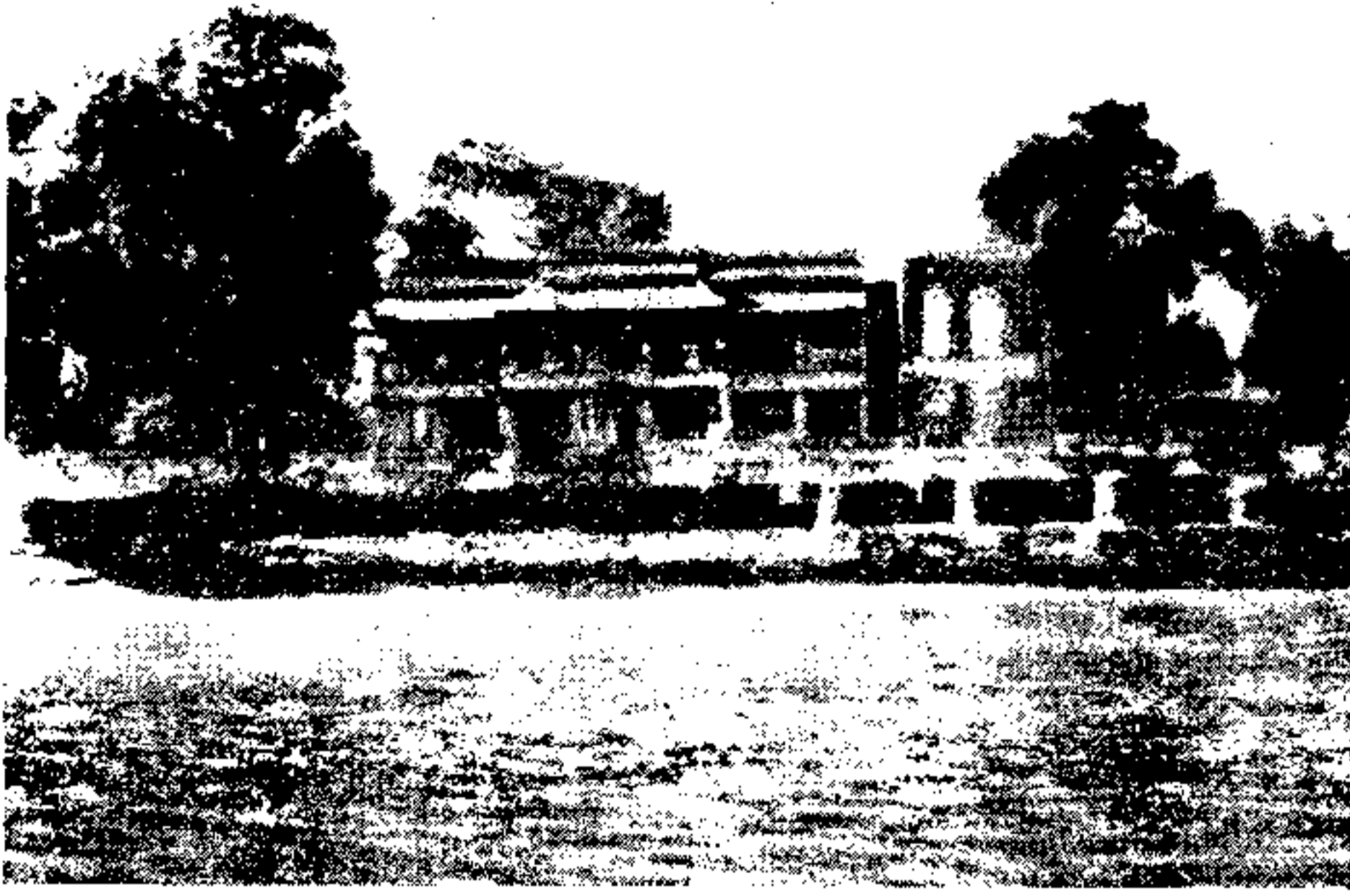
Baranagar Math : the two entrance pillars as they are now after renovation.



Ratan Babu's ghat where the inmates of Baranagar Math used to take bath. On the other bank stands Belur Math.



