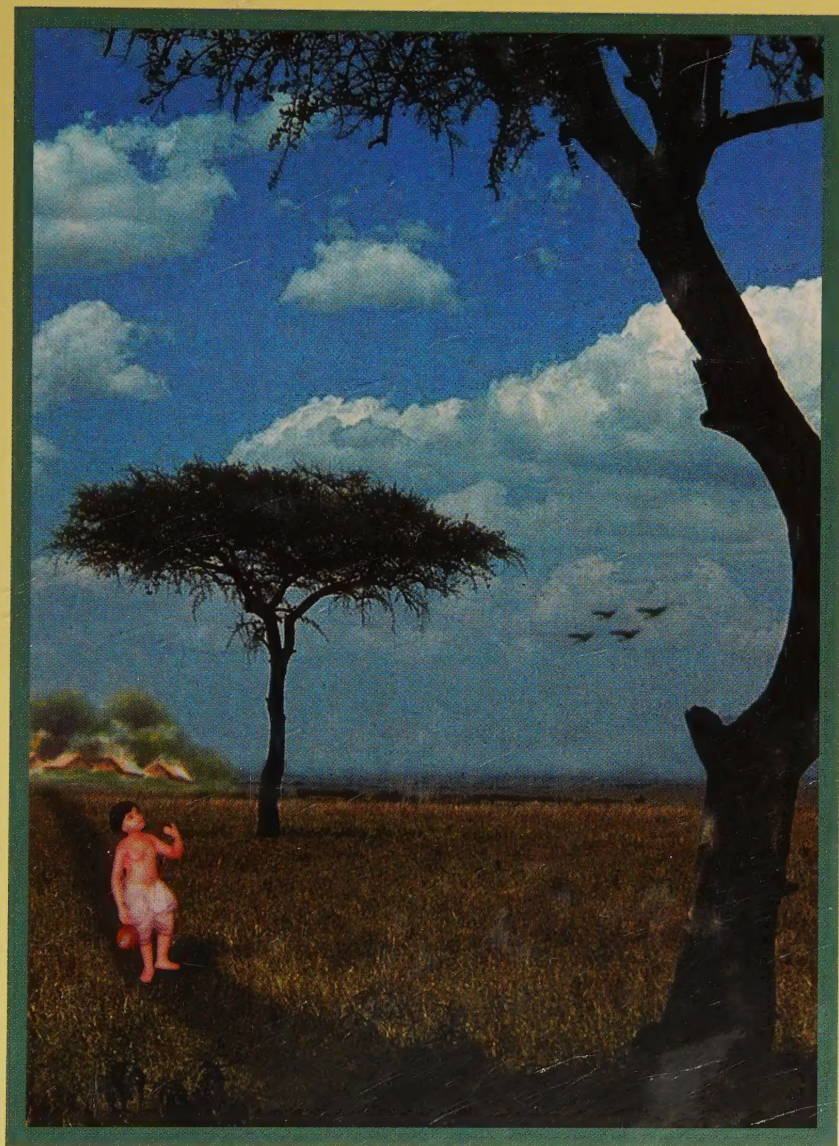


# SRI RAMAKRISHNA

*The* GREAT PROPHET OF HARMONY



**R**ELIGION ALWAYS, in India, precedes national awakening. Shankaracharya was the beginning of a wave that swept round the whole country, culminating in Chaitanya in Bengal, the Sikh Gurus in Punjab, Sivaji in Maharashtra, and Ramanuja and Madhvacharya in South. Through each of these, a people sprang into self-realization, into national energy and consciousness of their own unity. Sri Ramakrishna represents a synthesis in one person of all the leaders. It follows that the movements of his age will unify and organize the more provincial and fragmentary movements of the past.

— Sri Aurobindo

SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
THE GREAT PROPHECY OF HARMONY



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2023 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation

Raymond Ashmole  
President of the Department  
of the University of  
Oxford

*Published by*  
Swami Mumukshananda  
President, Advaita Ashrama  
Mayavati, Champawat, Himalayas  
*from its Publication Department, Calcutta*

© *All Rights Reserved*  
First Edition, December 1986  
under the title *A Bridge to Eternity*  
Second Edition, January 2000  
3M3C

ISBN 81-7505-207-4



*Printed in India at*  
Trio Process  
P-128 New CIT Road  
Calcutta 700 014

## CONTENTS

Publisher's Note to the Second Edition	13
Publisher's Note to the First Edition	15
Foreword	17
List of Illustrations	19
<b>I. SRI RAMAKRISHNA ON HIMSELF</b>	23
From <i>The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> by M. tr. by Swami Nikhilananda	
<b>II. IN THE EYES OF HIS APOSTLES</b>	
1. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi on Sri Ramakrishna A Compilation	31
2. Swami Vivekananda on Sri Ramakrishna A Compilation	40
3. Sri Ramakrishna (March 1930) <sup>1</sup> Swami Shivananda	50
4. Sri Ramakrishna (February 1936) Swami Ramakrishnananda	57
5. How Sri Ramakrishna Tested His Disciples (March 1930) Swami Saradananda	64

---

<sup>1</sup>The dates given in the brackets refer to the date of publication in the *Prabuddha Bharata*.

6. Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna 83  
(February 1936)  
*Swami Turiyananda*
7. On Sri Ramakrishna 90  
(August 1948)  
*Swami Premananda*
8. Sacred Memories of Sri Ramakrishna 94  
(April 1939)  
*Swami Akhandananda*

### III. IN THE EYES OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

1. Is Sri Ramakrishna an Ordinary Saint? 101  
(February 1936)  
*Ramachandra Dutta*  
A householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was a medical practitioner and held a post in the Calcutta Medical College.
2. Sri Ramakrishna 104  
(February 1936)  
*Upadhyaya Brahmabandhava*  
His real name was Bhavani Charan Banerjee. He was at first a staunch Brahmo and a follower of Keshab Chandra Sen. As a speaker, leader, and as Editor of the Bengali daily *Sandhya* he was well known.
3. Paramahansa Ramakrishna 106  
(February 1936)  
*Pratap Chandra Mazumdar*  
One of Keshab Chandra Sen's staunch followers. He was asked by Keshab to study the Christian faith. He represented the Brahmo Samaj at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893.

4. Ramakrishna Paramahansa 111  
 (February 1936)  
*Girish Chandra Sen*  
 A staunch follower of Keshab Chandra Sen. He was known as the 'Maulavi' of the New Dispensation Church, for on him had fallen the duty of studying Islam.
5. A Day with Ramakrishna Paramahansa 119  
 (February 1936)  
*Nagendranath Gupta*  
 Former Editor of the *Tribune*, Lahore.
6. On Sri Ramakrishna 122  
 (February 1936)  
 Extracts from the *Indian Mirror*. The Sunday issue of the paper was known as *The Sunday Mirror* which was an organ of the Brahmo Samaj at the time when these writings appeared in it. We have every reason to believe that the extracts quoted from the issues for the years 1876, 1879, and 1881 were written by Keshab Chandra Sen.
7. On Sri Ramakrishna 131  
 (February 1936)  
 Extracts from *The New Dispensation*. An organ of the New Dispensation Church founded by Keshab Chandra Sen. We have every reason to believe that these extracts from its issues of various dates were written by Keshab Chandra Sen.
8. Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna 134  
 (February 1936)  
*Aswini Kumar Dutta*  
 Aswini Kumar Dutta was a Brahmo. He was well known in Bengal as a political and social leader. He founded the Braja Mohan College, a first-grade college, in Barishal. He had great influence on the student population for whose betterment he devoted most of his energies.

## IV. IN THE EYES OF HIS EASTERN ADMIRERS

1. Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission 143  
to the World: What can It Teach us?  
(September 1902)  
*Swami Virajananda*  
Disciple of Swami Vivekananda and the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission 1938–51.
2. Sri Ramakrishna and the Modern World 163  
(February 1974)  
*Swami Gambhirananda*  
President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission 1985–88.
3. The Message of Sri Ramakrishna 178  
(July 1986)  
*Swami Bhuteshananda*  
President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission 1989–98.
4. Sri Ramakrishna and the Times We Live in 190  
(February 1960)  
*Swami Ananyananda*  
Former President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.
5. The Modernity of Sri Ramakrishna's Religion 202  
(February 1972)  
*Swami Smaranananda*  
General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.
6. Sri Ramakrishna and Islam 213  
(March 1984)  
*Swami Prabhananda*  
Trustee, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

7. Sri Ramakrishna the Unknown 236  
 (March 1979)  
*Swami Bhajanananda*  
 Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and  
 Ramakrishna Mission.
8. Ramakrishna: The Symbol of National Unity 246  
 (November 1954)  
*Swami Sundarananda*  
 Former Editor of *Udbodhan*, Calcutta.
9. Sri Ramakrishna and Modern Psychology 252  
 (October 1937)  
*Swami Akhilananda*  
 Former Head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta  
 Society, Boston, U.S.A.
10. Ramakrishna Paramahansa 262  
*Mahatma Gandhi*  
 From the Foreword to *The Life of Sri Rama-  
 krishna*.
11. Ramakrishna—Vivekananda 263  
*Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose*  
 Taken from the book, *My India, The India  
 Eternal*.
12. Ramakrishna Paramahansa 267  
 (April 1937)  
*Rabindra Nath Tagore*  
 Nobel Laureate, Poetry.
13. On Sri Ramakrishna 277  
 (May 1949)  
*Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*  
 First Prime Minister of India.

14. Sri Ramakrishna and the Modern World 285  
 (May 1936)  
*Dr. S. Radhakrishnan*  
 Formerly President of India.
15. Sri Ramakrishna and the 292  
 Problem of Modern India  
 (May 1947)  
*C. Rajagopalachari*  
 First Governor-General of Independent India.
16. Sri Ramakrishna and Service of Humanity 307  
 (May 1947)  
*Professor Humayun Kabir*  
 Formerly Education Minister, Government of India.
17. Sri Ramakrishna and the 310  
 Awakening Soul of India  
 (February 1936)  
*Sri Aurobindo*  
 Saint, Patriot.
18. Religious Progress in India: 313  
 Ramakrishna's Place therein  
 (February 1936)  
 From *The Indian Review* (Madras).
19. Sri Ramakrishna 315  
 (February 1936)  
 From *The Bengalee*.
20. The All-Pervading Humanism 317  
 of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda  
 (August 1969)  
*V.V. Giri*  
 Formerly President of India.

21. Sri Ramakrishna's Link with the Past 323  
(July 1943)  
*Professor V.K.R.V. Rao*  
Formerly Education Minister, Government of  
India.
22. Sri Ramakrishna and Religious Tolerance 329  
(June 1936)  
*Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*  
Formerly Art Historian and Head of the  
Eastern Section of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,  
U.S.A.
23. Sri Ramakrishna: A Life of 340  
Manifold Spiritual Realization  
(April 1960)  
*Dr. S.C. Chatterjee*  
Formerly Head of the Department of Philoso-  
phy, University of Calcutta.
24. Sri Ramakrishna 348  
(February 1936)  
*Sir Jadunath Sarkar*  
Noted Historian and formerly Vice-Chancellor  
of the University of Calcutta.
25. Sri Ramakrishna and the 349  
Spirit of Modern Science  
(September 1937)  
*Professor P.S. Naidu*  
Formerly Head of the Department of Edu-  
cation, Allahabad University.
26. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and His 361  
Religious Message to the Modern World  
(May 1918)  
*V.C. Seshacharry, B.A., B.L.*

27. Significance of Sri Ramakrishna's Life and Message 371  
 (July 1938)  
*Professor Sheo Narayan Lal Shrivastava*  
 Former Principal of Hitakarini City College,  
 Jabalpur.
28. The Vedanta of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: The Religion We Need 378  
 (June 1956)  
*Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao*  
 Noted author and philosopher.
29. Sri Ramakrishna's Contribution to the Social and Religious Life of India 385  
 (December 1938)  
*Ashok Kumar Bhattacharya*
30. Two Cultural Movements: Ramakrishnaism and Marxism 398  
 (January 1941)  
*Professor Akshaya Kumar Banerjee*

## V. IN THE EYES OF HIS WESTERN ADMIRERS

1. Ramakrishna's Life—The Story of a Phenomenon 415  
*Christopher Isherwood*  
 Taken from the author's book,  
*Ramakrishna and His Disciples.*

A well-known freelance journalist and author of many books. Born in England, he migrated to the U.S.A. in 1946. He was a member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

2. Ramakrishna—His Life and Sayings 418  
*F. Max Muller*  
 Taken from *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna Vivekananda*
3. Jiva is Shiva 425  
 (February 1936)  
*Romain Rolland*  
 French savant. Nobel Laureate.
4. Ramakrishna and the Indian Contribution 429  
 to the World Harmony  
 From *Vedanta and the West*, Jan.—Feb. 1960.  
*Arnold Toynbee*  
 Historian.
5. Ramakrishna's Attitude Towards the 433  
 Absolute and the Finite God  
 (February 1936)  
*Professor James Pratt*  
 Chairman of the American Philosophical Association and Professor of Sanskrit, in Williams College, Williamstown, Mass, U.S.A.
6. Sri Ramakrishna 437  
 (February 1936)  
*Professor Nicholas Roerich*  
 Russian painter and Indologist.
7. Sri Ramakrishna and What He Stands For 442  
 (February 1936)  
*Count Hermann Keyserling*  
 German statesman and Indologist.
8. Ramakrishna and the Harmony of Religions 443  
 (April 1936)  
*Professor Dr. Helmuth von Glasenapp*  
 German Indologist.

9. Ramakrishna Paramahansa . . . . . 450  
 (February 1953)  
*Professor Giuseppe Tucci*  
 Italian Indologist and former Director of the  
 Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, Rome.
10. Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance . . . . . 466  
 (February 1954)  
*Revered James B. Muckle*  
 Former Pastor of first Presbyterian Church,  
 Libertyville, Illinois, U.S.A.
11. A Sociologist is Introduced . . . . . 471  
 to Sri Ramakrishna  
 (December 1931)  
*Melvin J. Vincent*  
 Former Associate Professor of Sociology in the  
 University of Southern California, U.S.A.
12. A Modern Hindu Saint . . . . . 478  
 (February 1936)  
*Charles H. Tawney*  
 Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, in 1892,  
 and earlier Principal, Presidency College, Calcutta.
13. Sri Ramakrishna's Message to the West . . . . . 482  
 (November 1941)  
*Joseph Campbell*  
 Professor, Sarah Lawrence College, U.S.A.
14. Ramakrishna Paramahansa . . . . . 491  
 (February 1936)  
*Rt. Hon. The Earl of Ronaldshay*  
 Former Governor of Bengal and Secretary of  
 State for India.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

An anthology under the title of *A Bridge to Eternity: Sri Ramakrishna and His Monastic Order* was first published in 1986 in commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and the centenary of the Ramakrishna Order. The anthology comprised articles from *Prabuddha Bharata*, a cultural and philosophical monthly journal of Ramakrishna Order, started in the year 1896. Since then necessity was felt to incorporate into the book, a few more essays and compilations that will reveal several more facets of the great spiritual personality of Sri Ramakrishna and a more vivid picture of his monastic order. It has been thought wise to publish two separate books for this purpose—one on Sri Ramakrishna and the other on his monastic order—(Ramakrishna Sangha as it is called)—working through its two wings: Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The present publication, *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Prophet of Harmony* is brought out to highlight prominent aspects of the Master's life and message as the first step towards the implementation of the above scheme.

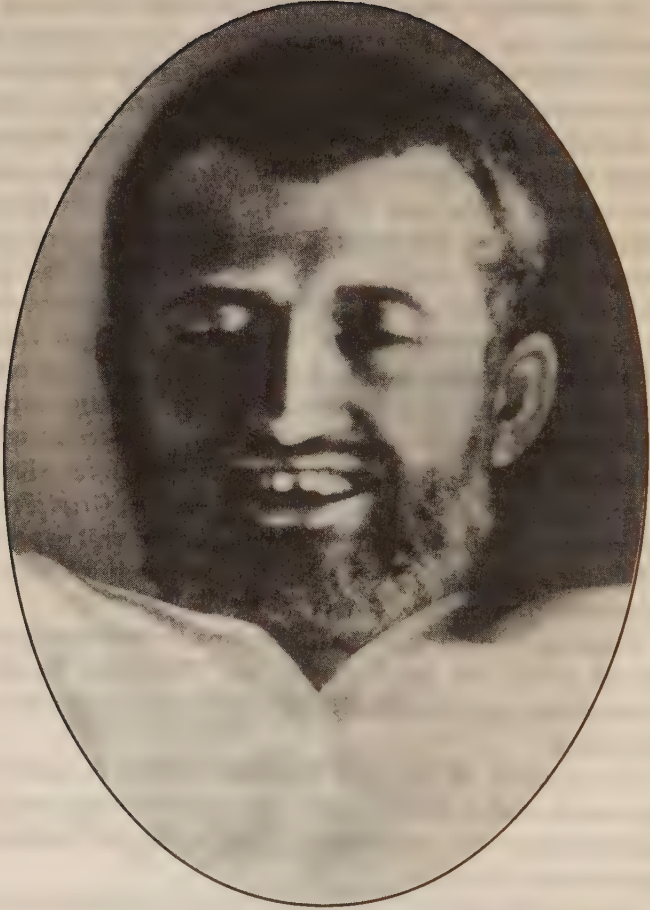
Homage is paid to Sri Ramakrishna by various appellations of which we have chosen one: *The Great Prophet of Harmony*—an appellation that is universally accepted and appreciated.

The sources of the new materials of this volume have been mentioned in the contents. We acknowledge our deep indebtedness to the publishers of the books and journals of these source materials.

May the book in its new form be of some service to the readers in their understanding the great spiritual phenomenon that is Sri Ramakrishna!

Mayavati  
1st January 2000

PUBLISHER



Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The year 1986 is twice blessed, in as much as it happens to be the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and the centenary of the Ramakrishna Order of monks, formally founded on 24 December 1886. On this doubly auspicious occasion, it is our privilege and pleasure to place in the hands of the devotees and admirers of the Great Master, this anthology entitled *A Bridge to Eternity: Sri Ramakrishna and His Monastic Order*.

The contents of this book are garnered from the Order's mouthpiece, *Prabuddha Bharata*, started in 1896 under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. The book is divided into two parts: One dealing with Sri Ramakrishna and Part Two with the Ramakrishna Order.

Part One consists of articles by the Master's direct disciples as well as by his contemporaries; several articles by his eastern and western admirers—monks of the Order, leading men of letters, national leaders, philosophers, statesmen, and other eminent men, each well known in his respective field. All the contributors have the same aim in view—studying the unique life and message of the Master and paying their humble homage to this child of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna, who is acclaimed as the 'Prophet of Renascent India.'

Part Two, which deals with the Ramakrishna Order, as such, its ideals, its founding, its consolidation, its later growth and activities, contains articles contributed by both monks and lay admirers, including one by a westerner and another on 'The Vedanta Movement in the West' by 'An Observer', whose identity is not disclosed.

Incidentally, *Prabuddha Bharata* completes its ninety-first year in 1986. During this long span of ninety years, there have been a number of learned editors who have kept the light of its ideal bright and burning and its universal message intact. Nine decades is a long period for any

journal and during this time the English language has undergone a transformation. It is therefore not unexpected to notice in this book variations in punctuation, spelling, diacritical marks, etc.

These outstanding articles by noted savants and writers, of the East and the West, would have been lost to the coming generations had they remained only in the back numbers of the journal, however well bound and preserved. An opportunity has now presented itself to unearth them and bring them together in a classified sequence. Published over a period of nearly seventy years, these articles span two major epochs in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement, and retain something of the ambience of those times. During this period, thousands of people found in the power and message of Sri Ramakrishna and the social presence of the Ramakrishna Order, a bridge to higher life. If the present book serves to remind the reader of this *Bridge to Eternity*, our purpose in publishing it now will be fulfilled.

We are grateful to Revered President Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Order for graciously consenting to write a Foreword to this memorable book.

We take this opportunity also to express our grateful thanks to M/s Tribeni Tissues Limited, Calcutta, for donating the paper on which this book is printed.

Mayavati  
24th December 1986

PUBLISHER

## FOREWORD

I am glad to know that Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, has decided to bring out in book form some of the important articles on Sri Ramakrishna and the Ramakrishna Order that appeared in *Prabuddha Bharata* with which I was associated for some years. A publication of this kind, which commemorates a great event, provides an opportunity to see past events in a larger perspective and also to retrieve some of the choice thoughts of the past from the limbo of time.

The birth of Sri Ramakrishna in 1836 and the founding of the Ramakrishna Order in 1886 are two important events the historical significance of which can never be exaggerated. Sri Ramakrishna imparted a tremendous dynamism and urgency to modern man's religious commitments and spiritual aspirations. Although he stressed only the eternal verities, he nevertheless found a place for even the non-essentials of religion in the divine scheme of universal life. Having realized through actual practice in his own life how all religious paths led ultimately to the transcendental experience of the ultimate Reality, to Sri Ramakrishna religious toleration and harmony were not a mere creed based on moral compulsion.

Nor was his realization restricted to the transcendent plane; it flowed freely through his whole personality, expressing itself through every action, word, and gesture of his and imparting a wonderful harmony and integrality to his life. As a result, traits, attitudes, and ways of life which had for centuries been regarded as mutually contradictory—such as Jñāna and Bhakti, Yoga and Karma, monastic life and householder's life—were found beautifully blended and unified in Sri Ramakrishna. He saw all human relationships as expressions of divine love. Therefore he was able to draw people of different temperaments to him with an intensity of love which can never be experienced in ordinary life.

The monastic order that bears his name and derives its inspiration and power from him is a direct continuation of his mission on earth: Though his physical presence was withdrawn from mortal eyes about a hundred years ago, his spiritual reality continues to work for the welfare and spiritual uplift of humanity through the Ramakrishna Sangha, which Swami Vivekananda regarded as the 'mystical body' of Sri Ramakrishna. After performing the consecration of the premises of Belur Math on 9 December 1898, Swamiji declared: 'From this Centre of universal toleration will go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the world.'

The present volume which brings together articles written by people belonging to diverse walks of life, nationalities, and cultures bears testimony to the fact that Swamiji's prophetic wish has already attained a considerable measure of fulfilment. As such, this anthology has a historical value over and above the intrinsic worth of the individual articles. I hope it will be read with interest by all those who cherish higher values in life.

Swami Gambhirananda  
*Eleventh President*  
 Ramakrishna Math &  
 Ramakrishna Mission

Belur Math  
 Howrah, December 1986

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- |    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 1. | Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy  | 14  |
| 2. | Sri Ramakrishna   | 20  |
| 3. | Photograph of Sri Ramakrishna taken at the studio of Bengal Photographers on 10 December 1881 | 28  |
| 4. | Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy during a <i>Kirtan</i> at Keshab Chandra Sen's house in Calcutta   | 140 |
| 5. | Painting by Frank Dvorak  | 412 |



Sri Ramakrishna



**SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
ON HIMSELF**

*The time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for every one in the world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence. Such a man was born. ...He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.*

—Swami Vivekananda

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA ON HIMSELF

(From *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*)

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar.... It was evening, eight o'clock, on Sunday, August 9, 1885. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Mahimacharan. Rakhal, M., and one or two companions of Mahimacharan were in the room. Mahimacharan was going to spend the night at the temple garden. The Master came down to the floor and sat near Mahimacharan.... M., and a few other devotees were near him. Rakhal also was in the room.

MASTER (to Mahima): 'For a long time I have wanted to tell you my spiritual experiences, but I could not. I feel like telling you today.'

'You say that by mere sādhanā one can attain a state of mind like mine. But it is not so. There is something special here [referring to himself].'

Rakhal, M., and the others became eager to hear what the Master was going to say.

MASTER: 'God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyan-tree I saw Him coming from the Ganges. Then we laughed so much! By way of playing with me He cracked my fingers. Then He talked. Yes, He talked to me.'

'For three days I wept continuously. And He revealed to me what is in the Vedas, the Purānas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures.'

'One day He showed me the māyā of Mahāmāyā. A small light inside a room began to grow, and at last it enveloped the whole universe.'

'Further, He revealed to me a huge reservoir of water covered with green scum. The wind moved a little of the scum and immediately the water became visible; but in the twinkling of an eye, scum from all sides came dancing in and again covered the water. He revealed to me that the water was like Satchidānanda, and the scum like māyā. On

account of māyā, Satchidānanda is not seen. Though now and then one may get a glimpse of It, again māyā covers It.

'God reveals the nature of the devotees to me before they arrive. I saw Chaitanya's party singing and dancing near the Panchavati, between the banyan-tree and the bakul-tree. I noticed Balaram there. ... (Pointing to M.) And I saw him too.

'I had seen Keshab before I actually met him—I had seen him and his party in my samādhi. In front of me sat a roomful of men. Keshab looked like a peacock sitting with its tail spread out. The tail meant his followers. I saw a red gem on Keshab's head. That indicated his rajas<sup>1</sup>. He said to his disciples, "Please listen to what he [meaning the Master] is saying."

'Keshab and his followers got from here [meaning himself] the names of Hari and the Divine Mother. That is why the Divine Mother took Vijay away from Keshab's party. But Vijay did not join the Ādi Samaj.<sup>2</sup>

(Pointing to himself) 'There must be something special here. Long ago a young man named Gopal Sen used to visit me. He who dwells in me placed His foot on Gopal's chest. Gopal said in an ecstatic mood: "You will have to wait here a long time. I cannot live any more with worldly people." He took leave of me. Afterwards I heard that he was dead. Perhaps he was born as Nityagopal.

'I have had many amazing visions. I had a vision of the Indivisible Satchidānanda. Inside It I saw two groups with a fence between them. On one side were Kedar, Chuni, and other devotees who believe in the Personal God. On the

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Samkhya philosophy, Prakriti (nature) in contrast with Purusha (soul) consists of three gunas (qualities or strands) known as sattva, rajas and tamas. Tamas stands for inertia or dullness, rajas for activity or restlessness and sattva for balance or wisdom.

<sup>2</sup>A sect of the Brāhmo Samāj.

other side was a luminous space like a heap of red brick-dust. Inside it was seated Narendra immersed in samādhi. Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called aloud, "Oh, Narendra!" He opened his eyes a little. I came to realize that he had been born, in another form, in Simlā<sup>3</sup> in a kāyastha family. At once I said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, entangle him in māyā; otherwise he will give up his body in samādhi." Kedar, a believer in the Personal God, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.

