

INSTITUTE BOOKLETS : 12

**THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES**

By

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA



**THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
INSTITUTE OF CULTURE
CALCUTTA**

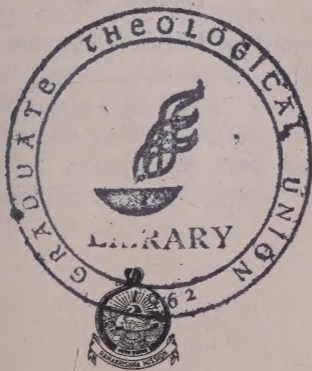
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The following was taken from the report of the
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to examine the administration of the courts
and to make recommendations for their
improvement. The Committee's report was
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Our Seal

‘The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of *karma*, the lotus, of *bhakti*, and the rising-sun, of *jñāna*. The encircling serpent is indicative of *yoga* and awakened *kuṇḍalinī śakti*, while the swan in the picture stands for the *paramātman*. Therefore, the idea of the picture is that by the union of *karma*, *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *yoga*, the vision of the *paramātman* is obtained.’

Swami Vivekananda



तत्रोद्दिष्टः प्रवोदयात्

THE

RAMAKRISHNA

MISSION

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

‘The national ideals of India are Renunciation and Service ; intensify her in those channels, the rest will take care of itself.’

Swami Vivekananda

I

THE first quarter of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of British supremacy in India. Within the space of two centuries, a small company of intrepid merchants from over the seas had become the rulers of a vast continent. The people of India, both Hindu and Muslim, awoke one fine morning to find the great Moghul Empire fallen and the new Empire of the British risen on its ruins. India’s first reaction was a sigh of relief ; after decades of warfare and strife, the country was blessed with the beginnings of a long era of peace and political unity.

II

But this new phenomenon in Indian history held deeper implications within itself. For the first time after several centuries, East and West met on the soil of India. India

had been in direct cultural and commercial intercourse with ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt till the rise of the Arabian Empire. This contact was continued indirectly through the Arabs till about the middle of the thirteenth century. With the rise of the Ottomon Empire, this contact almost ceased, and India became a memory with the peoples of Europe. The last decade of the fifteenth century saw the discovery of America by Columbus and the re-discovery of India by Vasco da Gama—two events which were to affect profoundly the history of the world.

In Europe itself, the Renaissance saw the re-birth of ancient Greece. The keen intelligence and bubbling energy of the European races manifested themselves in a great outburst of scientific thought and inquiry which was to revolutionize every department of life and activity. Invention followed invention, discovery followed discovery, while an extended commerce brought material prosperity in its train. Within the space of three hundred years, the nations of Western Europe became the creators and representatives of a virile culture and civilization whose basis was technical efficiency and whose aim was material prosperity. It was such a Europe that came to India through England in the nineteenth century.

III

India was dazed. The most ancient nation on the face of the earth, which remembered itself in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, which counted history not in centuries but in millenniums, which had grappled with some of the deepest problems of life and existence, whose trade and commerce had brought prosperity to Rome and Greece and Egypt in the past—such a nation found itself in a critical situation. Though the shock of conquest and the shame of subjection is a serious matter for any nation, the source of apprehension in this case lay deeper. India had seen conquests and invasions before. These invasions passed off, leaving the national ideals unchanged. The invaders in a short time became assimilated in the body politic of the nation. As invasions go, this one was mild in comparison. But the subtle influence of the powerful culture of the West, working on the mind of India in a variety of ways, began to uproot the inheritance of the race itself. India inherits a culture and a civilization which had been built up silently and steadily since five thousand years or more by a succession of sages, thinkers, philosophers, and national leaders of the first magnitude. The very soul of India is enshrined in this

culture. It is at the back of the spirit of charity and universality for which Indians are noted. In the field of religion it expresses itself as toleration and forbearance. The memorable words of the *Ṛg-Veda*, 'Truth is One ; sages call it by various names', form the Magna Charta of religious freedom. This, along with the synthetic teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and the great love and compassion of Buddha, has made the average Indians fine specimens of gentleness and courtesy. Another aspect of this culture is its deep spirituality. The Upaniṣads had proclaimed, 'The Ātman is to be realized', and an unending procession of seekers and devotees has borne witness to this highest Reality. India has existed to bear witness to the great truth of all religions, the reality of the highest in us. She has given the highest place of honour to her 'madmen of God'.