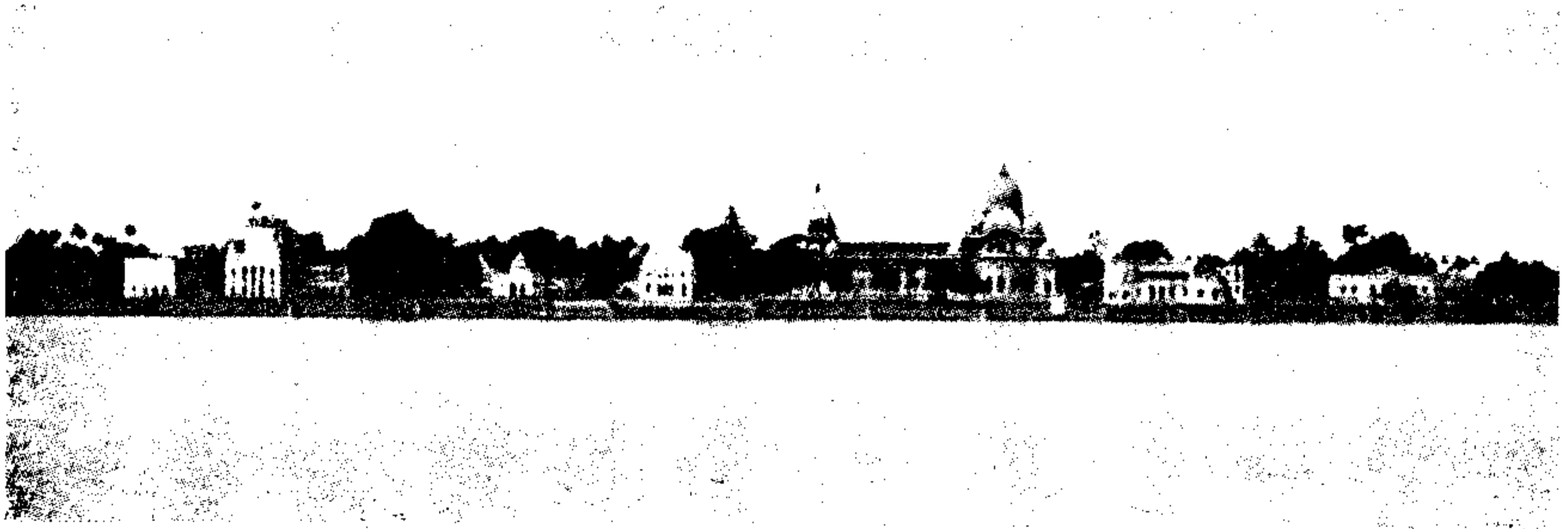
Alambazar Math : the Ramakrishna Sangha functioned here between November 1891 and February 1898.



Nilambar Babu's garden-house where the monastery remained from February to December 1898.