'Therefore I feel that it is the Divine Mother Herself who dwells in this body and plays with the devotees. When I first had my exalted state of mind, my body would radiate light. My chest was always flushed. Then I said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside." That is why my complexion is so dull now. If my body were still luminous, people would have tormented me; a crowd would always have thronged here. Now there is no outer manifestation. That keeps weeds away. Only genuine devotees will remain with me now. Do you know why I have this illness? It has the same significance. Those whose devotion to me has a selfish motive behind it will run away at the sight of my illness.

'I cherished a desire. I said to the Mother, "O Mother, I shall be the king of the devotees."

'Again, this thought arose in my mind: "He who sincerely prays to God will certainly come here. He must." You see, that is what is happening now. Only people of that kind come.

'My parents knew who dwells inside this body. Father had a dream at Gayā. In that dream Raghuvir said to him, "I shall be born as your son."

'God alone dwells inside this body. Such renunciation of "woman and gold"! Could I have accomplished that myself? I have never enjoyed a woman, even in a dream.

---

<sup>3</sup>The section of Calcutta in which Narendra was born.

‘Nangtā instructed me in Vedānta. In three days I went into samādhi. At the sight of my samādhi under the mādHAVI vine, he was quite taken aback and exclaimed, “Ah! What is this?” Then he came to know who resides in this body. He said to me, “Please let me go.” At these words of Totapuri, I went into an ecstatic mood and said, “You cannot go till I realize the Truth of Vedānta.”

‘Day and night I lived with him. We talked only Vedānta. The Brāhmani<sup>4</sup> used to say to me: “Don’t listen to Vedānta. It will injure your devotion to God.”

‘I said to the Divine Mother: “Mother, please get me a rich man. If You don’t, how shall I be able to protect this body? How shall I be able to keep the sādhus and devotees near me?” That is why Mathur Babu provided for my needs for fourteen years.

‘He who dwells in me tells me beforehand what particular class of devotees will come to me. When I have a vision of Gaurāᅅga, I know that devotees of Gaurāᅅga are coming. When I have a vision of Kāli, the Śaktas come.

‘At the time of the evening service I used to cry out from the roof of the kuthi, weeping: “Oh, where are you all? Come to me!” You see, they are all gathering here, one by one.

‘God Himself dwells in this body. It is He who, of His own accord, is working with these devotees.

‘What a wonderful state of mind some of the devotees have! The younger Naren gets kumbhaka without any effort, and samādhi too. Sometimes he stays in an ecstatic mood for two and a half hours; sometimes even more. How wonderful!

‘I have practised all kinds of sādhanā: jñānayoga, karmayoga, and bhaktiyoga. I have even gone through the exercises of hathayoga to increase longevity. There is

---

<sup>4</sup>Refers to the Bhairavi Brāhmani, a brāhmin nun who was one of Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual guides.

another Person dwelling in this body. Otherwise, after attaining samādhi, how could I live with the devotees and enjoy the love of God? Koar Singh used to say to me: "I have never before seen a person who has returned from the plane of samādhi. You are none other than Nānak."

'I live in the midst of worldly people; on all sides I see "woman and gold". Nevertheless, this is the state of my mind: unceasing samādhi and bhāva. That is the reason Pratap<sup>5</sup> said, at the sight of my ecstatic mood: "Good heavens! It is as if he were possessed by a ghost!"'

---

<sup>5</sup>Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, a distinguished member of the Brāhmo Samāj.



Photograph of Sri Ramakrishna taken at the studio of Bengal Photographers on 10 December 1881



**IN THE EYES  
OF HIS APOSTLES**

*Yasya vīryeṇa kṛtino vāyam ca bhuvanāni ca  
Rāmakṛṣṇam sadā vande śarvāṃ svatantram Īśvaram*

*Constant salutation be to Sri Ramakrishna, the  
Free, the Ishvara, the Shiva-form, by whose power we  
and the whole world are blessed.*

—Swami Vivekananda  
CW, 5.132

## HOLY MOTHER SRI SARADA DEVI ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA

The Master is really God who assumed a human body to remove the sufferings of men. He moved about just as a king walks through his city in disguise, and he left the world as soon as his identity was discovered.<sup>1</sup>

The Satya Yuga (Golden Age) commenced with the advent of the Master. Some highly developed souls came with him.<sup>2</sup>

Our Master was a man of direct perception. He saw everything; he knew everything. His words are the words of the Veda.<sup>3</sup>

This time the Master has come to liberate all—the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish. Now there is a splendid Malaya breeze. Just set your sail a little, take refuge in him and immediately you will be blessed. This time anything other than grass and bamboo—whatever has a little core—will surely become sandalwood.<sup>4</sup>

Is it ever possible for a man to free himself unaided, from the clutches of maya? It was for this that the Master performed spiritual austerities to the utmost extent and gave the results thereof for the redemption of mankind.<sup>5</sup>

The Master practised all kinds of disciplines. He used to say, 'I have made the mould; now you may cast the image.' ...To cast the image means to meditate and contemplate on

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1st ed., 1986), [hereafter GHM] p. 301; *Sri Sri Māyer Kathā* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 11th ed. 1995), [hereafter MK(B)] pp. 348–49.

<sup>2</sup>*In the Company of the Holy Mother*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1st ed., 1980), [C] p. 145; MK(B), p. 251.

<sup>3</sup>GHM, p. 151; MK(B), p. 236.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 381; *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76; *Ibid.*, 172.

the Master, to think of the various incidents of his life. By meditating on him, one gets all the spiritual moods.<sup>6</sup>

...it never occurred to me that he practised all the religions with the express *motive* of preaching the idea of spiritual harmony. He was always in his mood of divine ecstasy. He practised all the methods through which the Christians, Mohammedans, Vaishnavas and others worship God and realize truth, and thereby he tasted God's disports in diverse ways. Days and nights passed by him without any notice. But what you should note, my dear, is that *renunciation* is his special message in this age. Did anyone see such natural renunciation any time before? As for the harmony of religions you speak of, that also is true. In previous Incarnations, all other spiritual moods looked insignificant because of the emphasis on a particular one.<sup>7</sup>

Men are always forgetful of God. That is why whenever there is a need, God comes in human form and shows the way to piety. This time he [Sri Ramakrishna] has shown us the meaning of renunciation.<sup>8</sup>

The Master could not even touch money. His hand used to curl back when any metal contacted him. He once said, 'The world is an illusion. Ah, Ramlal, if I felt that the world was real. I would have covered your Kamarpukur with gold. But I know that it is all illusion. God alone is real.'<sup>9</sup>

Renunciation alone was his splendour.... One day he went to my room in the Nahabat. He had no spices in his small bag. He used to chew them now and then. I gave him some to chew there, and also handed over to him a few

<sup>6</sup>GHM, pp. 153–154; MK(B), p. 239.

<sup>7</sup>Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Sw. Gambhirananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 4th ed., 1986), [SD] p. 450.

<sup>8</sup>C, p. 161–162; *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>9</sup>GHM, p. 39; *Ibid.*, p. 39.

packed in paper to take to his room. He proceeded; but instead of going to his room, he went straight to the embankment of the Ganges. He did not see the way, nor was he conscious of it. He was repeating, 'Mother, shall I drown myself!' I became restless with agony. The river was full to the brim.... Hriday...was then taking his meal. He left his plate, ran to the Master, caught hold of him, and brought him back to his room. A moment more, and he would have dropped into the Ganges!... Because I put a few spices in his hand, he could not find his way. A holy man must not lay things by. His renunciation was hundred percent complete.<sup>10</sup>

How firm was the Master's adherence to truth!... The Master used to say, 'Truthfulness alone is the austerity of the Kali Yuga. One attains to God by holding to truth.'<sup>11</sup> [He also] used to say, 'He who speaks nothing but truth is resting on the lap of God!'<sup>12</sup>

It cannot be expressed in words in what wonderful divine moods he passed his days and nights then [i.e. at the time when the Master lived with her in the same room at Dakshineswar]. In that state of divine semi-consciousness what strange and wonderful words he spoke and with what flow! Sometimes he laughed, sometimes wept and sometimes was quite motionless in ecstasy. That was how he passed whole nights. What a wonderful presence and what an ecstasy! The whole of my body would tremble to see that, and I would wish the night might soon come to an end. I did not then understand anything of ecstasy; one night when I saw that his ecstasy did not come to an end, I was frightened, and wept and sent for Hriday. He came and went on repeating the Lord's name in the ears, when, after a long time he regained normal consciousness. Then

---

<sup>10</sup>*GHM*, pp. 124-25; *MK(B)*, p. 214.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, Pp. 342; *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152; *Ibid.*, p. 237.

when he came to know of my suffering, anxiety and fear, he himself taught me how in particular kinds of ecstasy particular names and mantras of God were to be repeated into his ears. After that I did not feel so much frightened; he would return to normal consciousness when those names and mantras were uttered into his ears.<sup>13</sup>

The Master spoke of nothing but God. He would say to me, 'Look how worthless is the human body. Here today, gone tomorrow and so many sorrows and troubles during life...God alone is the Eternal Truth, one's good lies in calling upon Him. The body is the source of complications.'<sup>14</sup>

All the acts of Sri Ramakrishna were directed to God alone. He once performed the *shodasi puja*, making me the object of worship. I asked him what I should do with the bangles, the clothes and other articles of worship. After a little thought he said that I could give them all to my mother....Sri Ramakrishna said to me, 'When you present your mother with these articles, don't think that she is an ordinary human being. Think of her as the direct embodiment of the Divine Mother of the Universe.' I acted accordingly. That was the nature of his teaching.<sup>15</sup>

One day Hazra said to the Master, 'Why do you constantly long for Narendra and other youngsters?... You had better fix your mind on God. Why should you be attached to them?' At these words, the Master took his mind away from the young disciples completely and merged it in the thought of God. Instantaneously he entered

<sup>13</sup> *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, vol. 1, Swami Saradananda, (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 5th ed., 9th impression, 1996), p. 470; *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga* (Bengali), Swami Saradananda (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 21st ed., 1995); *Guru Bhāva, Purvardha*, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>C, p. 256; MK(B), p. 60.

<sup>15</sup>GHM, p. 58; *Ibid.*, p. 61.

into samadhi; his beard and hair stood straight on end like the Kadamba flower. Just imagine what kind of a man the Master was!... His body became hard like a wooden statue. Ramlal, who was attending on him, said repeatedly, 'Please be your former self again.' At last the mind came down to the normal plane. It was only out of compassion for people that he kept his mind on the lower plane.<sup>16</sup>

What a great soul was born! How many people are illumined by his words! He was the embodiment of Bliss itself. All the twenty-four hours of the day were spent in devotional music, merriment, laughter, teaching and story-telling. So far as I remember, I never saw him worried by anything.<sup>17</sup>

I never saw the Master sad. He was joyous in the company of everyone, were he a boy of five or a man of ripe old age. I never saw him morose....<sup>18</sup>

Ah, what a great singer the Master was! His voice was so sweet. While singing he would be one with his song. His voice is still ringing in my ears.<sup>19</sup>

The Master saw the dabchicks floating, diving, and swimming in the water of the Haldarpukur, but there would not be a drop of water sticking to them—they would just shake it all off. He gave their example and said that in this world one should live like these. Though living in the midst of worldly possessions, one should completely shake off all attachments for them from the mind. The Master used to teach one to live in the world completely unattached.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>*GMH*, p. 110; *MK(B)*, p. 202.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56; *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 97; *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32; *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>*The Mother as I saw Her*, Swami Saradeshananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2nd ed., 1987), p. 224., cf *Vedanta Kesari*, vol. 67, 1980, pp. 485–86; *SK(B)*, p. 232.

The Master did whatever was good for my well-being.<sup>21</sup> He would tell me, 'One should always be active. One should never be without work. For when one is idle, all sorts of bad thoughts crop up in one's mind.' One day he gave me some hemp and asked me to prepare some string suspenders with it. He said he wanted them to hang the pots of some sweets etc., for his young disciples. I made the suspenders accordingly, and with the fibre that was left, stuffed a pillow.<sup>22</sup>

Once Balaram's wife was ill. The Master said to me, 'Go to Calcutta and visit her.' 'How can I go?' I said, 'I don't see any carriage or other conveyance here.' The Master replied in an excited voice: 'What! Balaram's family is in such trouble and you hesitate to go! You will walk to Calcutta. Go on foot.' At last a palanquin was brought and I set out from Dakshineswar. Twice I visited her during her illness.<sup>23</sup>

Ah! how kindly Sri Ramakrishna treated me! Not even one day did he utter a word to wound my feelings.<sup>24</sup> I was married to one who never addressed me as *tui*.<sup>25</sup> One day at Dakshineswar, I carried the Master's food to his room. As I was leaving the room, the Master thought that it was his niece Lakshmi and called out, 'Close the door behind you (*tui*).' I said, 'Yes, I am closing it.' Recognizing my voice he was embarrassed and said, 'Ah, it's you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Please don't mind.' That unintentional disrespect upset him so much, that the next morning he came to the Nahabat saying, 'Look here, my dear, the whole of last

---

<sup>21</sup>MK(B), p. 63.

<sup>22</sup>GHM, p. 60; MK(B), pp. 63-4.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 126; *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60; *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup>Familiar form of the second personal pronoun in Bengali, used when addressing juniors and inferiors.

night I couldn't sleep, worrying how indeed I spoke so rudely to you!<sup>26</sup>

The Master, who was such a great renouncer, nonetheless worried about me. One day he asked me, 'How much do you need for your pocket expenses?' I said, 'Five or six rupees will be enough.' Next he asked, 'How many *chapatis* do you eat in the evening?' I felt very embarrassed and wondered how I could answer. But as he insisted on a reply, I said, 'I eat five or six.'<sup>27</sup>

At that time he was ill, yet he got ornaments made for me at so much expense. He would remark jocularly, 'See, her relation with me is for the sake of this.' On his part, he could not touch money himself. He had seen Sita at the Panchavati with bangles having diamond-shaped designs on her hands. Having seen those bangles on Sita, he got similar gold bangles made for me.<sup>28</sup>

Can everybody recognize an Incarnation? One or two persons only can recognize him. How much suffering do they undergo for the liberation of human beings! Even when the Master used to vomit blood, he never stopped speaking. He was all the while worried about the well-being of people.<sup>29</sup>

The Master told me, 'I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have taken upon myself the miseries of the whole world.'<sup>30</sup>

The Master's disease was due to accepting the sins of others. He used to say, 'It is due to Girish's sins. He would not have been able to bear all this suffering.' The Master had the power to die at will. He could have easily given up

---

<sup>26</sup>GHM, pp. 161-62; MK(B), p. 246.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 302-3; *ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>28</sup>MK(B), p. 150.

<sup>29</sup>GHM, p. 208; MK(B), p. 366.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 128; *ibid.*, 217.

the body in samadhi. But he would say, 'It will be nice if I unite all these youngsters together in a close bond of love.' Until then, merely a 'How-do-you-do' relationship existed between them.... That is why, the Master did not give up the body early, in spite of so much suffering.<sup>31</sup>

When Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from cancer in the throat and could not swallow his food, he said one day, 'I shall eat later on in my subtle body through a million mouths.'<sup>32</sup>

[While at Dakshineswar] I kept the photograph [a photograph of the Master] with the pictures of other gods and goddesses and worshipped it. At that time I lived on the ground floor of the Nahabat. One day the Master came there and at the sight of the picture he said, 'Hallo, what is all this?'...Then I saw the Master take in his hand the *bel* leaves and flowers kept there for worship, and offer them to the photograph. He worshipped the picture.<sup>33</sup>

Once when Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore, a few devotees brought some offerings for Mother Kali of Dakshineswar temple. On hearing that the Master was at Cossipore, they offered all the things they had brought before a picture of the Master, and then partook of the *prasada*. On hearing about this Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'All these things were brought for the great Mother of the Universe. And they have offered them all here (meaning himself)!' I was frightened very much at this and thought, 'He is suffering from this dangerous disease. Who knows what might happen?' What a calamity! Why did they do it? The Master too was referring to this incident again and again. Afterwards at a late hour in the night he said to me, 'You will see how in course of time I will be worshipped in every house. You will see everyone accepting this (meaning

---

<sup>31</sup>*GHM*, p. 104; *MK(B)*, pp. 197–98.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42; *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 96–97; *Ibid.*, p. 191.

himself). This is surely going to happen.' This was the only day I heard him using the first personal pronoun with reference to himself. Usually he would speak of himself not as 'I' or 'me' but as 'this case' or 'as belonging to this', pointing to his body.<sup>34</sup>

The Master entered into spiritual trance very often. One day, as he came down from a long samadhi, he said, 'Listen, my dear, I went to a land where the people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!' Could I imagine then that these—Sara Ole Bull and others—would become devotees? I was at a loss to think who these white persons could be.<sup>35</sup>

When the Master passed away, I also wanted to leave my body. He appeared before me and said, 'No, you must remain here. There are many things to be done.' I myself realized later on that this was true; I had so many things to do. The Master used to say, 'The people of Calcutta live like worms squirming in darkness. You will guide them.'<sup>36</sup>

...the Master had the attitude of Mother towards every body in this world. He left me behind this time for demonstrating that Motherhood to the world.<sup>37</sup>

He who is the Master, am I.<sup>38</sup>

[Compiled by Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee]

---

<sup>34</sup>*Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother* (Her Life and Conversations), Swami Tapasyananda and Swami Nikhilananda, (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 4th ed., 1969), pp. 305–06; MK(B), p. 66.

<sup>35</sup>SD, pp. 389–90; SD(B), p. 301.

<sup>36</sup>GHM, p. 77; MK(B), p. 173.

<sup>37</sup>MK(B), p. 295.

<sup>38</sup>SD, p. 457; SD(B), p. 348.

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA A Compilation

'Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I come down to help mankind,' declares Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gitā*. Whenever this world of ours, on account of growth, on account of added circumstances, requires a new adjustment, a wave of power comes... [In the present age, Sri Ramakrishna is the] one man who has put in motion such a wave in India.<sup>1</sup> [When he came,] the time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the down-trodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside of India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence.... The time was ripe, it was necessary that such a man should be born, and he came....<sup>2</sup>

Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna incarnated himself in India, to demonstrate what the true religion of the Aryan race is; to show where amidst all its many divisions and offshoots, scattered over the land in the course of its immemorial history, lies the true unity of the Hindu religion.<sup>3</sup> We must interpret the Vedas in the light of the experience of Sri Ramakrishna. Shankaracharya and all other commentators

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), [CW] vol. 4, pp. 154, 156.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 267.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 183.

made the tremendous mistake to think that the whole of the Vedas spoke the same truth. Therefore, they were guilty of torturing those of the apparently conflicting Vedic texts which go against their own doctrines, into the meaning of their particular schools....[It was] Sri Ramakrishna who first exemplified in his life and taught that these scriptural statements which appear to the cursory view as contradictory, are meant for different grades of aspirants and are arranged in the order of evolution.<sup>4</sup> He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the Vedas, the Vedanta, and all other Incarnations have done in the past, Sri Ramakrishna lived to practise in the course of a single life. One cannot understand the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Incarnations, and so forth, without understanding *his* life. For he was the explanation.<sup>6</sup> His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought.<sup>7</sup> In order to show how the Vedic truths—eternally existent as the instrument with the Creator in His work of creation, preservation, and dissolution—reveal themselves spontaneously in the minds of the rishis purified from all impressions of worldly attachment, and because such verification and confirmation of the scriptural truths will help the revival, re-instatement, and spread of religion—the Lord, though the very embodiment of the Vedas, in this His new incarnation has thoroughly discarded all external forms of learning.<sup>8</sup> [Sri Ramakrishna] had to go afresh to Nature to ask for facts and he got [the] scientific religion which never says

---

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 411–12; (Also *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1929).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 483.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 335.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 483.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 184.

'believe', but 'see'; 'I see, and you too can see'.<sup>9</sup> In a narrow society there is depth and intensity of spirituality. The narrow stream is very rapid. In a catholic society, along with the breadth of vision we find a proportionate loss in depth and intensity. But the life of Sri Ramakrishna upsets all records of history. It is a remarkable phenomenon that in Sri Ramakrishna there has been an assemblage of ideas deeper than the sea and more vast than the skies.<sup>10</sup>

The life of Sri Ramakrishna is interesting, as it was a living illustration of the ideas that he preached.<sup>11</sup> ...he was a peculiar child from very boyhood. He remembered his past from his birth and was devoted to the fulfilment of that purpose.<sup>12</sup> [Early in life he] became fully convinced that the aim of all secular learning was mere material advancement, and nothing more, and he resolved to give up study and devote himself solely to the pursuit of spiritual knowledge.<sup>13</sup> He had heard that the Mother wanted to come to everyone, but... people wanted all sorts of foolish little idols to pray to, that they wanted their own enjoyments, and not the Mother, and the moment they really wanted Her with their whole soul, and nothing else, that moment She would come. So he began to break himself into that idea; he wanted to be exact even on the plane of matter. He threw away all the little property he had, and took a vow that he would never touch money, and this one idea, 'I will not touch money' became a part of him.... The other idea that came into his mind was that lust was the other enemy.... Every woman was his Mother, he must bring himself to the state when he would see nothing but Mother in every

<sup>9</sup>CW, vol. 7, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 411; (Also *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1929).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 162.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 163.

woman. And he carried it out in his life.<sup>14</sup> One of the sadhanas [for attaining that] was to root out the sex idea. Soul has no sex, it is neither male nor female. It is only in the body that sex exists, and the man who desires to reach the spirit cannot at the same time hold to sex distinctions. 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. ...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 breaths a man who does not care a straw for all the gold or all the fame that is in the universe.<sup>15</sup>

[At one state of his spiritual striving, Sri Ramakrishna] set about to learn humility, because he had found that the one idea in all religions is, 'not me, but Thou', and he who says, 'not me', the Lord fills his heart. The less of this little 'I' the more of God there is in him. ...and he set himself to accomplish this. ...[His habit was that] whenever he wanted to do anything he never confined himself to fine theories, but would enter into the practice immediately. ...He had the most wonderful faculty of carrying everything into practice which he thought was right.... [So] my Master would go to a pariah and ask to be allowed to clean his house. The pariah would not permit it; so in the dead of night, when all were sleeping, Ramakrishna would enter the house. He had long hair, and with his hair he would wipe the place, saying, 'Oh, my Mother, make me the servant of the pariah, make me feel that I am even lower than the pariah.'<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>CW, vol. 4, p. 169-70.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 174-75.

[After he had attained spiritual fulfilment by following the diverse paths prescribed in Hinduism, he] wanted to understand what other religions were like. So he sought teachers of other religions. ...He found a Mohammedan saint and placed himself under him; he underwent the disciplines prescribed by him and to his astonishment found that when faithfully carried out, these devotional methods led him to the same goal he had already attained. He gathered similar experience from following the true religion of Jesus the Christ. ...Thus from actual experience, he came to know that the goal of every religion is the same, that each is trying to teach the same thing, the difference being largely in method and still more in language.<sup>17</sup>

His hard-earned jewels of spirituality, for which he had given three-quarters of his life, were now ready to be given to humanity, and then began his mission.<sup>18</sup> The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it.<sup>19</sup> His teaching and preaching were peculiar....the teacher had no thought whether he was to be respected or not, he had not the least idea that he was a great teacher, he thought that it was Mother who was doing everything and not he. He always said, 'If any good comes from my lips, it is the Mother who speaks; what have I to do with it?' That was his one idea about his work, and to the day of his death he never gave it up.<sup>20</sup> ...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.

---

<sup>17</sup>CW, vol. 4, p. 173-74.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 177.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 184.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 177.

Gradually, there developed a vital throat disorder, and yet he could not be persuaded to refrain from these exertions. ...When expostulated with, he replied, 'I do not care. I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man....'<sup>21</sup>

This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world: "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization.'<sup>22</sup> ...such an experience is possible for everyone of us if we will only try. [My Master taught that 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> The second idea...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.<sup>25</sup> 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

---

<sup>21</sup>CW, vol. 4, p. 185.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 187.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 187.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 180.

undisturbed because he had realized that in reality they are all part and parcel of the one eternal religion.<sup>26</sup> To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master.<sup>27</sup> If there is anything which Sri Ramakrishna has urged us to give up as carefully as lust and wealth, it is the limiting of the infinitude of God by circumscribing it within narrow bounds.<sup>28</sup> 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 powers. 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.<sup>29</sup> A man may be intellectual, or devotional, or mystic, or active; the various religions represent one or the other of these types. Yet it is possible to combine all the four in one man, and this is what future humanity is going to do, that was his idea.<sup>30</sup> ...this is the new religion of this age—the synthesis of Yoga, knowledge, devotion and work—the propagation of knowledge and devotion to all, down to the very lowest, without distinction of age or sex.<sup>31</sup>

The whole world will undoubtedly forget its fights and disputes and be united in a fraternal tie in religious and other matters as a consequence of these teachings [of Sri Ramakrishna].<sup>32</sup> From the date that the Ramakrishna Incarnation was born has sprung the Satya Yuga (Golden Age). ...In this Incarnation atheistic ideas ...will be

---

<sup>26</sup>CW, vol. 4, p. 187.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 187.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 412; (Also *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1929).