Today we are able to perceive that these two characteristics of Indian culture—tolerance and catholicity on the one hand and thirst for and search after the Spirit on the other—are of supreme importance not merely to India but to the whole world as well. Many a western thinker has felt and expressed that India's contribution towards a stabler and completer world civilization is

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

invaluable. She has been hugging to her bosom the promise of this fulfilment.

IV

But in the nineteenth century it looked as though India is to lose this culture and her soul as well. The dominant European culture came to India through the new system of education introduced by Macaulay in 1836. Before the dazzling civilization of the West, India could put up only a poor show. As the new education advanced, imitation of the West began to spread, and very soon the old culture ceased to have any hold on the minds of the English educated generation.

The old heritage of India began to be assailed from many directions. The spread of the naive materialistic philosophy of the century weakened the hold of religion on the minds of the youth. Macaulay could write to his father with evident satisfaction in 1836:

'No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion.'¹

On the other hand, Christian missionaries indulged in a wholesale vilification of the Hindu religion. It is a sad chapter in the

1. G. O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, Vol I, p. 155.

history of inter-religious contact. William Edward, Judge of the Agra High Court, gave expression to the prevailing missionary attitude: 'Our best safeguard is in the evangelization of the country.'

Hindu religion itself had fallen on evil days. The pure religion of the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* had degenerated into meaningless formalism; superstition was rampant. The race had almost lost its spirit of independence and fearlessness due to long subjection. Social rigidity and exclusiveness had nurtured many an injustice and oppression. The dynamic conception of life taught by the Upaniṣads had given place to a static complaisance, and life moved in the narrowest circle possible. Society as a whole seemed to have forgotten the larger purpose and plan of the ancient seers and law-givers. There was a languishing of spirit everywhere.

V

Into this old bottle of social and national life was poured the new wine of European culture. There was a ferment, unrest, and questioning which issued forth in a Renaissance of the spirit of India. At the head of this movement in its first phases, guiding it and giving it a healthy direction, stands the personality and character of Raja Ram-

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

mohun Roy. The Raja strove hard to revive the spirit of his countrymen by drawing inspiration from the Upaniṣads. At the same time, he was liberal and catholic enough to accept and assimilate the spiritual deliverances of western culture on a basis of equality. But the time was not propitious. The work of synthesis had to wait owing to two factors: first, the racial superiority-complex of the rulers, coupled with the superior arrogance of the Christian missionaries, judged India and Hinduism as benighted and spent-up forces; secondly, Hinduism had to rediscover herself and collect her scattered spiritual forces. India was to achieve these two purposes much later in the personalities of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

The first stirrings of the re-awakening were felt in Bengal. The Brahmo Samaj, under the leadership of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen, liberalized Hindu religion and society and, by its appeal to the educated minds of India, stemmed the tide of conversion to a denationalizing Christianity, on the one hand, and a cheap atheism, on the other. In the Punjab, Swami Dayananda Saraswati 'forged a dynamic Faith from the pure metal of the Vedas', and his Arya Samaj vitalized Hindu

society in that quarter. A similar service was rendered by the Theosophical Society in the South. On the one hand, the reformers, in their crusading zeal, mercilessly battered the ancient edifice of Hinduism, while, on the other, the missionaries lost no opportunities in vilifying Hinduism and creating social disruption. The noble ideal of the synthesis of eastern and western cultures for which the great Raja lived and worked was receding further into the background. India, through the Raja, offered the hand of fellowship and reconciliation, but there was none competent to receive it. Western culture had yet to find its best representatives in India who would be free from arrogance and superciliousness.

As it was, the double attack on orthodoxy provoked a reaction: leaving aside the defensive attitude, it launched on an offensive. And the result was the creation of an atmosphere in India charged with hatred and violence, and a most vituperative literature in many a provincial language which was the shame of the country.

As a result of these reform and anti-reform movements and the incursions of the Christian missionaries, the whole Hindu society was convulsed, and many earnest



BHAGAVAN SRI RAMAKRISHNA (1836—1886)

and thinking men began to turn their attention to science and to the agnostic philosophers of the West like Spencer and Huxley.