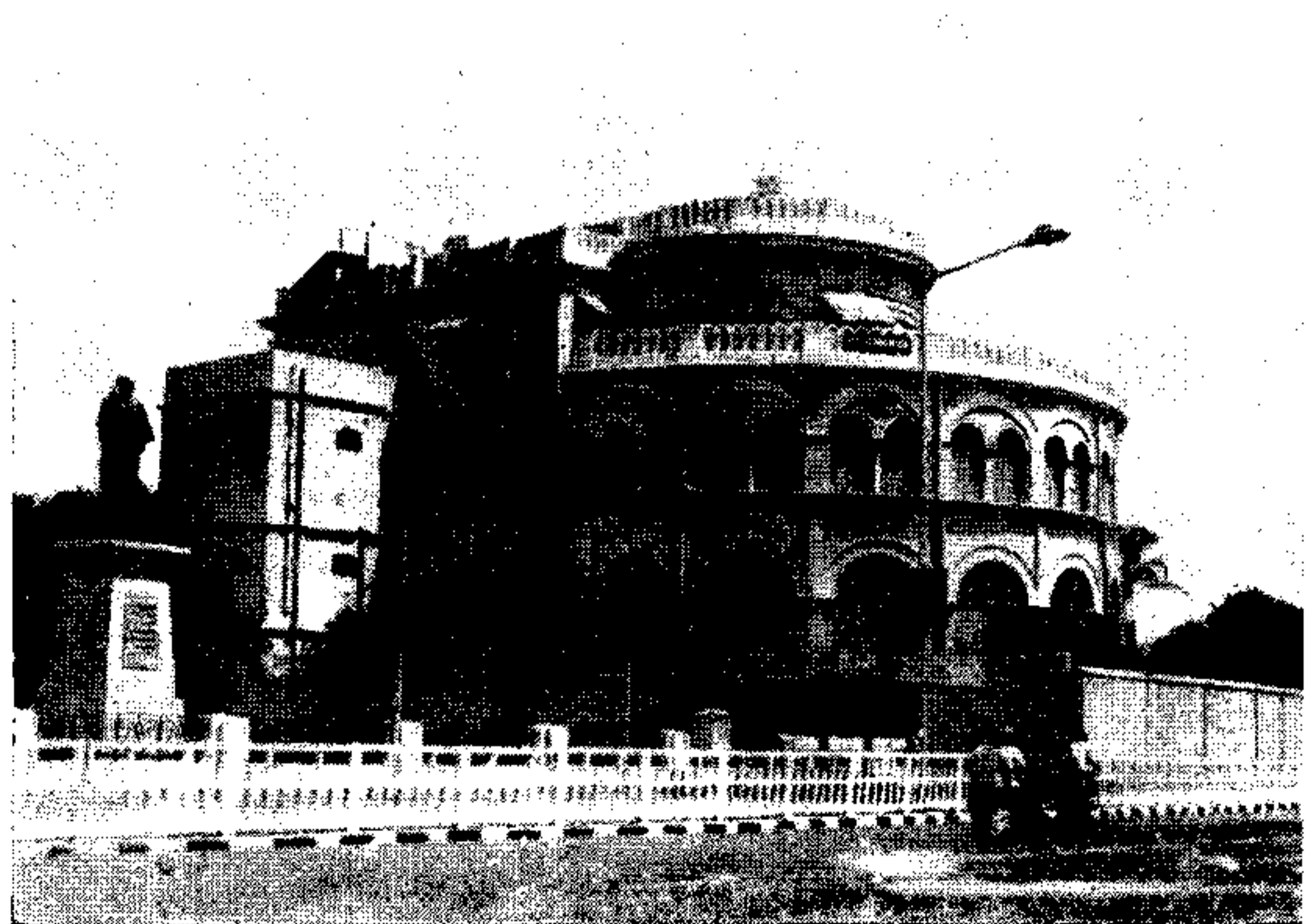


Beur Math as it was during the early days.



Beur Math as it is today, with a row of temples on the left dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Brahmananda, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

Castle Kernan (now renamed 'Vivekananda House') where Swami Vivekananda stayed in Madras in 1897, and where the first branch of the Ramakrishna Order in South India was started in June 1897 (after functioning for a couple of months in another building which no longer exists).



SWAMIJI'S INVITATION

पीत्वा पीत्वा परममृतं वीतससाररागाः
हित्वा हित्वा सकलकलहप्रापिणीं स्वार्थसिद्धिम् ।
ध्यात्वा ध्यात्वा गुरुवरपदं सर्वकल्याणरूपं
नत्वा नत्वा सकलभुवनं पातुमामन्त्रयामः ॥

प्राप्तं यद्वै त्वनादिनिघनं वेदोदधि मथित्वा
दत्तं यस्य प्रकरणे हरिहरब्रह्मादिदेवैर्बलम् ।
पूर्णं यत्तु प्राणसारैर्भौमनारायणानां
रामकृष्णस्तगुं धत्ते तत् पूर्णपात्रमिदं भोः ॥

Drinking constantly the nectar of immortality, giving up attachment to the world, discarding for ever self-aggrandizement which is the root of all quarrels, and ever meditating on the blessed feet of our Guru which are the embodiment of all well-being, with repeated salutations we invite the whole world to drink this nectar. That nectar, obtained by churning the eternal ocean of Vedas, for which Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva and other gods lent their support, and which is charged with the life-essence of the gods of the earth (Avatāras)—Sri Ramakrishna holds that nectar in his person in its fullest measure. Hail!

—Swami Vivekananda

TANNO HAMSAH PRACODAYAT

May that Self inspire us

SWAMJI'S INVITATION

पीला पीला परममूर्तं बीतसंहाररसाः
हिला हिला सकलकर्मदापिणी स्वार्थसिद्धिम् ।
ध्यात्वा ध्यात्वा दुःखरसं सर्वकल्याणकर्म
कथा कथा सकलमूर्तं पशुभ्यामन्वयात् ॥

आप्तं यद्देव्यादिपितृभ्यो देवोद्यति बहिला
एतं वायु प्रकरणे हृदिहृदय्यादिदेवैर्देवम् ।
पूर्वं यत्तु आसहारंभीभवापयमानं
एवमुच्यतेऽतं अतं तद्दुर्लभाभिव्रि श्रीः ॥

Drinking constantly the nectar of immortality, giving up attachment to the world, discarding for ever self-aggrandizement which is the root of all quarrels, and ever meditating on the blessed feet of our Guru which are the embodiment of all well-being, with repeated salutations we invite the whole world to drink this nectar. That nectar, obtained by churning the eternal ocean of Vedas, for which Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and other gods lent their support, and which is charged with the life-essence of the gods of the earth (Avatāras)—Sri Ramakrishna holds that nectar in his person in its fullest measure. Hail!

—Swami Vivekananda

TANNO HANSAH PRACODAYAT

May that Self inspire us