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 496.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 412; (Also *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1929).

destroyed by the sword of jnana (knowledge), and the whole world will be unified by means of bhakti (devotion) and prema (divine love).<sup>33</sup> Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the *chandala* will be a sharer in the divine love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, brahmins and *chandalas*—he lived to root out all.<sup>34</sup> There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. Hence, in the Ramakrishna Incarnation, the acceptance of a woman as the Guru, hence his practising in the woman's garb and frame of mind, hence too his preaching the motherhood of women as representations of the Divine Mother.<sup>35</sup>...he was the harbinger of peace—the separation between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past. That fight about distinctions that there was, belonged to another era. In this satya-yuga the tidal wave of Sri Ramakrishna's love has unified all.<sup>36</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna is a force. You should not think that his doctrine is this or that. But he is a power, living even now in his disciples and working in the world. ...He is still growing.<sup>37</sup> Ay, this boy born of poor brahmin parents in an out-of-the way village of which very few of you have even heard, is literally being worshipped in lands which have been fulminating against heathen worship for centuries. Whose power is it? Is it mine or yours? It is none else than the power which was manifested here as Ramakrishna Paramahansa. ...Here has been a manifestation of an immense power, just the very beginnings of whose

<sup>33</sup>CW, vol. 6, pp. 327–28.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 335.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 328.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 335.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 269.

workings we are seeking. ...It has come just in time for the regeneration of India ... for the good of India, and for the good of the whole human race through it. Ay, long before ideas of universal religion and brotherly feeling between different sects were mooted and discussed in any country in the world, here, in the sight of this city [Calcutta], had been living a man whose whole life was a Parliament of Religions as it should be.<sup>38</sup>

...it is absolutely necessary for the vast majority of human beings to have a personal ideal; and no nation can rise, can become great, can work at all, without enthusiastically coming under the banner of one of these great ideals in life. Political ideals, personages representing political ideals, even social ideals, commercial ideals, would have no power in India. We want spiritual ideals before us....Our heroes must be spiritual. Such a hero has been given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name ...it was the purest of all lives that you have ever seen, or let me tell you distinctly, that you have ever read of. And before you is the fact that it is the most marvellous manifestation of soul power that you can read of, much less expect to see.<sup>39</sup> God, though everywhere, can be known to us in and through human character. No character was ever so perfect as Ramakrishna's, and that should be the centre round which we ought to rally, at the same time allowing everybody to regard him in his own light, either as God, saviour, teacher, model, or great man just as he pleases.<sup>40</sup>

The waters of a river falling in a cataract acquire great velocity, the rising wave after a hollow swells higher; so after every spell of decline, the Aryan society recovering

---

<sup>38</sup>CW, vol. 3, p. 313–15.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 315.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 356.

from all the evils by the merciful dispensation of Providence, has risen the more glorious and powerful—such is the testimony of history. ...But greater than the present deep dismal night, now almost over, no pall of darkness had ever before enveloped this holy land of ours. And compared with the depth of this fall, all previous falls appear like little hoofmarks. Therefore, before the effulgence of this new awakening, the glory of all past revivals in her history will pale like stars before the rising sun; and compared with this mighty manifestation of renewed strength, all the many past epochs of such restoration will be as child's play....This epochal new dispensation is the harbinger of great good to the whole world, specially to India; and the inspirer of this dispensation, Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna, is the reformed and remodelled manifestation of all the past great epoch-makers in religion.<sup>41</sup>

...him I place before you, and it is for you to judge... what you shall do with this great ideal of life.<sup>42</sup>

[Compiled by Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee]

---

<sup>41</sup>CW, vol. 6, pp. 184–85.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 315.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Shivananda

Even as a child I had an inherent tendency towards spiritual life and an innate consciousness that enjoyment was not the object of life. As I grew older and my knowledge increased, these two ideas took a firmer hold over my mind. I went about the city of Calcutta seeking knowledge of God among its various religious societies and temples. But I could not find real satisfaction anywhere: none of them emphasized the beauty of renunciation nor could I discover a single man among them who was possessed of true spiritual wisdom. Then in 1880 or '81, I heard about Sri Ramakrishna and went to see him in the house of one of his devotees in Calcutta. This was the time when Swami Vivekananda and those other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who afterwards renounced the world to carry on his divine mission, had begun to gather round him. On that first day of my visit, I saw Sri Ramakrishna passing into samadhi; and when he returned to normal consciousness, he spoke in detail about samadhi and its nature. I felt in my inmost heart that here was a man who had indeed realized God and I surrendered myself forever at his blessed feet.

I have not yet come to a final understanding whether he was a man or a superman, a god or God Himself. But I have known him to be a man of complete self-effacement, master of the highest renunciation, possessed of the supreme wisdom and as the very incarnation of love; and as with the passing of days, I am getting better and better acquainted with the domain of spirituality and feeling the infinite extent and depth of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual moods, the conviction is growing in me that to compare him with God, as God is popularly understood, would be minimizing and lowering his supreme greatness. I have seen him showering his love equally on men and women, on the learned and the ignorant, and on saints and sinners,

and evincing earnest and unceasing solicitude for the relief of their misery and for their attainment to infinite peace by realizing the Divine. And I dare say the world has not seen another man of his type in modern times, so devoted to the welfare of mankind.

He was born at Kamarpukur in the Hooghly district in the year 1836. He looked upon name and fame with extreme disgust. His example and precepts deeply impressed on us the extreme insignificance of worldly joys before the ineffable bliss of God. He lived day and night in divine ecstasy; and samadhi, which is so rare and inaccessible, was perfectly natural to him. It is no wonder, therefore, that the idea of a God-intoxicated man being intimate with the details of everyday life, and instructing people thereon, and yearning to remove the sorrows of men and women who approached him with the tales of their worldly afflictions, should appear paradoxical and unnatural to those who had not witnessed his life. But we have seen innumerable such instances in his life; and there may be a few householders still living, who are feeling themselves blessed by remembering his infinite mercy and his eager attempts at relieving the sufferings of men.

One Mani Mallik, having lost his son, came to Sri Ramakrishna with a broken heart. Sri Ramakrishna not only sympathized with him, but entered so deeply into his feelings that it almost seemed as if he were the bereaved father and his sorrow surpassed Mallik's. Some time passed this way. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna changed his mood and sang a song which encouraged Mani to prepare for the battle of life. I remember how the father's grief was assuaged by it. The song gave him courage, calmed his sorrow and brought him peace. To Sri Ramakrishna there was neither good nor evil: he saw that the Divine Mother abides in all beings, the difference is only in manifestation. He visualized the Divine Mother in all women and revered and addressed them as his own mother.

By actually practising the doctrines of Hinduism, Christianity and Mohammedanism, etc., he demonstrated the truth of all religions, he found his own realizations tallying with the descriptions of the different scriptures—the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran, etc., and he declared that the Truth is one, being called and worshipped variously by the various religions of the different countries of the world. I have seen many true seekers of God, professing other creeds, come to him to solve their spiritual problems. And it is by seeing him that I came to believe in the truth of such Incarnations and prophets as Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed, and feel their infinite mercy. He never objected to anyone's spiritual mood or ideal. He helped all who came to him, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, high and low, to advance along the spiritual path according to their individual inclinations.

He was surely wide awake to the infinite sufferings of the world. He not only relieved the individual sufferings of those who came to him, but also removed collective suffering on several occasions and advised Swami Vivekananda and his other disciples to do the same. (I should mention here that Swami Vivekananda was himself a man of high spiritual attainments—we heard from the Master himself that the Swami's spiritual capacities were of a very high order.)

Once the Master accompanied Mathur Babu, a son-in-law of Rani Rasmani [proprietress of the Temple of Dakshineswar where he resided], to his estate in the Nadia district. It was the time when rents were to be realized from the tenants. But there had been a failure of crops for two consecutive years and the tenants were reduced to extreme straits. The sight of their starved and emaciated bodies deeply pained Sri Ramakrishna. He sent for Mathur Babu and requested him to remit their rents and to give them a sumptuous feast and supply them with clothes. Mathur Babu said: 'Father, you do not know how much suffering there is in the world. But it will not do because of that to

remit people's rents.' 'You are but Mother's steward,' replied Sri Ramakrishna. 'These are Mother's tenants; let Mother's money be spent. They are suffering so much and you will not help them? You must!' Mathur Babu used to look upon the Master as the Incarnation of God; he had therefore to accede to his request. I shall mention a second incident. It happened at Deoghar in Bihar. The Master was going on a pilgrimage with Mathur Babu and party. In those days the Master lived habitually in a semi-ecstatic state. When they arrived at Deoghar Sri Ramakrishna found the local inhabitants (Santhals, an aboriginal tribe) reduced to extreme starvation, emaciated and almost naked. On seeing their unusual appearance, he got out of the palanquin and asked Mathur Babu who and what they were. The locality had been going through a terrible famine for two years, and the Master had never seen such extreme misery before. When Mathur Babu explained the conditions to him, he said that they must be given oil, bathed, clothed, and fed well. When Mathur Babu remonstrated, Sri Ramakrishna said that he would not move from that place, but live with them till their misery was relieved. Mathur Babu had no other way than to do as he was bid. Those two incidents had happened before I met the Master; but I heard about them from his own lips.

Of those that occurred in our presence, I shall mention here two instances, from which it will be evident that he was not satisfied with mere verbal expression of sympathy and love for the afflicted, but also instructed Swami Vivekananda and us to remove their misery. One day at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna said in an ecstatic mood: '*Jiva* is *Shiva* (man is Divine), who can show mercy to him? Not mercy, but service by looking upon man as God.' Swami Vivekananda was then present there. On hearing this pithy utterance of the Master, pregnant with deep meaning, he said to us: 'I have listened today to a noble word of wisdom. If the opportunity ever comes, I shall proclaim its great truth to the world.' If anyone seeks for the root of the

innumerable works of service that are being done by the Ramakrishna Mission in different places, he will find it in this incident.

The other incident took place in the beginning of 1886. The Master was lying ill at the Cossipore Garden near Calcutta, under medical treatment. It was there, in that very year, that he entered Mahasamadhi. Swami Vivekananda and some fifteen more of us used then to live in the garden attending on him. Swami Vivekananda often pressed him during those days to grant him *nirvikalpa* samadhi (highest super-conscious realization). One day, while meditating, Swami Vivekananda actually experienced that state. Seeing him become unconscious and his body, grown cold like a corpse, we hurried to the Master in great fear and told him what had happened. The Master showed no anxiety: he merely smiled and said: 'Very well,' and then relapsed into silence. Some time after, the Swami regained outward consciousness and came to the Master. The Master said to him: 'Well, now do you understand? This (the highest realization) will henceforward remain under lock and key. You have the Mother's work to do. When it is finished, She will undo the lock.' Swami Vivekananda replied: 'Sir, I was happy in samadhi. In my infinite joy I had forgotten the world. I beseech you to let me remain in that state.' 'For shame!' cried the Master. 'How can you ask such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man! This realization will become so natural to you by the grace of the Mother, that even in your normal state you will realize the one divinity in all beings. You will do great things in the world. You will bring spiritual knowledge to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor.'

Sri Ramakrishna had the divine power to transmit spirituality to others and lift them to higher states of consciousness. This he would do either by thought, look, or touch. Like Swami Vivekananda many of us used to visit him and had the privilege of being lifted to higher planes of

consciousness according to our capacities. I myself had the privilege of attaining to that high spiritual consciousness (samadhi) thrice by his touch and wish during his lifetime. I am living still to bear direct testimony to his great spiritual powers. It was neither hypnotism, nor a mere state of deep sleep in as much as such realizations brought about changes of character and outlook, which were more or less permanent.

It was naturally not always possible for one like Sri Ramakrishna, ever living on high spiritual planes, to relieve the earthly sufferings of the poor, but it will be wrong therefore to think that he was unmindful of them. What he himself practised and gave out in aphoristic utterances were and are being subsequently realized and practised by Swami Vivekananda and others. It was impossible for him to look after even his own requirements while dwelling on the high spiritual planes. He therefore transmitted his spiritual ideas, apparently under divine guidance, to those who were fit to quickly assimilate those high spiritual truths and devote themselves to the welfare of mankind. The greatest of them was Swami Vivekananda—so we heard from the Master, and also felt it ourselves. Therefore, we find, as we study the life of the Swami, that as on the one hand he preached the wonderful message of religious harmony, so on the other he preached the universal creed of service by giving secular and spiritual knowledge, food, medicine, etc., to the needy, so that having all their wants fulfilled, they might by and by be led to the domain of spirituality. In fact, Swamiji was the greatest interpreter of the Master's life and a living commentary on the Master's aphoristic utterances on deep and noble spiritual principles. I doubt if any man will ever be able to fully determine the infinitude of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual realizations.

Some conceive a contradiction between the realization of the divinity in man and the acceptance of universal suffering, a primary motive for service. It seems to me that these are merely two aspects of the same state of mind and

not two different things. It is only by realizing the inherent divinity of man that we can truly feel the depth of his misery—for only then the state of man's spiritual bondage and deprivation of the divine perfection and bliss becomes vivid to our consciousness. It is the painful consciousness of the contrast between the divinity within man and his present ignorance of it and consequent suffering that goads the heart to his service. Without the realization of the spirit within oneself and in others, true sympathy, love, and service are impossible. This is why Sri Ramakrishna wanted his disciples to attain Self-realization before they could devote themselves properly to the service of mankind.

[This valuable article on the personal experience and understanding of his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna was originally written by Swami Shivananda in reply to several inquiries of Mr. Romain Rolland, the famous French author of the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* and the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA Swami Ramakrishnananda

Sri Krishna, after describing to Arjuna a little of his own glory, said to him: 'Whatever being there is, great, prosperous, or powerful, know that it has sprung from but a part of My splendour.' Everyone in India who is within the fold of Hinduism regards the son of Devaki (Sri Krishna) as the Lord Himself. But what is a matter for regret is that nowadays, people imbued with scientific and materialistic ideas of the West doubt the existence of God. If we think a little, we shall understand that this doubt about the existence of God can be entertained only by thoughtless people. O man, if you had the power to acquire everything you desire, I would not hesitate to call you God. If no one had the power to obstruct you, if you could enjoy unbroken bliss, being free from the fear of death and thus live in great happiness, if you could, at all times, easily and according to your sweet will, have gratified your innumerable desires, then you yourself would have been God. But just think for a moment and see whether your condition is not just the reverse. If so, it is mere foolishness to be an atheist, to dethrone God, and set yourself up in His place. That Supreme Power which you cannot obstruct and which easily obstructs you at every step, that power of all-conquering Time known as Kali, rules you and all this universe of movable and immovable things. This power of Time is what is known as *Ishwara*, the Personal God. This power is the cause of the creation, preservation, and destruction of this universe. Wherever we see a concentration of this Power, there we find the manifestation of God. Everyone knows to what a great extent this Power was manifest in Sri Krishna. No power on earth was able to obstruct Him. On the other hand He was able to put under His feet all the monarchs of His time and let only such of them live as were pious and righteous, thus fulfilling His own words in the

Gita: 'Whenever there is decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, then I body Myself forth, for the protection of the good and the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness.' The power of Time is ever favourable to righteousness and man cannot help admitting that He in whom this power is manifest to a great extent is an Incarnation of God. For it is such great souls who are all-powerful and all-merciful that are the real Masters of this world. These great souls control this great power for they have been ruling this world from time immemorial. Just as Kali, the power of time, is the ruler of this world, even so do these great souls rule this world. Their words are the scriptures of the world and are working for the good of mankind. They alone have shown mankind the way out of this relative existence (*samsāra*) by treading the path themselves.

In this age, in which great soul is this power of the Lord to be found, taking shelter at whose feet will man be able to cross the ocean of life unscathed? Which great soul today is able to save blind mankind which has fallen into the jaws of atheism and doubt? Which great Master's words—sweet and easy to understand like the loving words of a mother—are giving hope of the Kingdom of Heaven to man? Before which great personality—the embodiment of knowledge, bhakti and supernatural realizations—are the savants of the world standing awestruck and reverential like novices? Who is that great soul who, from behind the screen has today enlightened the world with his knowledge transmitted through Vivekananda?

Really, everything about Sri Ramakrishna is supernatural. In his own words, 'the key to this antechamber has to be turned the reverse way', i.e. if one wants to attain knowledge, worldly means will be of no avail. Sri Krishna also taught in the same strain: 'That which is night to all beings, in that the self-controlled man is awake. That in which all beings wake, that is night to the Self-seeing Muni.' The life of Sri Ramakrishna is an apt illustration of this

teaching. It is beyond ordinary human understanding. For what the world thinks of as good, was bad in his eyes, and what the world thinks of as giving it happiness and peace, he knew to be the cause of all misery and restlessness. His greatness is unequalled and irresistible. To bring home all these facts to our understanding it is necessary to cite a few instances from his pure life.

I have already said that God is manifest wherever there is the play of great power. It may be asked: what greatness could be found in a priest drawing a monthly salary of seven rupees, which would make people regard him as a manifestation of God? It seems to be an impossibility at first sight. Though a few years ago the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna was not known to the world at large, today there is no nation that has not heard of him and does not regard him with great reverence. What is the reason? His poverty and lack of worldly education are the two factors that highlight his greatness. A desired object is gained by certain means; through effort it is brought within one's reach. It does not require proof, therefore, to understand that he who without any means or effort can attain desired objects and goals possesses great powers. A battle can be won with the help of a big and well-equipped army; but if one can win a battle single-handed and without proper equipment, against a foe well equipped and numerically superior, then we have to accept that the Lord is manifest in such a person. Nowadays, to acquire learning people take the help of a library. The greater the number of books one reads the more learned is one supposed to be. It will not be wrong if we say that Sri Ramakrishna had no book-learning whatsoever. He sometimes used to say that books (*granthas*) are knots (*granthis*), for many become egotistic because of their learning and get bound to this world. In his younger days he used to hear from a great pandit with whom he was acquainted, about the unreality of the world and the reality of God, and from his talk he thought that the pandit was free from all worldly attachments. But one day when he

saw this pandit taking to the profession of a priest for the sake of a few handfuls of rice, it struck him that book-learning after all does not help one to attain true knowledge and that there must certainly be some other means to attain it. Thus he became averse to book-learning. When he saw pandits discussing on the unreality of things in a religious conference, he used to compare them with vultures. These birds rise high up in the sky but all the time have their eyes on the putrid carcasses of dead animals in the charnel pits; so also, pandits, though they may be talking of high spiritual matters, quoting scriptures, yet have their minds fixed on money. Once when a disciple of his was engaged in studying the scriptures of the Parsis, neglecting his service of the Master which would bring him infinite good, he said, 'My boy, this book-learning disturbs the mind. It is even an obstacle in the way of attaining devotion to the Lord.' The disciple was brought to his senses by this chastisement from the Master.

By reading too many books, the mind gets filled with other people's thoughts and loses the capacity of thinking for itself. If book-learning stimulates one's thought it is good but if it destroys one's capacity to think, then it is to be discarded.

Sri Ramakrishna, giving up book-learning, began the search for that storehouse of knowledge inside his own pure mind, and in no time came by such wealth of knowledge that he resolved to give freely from that inexhaustible storehouse to all men and women. The learned and the illiterate, the rich and the poor thought themselves blessed by getting knowledge from his inexhaustible storehouse.

We learn from the Upanishads that there are two kinds of knowledge—supreme and relative. There the knowledge of the scriptures is described as relative knowledge while supreme knowledge is said to be the means to God-realization. But we came to know what supreme knowledge really was after we sat at the feet of the Master. It was with the help of this supreme knowledge that he was able to dispel

the ignorance of both the pandits and the ignorant. No one has seen such a phenomenon anywhere else. This is a fact which goes to show that he was God incarnate.

In these days there is no chance for anyone to gain esteem without wealth. Wealth makes even a fool appear learned. Wealth makes the impossible, possible. So wealth is worshipped everywhere today. But Sri Ramakrishna came to show that wealth was the root of all evil. He had such a great dislike for coins that he could not even touch a metallic object, and his fingers would become benumbed if he touched any such object. It was because of his total renunciation of wealth that the wealthy regarded themselves as blessed to be able to serve him and spend money for him. Wealth comes of its own accord to him who renounces—this fact was proved in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Saving for a rainy day is something that is quite necessary for a man who is ever in want, for who knows what need may arise unexpectedly? But Sri Ramakrishna could not save anything even for the next moment. On account of this non-attachment, other people used to lay up for him. We read in the *Gita*, 'Persons who meditate on Me without any other thought, to those who are thus ever zealously engaged, I carry to them what they lack and preserve for them what they already have.' But we could not understand at that time the true significance of this statement. Later the divine life of Sri Ramakrishna made it quite clear to us.

In this world our 'ties' alone are the causes of happiness. The worldly life gives happiness only because of the ties of love. Even a beggar ties up in a bundle his old torn and tattered rags, lest he should lose them. So ties of some kind or other help the worldly man. But Sri Ramakrishna was afraid of all kinds of ties. Such ties bind man to this worldly life and do not allow him to commune with God. They rob man of his wealth of freedom. They do not allow one's heart to expand. So he who wishes to drink deep of the honey of the lotus feet of the Lord, or he who wants to attain freedom and go about

in this world without fear, enjoying great happiness, should not allow any ties of attachment to grow in his heart. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna used to look with so great an aversion on worldly ties that he could not even tie up any valuable thing for safe-keeping. Since to put on a *dhoti* (a wearing cloth) he would have to tie it around, he could not dress himself—somebody else would have to dress him. He was like a child of five. Therefore the Divine Mother had arranged many servants and maids for him who felt blessed by serving this great soul.

Sri Ramakrishna used to think of the Divine Mother as his real mother. Just as the child is unwilling to leave the lap of its mother, so he was loath to leave his Mother. Day after day he used to stand before the Divine Mother and get lost in divine bliss and he knew for certain that there was no place in this world except the feet of his Divine Mother where such great bliss could be had. That is why he liked so much to take the aspirants seeking bliss to the feet of the Divine Mother. In reality, so long as you regard all women as your mother, they also look upon you like their child; but the moment you look upon them with lust you are possessed by a strong desire to marry. When you take a woman as your wife, the responsibility of maintaining her is shifted to your shoulders. A wife has to be taken care of. Till your marriage you were living without any responsibilities and in great bliss, being taken care of by others. But having accepted the bondage of married life you are scorched by the fever of anxieties, and are carrying on your head the burden of misery and leading a despicable life. Your forehead is wrinkled with anxieties, and peace of mind has left you for ever. That is why Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Look at the new-born calf, how it skips about in great glee as though it is born to live in joy. But from the day the rope is put round its neck, it looks depressed, and its happiness diminishes. Before marriage man is happy as the calf, but when the rope of worldly ties is put round his neck, that happiness deserts him.'

Freedom is the source of happiness. Freedom makes a man all-powerful. Sri Ramakrishna never lost this freedom. No ties could bind him. His heart was as broad as the infinite sky. That is why he could appreciate all the religions of the world. He used to say, 'Never say that God is limited, or he is only this or only that. No one has yet been able to know him as he really is, nor will anyone be able to know him fully. He is the ocean of intelligence, taking a drop from which Shiva, Suka, and Narada became God-intoxicated. I have known him as with form and without form and to transcend both. But what He is in reality I do not know. All the religions of the world are but different paths to him. Follow sincerely the path laid down by the religion you are born in and you will in time reach the Abode of eternal bliss.'

There was not the least trace of egotism in Sri Ramakrishna. He could not say 'I' or 'mine'. Where people generally use the word 'mine' he used to say 'of this place', pointing to himself with his finger. For example, when he wanted to say it was not his opinion, he would say, 'It is not the opinion of this place. It was because there was no ego-consciousness in him that the cosmic ego of the Divine Mother worked through him. The Divine Mother, the sportive Kali, incarnated in the form of Sri Ramakrishna to give to Her innumerable children knowledge and devotion.

I have tried to give you, readers, an insight into the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. It is beyond my powers to describe in full even a particle of his infinite glory. If you are eager to know the truth, then dive deep into the ocean of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the all-compassionate one, and in time your heart will be enlightened by truth; you will get infinite strength; you will attain peace of mind and be blessed.

[Extract from the original in Bengali, which appeared in 'Udbodhan'.]

## HOW RAMAKRISHNA TESTED HIS DISCIPLES

Swami Saradananda

Sri Ramakrishna said to Keshab Chandra Sen, when the Brahmo Samaj was split over the Cooch Behar marriage: 'It is no wonder that your Samaj is breaking up. You accept all as your followers without testing them. But I do not accept anyone without doing so.' It was indeed wonderful in how many different ways the Master used to examine the devotees that came to him. He was illiterate; yet he mastered many wonderful methods of gauging human character. Was it due to his recall of knowledge acquired in past lives? Or to his supersensuous vision and omniscience attained through sadhana? Or to his being a Divine Incarnation, as he sometimes described himself to his intimate disciples?

### I

We always found that whenever any person came to [Sri Ramakrishna], he would look at him with special attention. And if he felt attracted towards the visitor, he would talk about spiritual things with him and ask him to visit him occasionally. As days passed and the visits continued, Sri Ramakrishna would observe, unknown to the visitor himself, the shape of his body and limbs, the nature of his thoughts, the strength of his carnal desires, and the extent of his love for him. From these minute observations, he would arrive at a sure conclusion about his latent spirituality; and before long he would have a firm grasp of his character. And if he felt the necessity of knowing any hidden facts of his inner being, he would know them by his keen yogic vision. About this he once said to us: 'During the small hours of the morning, while awake and alone I often think of the spiritual welfare of you all. The Divine Mother shows and lets me know how far one has advanced

in the spiritual path, why another cannot progress, and so on.' From this, however, let us not conclude that his yogic power was active only at that time. From his talk at other times we understood that he could ascend at will to high states of spiritual consciousness and obtain similar visions. For he said: 'Just as by merely looking at a glass almirah one can see all its contents, so I can know the inmost thoughts, tendencies, and everything of a man by merely looking at him.'

The above, however, was only his general method of judging character. In the case of his special devotees, he used to apply other methods also. In fact, their case was special in various ways. His first meetings with them always came about in a peculiar manner: he generally used to be in an exalted mood at those times. And he would intuitively know their nature—the facts of their inner life would be spontaneously revealed to him. The explanation is simple. By wonderful spiritual practices, he had made his body and mind excellent instruments for retaining and communicating subtle spiritual forces. Thus whenever any devotee approached him, his mind would be at once coloured by the same spiritual outlook as their own, and would automatically correspond to their level of spiritual progress. The facts about their inner life would become at once patent to him. This, it must be admitted, was a special method. It was an intuitive process. But as we have said, he also applied the general methods, the methods of observation, to his special devotees, and these can be described under the following four heads.

## II

Sri Ramakrishna would ascertain the predominant tendencies of his devotees by observing their physiognomy and other bodily signs.

Physiology and psychology now prove that every thought, when it becomes active, leaves an impression on

the brain and the body. The Vedas and other scriptures have always affirmed this fact. All Hindu philosophical and religious books declare that the mind builds up the body, and that a man's physical form changes accordingly as his thoughts and propensities are good or evil. Therefore, many proverbs are current amongst us about ascertaining a man's nature from the shape of his body and limbs. And that is also why on such occasions as marriage, initiation, and other ceremonies, the examination of the hands, feet, and other parts of the body of the persons concerned, is considered necessary.