VI

In the midst of this chaos and confusion, a new star was rising in the firmament of India—one that was ere long to shed peace and light in the land. The great Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) was performing his unique experiments in the realm of the spirit in the vast and well-equipped laboratory of his mind. Away from the 'madding crowd's ignoble strife', in the quiet temple of Dakshineswar near Calcutta, on the banks of the sacred Gaṅgā, Sri Ramakrishna lived all the major religions in turn and tasted truth through all of them. By the year 1875, he had finished his experiments, and very soon, he came into intimate contact with the thought currents and aspirations of Renascent India through Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahmo Samaj. For the next eleven years, till his entering *mahāsamādhi* (final passing away) in 1886, he was constantly pouring forth in simple words and rich eloquence, with the aid of stories and parables, the great truths he had realized, and hundreds of men and women, educated and unlettered, young and old, were his listeners.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

What was his message? All religions are true ; there is no need for any fight among religions. A simple teaching indeed! But what tremendous consequences follow from this simple message! Undoubtedly, the world has heard this teaching before ; but *his* teaching of it made a vast difference ; for 'he spoke as one with authority and not as the scribes'. So far as Hinduism is concerned, it was only a rediscovery of the spirit of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. A tree is to be judged by its best fruits ; the fruit of religion is sainthood which is character and character which is sainthood. Judged by this standard, we shall find that all religions have produced men and women of the most exalted character and saintliness. To be religious, therefore, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is to struggle to *realize* God ; nothing more and nothing less. Professions are not enough ; we are to live, move, and have our being in spirit which is God. Indifference is a greater enemy of religion than even irreligion. In the words of the biblical prophet, a lengthening of the ropes requires a strengthening of the stakes. What is required is a deepening of the spiritual life of humanity. Spirituality is the core of religion ; it alone can allay the hunger of the religious soul. Dogmas and doctrines are as

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

stones to a hungry man. They divide and lead to conflict, and these conflicts have brought religion into contempt. What is required is inter-religious fellowship, and this will come about only if we realize the fundamental unity of all religions.

VII

Sri Ramakrishna passed away in 1886 ; but he left a batch of young disciples imbued with his spirit to continue his work. Headed by the great Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), these educated young men lived in obscurity for about six years performing intense spiritual *sādhana* and wandering, mostly on foot, through the length and breadth of India, penniless, and depending upon God alone. Thus, towards the close of 1892, Swami Vivekananda reached Kanyakumari, the last southern extremity of India, where, in deep meditation, the whole history of India unfolded before his vision, and he became identified, as it were, with the achievements and failures, sorrows and triumphs of his motherland. Her past glory and continued existence through millenniums filled him with inspiration ; but her present condition filled him with dismay and dejection. Yet, presently, the future filled him with hope. With tears in his eyes and hope in his breast, he discovered his mission in life.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

which was to dedicate himself to the regeneration of India, the queen of his adoration, to reawaken her from her deep long sleep. *And this awakening is to be of real good not only to herself but also to the whole world. In short, an awakened India is to be a complete synthesis of the past and the present, of the East and the West.*

Like a second Buddha emerging from the seclusion of Buddha Gaya, Swami Vivekananda emerged from his meditations at Kanyakumari with the same determination which impelled Buddha 2,500 years ago to preach his great Gospel, 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many' (*bahujana-hitāya, bahujana-sukhāya*), and in this mood of assurance and resolve, he arrived in Madras. Here he attracted the attention of a few intelligent and educated young men and here he closed, once for all, the chapter of his obscurity. The enthusiasm of these young men and the help and sympathy of the rulers of Mysore and Khetri enabled him to proceed to America to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago (September 1893).

His speeches at the Parliament are characterized by a wide sympathy, broad outlook, and utter sincerity. In all his ad-

dresses before the Parliament 'he repeated with new argument, but with the same force of conviction, his thesis of a universal religion without limit of time or space, uniting the whole *Credo* of the human spirit, from the enslaved fetishism of the savage to the most liberal creative affirmations of modern science. He harmonized them into a magnificent synthesis, which, far from extinguishing the hope of a single one, helped all hopes to grow and flourish according to their own proper nature. There was to be no other dogma but the divinity inherent in man and his capacity for infinite evolution.'²

He closed his brilliant addresses with the following prophetic words: 'If the Parliament of religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that

2. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, pp. 43-44.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance, "Help and not Fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension".³

No such prophetic words have ever been uttered. The Chicago Parliament of Religions is remembered because of Swami Vivekananda. The Parliament in turn introduced Vivekananda to the people of the United States of America. And for the next four years, the western world, for the first time through the lips of an anointed son of India, heard the universal teachings of the sages of India. The East India Company had exposed before the gaze of the world for nearly three centuries the perishable portion of the wealth of India; but India herself, through Vivekananda, now gave to the same world the imperishable wealth of spiritual and cultural treasures of India.

In the briefest possible statement of his message of India he conveyed also to the modern world the essential spiritual message of every religion:

'Each soul is potentially divine. The

3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, Eleventh Edition, p. 24.