It is no wonder that Sri Ramakrishna, believing as he did in the scriptures, should examine the shape of the body and the limbs of his disciples. He would relate many facts about this in course of conversation. And we would listen, wonderstruck, to his descriptions of the various limbs and features of a man, as he compared their shape with the objects of everyday life, and explained their special significance. About the eyes he would say: 'Some have eyes like lotus petals; some like bulls' eyes; and some possess the eyes of a yogi or a *deva* (god). Those who have eyes like lotus petals are endowed with good and spiritual tendencies. Those whose eyes are like a bull's have strong sex-passions. The yogi's eyes have an upward look and a reddish tinge. The divine eyes are not very large but are elongated and, as it were, stretch to the ears. If a man casts side-glances or looks from the corner of the eye while talking, know him to be more intelligent than the average person. Or he would thus speak of the peculiarities of the body: 'Those who have devotional temperament have naturally a soft body, and the joints of their hands and feet are supple; and even if their body be lean, the muscles and tendons are so shaped that it does not appear angular.' In order to ascertain the turn of a person's mind, whether it was towards good or evil, he would weigh another's hand in his own, from fingers to elbow. If he found the weight less than usual, he would conclude that the mind was pure.

We may cite an instance. When Sri Ramakrishna was staying at the Cossipore Garden, suffering from cancer, the younger brother of the present writer came one day to visit the Master. The Master was very pleased to see him. He made him sit near him, questioned him about various things, and gave him many spiritual instructions. When the present writer came there, the Master asked him: 'Is this your younger brother? He is a fine boy and more intelligent than you. Let me see if he has a good or bad tendencies.' So saying he took the boy's hand into his own and weighing it said: 'Yes, he has good tendencies.' He then asked: 'Shall I draw him (that is, draw his mind away from the world and turn it towards God)? What do you say?' We replied: 'Yes, Sir, please do so.' But Sri Ramakrishna thought for a while and said: 'No, no more. I have taken one and if I take this one also, your parents, especially your mother, would be much aggrieved. I have displeased many a *shakti* (woman) in my life. No more now.'

The Master used to say: 'Men having different mental tendencies have also variations in their physiological functions, such as in sleeping. Experts can find indications of character also in them. For example, all people do not breathe in the same way during sleep. A worldly man breathes in one way, a man of renunciation in another way.'

Of women, Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there are two kinds, *vidya shakti*, of god-like nature, and the *avidya shakti*, of the nature of *asura*, or low nature. 'Those of godly nature, he said, 'take little sleep and food. They do not care for the sense-life, they like to talk with their husbands on religious subjects, and they save their husbands from evil thoughts and impure acts by filling them with high spiritual inspiration. They help their husbands to live a spiritual life so that they (husbands) may ultimately realize God.' But the *avidya shaktis* are just the opposite. They eat much and sleep much and they always want their husbands to think of nothing other than their happiness. They become annoyed with their husbands if they talk about religion.'

In this way, Sri Ramakrishna told many things. Once he examined Naren's (Swami Vivekananda's) body in that way. He was greatly pleased with the result. He said: 'You have all the good marks on your body. Only during sleep you breathe heavily. Yogis say that it indicates a short life.'

### III

The Master's second and third means of knowing a man's nature were the observation of his mental tendencies and his attachment to woman and gold, as expressed in small and ordinary actions.

Silently he used to watch all those who came to visit him at Dakshineswar. And when he had decided to accept one as his disciple, he would teach him in many ways and would sometimes scold him to correct his defects. After studying a newcomer he would decide whether he would train him to become a good householder or a sannyasin. First he would ask whether he was married or single, and whether he had sufficient means to maintain himself; or if he were to renounce the world whether there were anyone to take the responsibility of maintaining his family.

His love went out especially towards young students. He used to say: 'Their minds are not yet divided between many interests, such as wife, children, desire for wealth, fame, etc. If they are properly trained, they can give their whole mind to God. Therefore he loved to instruct them in the spiritual path. He used to say: 'The mind is like a packet of mustard seeds. If you once let it be scattered, it is very difficult to gather the seeds again.' Or he would say: 'Once a bird is full grown, it is difficult to teach it to say Radha-Krishna.' Or again he would say: 'The footprints of cows on unburnt tiles can easily be effaced, but when the tiles are burnt, those marks cannot be obliterated.' He would therefore question the young boys carefully to learn the natural tendency of their minds, whether it was towards worldly enjoyment (*pravritti*), or renunciation (*nivritti*). And

he would train them towards *nivritti* if he found them fit for it. Through questioning he would also learn whether the boy was simple and truthful, whether he really practised what he professed, whether he was discriminating or not in all his actions, and how far he could understand his instructions. All these he would ascertain very carefully.

Once he asked a young student who came to him: 'Why don't you marry?' The boy replied: 'Sir, my mind is not yet under my control. If I marry now, I shall get attached to my wife and that will destroy my power of discrimination between what is beneficial and what is not. If I can conquer lust, then I shall marry.' Sri Ramakrishna understood that though the boy had attractions for sense-enjoyment, yet his mind was tending towards the path of *nivritti*. He laughed and said: 'When you have conquered lust, you will not need to marry at all.'

Talking to another boy at Dakshineswar, he said: 'You see, I cannot always keep my dhoti (wearing cloth) on. Sometimes it becomes loose and drops off without my noticing it. I am an old man, and I move about naked. Yet I do not feel ashamed. What is the reason? Formerly I did not notice at all whether people saw me naked or not. But now I notice that some people feel embarrassed, so I keep my dhoti in my lap. Can you go naked, like me, before others?' The boy said: 'Sir, I do not know. But if you tell me to do so I think I can.' Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Try it. Take off your cloth, wrap it round your head and walk around the temple courtyard.' The boy said: 'No, Sir, that I cannot do. I can do that only before you.' Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Yes, others also say that they feel the same way. They feel no shame before me, but they do so before others.'

Once it was the second day of the bright fortnight. We had all retired. The moonlight was beautiful and the tide coming in on the Ganga was always a grand sight on such evenings. In the middle of the night Sri Ramakrishna called us and said: 'Come, come and see the incoming tide.' He himself then went to the embankment. Seeing the calm

waters of the Ganga rising in huge waves with the tide and splashing against the embankment, he felt as happy as a boy and began to dance.

Now, on getting up we had to take care of our dress before we could follow him. That made us a little late, and by the time we came to the embankment the moment of greatest beauty had passed. Only a few of us were in time to see a part of it. Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in his own joy. When it was over he turned to us and said: 'How did you enjoy it?' Hearing that we had come too late because we had to dress, he said: 'You fools, do you think the tide will wait for you to dress? Why did not you leave your cloth behind as I did?'

Sometimes he would ask a disciple if he wanted to marry and earn money. If he replied that he would not marry but would have to enter service to earn money, it would not satisfy the Master, who was a great lover of freedom. He would say: 'If you do not marry, why then be the slave of someone all your life? Give your whole heart to God and worship Him. Being born in the world, this should be a man's highest ambition. But if that is not possible, then marry, but make the realization of God your highest goal, and tread the path of righteousness.' Such were Sri Ramakrishna's views. If, therefore, any disciple whom he considered especially, or even fairly gifted spiritually, married or entered service to earn money, or worked for fame and wasted his energy, he would take it very much to heart.

One of his young disciples (Swami Niranjanananda) accepted employment to support his mother. When Sri Ramakrishna heard about it, he said, 'If it were not that you have done so for your old mother, I would have never looked at you again.' When another disciple came to the Cossipore garden to see Sri Ramakrishna after his marriage, Sri Ramakrishna wept as if he had lost a son. He put his arms round the young man's neck and crying, said repeatedly: 'May you not forget God and completely sink in the sea of the world!'

All scriptures teach that progress in the spiritual path is impossible without sincere faith. Knowing this, some of us would make it a point to believe in everything and every person. But Sri Ramakrishna warned us against that. Though he asked us to travel along the spiritual path with faith, he never asked us to cease to discriminate. One should use one's sense of right and wrong both in the spiritual path and in worldly matters—such, we think, was his view.

Once one of the young disciples (Swami Yogananda) went to a shop and bought a [cooking] pot. He appealed to the religious feeling of the shop keeper and did not examine the pot closely. Afterwards, he found that the pot leaked. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and said: 'Because you are a devotee of God, does that mean that you should be a fool? Do you think a shopkeeper opens a shop to practise religion? Why did you not examine the pot before you bought it? Never act so foolishly again. When you go out shopping, first find out the real price by going round several shops, then thoroughly examine the thing you buy. And do not fail to demand the little extras where allowed.'

Sometimes some persons, having begun the practice of religion, become so kind-hearted that their kindness itself becomes a bondage and even drags them down from the path of spirituality. Such is often the case with soft-hearted persons. Such people Sri Ramakrishna would instruct to be firm and resolved. But those who were by nature domineering and harsh, he would ask to be gentle. Swami Yogananda was of a very mild nature. We have never seen him getting angry or abusing anyone, though sometimes there was reason enough for it. Though it was quite against his nature and inclinations, because of his tender heart he suddenly got married. His mother entreated him, and seeing her weep he had not the strength to refuse. It was only through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna that he was saved from a life of bitter disappointment and repentance. Sri Ramakrishna watched over him with great care and

tried in every way to cure his excessive mildness. Here is just one instance to show how, even through the smallest things, Sri Ramakrishna would instruct us.

A cockroach was once found among Sri Ramakrishna's clothes. He asked Swami Yogananda to take it out and kill it. Swami Yogananda took it outside the room and let it go without killing it. Sri Ramakrishna asked: 'Have you killed it? Swami Yogananda said: 'No, sir, I let it go.' Then Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and said: 'I told you to kill the cockroach, but you let it go. You should always do as I ask you to do. Otherwise, later in more serious matters also you will follow your own judgement and come to grief.

Swami Yogananda was one day coming by a country boat from Calcutta to Dakshineswar. One of the passengers asked him where he was going. He told him that he was going to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna. Hearing this, the other passenger began to vilify Sri Ramakrishna's character. He said: 'Sri Ramakrishna is only a pretender. He eats well, sleeps on a bed, and still he claims to be a saint; and he spoils the young boys. Swami Yogananda was distressed to hear the man talk like that about Sri Ramakrishna. He thought of rebuking him. But his gentle nature prevailed and he thought: 'Well, people do not know Sri Ramakrishna, therefore they have queer ideas about him and blame him. What can I do?' So he kept silent.

Coming to Dakshineswar he told Sri Ramakrishna about it. He thought Sri Ramakrishna did not care what people thought or said about him, and so the matter would end there. But he was mistaken. Sri Ramakrishna took it quite seriously. He said: 'That man abused me for nothing and you kept silent! Do you know what the *shastras* say? You must cut the head of him who speaks ill of your guru or leave his presence at once. And you did not even protest against these false accusations?'

But Sri Ramakrishna's instructions varied according to the temperaments of the taught. In a similar case, under similar circumstances, Sri Ramakrishna taught his different

disciples different ways of conduct. Let us illustrate this. We have just had Swami Yogananda's case. Now let us see what happened to Swami Niranjanananda under similar conditions.

Swami Niranjanananda was of an impetuous temperament. Once, while he was going to Dakshineswar in a country boat, some fellow-passengers spoke ill of Sri Ramakrishna. At first Swami Niranjanananda protested vehemently. But when they continued their slandering talk, he became very angry and threatened to overturn the boat and drown them all. He was a strong man and a good swimmer. They all got frightened and to save themselves began to pacify him in many ways. And then he calmed down.

Now, when Sri Ramakrishna came to hear about it he scolded Swami Niranjanananda, saying: 'Anger is like a pariah (untouchable), you should never yield to it. The anger of a good man disappears like a line drawn in the water. Mean people will say many things, and if you want to quarrel about that you will pass your whole life time in that way. You should think in such cases: What are people?—they are like worms. Consider such men as no better than insects and be indifferent to their words. Think of what a wrong deed you were about to do through your anger. What was the fault of the boatmen that you should have put them also in danger?'

He would also train his women disciples similarly. Once he said to one of them who was particularly soft hearted: 'Suppose someone you know takes great pains to help you on all occasions, unable to control the infatuation for beauty, his weak mind begins pinning for you. Would you be kind to the man? Won't you, on the other hand, deal a hard kick on his chest and live far away from him? So you see, you cannot always be kind to all persons under all conditions. There must be a limit and you must discriminate.'

We remember another incident relevant to this topic. He was a strong young man. He had a beautiful wife and a son, and had enough means to support them. Coming to Dakshineswar a few times he felt a strong disgust for a worldly life. His simple nature, his devotion, and his gentleness made him very dear to Sri Ramakrishna who then became his protecting angel. From that time he passed most of his time at Dakshineswar, serving Sri Ramakrishna and meditating on the Lord. His guardians began to pursue him, his father-in-law asked him to go back to his home, his wife wept, but nothing could dissuade him from his purpose. He paid no attention to all these entreaties and threats. He remained silent and went on in his own way. Sri Ramakrishna, to teach us through this example, pointed out to us how calm and steadfast Harish was, and he would say: 'Those who are real men should be dead though living, like Harish.'

One day Sri Ramakrishna was told that because Harish had left them, the whole family had become very much stricken with grief and his wife, becoming overwhelmed with sorrow had almost given up food and drink. Hearing this Harish remained silent as before. But Sri Ramakrishna, in order to test his mind, said to him: 'Your wife is so very anxious to see you. Why don't you go to see her once? She has none to look after her. What is the harm in consoling her once this time?' Harish said humbly: 'Sir, this is not the proper occasion to show compassion. If I go there, I may fall in bondage again and forget the highest object of life. Pray, do not ask me to do that.' Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased with his reply, and he often repeated Harish's words to us, praising his spirit of renunciation.

We may cite many instances of Sri Ramakrishna's noting the trifling details of our daily life and thereby understanding our mental qualities and defects. Once he saw Swami Niranjanananda taking too much *ghee* (refined butter) and said, 'Why do you take so much *ghee*? Will you at last abduct somebody's daughter or daughter-in-law?'

(He meant that such rich food would make it difficult for the disciple to control his passions.) When one of the boys, despite his disapproval, began the study of medicine, he said: 'Far from renouncing your desires, you are increasing them instead! How then will you make any spiritual progress?'

He would not be satisfied with merely knowing the character of his disciples, but would also try to remedy their defects. And in order to ascertain the degree of the spiritual progress made by them he would always adopt a special means, which was his fourth method of examining his disciples.

#### IV

Sri Ramakrishna would often enquire whether the attitude of devotion and reverence, which had first brought his disciples to him, were increasing or not.

This enquiry would take the following form: He would sometimes question them about how far they could understand his spiritual conditions and conduct. Or he would observe if they put complete faith in his words. Or he would introduce them to other disciples, an intimacy with whom, he thought, would deepen their own spiritual moods. And he would not become assured of the spiritual future of a disciple until he had learnt to accept Sri Ramakrishna, of his own accord and intuitively, as the expression of the highest spiritual ideal of the world.

This may astonish some. But a little thought will indicate that it was only reasonable and natural for the Master to do so. For what else could he do, knowing as he did that there was an unprecedented influx of spirituality through him? As a result of the long practice of austerity, meditation and Samadhi, his egoism had been totally destroyed, and all chance of any delusion or error had been eliminated for ever. Necessarily, therefore, unlimited memory and infinite knowledge were manifested in him;

and he felt in his inmost soul that the spiritual ideal that was revealed through his mind and body, had never before been witnessed in the world. Therefore he naturally concluded that in this age whoever would, with full understanding, seek to mould his own life in the light of the ideal that was embodied in him, would find his spiritual progress easy and smooth. Need we then wonder that he enquired of his disciples if they understood him as the highest spiritual ideal, and were trying to build their lives in accordance with it?

The Master would variously express this conviction of his. He would say: 'The coins current in the reigns of the Nawabs became invalid during the Emperor's rule. If you follow my instructions, you will reach the goal straight away.' 'Those whose present birth is their last (that is to say, those who have been so far freed from their past karma that they would not have to be born again), will come here and accept the spiritual ideas and ideals of this place.' 'Your *Ishta* (Chosen Deity) is (pointing to himself) within this. If you meditate on this, you meditate on your *Ishta*.' We shall give a few illustrations.

All the disciples of the Master knew that at one time or another he asked them what they thought of him. This question was posed after a disciple had become intimately known to the Master. Not always so, however; for sometimes he would put this question to a disciple even at the first meeting. These were the devotees whose coming had long ago been announced to him through superconscious visions. The replies that he received were various. Briefly they were: 'You are a true saint,' 'You are a true devotee of God,' 'You are a *mahapurusha*—a great soul,' 'You are an emancipated person,' 'You are an incarnation of God,' 'You are Sri Chaitanya himself,' 'You are Shiva Himself,' 'You are God,' and so on. Some who belonged to the Brahma Samaj and did not, therefore, believe in divine incarnations, said: 'You are a lover of God, of the same rank as Sri Krishna,

Buddha, Christ and Sri Chaitanya.' A Christian named Williams<sup>1</sup> said: 'You are the Christ himself, the Son of God.' We cannot say how far the young disciples really understood the Master. But their answers at least indicated what they thought of him and what their conception of God was. The Master also evidently took the answers in that light and behaved with and instructed them according to their spiritual outlook and temperament. For the Master never interfered with anyone's spiritual attitude; on the other hand, he helped him to grow in his own way so that he might eventually realize the Highest Truth. But he always carefully observed whether the disciples replied from sincere conviction or merely copied others.

We shall mention the instance of Purna. The Master himself testified to his deep spirituality and reckoned him as one of his chief disciples; in fact, he gave him a place next only to Swami Vivekananda. Purna was only thirteen years old when he first met the Master, but he felt deeply moved even at the first meeting. When he next came to the Master, the Master asked him in what light Purna regarded him. Purna replied with a good deal of emotion: 'You are God Himself, incarnated in flesh and blood!' Sri Ramakrishna was surprised and delighted with the answer. He blessed him from the bottom of his heart and initiated him into the mystery of *shakti* worship.

Here is another instance: There was a picture in Sri Ramakrishna's room in which Sri Chaitanya and devotees were shown as absorbed in singing the praise of God. One day Sri Ramakrishna pointed it out to a friend of ours, and said: 'Do you see how absorbed they are in singing the praise of the Lord?'

---

<sup>1</sup>We are reliably informed that Williams, after he had seen the Master a few times, became convinced of his divinity. He gave up the world at the Master's advice, repaired to the Himalayas, and there passed away after practising hard *tapasya*.—The writer.

*Friend:* They are all lower class people.

*Master:* What do you say? You must not say so.

*Friend:* Yes, I come from Nadia.<sup>2</sup> I know these Vaishnavas are generally low class people.

*Master:* Oh, you come from Nadia?—Then I salute you a second time.<sup>3</sup> (pointing to himself) Well, Ram and others say that this is a divine incarnation. What do you think?—

*Friend:* They estimate you very poorly, sir.

*Master:* What! They call me a divine incarnation and you think that a poor estimate?

*Friend:* Yes, sir, An incarnation is a part of God, but I look upon you as Shiva Himself.

*Master:* Indeed!

*Friend:* So indeed I think of you. What can I do? You asked me to meditate on Shiva. But though I try daily, I cannot do so. Whenever I sit for meditation, your loving and blissful face appears before me in a luminous form. I cannot replace it by the form of Shiva, nor do I wish to do so. So I regard you as Shiva Himself.

*Master:* (*smiling*) Is that so? But I know that I am like an insignificant hair of your head. (*Both laugh*) However, I am satisfied,—I was anxious about you.

The significance of the Master's last words was not perhaps quite evident to our friend at that time. We remember that whenever in such cases the Master expressed satisfaction with us, we would be filled with great joy, without caring to go into the inner meaning of his words. Now we understand the reason for the Master's satisfaction with our friend: he had accepted the Master as the highest spiritual ideal.

<sup>2</sup>Nadia is the place of origin and stronghold of Bengal Vaishnavism.

<sup>3</sup>It was the custom of Sri Ramakrishna to salute a person as soon as he met him. That is why he said 'second time'.

The Master was very careful that the disciples properly studied all his ways before they accepted him as the highest ideal. He would often say to us: 'Watch a sadhu by day and by night, and then trust him. He encouraged us to see if a holy man practised what he taught. He would tell us never to trust a man whose thoughts, words and actions did not tally with one another.

Thus encouraged, we would carefully observe the ways of the Master. Some of us went so far as to test him. But he gladly put up with all this undue liberty we took with him in our sincere desire to strengthen our faith and devotion.

Yogin, who afterwards became Swami Yogananda, was one of the principal disciples of the Master. His home was very near the Dakshineswar temple; he could therefore pass long hours in the company of the Master. One evening Yogin, with the Master's permission, decided to spend the night with him, with a view to serving him in case of need. At about midnight Yogin suddenly woke up to find the door of the room open and Sri Ramakrishna missing. At first he thought he might be taking a walk outside. But he did not find him there. Suddenly a suspicion flitted across his mind—could he have gone to meet his wife, thus acting contrary to his profession? Unpleasant though it might be, he resolved to ascertain the truth and kept watch upon the door of the concert-room where the Holy Mother lived. Suddenly he heard the sound of slippers from the direction of the Panchavati. A moment later Sri Ramakrishna stood by his side. 'Ah, you are standing here, I see.' he asked. Yogin hung his head in shame for having doubted the Master's character, and could not utter a word. The Master understood the whole thing in a moment and relieved the penitent boy, saying: 'Well, it is all right. You must examine a sadhu by day and by night, and then believe in him.' Though forgiven, Yogin could not sleep any more that night.

## V

In conclusion, we may briefly delineate how Sri Ramakrishna examined Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) and what conclusions he formed about him.

Sri Ramakrishna had carefully observed Narendra's every action and movement ever since he first came to Dakshineswar. From this he came to feel that spiritual earnestness, courage, self-restraint, heroism, self-sacrifice for noble causes and other similar noble qualities existed in him in a developed form. He understood that these noble qualities were so predominant in him, that even under adverse circumstances and temptations, he would never and do any mean action. As regards his devotion to truth, the Master was so much impressed by it that he believed every word of his, and had the firm conviction that he would very soon reach such a state that an untruth would never come out of his mouth even by mistake, and that even the chance ideas crossing his mind would prove to be true. He would therefore encourage him in his regard for truth and say: 'Whoever holds to truth in word, thought, and action, is blessed by the vision of God who is Truth Itself'; and 'One who observes truth for twelve years in thought, word and deed, reaches a state in which whatever he resolves comes true.'

We remember a funny incident about Sri Ramakrishna's faith in Naren's truthfulness. In the course of his conversation Sri Ramakrishna once mentioned that the nature of a devotee is like that of the chataka bird. He said: 'Just as a chataka always looks to the cloud to quench its thirst and depends on it in all respects, even so, a devotee depends on God alone to quench the thirst of his heart and remove all his wants.' Naren was hearing this. He suddenly exclaimed: 'Sir, though it is the common belief that the chataka bird drinks only rain-water, it is not true. I have seen these birds drink from rivers and ponds.' Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Is that so? Do they drink like other birds?'

Then I am mistaken. If you have seen it, then there is no doubt about it.' But Sri Ramakrishna, simple as a boy, was a little disturbed in mind. He thought: 'If I am mistaken in this, then I may also be mistaken in my other convictions,' thinking thus, he left much dejected. After a few days Naren called Sri Ramakrishna and said: 'Sir, see, a chataka bird is drinking Ganga water.' Sri Ramakrishna rushed out of the room and said: 'Where? Where?' When they came near the spot, what did they see but one of the small-sized bats! Then Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said: 'You rogue, it is only a bat! You have given me so much trouble for nothing. Now I shall be wiser and not believe everything you say.'

It is often seen in men that as soon as they come into the presence of women, they become softer than is accounted for by only a sense of politeness, respect and appreciation of beauty. This, according to the shastras, is the result of certain subtle impressions deeply hidden in the heart. Such impressions and their manifestations were totally absent in Narendra. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this, and he was, therefore, convinced that Naren would never forget himself under the spell of feminine beauty. Once Sri Ramakrishna compared Naren with a well-known bhakta who often went into spiritual ecstasy and was thus highly respected by us. He said: 'That man gets beside himself on meeting women. But it is quite different with Naren. I watched him carefully. Though he does not say so, I found that he seems rather annoyed when they come. His attitude seems as if he thinks with some irritation: "Why are they here?"'

It was characteristic of Naren that though jnana was so strong in him and he was so manly in every respect, still he was very gentle and full of devotion. Sri Ramakrishna often remarked on this, and once he said, looking at Naren's face: 'Could one who is only a dry jnani have such eyes? With jnana, you have all the tender feelings of the bhakta. You have the strength of a man and the devotion of a woman.'

Those who have only manly qualities, do not have the black circles round their nipples. In the great hero Arjuna these marks were not present.'

Besides the four methods described above, the Master also tested him in other ways. We shall cite two instances. One day he told Narendra that he possessed many supernatural powers and would like to transfer them to him. Narendra asked him if they would help him in realizing God. When the Master answered in the negative, he sternly refused to have anything to do with them. This reply greatly pleased the Master.

But the other test was more severe. Narendra's visits to Dakshineswar were always hailed by Sri Ramakrishna with intense joy, so much so that sometimes even a distant sight of Narendra would plunge him into *samadhi*. But a day came when all this changed. Narendra came, saluted and sat before him, but there was no response from the Master. The Master talked with others, but not with him; he even turned his face away from him. The whole day passed in this way. In the evening Narendra saluted him and returned home. Several days after he again went to Dakshineswar. That day also he met with the same reception. The third and the fourth time also it was the same. Thus passed one month. Then one day Sri Ramakrishna called him to his side and said: 'Tell me, how is it that though I do not speak a word to you, you still continue to come here?' Narendra replied: 'Sir, it is not your words alone that draw me. I love you and want to see you, therefore I come.' Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased with his answer. He said: 'I was only testing you. I wanted to see if you would stay away when I did not show you love and attention. Only one of your calibre could put up with so much neglect and indifference. Anyone else would have left me long ago, and would never have come again.'

## REMINISCENCES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

### Swami Turiyananda

How wonderfully Sri Ramakrishna taught each man so as to remove his particular wants! He used to illustrate this method of teaching by saying: 'A mother has made various curries out of a fish. She doesn't give all her boys the same thing. She gives to each what would exactly suit his stomach.' The Master also followed this in practice.

Once Swami Yogananda heard someone abusing Sri Ramakrishna. But he did not protest and later reported about it to the Master. Hearing it the Master said, 'They abused me and you kept quiet!' And he rebuked the Swami.

Some time after this event, one day Swami Niranjanananda was coming to Dakshineswar by boat. A number of people were criticizing Sri Ramakrishna. The Swami was exceptionally strong. He forthwith came out of the cabin and placing his legs across began to rock the boat saying: 'You are abusing Sri Ramakrishna. I shall immediately sink this boat. I would like to see who dares to oppose me.' They were all dismayed, and begged him to stop. When Sri Ramakrishna heard this, he said: 'You rascal, if they abused me, what was that to you? Let everybody say what he likes, what does it matter to you?'

The teaching was according to the need of the recipient. Where can you find a teacher like him?

Once a gentleman came to Sri Ramakrishna from Jabalpur. He was a scholar, an M.A., and was very frank, but he was of an agnostic turn of mind. Consequently he had a long discussion with Sri Ramakrishna. He confessed that he suffered great mental unrest, but he would not pray to God, because, as he said, there was no proof of His existence. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, 'Well, I suppose you have no objection to praying like this, "If Thou really art, then listen to my prayer." If you pray like this, it will do you good.' The gentleman thought over it deeply and then

said that he had no objection to that sort of prayer. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to follow the advice and come to him again. The gentleman came again. He was a changed man. Touching Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he wept as he said, 'You have saved me!'

If one happened to be married but later regretted and informed him of his intention to embrace the monastic life, he would say, 'Wait, don't give up the world. If you are sincere everything will be set right. You have only to pursue faithfully the course laid down in the scriptures.' He never said, 'Leave everything and come.' 'If you are sincere'—that is what he used to say, because he knew the contents of everyone's mind. He used to tell the parable of a woman in love. 'She attends to all her household duties but her thoughts are on her lover. When in this way her whole mind goes to her lover, she breaks the family ties and follows the man of her heart. Work with one hand and serve the Lord with the other. When the time comes, you will be able to serve Him with both hands. And the time does come if one is sincere.'

Even men like Girish Babu were accepted by Sri Ramakrishna, who could accommodate all. But what we do is to try to change everybody according to our own likes and dislikes. Sri Ramakrishna used to take everybody where he was and help him go forward. He never disappointed anyone by failing in the attempt to mould him according to his own light. He had a unique relation with each devotee and maintained it throughout. Through humour he would teach a good deal. Ah, what a teacher he was! Where can one get a teacher like him?

What a fund of humour we noticed in him! It was unique. One day Keshab Babu was to visit Dakshineswar. Even before the appointed time, Sri Ramakrishna put on a red-bordered cloth, covered his body with decent *chaddar* (wrapper) and with his lips crimsoned by the chewing of betel began to pace the verandah of his room in expectation of Keshab. When Keshab saw him in that state he remarked,

'Ah, today you have dressed yourself with extraordinary care. What is the matter?' 'Why,' replied Sri Ramakrishna smiling, 'today I have to charm Keshab! That is why all this trimming.' At this Keshab began to laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna's humour used to create side-splitting laughter. He would say, 'I keep people in the right mood by introducing secular topics now and then.' Once a Brahmo devotee referred to Keshab Chandra Sen and Pratap Mazumdar, in their very presence, saying that they were like Gauranga and Nityananda. Sri Ramakrishna was close by. Keshab Babu asked him, 'What then are you?' Sri Ramakrishna at once replied, 'I am the dust of your feet.' At this Keshab Babu said, 'He is never to be caught napping.' Every word of Sri Ramakrishna was instinct with a wonderful power. He used to snatch the hearts of people, as it were.

He was greatly attached to truth. He once had an engagement with Jadu Mallik. But he forgot about it, being engrossed in conversation with a number of visitors. At 11 p.m., when he was about to retire for the night, he suddenly remembered it. Immediately he had a lantern lighted, and accompanied by Swami Brahmananda, went to the garden-house. Finding the gate closed, he put one foot inside and shouted, 'Here I have come.' Sri Ramakrishna once taunted Pandit Sivnath Shastri who had failed to keep his promise to visit Dakshineswar. He said, 'If you are all such sane people, how can you speak an untruth? You call me insane, but never does an untruth escape my lips!' Wishing to keep secret the incident of the Kalighat priest's kicking him while in a state of *samadhi* (the man being jealous of Mathur Babu's regard for him), he asked Hriday to elicit from himself a promise not to mention it to anybody. Hriday at first objected. But Sri Ramakrishna made him elicit the promise from him three times, and then remarked, 'Now it will never escape my lips.' For the good of the priest he thus put himself under a vow to maintain silence on the matter.

His humility was wonderful. Hriday was once ordered to clear out of Dakshineswar. The gate-keeper came and said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'You will have to leave this place.' 'What do you mean? It is not I, but Hriday,' replied Sri Ramakrishna. The man said, 'No, my master has ordered that both of you should go.' This decided the question. He put on his slippers and started walking towards the gate. Trailokya Babu<sup>1</sup> saw this from the concert room, ran and fell at his feet, saying, 'Sir, why are you going? I have not asked you to leave.' Without speaking a word Sri Ramakrishna came back. Just see, there was not a bit of animus in his renunciation. And how we raise a storm over our deeds! Had we been in his place, we would surely have given the Babu a piece of our mind. But Sri Ramakrishna said nothing—he was as ready to go away as to return.

He used to be dressed shabbily, so much so that one day a man mistook him for the gardener and asked him to pluck a rose for him, which he immediately did. Some time after, that very man came to know of his mistake and stammered out an apology. At this the Master said that there was nothing wrong about it as one asking for help should be assisted by all means.

He used to give no other blessing except this: 'Mother, let them have illumination—let them be conscious of their real nature.' Rakhai Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) then used to live with him. It was his relatives who brought him to the Master. But when they found that he was about to renounce, they did not like it. First of all they spoke to Sri Ramakrishna but he did not pay much attention to them. Suresh Babu then used to spend some money on the comforts of the devotees around Sri Ramakrishna. One day Manomohan, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and a relative of Rakhai Maharaj, said, 'Suresh Babu does not like Rakhai living here.' Immediately Sri Ramakrishna called out, 'What!

---

<sup>1</sup>Grandson of Rani Rashmani.

Who is Suresh? What has Suresh got to do here? Hallo, throw away all that bedding Suresh brought—remove them at once. (Whenever the Master got excited everybody would be terribly afraid. None would dare come near.) Because these boys have good characteristics that tend to spirituality, I keep them with me. And I pray to Mother to bless them so that they may realize the Self. My idea is that they should first attain realization of God and then they may live anywhere they like.' Coming to know of all this later, Suresh Babu fell at the Master's feet with tears in his eyes said that he had never said such a thing—that it was all false.

Sri Ramakrishna knew a lot about things. Girish Babu once said to him, 'You are my superior in every respect—even in wicked things.' At this Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No, no, it is not so. Here (meaning, himself) there are no *samskaras*. There is a world of difference between knowing a thing by actual experience and learning about it through study or observation. Experience leaves impressions on the mind which are very difficult to get rid of. This is not the case with knowledge acquired through study or observation.'

Once when I told him that my life's ideal was to attain *Nirvana*, he reproved me for entertaining such a low ideal. He said, 'The granny likes the play to go on.'<sup>2</sup> I said to him: 'But what of that? Why should I play?' He at once rebuked me saying: 'What? How selfishly you talk! The whole bliss is in the continuance of the game. The granny dislikes those players who dawdle and loiter about her. But she stretches forth her hand to one who after vigorous play comes back to touch her. Haven't you noticed how, in a game of dice, the expert player sometimes gives up an

---

<sup>2</sup>An allusion to the Indian game of hide-and-seek, in which the leader, known as the 'granny' hides herself. The players with bandaged eyes are supposed to find her.

invulnerable position willingly? He plays again and by a few masterly throws of the dice gets back to his former position.'

I asked him if this was possible. He answered: 'Yes, quite possible through the grace of the Mother. Must not a man believe in the infinite power of God? Can a man who, when a fish bone gets stuck in his throat, touches the feet of a cat in humble supplication and makes obeisance to a date-tree,<sup>3</sup> dare to deny God? What do you mean? Well, you prattle about knowledge, but He has subjected man to the curse of sleep which renders him so helpless that even a dog might lick him in that state and he would not know anything of it!'

An hour of congregational singing in the company of the Master used to fill us with such exuberant joy that we would feel transported, as it were, into an ethereal region. But now even meditation fails to evoke that celestial bliss, or even a semblance of it. That bliss would abide in us for a week continually. We used to feel intoxicated, though we did not know the why or how of it. Who will believe it? It is difficult to convince anyone.

One day I arrived at the Dakshineswar Temple when the Master was taking his dinner. A number of bowls containing various preparations were placed before him. Someone perhaps thought these an unbecoming luxury, fit only for a *rajasic* life. Sri Ramakrishna at once said: 'Well, the tendency of my mind is ever towards the Infinite. It is by such *rajasic* devices that I hold it down to the lower planes, otherwise I could not have talked with you.' 'How strange!' I said to myself on hearing him, 'Others seek to attain *sattva* by overcoming *rajas* through rigorous discipline of food, whereas he has to forcibly check his mind from rising to the *sattvic* plane!' Out of infinite mercy, he once

---

<sup>3</sup>This refers to the common belief that such conduct will enable him to get rid of the bone.

vouchsafed to me the realization that every action and movement of his, nay, even his footfall, was meant for the good of others.

Those who profess to be the children of Sri Ramakrishna must have yoga, bhakti, karma, jnana, nay, everything. For Sri Ramakrishna stands for the synthesis and harmony of all religious paths. That spiritual growth of a person depended on his following a particular attitude exclusively was the rule in the past. But now one should have an all-round development combined with a magnanimity of heart to love others.

[Adapted from his conversations]

## ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA Swami Premananda

### *His knowledge*

The behaviour of the Master was like that of an ordinary man. But how many sciences he knew! He knew the language of birds and how to read a person's nature and character from the shape of his body, and he also knew the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas, and the Tantras. Almost everything was known to him, as a person knows an amalaki fruit held in the palm of his hand. He used to say, 'I can see the inside of a man by looking at his eyes and face.' The Master used to examine every limb of a person who went to him for the first time. He did it with me also. He felt my arm up to the elbow, placing his own beneath it; and after weighing it to find out whether it was light or heavy, he said that the signs were good. Heaven knows from where he attained all his knowledge and skills!

### *Mastery over the body*

The *shastras* (scriptures) speak of *urdhva sauratam*, the absolute conquest of the sex impulse. We could never have believed such a thing had we not seen the Master. What a wonderful control he had over every nerve and muscle of the body! At the time of washing the cancerous sore of his throat which caused such terrible suffering, he would ask us to wait for a moment and then say, 'Now wash.' No pain or suffering would then be felt by him. Do you know the reason for this? The yogis acquire mastery over all parts of the body. They can even stop the heart and withdraw or deflect at will nerve-currents from a particular part of the body. That part of the body at that time becomes inert, like lifeless matter, dead to all sensation. It does not respond even if you drive the point of a knife into it. Don't think

these are mere stories. We have seen all these with our own eyes. Sri Krishna used to sport with the gopis<sup>1</sup> after withdrawing the *prana* force from the physical body. Now try to understand what *urdhva sauratam* means.

You should also know that though the *avatars* (divine incarnations) remain established in the Self, there is still some identification with the psycho-physical instrument, however tenuous that may be. But they can, whenever they desire, withdraw even that. A bit of it is necessary, otherwise the body cannot remain alive. As the Master used to say, though the kernel of the coconut, when dry, becomes separated from the husk, it nevertheless remains in contact with the latter at some point or other.

### *Caste and Food*

As regards caste he used to say that the devotees, formed a class by themselves. They need not observe caste rules among themselves. He could not eat from the hands of a person of evil character, though the latter might have been born in a superior caste. He could not even sit on a mat rolled out on the floor by such a person. On the contrary, he was once going to touch the leaf-plate from which someone had eaten. The latter at once cried out, 'What are you going to do, Sir! I have taken forbidden food; please don't touch the leaf-plate from which I have eaten.' The Master replied, 'There is no harm in it. You are of a pure mind.'

He would often say, 'though a person takes *havishyanna* (self-cooked, pure food of rice and ghee) yet has no love for God and is very worldly, his food is as good as pork and beef. But if one who is endowed with bhakti and faith takes even forbidden food, it is not to be regarded as forbidden, it is *havishyanna*.'

---

<sup>1</sup>Cowherd boys and girls of Vrindavan, playmates of Sri Krishna.

*Compassion*

The Master was compassion and pity incarnate. There was no limit to his kindness. Once while he was travelling to Benaras, he got down at Vaidyanath Dham, Deoghar. At the sight of the pitiful condition of the poor people of the locality, he told Mathur Babu, 'Feed them well; otherwise hang your Kashi and all, I am not going to move an inch leaving these people.'

His kindness did not fail even if he was insulted. Even in the midst of unbearable suffering, his compassion made him restless. He would say, 'Why, nobody came today!' and look towards the road. Once Hazra asked him, 'Why are you so restless with thoughts of Naren?<sup>2</sup> What need have you to be anxious for him? Your place is in Goloka and in Kailasa (the highest plane of spiritual consciousness according to the Vaishnavas and Shaivas respectively); why should you worry about him?' This made the Master think; and he went to the Panchavati (grove of five sacred trees, where he had done hard religious austerities) where he had most of his visions. There the Mother told him, 'What a fool you are! Have you come into this world for the sake of your own happiness? Fie!' So the Master used to say that he would suffer million times more if necessary for the good of the people. Hardly six months passed before the Master developed cancer of the throat by taking upon himself the *karma* of others. He could not speak in a loud voice. He felt hungry, but could not eat; he could neither sit nor lie down at ease, and day and night he felt a burning sensation all over his body. But he was an ocean of unconditional and spontaneous mercy, and the flow of his grace knew no interruption. A year and a half passed in that way. What else can be called a crucifixion for the sake of humanity?

---

<sup>2</sup>Later Swami Vivekananda.

*Karma Yoga*

We sometimes find people wasting time by sitting idle in the name of japam and meditation (spiritual practices of meditation and repeating holy names) which is a sign of *tamas*<sup>3</sup>. What a great amount of work the Master used to do! We have seen him work as a gardener. He used to sweep the floor of his room. And he could never stand work in a slipshod manner. He would perform all work, even the most trivial, with absolute perfection down to the minutest detail, and would teach us to do the same. If we mislaid things, he would rebuke us. He even taught me how to prepare a betel rolls in a clean and artistic way. Yet his mind was always indrawn. If someone went to buy a thing and came away cheated, he would make fun of him saying, 'I have instructed you to become pious, and never to turn into fools. He would say, '*Yogah karmasu kaushalam* (Yoga is skill in work)'. So that work which naturally binds by strengthening egoism in an individual becomes a means, when performed disinterestedly, to the dissolution of the false 'I' and attainment of freedom.

---

<sup>3</sup>The lowest constitutive principle of nature, namely, inertness or materiality in the narrow sense of science; also, sloth, dullness, darkness, etc., in human thinking.

## SACRED MEMORIES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

### Swami Akhandananda

After the death of his father, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) did not come to see Sri Ramakrishna for a long time. The Master would often think of him, and at times he would send someone to inquire about him. Yet Swamiji did not come—his mental condition was so bad. He did not come lest his misery should in any way trouble the Master.

Later on, whenever I went to the Master, I met one or the other of the three Swamis—Brahmanandaji, Abhedanandaji or Saradanandaji.

One day I went to the Master after having eaten my self-cooked, simple meal. When I was about to return to Calcutta in the evening, someone suggested that I might accompany another man who was about to return. The Master protested, 'Oh, no, no; he is a little boy, he can't keep pace with that fast-walking, military man. He will go with these women devotees (Jogen-ma, Gouri-ma and others).' Saradanandaji was also there in the group.

After evening *arati*, we all came to Baranagar and hired a carriage. Saradanandaji being older than I, naturally said, 'You are younger, go inside. I will sit on the coach-box.' The three ladies and I got into the carriage.

Thus passed the most blessed days of my boyhood—one after another, each and all became principal assets of my life.

The Master generally travelled to Calcutta in a second class horse carriage of a particular owner, because his horses were stout and strong. The Master would become restless if the horses were whipped to make them go faster. He would exclaim, 'Oh, they're beating me!' So whenever the owner heard that Paramahansa Dev was to go out, he would send his best horses, so that they would run at ease and would need no whipping.

Once Swami Adbhutananda and I accompanied the master on a drive to Calcutta. Stopping the carriage at a Baghbazar street, he asked if I would call Naren and a boy who used to visit him at Dakshineswar. I called Naren; the Master talked to him, inquiring why he had not come to Dakshineswar for a long time, and insisted on his coming there.

Next we stopped at the house of Vishwanath Upadhyay, the ambassador of Nepal (whom the Master called 'Captain'), in the Shyampukur locality. We went upstairs, where the members of that family prostrated themselves before the Master. There he took a little ice water—his favourite drink. After that, we went on to Balaram Babu's house, and from there back to Dakshineswar. The Master hardly ever spent a night anywhere but at Dakshineswar, except on perhaps one or two occasions when he stayed at Balaram Babu's place. I have heard Swamiji say that the Master would not take his food anywhere but at Balaram Babu's. The Master used to say, 'His food is pure.' That is why Swamiji once said, 'Have you marked—*mahapurushas* (God-realized souls) can never spend their nights in cities like Calcutta?'

At that time saints of almost all denominations used to come to Dakshineswar and one or another of them would always be living in the temple garden. They would feel blessed by having the company of the Master, and in receiving occasional instructions from him. Once such a holy man, with matted hair and bare body, lived for some time near the bungalow in the garden. The Master said to me, 'A great sadhu from Kashmir is staying over there.' I went there and bowed down to him. He looked very grave and talked but little. He simply answered a question or two put by me. Whenever such a sadhu came to Dakshineswar, the Master always sent us to him to receive his blessings.

It was a Saturday in summer. I went to him in the morning. At about two o'clock the Master said to me, 'Get a little ice for me.' I took a few coins and proceeded

towards Alambazar; ice was sold for one or two pice per seer (about 2 lbs.) then. While on the way, I resolved not to come back without the ice. How strange! I had not even to walk five minutes when I saw an ice-vendor coming towards Dakshineswar. My joy knew no bounds. On my return the Master asked, 'Have you got it?' Oh, he was so glad to see the ice! I burst forth, 'Wonderful! I was determined to get it, however far I might have to go, but I had not even gone a little distance when I saw the ice-vendor. Evidently he was coming for you!' Then the Master took a little water with the ice. I spent that night with him.

One day a number of devotees—one of them a landlord—were going to Dakshineswar by boat. When the boat was in midstream, a strong gale arose and the waves struck against the boat and rocked it. The helmsman was all alert. Now one of the fellow passengers—a plump but handsome man of jovial temperament—began to rock the boat from within also. I was then a boy and felt afraid. At last the boat touched Dakshineswar.

It was afternoon. The Master was sitting on his smaller cot as we entered the room. One of us said, 'Sir, we have brought some devotees from Benaras.' The Master exclaimed, 'then you have brought a group who say, "I am He"', and in great joy he asked them to take their seats.

The landlord was the first to ask, 'Sir, He who is the *Purna* (full) Brahman (the Absolute) has no want in the universe. He pervades all space and time; how is his incarnation possible?' The Master replied, 'Well, he who is the absolute Brahman is the witness and is immanent everywhere. The Divine Incarnation is an embodiment of his Power; the power is incarnate somewhere a quarter, somewhere else a half, and very rarely in full. He in whom the full power is manifest is adored as *Purna* Brahman, like Krishna. And three quarters of the Divine were manifested in Rama.'

Another devotee asked, 'Well, Sir, this body is the root of all miseries. Now if we destroy it, all troubles will cease.' The Master replied, 'You see, in a pottery, unburnt earthen

pots can be put into shape again, but not so the burnt (hardened) ones. In like manner, if the body be destroyed before attainment of Knowledge one has to take up a body again and again.'

*Question:* 'Well, Sir, why care so much for the body?' The Master, 'Just see, in a moulding works, they preserve the mould with care until they get a good impression out of it. When that is done it matters little whether the mould is preserved or not. So, likewise, one has to attain Knowledge through this body. One has to realize the Self, and after that it doesn't matter whether the body remains or falls. Till then the body needs to be well cared for.'

Then he sang some of his favourite songs. Listening, the landlord began to weep. The Master was very pleased and said, 'Oh, fire has been placed under his pot of butter, so this sizzling. Later on he will be silent.'

After a long time the Master got up, and others went out to have a walk around. Among the visitors one was of Brahmo inclination, being a devotee of Keshab. The Master took him to the eastern portico and asked, 'Do you perform your brahminical elevations?'—to which he replied, 'I don't like them.' The Master, 'You know, you should not do away with anything by force. In the case of the gourd, etc., the fruit rots away if the flower is plucked off, but the flower falls off naturally when the fruit is ripe.' The Master asked again, 'Which do you like, God with form or without form?' 'Formless,' was the expected reply.

The Master went on: 'Through daily practice Sandhya (ritual) merges into Gayatri and Gayatri (mantra) into Om, and that into the still transcendental state of Turiya (transcendental Absolute). Then the daily practices, rituals, etc., fall away naturally, of themselves. How can you meditate on the Formless all at once? The archer first learns by aiming at a large plantain tree, then at a more slender tree, next at a fruit, then at a leaf, and lastly at a flying bird. First meditate on the aspect with form, this will enable you to see the formless later.'

Just before this, in his room he had been telling all of us, 'While listening to the *Ramayana*, my mind would go back to the days of Rama—on the bank of the Sarayu. I saw Ramachandra, green as the new *durva* leaves, with loin-cloth on, bow in hand and quiver on his back, and with him Sita and Lakshmana. Oh, what joy experienced at the sight of them! I lost all outer consciousness. I much enjoyed that Form!'

With such holy talk that day was spent in joy, which tastes the sweeter the more I recount. We all came back in a boat.

Other gurus teach their disciples to follow a set of fixed rules and regulations and thereby help their spiritual unfoldment. But the case of our Master was very different—even extraordinary. He was a unique type of spiritual teacher. He blessed those who came to him by a mere touch, by a mere look, or by a mere wish. In this way he transmitted spiritual powers through which the recipients got spiritual experiences. He wanted all of us to enjoy the bliss of God-union. How eager was he to rouse the dormant spirituality in us and awaken our souls to God-consciousness! To his intimate disciples he spoke of his spiritual illuminations and inspired them to attain those realizations.

[Translated from the original Bengali, *Smritikatha*.]



**IN THE EYES OF  
HIS CONTEMPORARIES**

Who art Thou, lying here  
Upon Thy Brahmin mother's lap,  
Filling the worlds with light?  
Who art Thou, born in this poor hut,  
O naked babe—Thou jewel without a peer,  
Who art Thou, O my dear?  
Hast Thou compassionately come down,  
Seeing this wretched world's unhappy plight?  
Hast Thou come down alone  
To shower Thy mercy on the afflicted soul,  
To others all unknown?  
Thy face is full of kindness:  
For whom dost Thou so weep and cry?  
Thy beauty dazzles me  
So that I cannot turn my face from Thee  
O sweet destroyer of the heart's unrest,  
Thee would I hold for ever to my breast!

Girish Chandra Ghose\*  
Translated by John Moffitt, Jr.

\*The famous actor and dramatist of Bengal  
and a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

## IS SRI RAMAKRISHNA AN ORDINARY SAINT?

Ramachandra Dutta

Many believe that the Master is no ordinary spiritual person or saint. It is the opinion of many in the field of religion that he belongs to the same class to which persons like Chaitanya, Mohammed, Jesus and others belonged. When persons belonging to religions other than Hinduism also declare him to belong to a class different from that of ordinary saints, the matter cannot be lightly brushed aside.

Keshab Chandra Sen during his last days said to some that the Master was an incarnation of Chaitanya. When Babu Rajendra Lal Mitra, the then Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal, asked Keshab Babu for his view about the Master's love for God, Keshab Babu said in reply: 'The various states of divine ecstasy are generally not seen in ordinary spiritual aspirants. *Mahabhava*, or the highest state of divine ecstasy was seen in this country in Sri Chaitanya. Amongst aliens Jesus had it.' Saying this he pointed to a picture in his room and said, 'Sri Ramakrishna has this kind of ecstasy. Therefore some regard him as an incarnation of Sri Chaitanya.'

We once went to Pandit Shivanath Shastri, a minister of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, to learn about the greatness of the Master. His words increased our devotion to the Master a thousandfold. Had we not heard him saying what he did, it is just possible that we would have taken longer to be blessed with faith in the Master. He said, 'Paramahansa Deva's instructions are to be found in some book or other. He may not be great for his teachings; then wherein lies his greatness? Who has that devotion which made him cry out in tears on the bank of the Ganga, "Mother, O Mother!"? Sri Chaitanya had this kind of devotion. He would rub his face on the ground and tear his hair out to have a vision of Krishna. Jesus had such devotion. He fasted for forty days. Mohammed too had such devotion.'

He was sitting inside a cave and when his wife approached him there, he rushed out to kill her with a sword. The devotion that leads one to self-surrender, to renounce all the pleasures of the world for God, is rare indeed. Jesus said to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Just as salt imparts flavour to food, so does a truly virtuous man impart strength to an ordinary person engrossed in the affairs of the world by instilling into his mind the feeling of love for God. Paramahansa Deva is one such. That country in which such great souls are born even once in four centuries, never lacks spirituality. One of the devotees of the Master went to the famous Yogi, Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur. When the baba heard the name of the Master he said, 'He is an *avatara* (Incarnation).' Pavhari Baba had a photograph of the Master with him. According to others the Master belongs to that class of persons who are superior to the ordinary saints and who, from time to time, come down with a special divine mission of bringing about a religious upheaval. So the opinions of all classes of people seem to coincide, though they were variously expressed.