*goal (of life) is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.*⁴

After a strenuous record of lecturing and teaching in America and England, and establishing a permanent Vedanta Society in New York, Swami Vivekananda returned to India in 1897 to enter upon what proved to be the supreme moment not merely of his own career but of the history of Modern India as well. The unknown *sannyāsin* who carried within his bosom the heart of a patriot and of a lover of humanity, who had traversed the sacred soil of India almost unknown five years back, now landed at Colombo armed with conviction and prestige. From Colombo in the South to distant Almora in the Himalayas, his movement was one triumphal procession, and in a series of brilliant lectures, he expounded his philosophy of the Indian national awakening, the way it has to be worked out, the various difficulties ahead, and what part an awak-

4. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

ened India is to play in the coming world events. He upheld the glory of our ancient heritage, the greatness of the Vedānta philosophy, and emphasized the need for making spirituality the basis of all national programmes. Like a true leader befitting the Indian nation, he enunciated the domestic and foreign policy of India to consist in the application of the Vedāntic principles of life to the solution of her religious, economic, social, and political ills, and the preaching of the same broad and catholic ideas of Vedānta to the world outside in order to bring about a spiritual revival in the West in tune with the rational and scientific spirit of the modern age.

Says Romain Rolland about his message:

*'His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports, must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero.'*⁵

The *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* has

5. *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 162.



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1863—1902)

rightly been considered the fountain-head of national inspiration, and Swami Vivekananda stands as the great 'Patriot Saint of Modern India.'

VIII

Apart from lectures and discourses, valuable as they are, another gift of Swami Vivekananda to India and the world is the organization which he founded as an effective conduit for the working out of his ideas. Ever since the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, a monastic order bearing his name had been organized by his *sannyāsin* disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda which gradually set up the following twin but inseparable objects before itself:

- (i) To bring into existence a band of monks devoted to leading a life of purity, renunciation, and practical spirituality under the inspiration of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, from among whom teachers and workers could be trained and sent out to serve the world in all possible ways. And,
- (ii) to carry on, in conjunction with lay workers, religious, philanthropic, and charitable activities.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

looking upon all men, women, and children irrespective of caste, creed, nationality, sex, and colour, as veritable manifestations of the Divine.

In 1899, Swami Vivekananda, on his return from the West, established the Ramakrishna Math, which embodies the first of the above objects, at Belur (Howrah District, Bengal) under a Deed of Trust known as the Belur Math Trust. Two years earlier, in May 1897, he had started an association called the Ramakrishna Mission Association with a view to giving a concrete shape to the second of the above objects. Soon after this, the Math took upon itself, and for some years carried on, the work of the Mission Association also. As its activities increased and responsibilities grew, it was found necessary to give the Association a legal status. Accordingly, it was registered in 1909 under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 under the name of the RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, with its management vested in a Governing Body consisting of the Trustees of the Belur Math for the time being. Both the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission soon extended their sphere of activity with branches in different parts of the country and abroad.

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

At the back of these principles of the Ramakrishna Movement there are, as their sanction, certain experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, besides the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* and the great examples of Buddha and Jesus and the movements associated with them. The one idea that haunted Swami Vivekananda during his *parivrājaka* (wandering monk) days was how to make Vedānta practical, how to bridge the gulf between *paramārtha* and *vyavahāra*, between the claims of spirituality and the practical life of the world. The Upaniṣads proclaim the solidarity and spiritual oneness of the whole universe, but human experience affirms the many. Life demands a reconciliation of these two poles of experience. The *Gītā*, through its teaching of *niṣkāma-karma*, had enunciated this principle long ago, but circumstances were then not propitious to apply it on a collective scale. The genius of Swami Vivekananda lies in the formulation of his scheme of practical Vedānta through his famous doctrine of service—the service of all beings, looking upon them as the Divine or as sparks thereof. The good of self is reconciled with the welfare of the world: *Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*. This attitude at once removes all distinction between the sacred

and the secular ; work *is* worship. Life itself is religion. Ordination is as much necessary for the worker as for the priest. In the words of Sister Nivedita :

‘If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.’⁶

This is the background, this the basis of all the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Julian Huxley, in one of his thoughtful books, points to the necessity for creating a body of people which will join the liberal and rational spirit of science to the ardour and faith of religion. He asks :

‘Is it possible to plan a body which shall engender enthusiasm and canonize devotion after the fashion of a young religious order, but which shall not fall into the dangers of religious dogmatism on the one hand, and on the other shall, by defects in its organization, slip into the conservatism or worldliness

⁶. ‘Introduction’ to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, Eleventh Edition, p. xv

which is the usual fate of so many orders? '7

The history of India of the last few decades demonstrates clearly the practicability of this proposition. *The new movements of the spirit of India as initiated by Swami Vivekananda are synthetic of not merely science and religion but also of the sacred and the secular, of the East and the West.*

IX

The aims and objects of the Ramakrishna Mission can be more fully understood if we give a few extracts from the Memorandum of Association of the Ramakrishna Mission.