He was not one of those who can be regarded merely as sadhus or pious men. Though he practised the methods of established religions, he never restricted himself to any one. Ordinarily we find that saints are adept in one particular form of *sadhana*. For this reason, whoever realized his ideal became a sadhu or saint following the *sadhana* prescribed by any particular sect, his ideal made his disciples also follow the same path. The Master was not of this class. So he cannot be said to be an ordinary saint. He was possessed of far greater spiritual powers. He was an adept in all the various doctrines. If anyone asked him the method of practising religion according to any faith, he had his desire fulfilled; nay, the Master even helped him to attain the goal through those practices if he failed in his attempt. Never before has anyone even heard of, let alone see, such a great spiritual personality. Has there been, or is there at present, any such saint in any nation or sect, who could

instruct a Mohammedan in Mohammedanism, a Christian in Christianity and at the same time remain a perfect master of the different kinds of spiritual practices prescribed by the different sects in Hinduism with all their rituals? There is no doubt that the Master was an adept in all kinds of spiritual practices. Men belonging to diverse sects or religions, among which there was never harmony, nor any possibility of it in the future, such as between Shaktas, Vaishnavas, Christians and Mohammedans, had their heart's desire fulfilled in him, and even attained their goal through his help. And that was not all; they found in him the unrivalled spiritual preceptor of their faith. History has no record of such a saint. So the question arises, What was he then? To which class did he belong? He was no ordinary saint. Is it possible for a man to attain realization through so many diverse faiths and spiritual practices—a thing which no one till now has been able to accomplish? Totapuri attained *samadhi* after undergoing spiritual practices for forty years. The Master achieved it in three days. This is no ordinary mystery. The Master himself said, 'Whoever would come here with the desire of realizing God, of knowing the Ultimate Reality, will have his desire fulfilled.' No one can say this except a Saviour. Ordinary perfected souls cannot take the burden of others' sins. It is only an Incarnation that can do it.

[Adapted from the writer's *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivanvrittanta*, in Bengali.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA

### Upadhyaya Brahmabandhava

Who is Ramakrishna? Well, that I do not know. But this much I can say that in the firmament of Bengal no other moon of such sweetness has risen since Lord Gauranga. I have compared him with the moon. Even the moon is not spotless, but this moon which is Ramakrishna is absolutely free from all blemishes. Ah! his divine body was pure and bright like fire itself. Never was it contaminated by the slightest touch of sex. When he was married his wife was only six. Full ten years after marriage he met for the second time this lady, who was chastity personified. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped womanhood in this lady, just stepping into the prime of her youth—yes, he worshipped her, not figuratively, but literally with all the rituals of Hindu image-worship—and made an offering of his holy rosary at her feet. Since this consecration, Ramakrishna shone in his fullest splendour like the full moon with its bright halo. It is a beauty unique in human history. Many saints and prophets were there who had renounced their wives for God; but this renunciation of Ramakrishna is no ordinary renunciation, it is the height of acceptance. The light of the moon cannot live apart from the moon. Nor did this lady, the incarnation of chastity, live apart from Sri Ramakrishna. Ever since that unique worship of this lady of sixteen, she was always by the side of Ramakrishna, even like his halo. Go once and sit for a while at her blessed feet, so reverentially worshipped by her divine consort, and if you can have her grace and blessings on you, then your sanctified self will be able to understand and realize Sri Ramakrishna, you will be blessed indeed.<sup>1</sup>

Who is this Ramakrishna? He is one who attained the highest realization of Brahman—a stage where the realizer

---

<sup>1</sup>When this was written Holy Mother was alive.

and the realized become one. And of this Brahman, Ramakrishna would say: all the truths contained in the scriptures of the world have been uttered, have been expressed in words through the mouth, but this Brahman or the knowledge of Brahman has not been expressed, it is inexpressible. It is like the joy experienced by a dumb man who feeling the intensity of it, would do anything to give expression to it, but cannot.

Who is this Ramakrishna? He is the prince of *sādhakas*<sup>2</sup>, who through his spiritual practice, so rich with emotion and fervour, gathered round him the various spiritual attitudes of the different sects and faiths of the world, and thus demonstrated the all-comprehensiveness of his Brahman-realization. In his personality have been synthesized and unified the superconsciousness of the *yogis*, the sweetness of the love of the *gopis* of Vrindaban, and the awe-inspiring attitude of the *shakti* worshipper. He practised Islam and realized its highest goal. He also realized the Christhood of Jesus. Fully established in his consciousness of the immutable Brahman and keeping intact the continuity of the Eternal Dharma of the *Āryas*, Sri Ramakrishna welcomed with open arms all the diversities of the spiritual life and enriched India by incorporating in it all the new spiritual forces and orientating them all to Advaita<sup>3</sup>.

Sri Ramakrishna is the heroic conqueror of lust and greed, is one to whom Brahman-consciousness is as natural as breathing; he is the crest-jewel of devotees, the saviour of mankind, and the deep ocean of the grandest spiritual synthesis.

Salutations to this Ramakrishna.

[Translated from the original contributed to *Swaraj*,  
a Bengali monthly which has ceased publishing.]

---

<sup>2</sup>Seekers of God-realization, holy men.

<sup>3</sup>The philosophy of non-dualism.

## PARAMAHAMSA RAMAKRISHNA

Pratap Chandra Mazumdar

My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me. What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centered, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why would I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? I, who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Brahmo Samaj—why should I be spell-bound to hear him? And it is not I only but dozens like me who do the same. He has been interviewed and examined by many, crowds pour in to visit and talk with him. Some of our clever intellectual fools have found nothing in him, some of the contemptuous Christian missionaries would call him an impostor, or a self-deluded enthusiast. I have weighed their objections well, and what I write now, I write deliberately.

The Hindu saint is a man under forty. He is a Brahmin by caste, he is well-formed in body naturally, but the dreadful austerities through which his character has developed appear to have disordered his system. Yet, in the midst of this emaciation, his face retains a fullness, a child-like tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile that I have seen on no other face that I can remember. A Hindu saint is always particular about his externals. He wears the *gerua* cloth, eats according to strict forms, refuses to have intercourse with

men, and is a rigid observer of caste. He is always proud and professes secret wisdom. He is always Guruji, a universal counsellor and a dispenser of charms. This man is singularly devoid of such claims. His dress and diet do not differ from those of other men except in the general negligence he shows towards both, and as to caste, he openly breaks it every day. He most vehemently repudiates the title of guru, or teacher, he shows impatient displeasure at any exceptional honour which people try to pay to him, and emphatically disclaims the knowledge of secrets and mysteries. He protests against being lionized, and openly shows his strong dislike to be visited and praised by the curious. The society of the worldly-minded and carnally inclined he carefully shuns. He has nothing extraordinary about him. His religion is his only recommendation. And what is his religion? It is orthodox Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (for that is the name of this saint) is the worshipper of no particular Hindu god. He is not a Shaiva, he is not a Shakta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these*. He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedanta doctrines. He accepts all the doctrines, all the embodiments, usages, and devotional practices of every religious cult. Each in turn is infallible to him. He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator on the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms Akhanda Satchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). His religion, unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu sadhus, does not mean too much dogma, or controversial proficiency, or the outward worship with flowers and sandalwood, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire and lasts long hours. While his interlocutors are weary, he, though outwardly feeble, is as fresh as ever.

He merges into rapturous ecstasy and outward unconsciousness often during the day, oftenest in conversation when he speaks of his favourite spiritual experiences, or hears any striking response to them. But how is it possible that he has such a fervent regard for all the Hindu deities together? What is the secret of his singular eclecticism? To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being who is unchangeable in His blessedness and the Light of Wisdom....

He has successfully escaped the evil of carnality which he dreaded. His Mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kali, made him recognize every woman as Her incarnation, so that he now honours each member of the other sex as his mother. He bows his head to the ground before women, and before little girls; he has insisted upon worshipping not a few of them as a son might worship his mother. The purity of his thoughts and relations towards women is unique and most instructive. It is the opposite of the European idea. It is an attitude essentially, traditionally, gloriously national. Yes, a Hindu *can* honour woman....

...The other sin, which he spent his life to be free from, is the love of money. The sight of money fills him with strange dread. His avoidance of women and wealth is the whole secret of his matchless moral character. For a long time he practised a singular discipline. He took in one hand a piece of gold and in the other a lump of earth. He would then look at both, repeatedly calling the gold *earth*, and the earth *gold*, and then shuffling the contents of one hand into the other, he would keep up the process until he lost all sense of the difference between the gold and the earth. His ideal of service is absolute unworldliness and freedom from the desire of gain....

Nor is his reverence confined within Hinduism. For long days he subjected himself to various disciplines to realize the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he

continually repeated sentences from the Koran. His reverence for Christ is deep and genuine. He bows his head at the name of Jesus, honours the doctrine of his sonship, and we believe he once or twice attended Christian places of worship. These ideas at all events show the catholic religious culture of this great Hindu saint.

Each form of worship that we have tried to indicate above is to the Paramahansa a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion, and the accounts of discipline and exercise through which he has arrived at his present state of devotional eclecticism are most wonderful, although they cannot be published. He never writes anything, seldom argues, he never attempts to instruct, he is continually pouring out his soul in a rhapsody of spiritual utterances, he sings wonderfully, and makes observations of singular wisdom. He unconsciously throws a flood of marvellous light upon the obscurest passages of the popular Hindu faith with a philosophical clearness which contrasts strangely with his simple and illiterate life. These Incarnations, he says, are but the forces (*shakti*) and dispensations (*līlā*) of the eternally wise and blessed Akhanda Satchidananda who never can be changed or formulated, who is one endless and everlasting ocean of light, truth and joy....

If all his utterances could be recorded they would form a volume of strange and wonderful wisdom. If all his observations on men and things could be reproduced, people might think that the days of prophecy, of primeval, unlearned wisdom had returned. But it is most difficult to render his sayings in English.

A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is this good and holy man. He has wholly controlled his flesh. It is full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity. As a *siddha* (perfect) Hindu ascetic he is a witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world. His testimony appeals to the profoundest heart of every Hindu. He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his

humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. His spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied, endless wisdom, his childlike peacefulness and affection towards all men, his consuming, all-absorbing love for God, are his only reward. And may he long continue to enjoy that reward! Our own ideal of religious life is different, but so long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality, and inebriation in the love of God.

[Extract from the *Theistic Quarterly Review*, October 1879]

## RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

Girish Chandra Sen

The Panchavati grove in the Dakshineswar temple on the bank of the Ganga is the place of his *tapasyā*. For eight years through austere *tapasyā*—fasting, and sleepless nights, he had reduced his body to a skeleton. He did not practise *sādhana* according to the prescribed rules of the *Yoga Shastra*, or other system. Being led by intense hankering for God-realization he had adopted various methods and practices for controlling the passions, for attaining *vairagya*, (dispassion), for the purification of the mind, and for the vision of God...Recently a friend asked him, 'What is the way to God-realization?' He replied, 'Intense yearning is the only way. But without His grace this intense desire does not arise. Once I had experienced such an intense longing.'

From the very beginning he was utterly averse to lust and gold knowing them to be the two great obstacles to God-realization, and by hard austerities had attained complete control over these two. To get rid of lust he had worshipped Bhairavi. He used to salute any woman he met and would see the presence of the Divine Mother in her. When he was married his wife was seven years old. He came to Calcutta when she was nine years old. In this life of marriage he never had any physical relations with his wife. It is true that after many years, he allowed her to live near him but he did not have any physical relations with her, he had full control over his senses. During his period of sadhana, Ramakrishna used to throw coins into the Ganga saying, 'Money is earth, earth is money.'...Later it came to such a pass that if he touched a coin his hands would get numb. He gave no thought to his daily needs nor did he save anything for the future. He was extremely dispassionate towards the world and had no faith in the worldly-minded people. He never cared for the wealthy, the learned, pandits or anybody else. At times he told them

rather unpleasant truths. On account of this many of them were displeased with him....

He used to get overwhelmed with deep devotion while talking of profound spiritual truths, about God-vision, yoga, and bhakti or singing the Lord's name; he would be rapt in samadhi and stand still like an inert image, and he would sometimes laugh and cry and behave like a child or like one drunk. At such moments, by uttering great spiritual truths he struck his hearers with wonder. By seeing his divine ecstasies one was spiritually benefitted; the scepticism of the sceptics and the wickedness of the sinful were wiped off. What a great number of drunkards, licentious men and atheists have been transformed by seeing his ecstasies, his extreme devotion, and divine life....He had such a sweet nature, his words were so sweet that even a person experiencing extreme miseries would forget everything within a few moments after coming to him. One would get enchanted by seeing his smiling face, his childlike simplicity, his devotion for the Mother's name, and his absorption in samadhi. Often the very talk of God used to send him into samadhi. In that state the eyelids would get fixed without blinking, tears of ecstasy would flow from both eyes, the face would be lighted by a sweet smile and all outward consciousness would be lost—the whole body would become rigid and motionless like a statue, and he would come to normal state only after the chanting of 'Om' continuously in a loud tone in his ears. He was above all social etiquette. Sometimes he used slang expressions but there was not the least trace of impurity in his mind. He always talked of God and religion and never indulged in worldly talk. His conversations revealed great wit and presence of mind. His chosen deity was both with form and without form. Uttering the word Kali or Mother he would become God-intoxicated and tears of ecstasy would roll down his cheeks. Being asked about it, he would reply, 'I do not worship Kali made of straw and earth [the image], my Mother is a Conscious Principle, She is the essence of

Satchidananda—Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. That which is infinite and deep is always dark-coloured, the infinite sky is dark-coloured and so is the deep sea. My Kali is infinite, all-pervading Consciousness Itself.' He did not worship the image but the spirit behind. One day when he was going along a road, seeing a man strike at a tree with his axe he burst into tears and said, 'My Mother is present in this tree, the axe is striking against Her.' He was equally a Vaishnava, a Shakta and a Vedantin. Yoga and bhakti were wonderfully harmonized in him. Like Chaitanya he would dance beautifully, keeping time, being overwhelmed with divine intoxication. At that time in the height of ecstasy the cloth would fall from his body. Again he would be lost in deep samadhi, motionless and unconscious of the external world. Childlike simplicity, devotion, and knowledge were all seen in him. From the very beginning of his spiritual life there was seen in him the manifestation of the harmony of religions and of the forecast of the New Dispensation. But for such catholicity, could he have taken prohibited food and repeated the name of Allah? In his room, a picture of Jesus hung on the wall along with the pictures of Chaitanya, Nityananda and others.

It was in the month of March 1875 that Paramahansa Deva arrived with his nephew Hriday, at about 8 or 9 a.m., at the Belgharia garden-house of Babu Joy Gopal Sen. At that time Acharya Keshab Chandra Sen was practising devotions (sadhana) with the ministers. He used to cook his food under a tree and eat it in the open, and was observing special austere rules and regulations for attaining self-control and *vairagya*. Paramahansa Deva had first gone to Acharya's house at Colootolah to meet him. Hearing that he was practising devotions at the above-mentioned garden-house, the Paramahansa came there. Acharya Deva (Keshab) with his friends was sitting on the ghat (steps) of the garden tank, preparing to have a bath, when Ramakrishna arrived there in a rickety hackney carriage. Hriday got down from the carriage first and, approaching Acharya

Deva said, 'My uncle likes to hear about God, he gets into samadhi due to intense divine intoxication (*mahabhava*). He has come to hear from you about God.' Keshab concerted to the visit and Hriday helped Paramahansa Deva to get down from the carriage and brought him to us. Paramahansa Deva was wearing only a single piece red-bordered dhoti. He had neither a coat nor an upper garment to cover his body. One end of the dhoti he was wearing, he had put on his shoulders. He appeared weak and emaciated. Seeing him the ministers took him for an ordinary man. Coming near he said, 'I hear you have been having God-visions, I would like to know about the nature of your visions.' Thus the religious conversation began. After that the Paramahansa sang a song of Ramprasad and in the course of singing he entered into samadhi. No one at the time took samadhi for a high state of spiritual consciousness; they thought it to be a kind of feigning. Soon after this, Hriday began to chant in a loud tone 'Om', 'Om', and requested others to do so. As requested, all those present also began to chant the sacred mystic syllable. After some time the Paramahansa came round to some extent and smiled. He then began to utter deep spiritual truths like one inspired. Hearing them the ministers became wonderstruck. They now realized that Ramakrishna was a divine person and not an ordinary man. All were charmed with his company that day and they forgot about their usual routine. It was late that day when they finished their bath, etc....

A sadhu can at once recognize a sadhu. Seeing the Paramahansa, Acharya was charmed and the Paramahansa also became greatly attached to him. From that day on, they became deeply united in spirit. Sometimes Acharya Deva used to visit the Paramahansa at Dakshineswar and the Paramahansa too used to come to Acharya's house with Hriday. On such occasions the neighbours and relations of our Acharya used to come to his house to have a look at the Paramahansa and there used to be a big congregation. For five to seven hours what continuous current of bliss and

ecstasy in spiritual talks there used to be! Every year after the annual celebrations of the New Dispensation, Acharya Deva used to go with the Brahmos to Paramahansa Deva either by steamer or by boat. Sometimes he would go to his Belgharia *tapovan* and send a carriage to fetch the Paramahansa. To have spiritual talk and merrymaking with him was regarded as a part of the celebrations. Our Acharya Deva's life was very much influenced by the Paramahansa and the Paramahansa's by our Acharya Deva. It was due to the influence of the Paramahansa's life that the Motherhood of God was accepted to a great extent in the Brahmo Samaj. More than before, Acharya Deva learnt from him to address God with the sweet appellation of Mother like a simple child, to pray to Her and crave indulgences like a child. In spite of the devotional aspect in it, the Brahmo religion was more a religion of faith and rationalism. Due to the influence of Paramahansa's life it became sweet to a great extent. The Paramahansa also, through the help of Acharya's life, advanced more towards the formless God, acquired catholicity of religious outlook<sup>1</sup> and learnt some etiquette of social life.

After Keshab began writing articles in books and journals about the Paramahansa's pure life and lofty teachings, people came to know of him. A small pamphlet *Paramahamser Ukta* (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna) was also published and distributed. The Brahmos used to go to him to learn and receive his instructions. Besides the Brahmos,

---

<sup>1</sup>Sri Ramakrishna had realized the Brahman, the Impersonal God, as early as 1866 under Totapuri, and for six months he was constantly in that state. This was nearly ten years before he met Keshab Chandra Sen. He had also realized, before he met Keshab, the Muslim and Christian ideals of Godhead both of which, especially the former, are defined as 'formless but with attributes'. As regards catholicity we may refer to writer's own remarks on page 111—*Publisher*.

men and women of other communities also used to visit him in numbers. To start a new religion, to preach, or to form a new sect was not the aim of his life. If anybody asked him for instructions he would say, 'For that he (meaning Keshab) is there.' But afterwards he gave instructions on spiritual practice to many. Many well-educated young men became his devoted disciples.

...The Paramahansa had extraordinary insight into the nature of persons. Seeing the face of a man or after hearing a few words from him he could at once know what kind of a person he was. Ramakrishna once said, 'Many years back on a Wednesday I had been to the Brahmo Samaj at Jorasanko. I saw at that time young Keshab in the pulpit conducting the service, and hundreds of worshippers sitting on either side of him. I looked intently and saw that Keshab's mind was absorbed in the Brahman, his float had sunk. From that day my mind became attached to him. I found the rest in the congregation were sitting with weapons, as it were. From their faces I saw that in their minds the attachment for the world, egotism, and passions were very strong.' Ever since then Paramahansa Deva was fond of Acharya Deva. But Acharya Deva did not then know him. Many years afterwards at Belgharia they came to know each other intimately in an auspicious moment. There was a great necessity for the Brahmos at the time to come in contact with him. We have to accept it as the work of Providence.

Though we cannot accept Paramahansa's religious views *in toto*—we know that certain principles of his are not approved by the Brahmo religion—yet we cannot have the least doubt that the exalted life of this great soul, in whom yoga and bhakti were predominant, was utilized by Providence for the betterment of the New Dispensation. Keshab, greatly religious, learned, and of world-wide fame, used to sit by the side of this illiterate Paramahansa like a disciple or younger brother in all humility, and hear his teachings with reverence and appreciation. He never used to argue

with him. He would assimilate and adopt in his own life all the spiritual qualities of the Paramahansa. Keshab Chandra has shown us how we should respect sadhus and imbibe their saintliness. Many a time before visiting the Paramahansa, Keshab prepared himself, by offering prayers during service in the church.

Paramahansa Deva had once been to see Acharya Deva during his last days when he was ailing from a fatal disease. At that time they had deep spiritual conversations. One afternoon Paramahansa Deva had gone to the Brahmo mandir (temple) with a minister. Entering the mandir he remarked, 'Nearly three hundred people congregate here to worship God without form, and take His name!' Saying this he was overwhelmed with ecstasy. He never joined any service in the temple, for how could he do so? Even before the service had begun he was in ecstasy.

Hearing of the passing away of Acharya Deva, the Paramahansa became overwhelmed with grief. He said, 'The death of Keshab has taken half of my life away. He was like a great banyan tree, giving comfort and shelter to thousands of people. Where can you get another such tree? We are like the betel-nut and palm trees, incapable of sheltering a single soul.'

...The Paramahansa's humility was marvellous. As soon as he met anybody he would salute him before the other could do so. He never liked that his teachings be published, that any publicity be given about him in the papers or that he be photographed. Except when he was in a state of samadhi and lost all outward consciousness, it was not possible to take his photograph. In state of samadhi he never fell on the ground unconscious nor stepped on anybody around him. Sitting or standing, he would become steady and motionless. Such a great soul is a living example of divine grace. He is a beacon-light of hope to souls whose life-boats are almost sinking in the ocean of relative existence covered with the darkness (of ignorance) and so difficult to cross. We have read about great souls like

Chaitanya and others in books, but we have been blessed by seeing this life with our own eyes. Ramakrishna never cared for the present-day civilization, he never went to any meetings, nor did he give any lectures, nor have anything to do with books or newspapers. He has shown to the world how one is to attain a high spiritual life by dint of one's earnestness alone, without any help from anyone, through mere divine grace, divine help, and spiritual practices. As a swan takes only the milk and rejects the water, so did the Paramahansa take only the essence in Hinduism, rejecting all the nonessentials.

[Adapted from the writer's booklet,  
*'Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamser Ukti O Sankshipta Jivani'*  
in Bengali, fourth edition.]

## A DAY WITH RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

Nagendranath Gupta

In 1881 Keshab Chandra Sen, accompanied by a fairly large party, on board a steam yacht belonging to his son-in-law, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup of Cooch Behar, went to Dakshineswar to meet Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I had the good fortune to be included in that party. We did not land, but the Paramahansa accompanied by his nephew Hriday, who brought a basket of parched rice and some *sandesh* for us, boarded the yacht which steamed up the river towards Somra. The Paramahansa was wearing a red-bordered dhoti and a shirt which was not buttoned. We all stood up as he came on board and Keshab took the Paramahansa by the hand and made him sit close to him. Keshab then beckoned to me to come and sit near them and I sat down almost touching their feet. The Paramahansa was dark-complexioned, kept a beard, and his eyes, never open very wide, were introspective. He was of medium height, slender almost to leanness and very frail-looking. As a matter of fact, he had an exceptionally nervous temperament, and was extremely sensitive to the slightest physical pain. He spoke with a very slight but charming stammer in very plain Bengali, mixing the two forms of 'you' (*āpni* and *tumi*) frequently. Practically all the talking was done by the Paramahansa, and the rest, including Keshab himself, were respectful and eager listeners. Now it is more than forty-five years since this happened, yet almost everything that the Paramahansa said is indelibly impressed on my memory. I have never heard any other man speak as he did. It was an unbroken flow of profound spiritual truths and experiences welling up from the perennial spring of his own devotion and wisdom. The similes and metaphors, the apt illustrations, were as striking as they were original. At times as he spoke he would draw a little closer to Keshab until a part of his body was unconsciously resting in Keshab's lap, but Keshab sat perfectly still and made no movement to withdraw himself.

After he sat down the Paramahamsa glanced round him and expressed his approval of the company sitting around saying, 'Good, good; they all have beautiful large eyes.' Then he peered at a young man wearing English clothes and sitting at a distance on a capstan. 'Who is he? He looks like a sahib.' Keshab smilingly explained that he was a young Bengali who had just returned from England. The Paramahamsa laughed, 'That's right. One feels afraid of a sahib.' The young man was Kumar Gajendra Narayan of Cooch Behar, who shortly afterwards married Keshab's second daughter. The next moment the Paramahamsa lost all interest in the people present and began to speak of the various ways in which he used to perform his *sāadhanā*. 'Sometimes I would fancy myself the brahminy duck calling for its mate. (There is a poetic tradition in Sanskrit that the male and female brace of brahminy ducks spend the night on the opposite shores of a river and keep calling to each other.) Again, I would be the kitten calling for the mother cat and there would be the response of the mother.' After speaking in this strain for some time he suddenly pulled himself up and said with the smile of a child, 'But you see, Sir, everything about secret *sāadhanā* should not be told.' He explained that it was impossible to express in language the ecstasy of divine communion, when the human soul loses itself in the contemplation of the Deity. Then he looked at some of the faces around him and spoke at length on the indications of character by physiognomy. Every feature of the human face was expressive of some particular trait of character. The eyes were the most important, but all the other features, the forehead, the ears, the nose, the lips and the teeth, were helpful in the reading of character.

And so the marvellous monologue went on until the Paramahamsa began to speak of the *nirakara* (formless, unconditioned) Brahman: 'The manifestation of the formless has to be realized.' He repeated the word 'nirakara' two or three times and then quietly passed into samadhi as a diver slips into the fathomless deep. While the Paramahamsa remained unconscious, Keshab Chandra Sen explained that

recently there had been some conversation between him and the Paramahansa about the nirakara-Brahman and the Paramahansa appeared to be profoundly moved.

We intently watched Ramakrishna Paramahansa in samadhi. His whole body relaxed and then became slightly rigid. There was no twitching of the muscles or nerves, no movement of any limb. Both his hands lay in his lap with the fingers lightly interlocked. The sitting posture of the body (*āsana*) was easy but absolutely motionless. The face was slightly tilted up and in repose. The eyes were nearly, but not wholly closed. The eyeballs were not turned up or otherwise deflected, but they were fixed and conveyed no message of outer objects to the brain. The lips were parted in a beatific and indescribable smile, disclosing the gleam of white teeth. There was something in that wonderful smile which no photograph was ever able to reproduce.

We gazed in silence for several minutes at the motionless form of the Paramahansa, and then Trailokya Nath Sanyal, the singing apostle of Keshab Chandra Sen's church, sang a hymn to the accompaniment of a drum and cymbals. As the music swelled in volume the Paramahansa opened his eyes and looked around him as if he were in a strange place. The music stopped. The Paramahansa looked at us and said, 'Who are these people?' And then he vigorously slapped the top of his head several times, and cried out, 'Go down, go down!' No one made any mention of the trance. The Paramahansa became fully conscious and sang in a pleasant voice, '*Shāma mā ki kāl koreche, Kālī mā ki kāl koreche.*' (What a wonderful machine Kali the Mother has devised!) After the song the Paramahansa gave a luminous exposition on how the voice should be trained in singing and on the characteristics of a good voice.

It was fairly late in the evening when we returned to Calcutta after landing the Paramahansa at Dakshineswar.

[Extracted from the author's article 'Some Celebrities' in the May 1927 number of the *Modern Review*]

ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
Extracts From *The Indian Mirror*

*The Brahma Samaj*

Ramakrishna, a Hindu devotee known as a Paramahansa, now living at Dakshineswar, is a remarkable man, and appears to have attained an extraordinary elevation of moral character and spirituality. Several Brahma missionaries who have visited him from time to time speak highly of his devotion and purity and his deep insight into the realities of the inner world. Though a true Hindu he is said to sympathize heartily with the Brahmos of the advanced school.

Sunday, February 20, 1876.

*Visit to the Yogi of Dakshineswar*

Ramakrishna is not educated in the English sense of the term. His views may be anything but pleasant to hear and his notions of gallantry or propriety are such as will probably shock the fastidious tastes of Western critics. I can assure the reader, however, that if the Yogi is not gallant he is pure. If there is no warmth in his feelings about a woman, the place which he assigns her in the kingdom of God is far higher than any which the passions of men might reach. Our good hermit thinks that any extended scale of devotion or communion is impossible so long as there is lust to distract or a woman to seduce the heart from the way of heaven. Every devotee should be absolutely proof against any influence of the kind. So that the mind, being free from every sort of distracting influence, may proceed uninterruptedly to its earnest search of the Almighty; but how to be thus free, how to be proof against lust?

The method is to resort to the most violent pains for the purpose of extinguishing lust. If I am asked to state my opinion as to whether the mode alluded to is practicable or

beneficial I shall say that I do not know. For surely it has been feasible in one or two cases, or why was it resorted to at all? But to enforce it as a rule in all cases would be the height of absurdity. The same remark perfectly applies to Sri Ramakrishna's method. But let us see what it is. I have to only recall the figure used in my last letter, viz. that the door-keeper at the mansion of heaven is a woman; now in what way is one to overcome the superior power of this being? Sri Ramakrishna says there are three ways of doing it.

The first is what is called the 'heroic' method—and its principle is the defeat of sin brought on by indulgence in sin. Let a man go straight to the door-keeper and attain satiety and complete reaction by indulging in every sort of sexual pleasure. This is the most hideous principle which depraved imagination has invented for the purification of the heart. Yet it is a melancholy fact that hundreds, thousands of depraved men and women are pursuing this suicidal course at the time of the day.

The second method consists in assuming the female nature. If a man puts on a woman's dress, imitates her manners and cultivates the tenderest feelings of female nature and in this way forgets his own manhood, verily he cannot look on woman with evil eyes. He greets her as his handmaid and in this way gets access to heaven.

The third is called the 'filial' method and it means that the devotee is to learn to call a woman by the name of Mother: For if he is a son he cannot possibly commit lust in his heart. Now this may appear to most readers as transcending God's evident intentions and violating nature's beneficent laws. But the fact is there. Ramakrishna owes much of his success to the last mentioned method. The trial and temptations which he voluntarily underwent are marvellous to those who believe that 'since it is hard to combat, learn to fly.' He was tempted in a hundred different ways—but from every blast of the furnace he came out and shone as the purest and brilliant metal.

June 15, 1879.

*Note*

The Paramahansa of Dakshineswar to whose hermitage we paid a visit on the occasion of the moonlight festival, completely lost his senses when he heard the procession chant the name of God before him. This is what we call being intoxicated or maddened by communion with God. The very sight of a man showing his love to Hari renders him literally insensible with joy. The sight we saw there is worth seeing by all means.

November 2, 1879.

*Note*

The Paramahansa of Dakshineswar is rousing the spirit of Devotion and spreading the love of God among the educated classes in the city. Last evening there was a devotional festival at the house of Babu Rajendranath Mitter.

December 11, 1881.

*Editorial Notes*

Friday was the day set apart for our autumnal festival. So we went to Dakshineswar to pass a few hours in a friendly talk with the good Paramahansa with whom our readers have become probably quite familiar by this time. More than fifty gentlemen were present on the occasion. The first thing that as usual edified us was the sight of this holy person in a trance. Ramakrishna is a man marvellously susceptible of religious impressions and whenever he hears somebody speak lovingly and genuinely of the Lord, he is so much moved that he cannot contain himself and much against his own will is literally lost in rapture of his emotional pleasures. He loves our minister and whenever we accompany the latter to Dakshineswar on a visit to the good man, the first thing that greets our eyes is a profound,

respectable, sincere and affectionate bow on each side and then the complete immersion of the saint in a few minutes' trance. That is the work of *love*. He regains his consciousness little by little and when he is half awake begins the conversation as edifying in its nature as it is marked by all the humour and humility that characterizes a genuine son of God. One thing is remarkable about his discourses. He never states many propositions, but the largest portion of what he says is taken up with illustrations. And what illustrations they are! Facts drawn from the commonest incidents of life, familiar sights and commonplace details are combined and enlarged upon with such infinite sagacity and humour as suffice to suggest, as soon as you have taken your seat before him for a few minutes, that you are before no ordinary person. The subject of our talk on Friday last was the renunciation of self—a topic which he always likes to descant upon. Two obstacles, according to him lie in the path of spiritual regeneration—the love of woman and the love of money, and on this day he discussed whether it was possible for a regenerated man to live in the world and yet be above it. Those who affect piety are not necessarily above the world; for like vultures and kites they soar very high, heavenward as they presume and yet their hearts are towards the drains and ditches where lie the carcasses they feed upon. But one who is freed from self remains in the world like a cord that is burnt: the similitude of the cord is seen, but the least wind disperses the ashes; like the boiled paddy that seems like the grain and is yet unable to produce other grain; in other words the liberated soul moves about in the world, takes part in its affairs, and retains every semblance of the ego, and yet it is not in reality the ego, but something above it. It is possible for such a soul to remain here in activity and yet be unsullied and unaffected by the passing impurities, as it is possible for a flint stone to remain immersed in water and when brought out, to give the same sparks of fire that came from it when it had not touched water. The flint does not lose its

fire by being immersed, and so the liberated soul does not lose its heavenly warmth even when it is compelled to touch the impurities of the world.

October 9, 1881.

*The Late Ramakrishna Paramahansa*

I

Ramakrishna Bhuttacharji<sup>1</sup>, better known in the Hindu community as the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, was born on the 6th of Falgoun, 1836, at Kamarpuker in the District of Burdwan. His father, Khuderam Bhuttacharji, was a devout Brahmin and in all respects a true Hindu. On the young Ramakrishna the qualities of his parents must have exercised more than usual influence. A peculiarly religious temper seems to have taken powerful hold of his mind and it continued the ruling principle through life. In his 16th year he came to Calcutta with his eldest brother Ramkumar Bhuttacharji and lived in Jhamapukur, where the latter founded a *chatuspaty* or a school for Brahminical learning. Here Paramahansa always deprecated Brahminical learning which, he said, instead of making a man religious, only secured him an oblation of rice and plantain. But though not distinguished for scholarship, Paramahansa had a gift of strong common sense and quick apprehension. He could argue learnedly with the most erudite Pandits of the day and understand and explain the most abstruse passages of the Sanskrit scripture. In 1855 the stupendous temples of Dakshineswar were founded by the late Rani Rashmani. Paramahansa's eldest brother Ramkumar Bhuttacharji was appointed priest of the temple of Kali. After his death Paramahansa succeeded to his office. He did not hold it for a long time, but resigned it for higher devotional exercises.

---

<sup>1</sup>Spellings remain unchanged from the original writing.

The acquaintance which he here formed with Hindu ascetics of various denominations, seems to have caused a considerable diversion in his religious opinions. The teachings of these Yogis had an abiding effect on his whole life. From this time he secluded himself entirely from the world and passed his days in prayer and contemplation in an obscure corner on the riverside of the temple garden. This place known as Panchavati is held in sacred veneration by many of his followers. Here

‘Remote from man, with  
 God he passed his days  
 Prayer all his business, all his  
 Pleasure praise.’

The great doctrine of his religion was the renouncement of Kāmini-Kānchan, that is, woman and wealth. The late Paramahansa was held in the highest respect by all sections of Hindu community. The educated Hindus appreciated his teachings highly and among his followers were many graduates and under-graduates of the University. The great Brahmo leader, the late Babu Keshab C. Sen, had a profound love and respect for him. If faith, love, self-sacrifice, purity of character and entire resignation to the will of the Almighty be the chief qualifications of a religious man, they found their highest perfection in him and the veneration of the people was not misplaced.

August 21, 1886. Originally published in *The Englishman*.

## II

The much respected Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, who was ailing for some months past from scrofula, breathed his last at about 1 a.m. on Sunday, the 15th instant. The disease had gradually undermined his health, but it was not expected that the end would come so soon. On the day in question, he had taken his evening

meal, and had, as usual, retired to bed. A song which was being sung by some of his attendants awoke him and he joined with them, but a short while after, they did not hear his voice, and thought that he had as was his wont gone into ecstasy (samadhi). As, however, he continued in this state for a somewhat longer time than usual, they touched his body and felt his pulse, when it was found that he had ceased to breathe and was no longer living. The very evening he had asked one of the medical men who visited him, whether his disease was a curable one, but having received no satisfactory reply he was heard to say that he was prepared to die any moment.

The next evening his body was removed to the burning ghat at Cossipore. The funeral procession was followed by a large number of his followers, friends and admirers who had hastened to the spot to have a last look at his face. The party entered the ghat, chanting hymns in praise of Hari. The cot containing the body was then laid down on the side of the river and all the men sat down on the bare ground, forming a circle around the dead body. Babu Traylokhyia Nath Sanyal, the singing minister of the Brahmos, sang a few songs suited to the occasion. After the songs had softened to some extent the hearts of the sorrowing multitude, the body was placed on the funeral pyre and in an hour and a half the burning was complete. A few bones only were taken to be interned at a suitable spot.

Ramakrishna began life as a priest in one of the shrines at Dakshineswar. Here he practised devotion, Yoga and austerities, such as is customary with Hindu devotees. The outcome of all this was a religion which is as liberal as possible. Ramakrishna combined in his own person a Hindu, a Mohammedan and a Christian. In fact, he made no distinction of castes and creeds and his constant wish was that the followers of all religions, being freed from mutual jealousies, would all unite in brotherly love, and sing in praise of the Almighty. He was an unlettered man, but his common sense was strong and his power of obser-

vation keen. He had facility for expressing his ideas in such homely language that he could make himself easily understood by all on intricate points of religion and morality. His childlike simplicity and outspokenness, his deep religious fervour and self-denial, his genial and sympathetic nature and his meek and unassuming manners won the hearts of those who came in contact with him, and music from his lips had a peculiar charm on those who heard him sing. Among others the late Babu Keshab Chandra Sen was very fond of his company and used to spend hours with him in religious conversation. The most remarkable feature in his life was that he succeeded in reforming the character of some young men whose morals were very corrupt. Graduates and under-graduates vied with one another in becoming his followers and many of them have already renounced the world and have adopted the life of ascetics. During the last few months of his illness, it was a touching scene to see the tender care and love with which these young men attended on him day and night. Now that he is no more, may the spirit of love and kindness and the high moral tone which he has imparted last for ever, and bear golden fruits.

August 19, 1886.

### III

With the exception of a few people in and around the city, Paramahansa Ramakrishna was not much known in the country. But he was devotee of the true type. Born of a poor Brahmin family in Jahanabad in the Hooghly district, Ramakrishna was not fortunate in receiving a good education, secular or spiritual, in his younger days. When he grew up to be a man, his brother, who was a priest, brought him down to Calcutta to relieve him of his priestly duties, but Ramakrishna was averse to this as he always entertained a feeling of intense hatred towards the so-called Brahmin priests. A few years after, his brother died and he was induced by his friends and relations to fill the place of

his brother for the support of his family, which he did with great reluctance. At last, Ramakrishna was relieved by a nephew of his, and he commenced to pave the path for his journey to the happy land. Days and nights, weeks and months, he passed on the banks of the holy Ganges, meditating and communing with the supreme being whom he styled by the name Divine Mother. Ramakrishna's divine exercises became gradually so strong that when he performed them he used to lose all external sensibility. I had the good fortune of seeing him and conversing with him many a time, and I had been out of humour to see him performing the exercises when his body used to become void of animation. Anyone who touched his body at that time found it to be as stiff as a plank. Mr. Cooke, the American evangelist, who came to this country a few years ago, once witnessed Ramakrishna's divine exercises and he expressed his great surprise at it and remarked that he was not aware before that a man could become so much immersed in divine spirit as to lose all perception of the external world. It is about ten or twelve years when the late Babu Keshab Chandra Sen found Ramakrishna out, and from that time he came to be known to some persons. Ramakrishna was very fond of Keshab Chandra Sen and before his death, he expressed his desire to pass the remaining days of his life in the sanctuary at the Lily Cottage, the residence of the departed Brahma leader. Ramakrishna was simple and unassuming in his habits. He had a peculiar facility in expressing deep spiritual truths in homely and impressive language. All sections of the community mourn his loss. The other day his ashes were buried in the garden house of one of his disciples, on which occasion hundreds of educated persons were present. A procession of several graduates and under-graduates of our University was formed when the ashes were conveyed to the garden house.

September 10, 1886.

**ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA**  
Extracts from *The New Dispensation*

*Hopeful Signs*

Those who have watched the later phases of religious thought and life in Calcutta must have been struck to find how the venerable Paramahansa of Dakshineswar is serving as a marvellous connecting link between the Hindus and the Brahmos of the New Dispensation. There have been a series of religious meetings of late in the houses of respectable Hindus, in which the representatives of the two communities were harmoniously blended together so as to form a unity of thought and devotion, which was alike striking and interesting. The proceedings of these meetings generally embrace hymns and discourses by the Paramahansa, questions and answers and *kirtans* of a most enthusiastic character. Ladies of high caste Hindu families congregate behind the *purdah* in the upper verandah and listen with the deepest interest. Learned Pandits, educated youths, orthodox Vaishnavas and Yogis gather in numbers, some from curiosity, some for the sake of *Sadhusanga*, good company, others for acquiring wisdom and joining the *kirtan*. We have invariably found on such occasions an outburst of living devotional enthusiasm—a mighty wave of rapturous excitement—sweeping over the whole audience. The effect is wonderful. Theological differences are lost in the singing wave of love and rapture. What this spiritual fusion and loving union may lead to in the end who can divine? The ways of the Lord are past finding out.

January 8, 1882.

*Notes*

The great devotee, the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, had another long interview with the minister and his

friends at Lily Cottage whither he had been invited on the 21st instant. The Paramahansa, though he could not be much over forty-two, looked more aged than he did the last time he was seen. His singular merits suffer no diminution, but attain greater maturity with the progress of time. Simple as a child, yet sensible and shrewd, he loses nothing of the utter inebriation of God's love. He has a strong attraction for every class of Brahmos who flock to enjoy his communion wherever he goes.

July 30, 1882.

### *Two Great Minds*

The venerable Paramahansa lately paid a visit to the eminent philanthropist and scholar, Vidyasagar. Why did he call? What earthly or unearthly advantage did that recluse expect from such a visit? The Paramahansa has a passion for great minds. His curiosity to see distinguished men is most ardent. He is ever asking his friends to show him great things and in this he is at times most importunate. Now he is off to see a lion. Now his heart is bent on witnessing the force of steam as it propels a steam launch up the river. He is impatient to have a look at a cathedral with its prayerful thousands. As among beasts and things inanimate he would honour the great, so also among the human species. Curiosity alone, deep and impulsive, led the devotee of Dakshineswar to Vidyasagar's house in Calcutta. No prospect of earthly good actuated him.

'Eminent Sage,' said the devotee, 'I come as little muddy stream into the vast deep sea (sagar).'

'Yes,' replied Vidyasagar, 'but you must remember, venerated Sire, that the sea is full of salt water, and if a fresh water stream mixes with it, it too becomes salt and loses all its sweetness.'

'It is not *avidya* sagar which indeed is to be shunned but *vidya* sagar that draws me into its welcome-waters' was the rejoinder.<sup>1</sup>

'But the sea hath its dangers and perils,' said Vidya-sagar, 'and thousands of monsters hide themselves in its treacherous waters.'

'Are there not pearls in the deep water of the sea? In search of those pearls I am here. The sea is famous for its hidden treasures. Great is your value, Vidyasagar,' said Paramahansa.

Sunday, September, 1882.

---

<sup>1</sup>Pt. Vidyasagar's name, *Vidya* plus *sagar* (lit. knowledge-ocean) is the subject of the Master and his host's *bon mots*. *Avidyā* is ignorance.

## REMINISCENCES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Aswini Kumar Dutta

It was perhaps during the Puja holidays of 1881 that I met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. Keshab Babu was to come that day. I arrived at Dakshineswar by boat, and going up the steps of the landing ghat asked someone where the Paramahansa was living. 'There is the Paramahansa!' the man replied, pointing to one reclining against a bolster on the northern verandah facing the garden. When I saw that he wore a black-bordered dhoti and reclined in a somewhat queer way, I thought, 'What kind of a Paramahansa can he be?' There he sat leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped across his drawn-up knees. Then I thought, 'He evidently is not accustomed to the use of pillows as gentlemen are, so perhaps he is a Paramahansa.' On his right, very near the pillow, sat a gentleman whose name, I learnt, was Rajendra Lal Mitra and who afterwards became Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. A little further off sat a few other gentlemen.

After a few moments Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Rajendra Babu, 'Please see if Keshab is coming.' Someone went out to look, and coming back said, no. After a brief interval, hearing a sound outside, he again said, 'Please look once more.' Again someone went out and came back with the same reply. Then Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, 'The rustling of leaves makes Radha exclaim, "Oh! Here comes my Beloved!" You see, Keshab always tantalizes me like this!' After some time, at dusk, Keshab came with his party.

When Keshab bowed before him touching the ground with his forehead, Sri Ramakrishna returned the salutation in the same manner. Shortly after, he raised his head and in a state of semiconsciousness said, addressing the Divine Mother, 'Thou hast brought the entire population of Calcutta—as if I am going to deliver a lecture! I can't do that! Do it Thyself if Thou likest. I can't do these things!'

Then, still in that ecstatic mood, with a divine smile, he said, 'I am Thy child. I will simply live and move about. I will eat, sleep and busy myself with such trifles. I can't give lectures.' Keshab Babu's heart was overflowing with emotion as he looked at Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing this state of the Paramahansa, I thought, 'Is this only a pretence?' I had never seen anything like it before, and I was not a credulous man.

Coming out of this exalted state Sri Ramakrishna said to Keshab, 'Keshab, once when I went to your temple, I heard you say, "Plunging into the river of devotion we shall be carried straight to the ocean of Satchidananda." Then I looked up [at the gallery where Keshab's wife and other ladies were sitting] and thought, "What will become of these ladies then?" You are householders, how can you reach the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda all at once? You are like the mongoose that has a stone tied to its tail. If something happens, it runs up and sits in a niche in the wall. But how can it remain there? The stone pulls it down and with a thud it lands on the floor. You may practise a little meditation, but the weight of wife and children will drag you down. You may dive into the river of devotion, but you must come up again—dive and come up again. It will be like that. How can you dive down once for all?'

'Is that altogether impossible for householders?' Keshab Babu asked.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* You see, so long as man is under the sway of maya, he is like a green coconut. If you take the tender part of it out, you can't help scraping up a little of the shell with it. But the man who has gone beyond maya is like a ripe coconut. The kernel is free from the shell—when you shake it, you hear that it is so. The soul then gets loose from the body. It is no longer attached to it.

It is the ego that is the cause of all trouble! The wretched 'I' is almost indestructible. It is like the peepul tree that grows from the rubbish of a dilapidated house. You may cut it down today, but tomorrow you will find it grows

from the roots again. The same is the case with the ego. You may wash a cup in which onions have been kept several times, but the strong odour persists.

In the course of the conversation he said to Keshab Babu, 'Well, Keshab, is it true that you Calcutta babus (gentleman) deny the existence of God? One such babu was going up the stairs. He took one step, but while taking the next one he cried, "Oh, my side! my side!" and fell unconscious. There was a hue and cry for a doctor. But before he came the man was dead. And such people say there is no God!'

After an hour or so the *kirtan* (devotional music) commenced. What I saw then I shall probably never forget in this life or in the life to come. All began to dance, Keshab included, with Sri Ramakrishna in the centre and the others in a circle around him. In the course of the dance Ramakrishna suddenly stood motionless. He was in samadhi! It continued for a long time. Hearing and seeing all this I understood he was a real paramahansa....

I went to see him another day. When I bowed down to him and took my seat, he said, 'Can you bring me some of that thing—half-sour, half-sweet—that begins to fizz when you push down the cork?' 'You mean lemonade?', I asked. 'Yes,' he said, 'Will you bring me that?' I think I brought him a bottle. So far as I remember, he was alone that day. I asked him a few questions.

*Myself:* Do you observe caste?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Well, not much to boast of. I ate a curry at Keshab Sen's house. Let me tell you what happened once. A man with a long beard [a Muslim] brought ice for sale, but I didn't feel inclined to take it. A little later, someone brought me a piece of ice from that very man and I chewed it up. You see, caste restrictions fall away by themselves. When coconut trees and palm trees grow up, the leaves drop off by themselves. Caste observances also go like that. But don't tear them off.

*Myself:* What do you think of Keshab Babu?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Oh, he is a saintly man.

*Myself:* And Trailokya Babu?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* A nice man and good singer.

*Myself:* And Shivanath Babu?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* A good man. But he argues too much!

*Myself:* What difference is there between the Hindus and the Brahmos?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Not much. When they play on oboes (*shennai*) here, one man holds the same note right along, while another plays different melodies. The Brahmos are keeping on the same note—the formless aspect of God; but the Hindus enjoy His various aspects.

God without form and God with form are like water and ice. Water when cold enough becomes ice. The heat of knowledge melts ice into water, and the cold of devotion freezes water into ice. It is the same thing, called by different names....

He told me a little of his religious practices. He also spoke about Totapuri. Then I asked him, 'How can I realize God?'

'Well,' he replied, 'He is always drawing us as a magnet draws iron. Only when the iron is covered with dirt, it is not attracted. As soon as the dirt is washed off the mind by weeping, it is instantly drawn to Him.'

As I was noting down his words, he remarked, 'Look here, only crying "hemp" will not bring intoxication. You must get the hemp, rub it in water and drink it.' Later he said, 'You have to live in the world. So have your mind highly intoxicated with the thought of God. While you are at work, let that feeling of inebriation be with you. You cannot of course be like Suka Deva and drink and drink till you lose all consciousness of the body.'

'If you will be in the world, give Him power of attorney, make over all your responsibilities to Him. Let Him do as He likes.'

All this time Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the floor. Now he got up and stretched himself on his cot. Then he

said, 'Please fan me.' I began to fan him and he was silent. After a while he said, 'Oh, it's so hot! Why don't you just dip the fan in water?' I remarked, 'Ah, you have also your likings!' He smiled and said, 'Yes, why not?' 'Very well,' I said, 'have your full measure of them.' I cannot express in words the immense pleasure I derived from his company that day....

A little later he got up, and after repeating 'Om' several times started singing a song that began: 'Dive deep, dive deep, my mind, in the ocean of divine beauty.' Scarcely had he rendered a few lines when he himself dived deep and fell into samadhi!

When the Samadhi was over he began to pace the room and with both hands began to pull up his dhoti till it reached the waist. One end of it was trailing on the floor and the other end was hanging loose. Nudging my companion, I whispered, 'See, how nicely he wears his dhoti!' A moment later he threw it away with the words, 'Ugh, what a nuisance! Off with it!' He began to pace up and down the room. From the northern end he brought a stick and an umbrella and asked, 'Do these belong to you?' Scarcely had I replied 'no' when he said, 'I knew it! I can judge a man by his stick and umbrella. They must belong to that man who was here some time ago and swallowed a lot of my words without understanding them.'

He sat down, still nude, on the northern end of his cot, facing the west and began the following conversation:

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Well, do you consider me ungentlemanly?

*Myself:* Of course not. Why do you ask that?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Well, Shivanath and others think otherwise. When they come I have to wrap a dhoti somehow. Do you know Girish Ghosh?

*Myself:* Which Girish Ghosh? He who runs a theatre?

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Yes.

*Myself:* I have never seen him, but I have heard about him.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* A good man.

*Myself:* They say he drinks.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Let him! How long will he continue that? Do you know Narendra?

*Myself:* No, sir.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* I wish very much that you meet him. He has passed the B.A. examination and is unmarried.

*Myself:* Very well, I shall meet him.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Today there will be a kirtan at Rama Dutt's house. You may meet him there. Please go there this evening.

*Myself:* All right.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Yes, do. And don't forget.

*Myself:* It is your command and I must obey it. Surely I will go.

He showed us the pictures in his room and asked if a picture of Lord Buddha could be had. I answered. Very likely.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* Please let me have one.

*Myself:* Yes, I'll bring one when I come again.

But, alas! I never had the opportunity....

I met him only four or five times. But in such a short time we became so intimate that I felt as if we had been class-mates. What liberties I took when speaking with him! But no sooner did I leave his presence than it flashed one me, 'Great God! With whom have I been speaking?' My whole life has been sweetened by what I got from him during those few days I spent with him. The memory of that elysian smile is still with me, shedding unending bliss.

[Rendered from *Sri Sri Rāmmakrishna Kathāmrita*, by M.]



Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy during a *Kirtan* at  
Keshab Chandra Sen's house in Calcutta



**IN THE EYES OF  
HIS EASTERN ADMIRERS**

To the Paramhansa

Ramakrishna Deva

Diverse courses of worship  
from varied springs of fulfilment  
have mingled in your meditation.

The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite  
has given form to a shrine of unity  
in your life

where from far and near arrive salutations  
to which I join mine own.

Rabindranath Tagore

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS MISSION TO THE WORLD: WHAT CAN IT TEACH US?