- (a) To impart and promote the study of Vedānta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of comparative Theology in its widest form.
- (b) To impart and promote the study of arts, sciences, and industries.
- (c) To train teachers in all branches of knowledge above-mentioned and enable them to reach the masses.

7. Julian Huxley, *What Dare I Think?* (The Challenge of Modern Science to Human Action and Belief), 1931, pp. 172-73.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

- (d) To carry on educational work among the masses.
- (e) To establish, maintain, carry on, and assist schools, colleges, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid, and the afflicted, famine relief works, and other educational and charitable works and institutions of a like nature.
- (f) To print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books, or leaflets, that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.
- (g) To carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on in connexion with and calculated directly or indirectly to promote any of the above-mentioned objects.

Member's Declaration Form

Anyone irrespective of caste or creed, sex or nationality, can become a member of the Mission by subscribing to the following declaration of conviction:

- (i) I look upon Sri Ramakrishna as an illustration and embodiment of the

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

Religion Eternal, whose life and teachings help one to understand the plan and purpose of all the religions of the world and their underlying truth and harmony.

- (ii) I look upon all religions as paths to God, and shall try to live in peace and fellowship with the followers of all religions.
- (iii) I have full sympathy with all the objects of the Ramakrishna Mission as set forth in the Memorandum of Association, and I will actively cooperate with the work of the Mission.

The Headquarters of the Mission is at Belur, a small town on the banks of the Gaṅgā, about four miles up Calcutta. This Centre was established in 1899 by Swami Vivekananda himself, after his return from the West, as the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order of monks and, subsequently, also of the Ramakrishna Mission. Situated on the banks of the sacred Gaṅgā and commanding a distant view of the Dakshineswar temple garden, where Sri Ramakrishna had lived and taught, the Belur Math contains, besides the monastery, a library, a guest house, a charitable dispensary, and a magnificent temple dedicated in 1938 to Sri Ramakrishna

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

and built at a cost of about 8 lakhs of rupees, most of it being the kind donation of two American ladies who were friends of India and devotees of the Mission. A Degree College, a Teachers' Training College, and a Social Education Organizers' Training College—all run on residential lines, with the first two affiliated to the Calcutta University—and an Industrial and Technical School, which bids fair to develop into a full-fledged Engineering College at an early date, comprise the important educational institutions conducted by the Mission in the close vicinity of the Belur Math.

Along with the Headquarters at Belur, there were, in March 1963, 42 Mission centres, 15 combined Math and Mission centres, and 28 Math centres in India, which were distributed as follows: 30 in West Bengal, 12 in Uttar Pradesh, 11 in Madras, 7 in Bihar, 6 in Kerala, 4 each in Assam and Mysore, 3 in Orissa, 2 each in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, and 1 each in the Punjab, Gujarat, Delhi, and Rajasthan. In addition, there were two Mission centres, 6 combined Math and Mission centres, and 3 Math centres in East Pakistan, 2 Mission centres in Burma, 1 Mission centre each in Ceylon, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, and France, 1 Math centre each in England, Switzerland, and

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

Argentina, and 10 Math centres in the United States of America. Thus there were altogether 72 Mission centres and 65 Math centres. Moreover, attached to the branch centres, there were 22 sub-centres, where monastic workers resided more or less permanently.

Medical Service: Most of the Math and Mission centres in India and Burma conducted various activities ministering to the physical needs of the public in general, irrespective of creed, colour, or nationality. Typical of these are the Śevashramas (hospitals) at Varanasi, Vrindaban, Kankhal, Trivandrum, and Rangoon, and the T. B. Sanatorium at Ranchi and the Sevapratisthan in Calcutta. In 1963, there were 12 indoor hospitals, with 1,213 indoor beds, which accommodated 28,007 patients and 62 outdoor dispensaries, which treated 30,82,433 cases. Besides, gratuitous relief and other kinds of service were rendered by some of the Ashramas.

The Sevashrama in Rangoon which was started in 1921 and which has been one of the most efficiently run hospitals in Burma, was taken over by the Government of Burma in 1965 under its general policy and programme of nationalization. When the Mission handed it over to the Government, it had about 175 indoor beds with separate

medical, surgical, pediatric, cancer, eye, and children's wards, and Nurses Training School.

Educational Work: The organization ran during the period 3 general colleges at Madras, Belur, and Narendrapur (Calcutta)—the last two residential—with 1,911 students on their rolls, 2 B.T. colleges at Belur and Perianaickenpalayam (Coimbatore) with 216 students, 2 Basic Training schools at Perianaickenpalayam and Madras with 219 students, one Post-graduate Teachers' Training college at Rahara and 3 Junior Basic Training colleges at Rahara, Sarisha, and Sargachi with 349 students, 2 colleges for Physical Education and Rural Higher Education and a School of Agriculture with 80, 208, and 62 students respectively at Perianaickenpalayam, 2 Social Education Organizers' Training Centres there and at Belur with 193 trainees, 4 Engineering schools at Belur, Belgharia, Madras, and Perianaickenpalayam with 1,312 students, 9 Junior Technical or Industrial schools with 640 boys and 172 girls, 83 Students' Homes or hostels, including some orphanages, with 6,523 boys and 530 girls, 3 *catuspāthis* with 65 students, 13 Multipurpose Higher Secondary schools with 4,163 boys and 769 girls, 7 Higher Secondary schools with 2,455 boys and 1,204 girls, 19 High and Secondary

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

schools with 7,478 boys and 3,908 girls, 25 Senior Basic and M.E. schools with 5,438 boys and 3,284 girls, 44 Junior Basic, Elementary, and Upper Primary schools with 5,652 boys and 2,636 girls, and 46 Lower and other grades of schools with 1,856 boys and 2,282 girls. The Seva Pratisthan in Calcutta and the Sevashrama at Rangoon trained nurses, the number of trainees being 139. Thus there were altogether 38,810 boys and 14,923 girls in the educational institutions run by the Math and Mission in India, Pakistan, Singapore, Fiji, and Mauritius. The Students' Homes at Belgharia, Narendrapur, and Madras, and the schools and colleges at Cherrapunji, Calcutta, Belur, Sarisha, Manasadwip, Midnapore, Jamshedpur, Asansol, Deoghar, Kanpur, Madras, Mysore, Perianaickenpalayam, Calicut, Trichur, and Kalady, and the Boys' Home at Rahara are illustrative of the educational work done by the organization.

Rural Uplift, and Work among the Labouring and Backward Classes: The Math and Mission have all along tried their best for serving their unfortunate countrymen who have fallen back culturally or otherwise. In addition to the more prominent village ashramas like those at Sarisha, Manasadwip, Jairambati, Kamarpukur, Sar-

gachi, Taki, Perianaickenpalayam, Kalady, and Cherrapunji, and the Gurukula at Trichur in Kerala, quite a number of centres—both permanent and semi-permanent—are run under the Mission branches at Belur, Sarisha, Bankura, Tiruvalla, Narendrapur, and Cherrapunji. Of these, special mention may be made of the 186 village sub-centres which have been started for serving the hill tribes, the backward classes, and the village folk. In addition to such numerous activities, preaching and educative tours with magic lanterns, films, gramophones, etc. are also undertaken. For the labouring classes in industrial areas, the Mission conducted a good number of Night Schools and Clinics.

Relief Work: From the very commencement of its existence, the Mission has responded to the call of distress arising from natural calamities like flood, earthquake, and civil disturbance. Since the country attained political independence in 1947, the national government takes the initiative in starting relief measures on such occasions. Still, the Mission has continued to respond to the nation's call in times of general distress.

Foreign Work : The monks of the Ramakrishna Math took upon themselves the task of carrying the message of India to distant

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

lands. The various centres in North and South America, Europe, and outlying parts of Asia bear ample evidence of their labour of love.

Spiritual and Cultural: Both Math and Mission centres laid special 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 teaching of Sri Ramakrishna that all religions are true. The centres established real points of contact between people of different faiths through public celebrations, meetings, classes, publications, etc. They also conducted libraries and reading rooms. A number of Sanskrit *catuspāthis*, too, were run, partly for the benefit of the members of the Order. Special mention should also be made of the Institute of Culture in Calcutta, which tries to bring together eminent men and women of India and other lands in cultural fellowship.

The Math and Mission have published a large number of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and other types of religious and philosophical works in English, French, Spanish, and Hindi and many other Indian languages. In this connexion, special mention must be made of the publication, in several Indian languages, of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* during the world-wide Swami

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Vivekananda Birth Centenary celebrations in 1963-64. The Centenary gave the impetus for the publication of books of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in Japanese and some other foreign languages as well. These are finding ever increasing circulation in India and abroad. Besides journals in Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, and Malayalam, the Math and Mission publish 5 English journals—*Prabuddha Bharata*, *The Vedanta Kesari*, and *The Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* from India, *Vedanta and the West* from U.S.A. (Hollywood), and *Vedanta for East and West* from U.K. (London).

Work for Women: The Mission has ever been conscious of its duties to the women of India. Typical of the work done for them are the Seva Pratishthan (Maternity and General Hospital) in Calcutta, the Maternity Clinic at Jalpaiguri, the women's sections of the hospitals at Varanasi, Vrindaban, and Rangoon, the attached Invalid Women's Home at Varanasi, the Sarada Vidyalaya at Madras, the Girls' High schools at Jamshedpur, the Sister Nivedita Girls' School in Calcutta, and the Sarada Mandir at Sarisha (24-Parganas). Besides, there are special arrangements for women in the other hospitals, dispensaries, and schools, and some

institutions are conducted particularly for them.

Swami Vivekananda had keenly felt the need to organize an independent Order for women under the inspiration of Sri Sarada Devi, the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna, parallel to the Ramakrishna Order for men. He himself had started a nucleus of such an Order with his two western women disciples, namely, Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine, who had followed him to India and started an educational institution for girls in Calcutta which, in due course, developed into the present Sister Nivedita Girls' School. Fired with the spirit of renunciation and service, groups of educated women had joined in later years this and other Mission institutions in India and in the West, particularly institutions meant for the service of women.

During the birth centenary of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, in 1953-54, the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission decided that the time was ripe for giving a concrete shape to Swami Vivekananda's visions and ideas in the matter. Accordingly, the first group of these dedicated women were initiated into *brahmacharya* during the Holy Mother's birth centenary, and into *sannyāsa* on the

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Holy Mother's birthday in 1959, by the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission at the Belur Math. This group formed the nucleus of a new order of nuns, the Ramakrishna Sarada Order, with its own President and Board of Trustees chosen from among themselves. Earlier, on 2 December 1953, a spacious premises on the left bank of the Gaṅgā, adjacent to the northern suburbs of Calcutta, and close to the Dakshineswar temple, which had been purchased for this purpose, was dedicated as the permanent Headquarters of this Order which, with its nuns and nun probationers, has come to be known as the Sarada Math.

Along with the Sarada Math was also constituted the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, on parallel lines with the Ramakrishna Mission, with a Governing Body consisting of the Trustees of the Sarada Math for the time being. The authorities of the Ramakrishna Mission immediately took steps to legally transfer to the new Ramakrishna Sarada Mission the properties and management responsibilities of some of its educational, cultural, and medical service institutions which were specially meant for women and which were being ably run by this group of dedicated women since some years. These comprise the Sister Nivedita Girls' School,

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

the Matribhavan Maternity Hospital, and the Women's Welfare Centre in Calcutta, and the Sarada Asarama, with its Girls' High School and Hostel, in Trichur, Kerala State. To these were added in subsequent years three new institutions started by the nuns of the Sarada Math themselves, namely, the Vivekananda Vidyabhavan (Residential College for Women), and the Siksha Mandir for women in Calcutta and the Sarada Math branch in Madras.

In the West, a number of nuns and nun probationers of the Ramakrishna Order reside in the Sri Sarada Math at Santa Barbara in the U.S.A. and at the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, in France.

The first batch of two of these *brahmachāriṇīs* (nun probationers) of U.S.A. had been initiated into *brahmacarya* as early as in September 1947 at a solemn ceremony at the Vedanta Society, Hollywood, in the presence of seven senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order residing in the United States. One month later, the first convent of the Order in the western world came into being when seven of these nun probationers moved into the convent's newly acquired premises in the nearby town of Santa Barbara.

Since its constitution, the Ramakrishna Sarada Order has continued to receive new

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

accession of strength in India, United States, and France. More and more members have joined it as *brahmacāriṇīs* and more and more *brahmacāriṇīs* have been initiated into *sannyāsa*. The nuns of the Ramakrishna Sarada Order are called *pravrajikās*, which is the equivalent of the term *swamis* applied to the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

Though drawing inspiration from a common spiritual source and rendering service to humanity on parallel lines, with the awareness that service of man is the worship of God, the Sarada Math and Mission is constitutionally and legally independent of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and is meant to take over, in a large measure, and prosecute more energetically, the latter's work for women.

X

Though the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, with their respective branches, are distinct institutions, they are closely related, since the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math; the principal workers of the Mission are members of the Ramakrishna Math; and both have their headquarters at the Belur Math. The name 'Ramakrishna

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

Mission' is, however, loosely associated by people with all Math activities also.

It is necessary 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 controlled by the central organization at Belur.

The Math and the Mission own separate funds and keep separate accounts of them. The Math fund consists of subscriptions and donations from friends and devotees, while subscriptions and donations from the general public—supplemented in certain cases by municipal or government grants—constitute the Mission fund. Both the Math and the Mission funds are annually audited by auditors duly appointed for the purpose.

The Ramakrishna Mission is in existence for about sixty-nine years, and from very humble beginnings it has become today the world-wide organization that it is, working in a wide variety of fields. Deeply religious as the members of the Ramakrishna Order are, and remaining Hindus to the core, they yet feel one with the followers of all other religions and prophets. *True to the spirit of Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna, the Mission is not a proselytizing body, nor is it a sect within Hinduism itself.* The work of the Ramakrishna Mission outside India is

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

merely the propagation of the universal principles of Vedānta and the spreading of true ideas about India and her catholic culture. It does not seek to transplant the American or the European or the Arab from his Christian or Islamic soil to that of Hinduism. It believes that the rational philosophy of Vedānta can make a Christian a better Christian, a Muslim a better Muslim, as much as a Hindu a better Hindu. The increasing demand from various parts of the world for workers of the Mission is a clear evidence of the genuineness and need for this kind of missionary enterprise.

A dynamic institution of this nature cannot but be a growing organism. No year passes without seeing the springing up of new branches, and it has become almost difficult to respond to the incessant calls from the public to open more centres. In the words of the Bible, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few'. The Mission owes not a little of its success to the kind and generous public for the help they have readily given in all its undertakings. The heartiest thanks of the Mission go to one and all who have sympathized with its aims and objects and helped it materially or otherwise in the conduct of its multifarious activities.

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

With the attainment of political independence, the people of India have now the opportunity and privilege to work out at home and abroad the dreams and visions of her sages and teachers, recent and past. These dreams and visions in the case of India have, as has been mentioned earlier, the innate Divinity of man for their theme and the unity and fellowship of man for their objective. In this modern age the ancient theme and objective of India has found striking expression in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. It is the privilege of the members of the Ramakrishna Order and the Ramakrishna Mission to make free India realize the significance of these two lives and help her to mould herself in the light of the finest and best in her spiritual and cultural heritage, and to be the carriers to the world at large of the spiritual peace and benediction of Renascent India.

Admission to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission

As a Monastic Member of the Ramakrishna Order

The Order admits to its membership unmarried young men of ages above 18 and below 25 for undergraduates and 30 for graduates who have due regard for the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and who feel a keen desire to devote their lives to the realization of God and service of man through renunciation of lust and gold. They should have a minimum educational qualification of the School Final or other equivalent standard. Such a spiritual aspirant, who also possesses good health and is accommodative by nature and free from all family encumbrances, is admitted into the Order either at its Headquarters at the Belur Math (Calcutta) or at the various branch centres authorized to do so. After one year of pre-probation and eight years of probation, if not found unfit spiritually or otherwise, he will be initiated into *sannyāsa* (monkhood) to become a full-fledged member of the Order.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

As a lay member of the Ramakrishna Mission

Any person intending to be a lay member of the Mission may apply in the prescribed form available at the principal centres of the Organization.

He will look upon Sri Ramakrishna as an Illustration and Embodiment of the Religion Eternal, whose life and teachings help one to understand the plan and purpose of all the religions of the world and their underlying truth and harmony. He will fully sympathize with all the objects of the Mission and actively co-operate with the work of the Mission.



Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belur
(as viewed from the Ganga)

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OF

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission

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SWAMI VIRESWARANANDA

Vice-Presidents:

SWAMI NIRVANANANDA

SWAMI OMKARANANDA

General Secretary:

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P.O. Vivekanandanagar, Dt. Purulia
- Ramakrishna Math and Mission Sevashrama
P.O. Amlagora, Garbeta, Dt. Midnapore

ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

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IT'S IDEALS' AND ACTIVITIES

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ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

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ITS IDEALS AND ACTIVITIES

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