Swami Virajananda

The subject of this paper is the life of one who is not removed from us by long centuries with their unavoidably wild growth of mythology, story and tradition, one contradicting another, such as cluster round great personalities: but one who is within the loving memory of many young men of today—one who left this *māyāvic* mask of the body only sixteen years ago, one who lived nearly till the end of the nineteenth century, yet took us back through the rolling vistas of time to the sacred atmosphere of the age of the *rishis* when the first enlightened seers sounded the trumpet of freedom:

‘I have known that Great One radiant like the Sun, beyond darkness.’ (*Svet. Up.*, 3.8)

Sri Ramakrishna was a strange personality, having so many varied aspects of character that it might truly be said that he lived in one body the lives of many of the perfected ones that humanity has ever produced. He was the cord that threaded into a single garland all the highest spiritual ideals of the past and the present alike! He was himself the living embodiment of the words that fell from his lips, untouched by the taint of the present-day materialistic civilization, though living in it.

His was the spontaneous growth of a soul towards the highest and the blossoming forth of a spirit-flower, which drew the bees from all around. Ramakrishna was nothing if not original. His life affords a unique study for those who aspire to truth, to victory over the senses, to the realization of God. And he who casts his life in Ramakrishna’s mould will surely attain, like him, the success, the peace, the goal, which is blessedness. He was wonderful even as a boy. Son of a brahmin who was intensely religious in the orthodox way, rigid in the observance of sacred rites, Ramakrishna’s

dauntless independence of character showed itself early, on the occasion of his investiture with the sacred thread, by his taking alms (*bhiksha*) from the hands of a low-caste woman to whom he had promised this, notwithstanding all the remonstrances and threats of his father<sup>1</sup>. Discrimination formed one of the strongest traits of his character. As a boy of seven years, sent to a village school for education, he brooded over the ultimate end of intellectual knowledge and could see nothing in it but a means of earning livelihood. Even so the vulture soars far above in the sky, but its whole attention is bent on finding some rotten carcass on the ground. *Once the conclusion is reached the matter is solved for good.* His school life ended, but not to give place to idleness. He determined to gain the Knowledge which destroys ignorance, the light which dispels darkness, that Knowledge, by knowing which all else can be known, for as the Upanishad says, 'By knowing clay, all that is made of it is cognized.' This spirit of discrimination, coupled with the resolute will not to turn back as long as the goal is not reached, formed the secret of his success all through life. He distinctly perceived by his acute analytical mind that the chief bar to God-vision was the heart's hidden clinging to the world. He now set his whole heart upon the conquest of this deadliest foe of man. He reduced the countless forms in which world-attachment shows itself into two, viz., lust and gold, and vanquished them, one after the other by the mighty sword of discrimination. He sat down to discriminate, taking in one hand a lump of clay and in the other a silver coin. Addressing his mind he said, 'This is silver and this clay; by the one you can build huge temples and palaces and feed hundreds of men and animals, ride in carriages drawn by horses and supply all the wants of the body; by the other also you can make bricks and tiles and

---

<sup>1</sup>Actually it was Ramakrishna's elder brother who remonstrated with him. His father had passed away earlier. —*Publisher*

the beautiful shapes of statues and so on, but what is either of these meant for, except the enjoyment of the senses? Both being matter, they never take one beyond it. Being themselves finite they never lead one to the infinite. Why do you vainly hanker after such? Let them both be the same to you.' Having meditated upon this over and over again, his mind was strongly impressed with the idea that both were the same; and he ended by throwing both into the Ganga. But it should be remembered, that this was no mere intellectual achievement; it was renunciation, true to the word and the spirit.

For, henceforward he could not even touch any metal without having his fingers stiffened and paralyzed. It may sound like black magic to the worldly minded—something of charlatanry, something imposed upon our credulity; but it stood the test of a hundred trials. Someone put a coin under the mattress of his bed when he was away; coming back he could not even touch the bed, which to him seemed a couch of thorns as long as the coin was not taken out. Someone put an *amla* fruit in his pocket without his knowledge and he could not with the stolen article walk through the right road to the gate, his feet taking him, why he did not know, amidst thorns and by dirty ways. Hundreds of instances like these may be cited.

The other great barrier that he saw in the path of spirituality was the idea of sex. This animal instinct must be done away with, or a total shipwreck of life and soul is inevitable. He did not need to read the histories of nations, he did not read the fall of Antony or the siege of Troy, or even the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyana*, in order to be convinced of the downfall of many heroes and sages in the snare of sex. He saw it clearly and vividly by studying human nature. He resolved to enter into the heart of the question, and before his scrutinizing discrimination the skin-deep glitter of body had to yield, and show itself as nothing but the worship of a cage of bones coated over only with flesh and expression.

Of all the human emotions of mutual relationship none is so pure and high, none so unselfish and ennobling, none so innocent and sweet, as the relation of a child to its mother. So there is but one way of escape from carnal passions and that is to know woman as mother—as the manifestation of Divine Motherhood, that *shakti* or force which is both *vidyā* and *avidyā*<sup>2</sup>—playing as the chaste and modest wife, but none the less also as the prostitute, though in very different garb. This once realized, it became to him a fact, and he could not see even his own wife (for he was married in his boyhood) in any other light.

The great impostor that clings to man so fondly, and is nearest and dearest to his heart, that treacherous fiend—egoism—which is the hardest of all to get rid of—springing up again and again like the banyan tree, however often it may be cut down, was the one he saw still left, eating and fattening itself, unawares, upon the dearly earned fruits of his devotion. 'What is this idea of "me" and "mine"?' he asked himself. 'Who is always boasting—I am the son of so-and-so, I do this, I do that, I am so very good and religious; who is there to compare with me? Do they not know me? It is my house, my land, my wealth—this pest of "me" and "mine" always harassing me, turning the mind inside out, and disturbing its equanimity and peace, causing untold trouble. It must be eradicated.'

He struggled and struggled, but the idea would not go, indeed it seemed to stay, as if only to provoke him. He saw that this idea had its existence in ignorance only, and that it was only with the advent of Knowledge that 'me and mine' changes places with 'Thee and Thine'. Or it leaves its narrow cell and spreads itself into the universal 'I', the universal Self—there is then nothing but I; I am all in all.

---

<sup>2</sup>*Vidyā*, or the power of maya that leads one to knowledge and ultimate Reality. *Avidyā*, or maya's power that leads one into ignorance and bondage.

This is the 'I' of Knowledge—the ripe I', as he used to say, in comparison with the unripe 'I—the 'I' of ignorance. His mastery over the narrow self was so complete that he could not utter the first person singular or first person possessive singular when speaking of himself. He would always say 'this body' instead of 'my body'; 'Mother wishes' instead of 'I would'; 'Do come here' instead of 'Do come to me'. He always dealt a death blow at the 'I'—idea whenever it reared its head. Once a rich disciple of his presented him with a valuable shawl, and himself put it around him. A few minutes later, great was his surprise to see Ramakrishna throw it away in the mire, addressing himself at the same time saying, 'Now you are rightly served, you are, fool of an egoist!'

But the most prominent feature of his life, the one thing that we lack so much nowadays, but which was our distinctive national character in olden times—was his intense practicality in religion. Theorizing would not do. The world had had enough of it. One might talk exceedingly well, deliver beautiful and stirring sermons and lectures, but of what avail would it all be if one failed miserably to live the life one preached? Who would listen and attach importance to one's words if one could not show in one's life a living example of what one said? Any amount of thinking and theorizing is sure to fail in the long run; is sure to be superseded by another higher intellect; is sure to leave the man as weak as ever—a miserable wreck—before any great temptation and trial, if unaccompanied by a life of realization. Religion—the power of the spirit that would tide over all those ills and ailments of the internal world that the human soul is victim to—must be realized, must be sensed, as it were, or no peace, no cessation of misery, no escape from eternal slavery to nature, is possible. So intense was Ramakrishna's devotion that he would forget food and drink often, would not know what sleep was for months. So intense was his anxiety to see his Divine Mother face to face, talk with Her, be a child in Her arms, that he would

become frantic at seeing the sun set on the horizon day after day, in each of which he had expected to be blessed with the Divine vision. With this intense fire burning in his heart, fanned by daily disappointments, he would roll on the ground, rubbing his face, shedding tears that would make the earth wet, with cries of 'Mother, Mother where are You? Show yourself to me, your helpless child, but once.' His heart-rending cries and lamentations would draw crowds of sympathetic men and women from the neighbourhood who, thinking that his beloved mother had just died, would try in vain to soothe him. 'A hurricane,' as he used to say referring to those days, 'passed over me sweeping away everything before it.' At last he was blest with the vision of his Mother, at which moments he would lose all outward consciousness in the overpowering ecstasy of divine communion, when he would speak in broken words, whose meaning no one understood, laugh and dance, and cry, and shake, or be still and silent. His sacred thread he would lose every time it was put on his body, his *dhoti* (wearing cloth) he would put under his arm and hold it there or it would fall off unconsciously!

No wonder many called him mad beyond recovery. Many medicines were tried on him, but the disease showed no sign of abatement. Ah! the ignorance of the human heart, what does it know beyond its own limit! But one can only understand another if one be on the same plane himself. As he used to say: seeing a God-intoxicated man lying in a ditch, a drunkard took him to be one in a worse plight than himself, through excessive drinking; a lunatic took him to be another like himself; a homeless, hungry beggar expressed pity for his condition more miserable than his own, and so on, until another God-intoxicated man coming that way knew what he really was.

Now comes the chapter of his life which is unique in the records of prophets, of seers and of God-men, as one which proved by demonstration the great truth that different faiths and religions are but so many paths to lead to the

one Reality. He did not arrive at that conclusion by intellectual gymnastics or liberal thinking, but took by the hand one religion after another separately and in succession, became duly initiated into each of them and practised the formulas of each in its orthodox style, and finally reached the ultimate goal of each.

Totapuri, a great Vedantist sannyasin, in course of his wanderings came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar near Calcutta, where Sri Ramakrishna lived and spent the greatest part of his life—and instructed him in the knowledge and practices necessary for the realization of the Absolute Brahman, the One without a second. What was his surprise to see his disciple reach the highest stage of Yoga the *samādhi* in the unconditioned Brahman—in only three days—a stage which had taken Totapuri himself forty years of hard work on the banks of the river Narmada to arrive at! He went through many other *sādhana*s or religious practices, consisting of the idea of the five relationships with God connected with the various sects of Hinduism. His first preceptor was a sannyasini, wonderfully versed in the scriptures, who initiated him into Tantric practices. She was the first to dispel from people's minds the false notion of Ramakrishna's madness and disease, by quoting from the scriptures the characteristic marks of God-men, such as Chaitanya, Sri Krishna, and others, and showing point by point their agreement with Ramakrishna's case.

Having thus realized the ideals of the different sects of Hinduism, he next turned his attention to the other religions of the world. He practised the religion of the Prophet of Arabia, being initiated by one who was secretly following it.<sup>3</sup> Be it noted here that for the three days he practised it, he adhered strictly to Mohammedan customs and usages,

---

<sup>3</sup>The Sufi sect. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1978), p. 299.—*Publisher*

eating such unorthodox food as onions. During that time he would look at no temple or Hindu god or goddess, while he believed that he was praying in a mosque amidst the Mullahs.

One day while visiting an adjacent garden he saw a beautiful picture of Christ hanging on the wall. On being enlightened as to the personality of Christ, he saw an aura proceeding from the picture and entering into himself. Coming back he was full of the Christ-idea for three days. He saw himself within magnificent churches, Christian worshippers offering incense and lights before the image of Jesus, listening to the reading of the Bible, and sermons from the pulpit, until, in vivid vision, Jesus was before him in his full glory.

All these various practices occupied him full twelve years of arduous devotion, frequent communion, and samadhi. During this long period he had scarcely any idea of the body, knowing not what sleep was, when to eat or drink. Such a love, and not the daily dry routine of closing the eyes and sitting motionless for certain hours, ensures success in spiritual life. All body-idea goes, attachment to persons, and the thousand-and-one objects of the senses is given up, so that the whole self may be one-pointed towards the attainment of the ideal. Perfect self-sacrifice, no looking backwards and forward, 'let the body go if it will, I will not stop till I reach the end of the path', such iron will and perseverance, such intense yearning and concentration of purpose, can alone be blest with the attainment of perfection. There is no royal road to it.

It was this realization of the highest truth through each and every path, paths though apparently as opposed to one another as the poles, that made him look upon all religions as true, leading to the same goal. Hence, no more dissension about your faith or my faith, no more narrowness or shutting-off of sympathy from one another, for we are all fellow travellers who may be widely divergent now, in this plane of diversity, but who will meet again in that one

place, nay, will unite with an affinity of one drop of water for another, in the great ocean of Reality. If this noble idea were comprehended and followed by the majority of mankind, how much narrow-minded sectarianism, unrest, and useless waste of energy, bloodshed, and destruction, could have been saved. With the mind full of love and fellow-feeling, calm and undisturbed, man could have made rapid progress in the path that leads to freedom. To sound the trumpet note of peace among the warring sects, by his own living example, was the grandest mission of Sri Ramakrishna's life. All love for everyone and not a word of abuse, ever broke forth from his lips. Members of all sects and denominations used to throng around him, and they would go back, each taking him to be the ideal of his own sect. Thus the Vaishnava would think him to be a perfect devotee of Sri Krishna, the Shakta would see in him a perfect man, a *siddha purusha* of Kāli, the Advaitist would find in him a knower of the absolute and unconditioned Brahman, and so on. He would never destroy anyone's faith, but push one further in the direction that one was already going, instilling strength, and helping by such advice as would be conducive to one's growth. This endeared him to all.

At a time when everyone is anxious to preach and teach, and no one to follow, the study of his life affords a great lesson to us all which we can with profit make our own. He hated the modern method of self-advertisement. Referring to it he used to say, 'It is as if inviting a hundred persons to dinner while providing for only one.' 'The flower, when fully blossomed does not go to invite the bees, they come of themselves, drawn by its sweet fragrance. The true teacher does not go out to look for audiences and cry, "O come and hear!" They flock of themselves around him and seek his advice.' This is true preaching, and it was fully exemplified in his own daily life. He was there in a lowly corner, a man illiterate and uncultured, unassuming and humble, yet hundreds of distinguished scholars, men of vast

erudition, and saints used to come and sit at his feet and learn. Yet all their adulation and worship, and their urging on him divine honours, did not seem to work any change in his childlike character. He never posed himself as the teacher of men and yet he was one of the greatest of them. He never knew that people came to him to be taught. If pressed by someone to teach, he would say like a child, 'What do I know? I know only that my Mother *is*, and that I am Her child.' If he would say anything to anyone, he would say, 'My Mother says so.' If anyone in his presence would call him teacher or guru he would be vexed beyond measure and rebuke him, saying, 'Who is whose guru? The Lord is the guru of all.' He would make no distinction between the rich and the poor, a powerful or a famous personage and a weak and unknown man. He would not see whether one was Dvaitist or Advaitist, or Vishishtadvaitist or even nihilist, whether one was a worshipper of Vishnu, or Rama, or Kali, or Christ, but he would only judge each by the depth of sincerity of heart. He would see only whether one was *sincere*, no matter if one believed in anything or not, no matter if one was looked down upon and branded by society as a sinner. No, he would not condemn or hate even a prostitute or a drunkard. Nor would he bid him or her to give up bad habits immediately, for he knew they could not, then and there, but he would ask them to come now and then, so that by the influence of holy association, they might come round in time. He cared not a straw for the opinion of others. Truths, plain truth, he would say. He would point out faults even to a powerful and famous man, whether the latter liked it or not, for he had no selfish motive. A sincere man, who is struggling with his weaknesses, can never take offence if they are pointed out. It is only those that are deluded by egotism and pride who feel offended at this. The one thing he prized above all was sincerity. Be sincere, this is the one qualification of discipleship.

The preacher must be one who is fully devoid of the teacher-idea. It is pride and egotism that ruin. Another factor that he laid much stress upon was that the teacher, before attempting to preach, must receive a commission from the Lord. He must have full credentials behind him or his teaching will be a waste of voice with no abiding result. 'A single policeman,' he used to say, 'can quell a riot with ease. Why? Only because he has the badge of authority from the government. So the teacher must have the badge of divine authority and then he is irresistible. He is never in want of thoughts or arguments. His store of knowledge is inexhaustible, for he draws his inspiration from the infinite Source of knowledge.'

His relation with those who came to him was of the sweetest character. His all-embracing love for each and everyone was truly divine. In his eyes everything was full of life and consciousness. Sometimes he could not even pluck a flower, and felt hurt if he saw any one treading on the grass. His whole life was one grand sacrifice for the good of humanity. In the last part of his life he had the terrible disease of cancer in the throat and his doctors strictly forbade him to talk, but he could not abide by their advice and made his condition worse by talking to those who came to see him. Asked not to do so, he used to say, 'What! Ought I to mind about the body when I would be glad to take a hundred bodies even living on sago-water, if I could help one soul out of this misery of the world?' He was a sacrifice to the cause of humanity; one who would willingly die a hundred deaths for just one soul, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcaste, for the downtrodden, for every one in this world.

He was a personification of humility. He taught this virtue daily to all those who came to him. No one can boast of ever having given him, before receiving from him, a salute. He would not even conform to the outward observances of the religious life. But he disapproved of doing away with all rites and ceremonies—such as caste rules and

image worship and the many other things which help a beginner—as long as the fire of the knowledge of Brahman did not blaze forth from within. ‘Cartloads of even the driest wood if heaped upon a fire which is just beginning to burn will tend to put it out, but in a huge conflagration even plantain trees, which are nearly all water, will be burnt to ashes in no time. These rites and ceremonies will drop away by themselves when their time is come, like dry coconut leaves falling away from tree. Eating and drinking with any and everybody without distinction is no criterion of universal brotherhood if there reign in the heart hatred, egotism, pride, and contempt.’ For himself, however, the sacred thread could not be put on; it would fall off and be lost, every time it was put round him. He could not hold water in the joined palms of his hands to ceremoniously offer it to the ancestors (*pitris*) and gods—for his fingers would grow stiff and bend if he even tried to do it.

At a time when the tidal wave of occidental materialism was washing over the land with its destructive flood; when the intoxication of western ideas was too great for young minds to see any truth in Hinduism; when they were losing all faith in the religion of their forefathers and going out to borrow foreign ideas and invest in with them, there was born a man who showed by his life that every religion in itself contains—not part, but the whole of truth, if one is only in earnest for its realization and not set on mere ‘leaf-counting’.

Sri Krishna voiced but the natural law of the action and reaction of forces in the universe, which history has demonstrated again and again, when he said in the *Gita* (4.7): ‘Whenever, O descendant of Bharata, there is decline of spirituality and rise of unspirituality, then I body Myself forth.’

The manifestation of this marvellous power is not confined simply to the religious sphere alone, but shines out in every plane. In India religion is the life-centre of the nation, and that was in danger. So this tremendous power in the form of Sri Ramakrishna became manifest.

And what a reactionary force it was! Who had ever dreamed that a poor, illiterate man, born in a corner of an obscure village, would turn the life-tide of many of the most brilliant men of our country who were imbued with ideas just the opposite of his? What a marvellous expression of power in ways least expected, least thought of! Limited as we are by our very nature, we cannot grasp at once the Impersonal; we want spiritual ideals and grand spiritual examples before us, to give us strength and courage to follow them and persevere. Such a one, we have before us. Well may he be regarded as a manifestation of Divinity. But he did not come to add one more deity to the many existing ones, to be put within a temple and worshipped with flowers and ceremonies, but to be followed and studied, so that one may learn to act as he would act, in the same circumstances. As he used to say, if one can do one sixteenth of what he said and did, that is enough. It is a long, long story, and it is impossible for me to attempt an exhaustive summary of his most marvellous life, in a paper like this. Each insignificant act or word of his if studied closely, would reveal volumes of teaching. For even such commonplace acts as eating and walking and talking, were marked by a peculiarity all his own—something not of this world—something of sweet renunciation, something saturated with divine love, something of a beauty unspeakable, something taking us to a region of thought where one, if one is a thinker, is destined to tread losing all sense of personality. His life forms a most reliable guidebook to all travellers who have consecrated themselves to the attainment of the ultimate goal of perfection.

Though, as I remarked, an exhaustive summary of this great life is impossible, yet it is my bounden duty, when treating of such a subject, to point out at least the most important and instructive, as well as the most prominent and extraordinary features of this wonderful character which, like a flower divine miraculously blossoming in a desert, sheds grace and sweetness on our hard and harsh worldly existence.

Time rolls on in its usual course, robbing us of our blessed childhood and landing us in youth, where we vainly pursue the fleeting shadows of this world; and before we are hardly aware of it we find ourselves going down the vale of tears! The blessed and innocent days of childhood subsequently become cherished memories of dreamland—this is the irresistible law of nature. But lo! In the life of Sri Ramakrishna nature's law was set at naught. He was a child for life, a child, pure and simple, in the mask of a grown-up man and those who saw him in the latter period of his earthly existence were charmed to see this extraordinary expression of a child in his face, only divinely illumined. Perhaps the two first impressions that every visitor to Sri Ramakrishna carried away with him—be he a devout religious believer, or a sceptical and scoffing worldly soul—were his wonderful childlike nature and his extreme simplicity. Like a child he could not take care of his dress, and like a child he would sometimes cry out when hungry or thirsty, forgetful of time and place, whether he was in the parlour of a rich man whom he had gone to see for the first time, or in a carriage. Like a child he could not eat much at a time even when he said he was dying of hunger, but would take just a few morsels. Like a child he could be easily consoled and satisfied. Once a gentleman went to see him when his arm was fractured. Sri Ramakrishna asked him if he had come there to see the temples. The newcomer replied, 'No, sir, I have come here to see you.' Sri Ramakrishna broke forth into a loud cry, 'What will you see? Babu, my elbow is dislocated. How much it is aching!' The gentleman was charmed and did not know what to answer. After a while in order to console him he said, 'There is no cause for anxiety, sir, it will be all right before long.' Immediately Sri Ramakrishna was as delighted as only a child could be, and exclaimed: 'Will it be so? Will it be so?' Then he called out to someone and told him, 'This Babu has come from Calcutta. He says my arm will be all right.' At once he threw off all anxiety and became cheerful.

He would not allow anyone to call him Baba (father) saying, 'I am the child of my Divine Mother, how can I be anybody's father?' Sometimes he was in a state of mind when he could not do a single act, however commonplace, without going to the temple and asking his Mother's permission, which he used to get readily; for to him his Mother was more real than those earthly counterparts of Her known to us.

Once he was told by a student fresh from college that his samadhi was nothing but a disease of the brain, a sort of nervous disorder due to weakness. No sooner had he heard this than he ran out to the temple of Mother Kāli crying: 'Mother, Mother.' Returning he said, 'Mother tells me there is nothing wrong with my head, but that it is a mistake on your part to think so!'

He used to say, 'When one attains God one becomes like a boy of five. The boy is not influenced long by any of the *gunas*. Now see, he is not subject to *tamas*. He quarrels and fights with his playmate; the next moment how he loves him, how much he plays with him, encircling his neck with his arm. Again he is not bound by *rajas*. Now he takes out his playthings, makes various rooms, and there is no end of arrangements and resolutions, but immediately afterwards he leaves everything and runs to his mother. Perchance he has a beautiful cloth on and you see it and ask him, "Whose *dhoti* is this, it is such a nice one!" He says with all the force of egotism, "Oh, it is my cloth, my father has given it to me." If you say to him persuasively, "Give it to me, you are such a good and nice boy", he revolts, "No, no, it is my cloth, my father gave it to me, I won't give it to you by any means." But if you put a doll or a two-penny red whistle in his hand, he will gladly part with the cloth worth five rupees. Again he is not rigid as regards *sattva*. Now he loves his playmates so much, as if he cannot live without seeing them for a moment. But if perchance they go away, he gets new companions and all his love centres round them; he then forgets his old playmates

completely. Again, he has no overweening opinion of his high caste. If his mother tells him that somebody is his brother, he believes it; and if he is a brahmin's son, and the other a blacksmith's, he will eat rice from the same dish with the other. He has also no idea of uncleanness; he loves to roll as dearly on a soft snow-white sofa as in the dust. Again, he has no sense of shame or privacy—the product of impure impressions in the mind. Sometimes he acts and behaves like a lunatic, crying, dancing, and laughing almost simultaneously.' Whether in his devotion to God or in his dealings of this kind, Sri Ramakrishna's life was full of manifestations of a similar nature.

His life was also equally simple. He never did wear the customary *gerua* (ochre-red cloth) of the sannyasin. Many people came to see the Paramahansa with the idea that they would find an unapproachable grave-looking figure clad in *gerua*, sitting on a tiger skin, with his hair in knotted locks and *rudraksha* beads round his neck, his body besmeared with ashes, and surrounded by *chelas* of the same type. What they found instead, was a simple plain looking man, with a small white *dhoti* hanging loosely from his waist, sitting on a wooden *charpoy* (lit. four legs, a bedstead) in a nice room, with pictures of gods and goddesses on the walls! Maybe he was amusing himself with the young men who had come to see him as if he was one of them. His *bon-mots* were calling forth peals of laughter from his hearers and he would continue in the same jocose and light vein, never caring what a visitor might think of the spectacle. But, lo, in a moment the scene might be transformed. In the course of conversation the subject would suddenly turn to God and Soul, and the seemingly frivolous man would completely lose himself in deep samadhi, sitting motionless, eyes fixed and half-closed, tears of joy rolling down his cheeks, fingers twisted and stiff, breath imperceptible, as if the senses and the mind had left their functions for good, driven back from a plane where they had no passport to re-enter, where time and creation are not, but Absolute

Existence and Bliss beyond unity and duality! Some of the bhaktas, who had a few moments before been indulging in merriment, would be gazing speechlessly on this strange transformation. Some out of the fullness of the heart would be crying, some uttering aloud the name of the Lord. Such was he, an unusual man, and much more so as a sannyasin, according to the popular idea, perhaps.

Once a reputed physician of Calcutta was called to attend a patient at Dakshineswar. On his way back he strolled by the Ganga through the temple garden of Rani Rasmani. Various kinds of flowers had blossomed yielding their fragrance in the cool evening air. The doctor happened to see Sri Ramakrishna walking near by. Taking him to be a gardener, the doctor ordered him to pick a few flowers for him and Sri Ramakrishna instantly obliged him. What was the astonishment of the doctor, when years afterwards he came to examine his throat and cried out in amazement, 'Oh, woe unto me, what did I do? I ordered him to pick flowers for me!'

Such was Sri Ramakrishna's extreme simplicity in dress and manner that it appeared an embarrassment, at least for once, to one of our cultured Brahmo ministers. Deeply affected by Sri Ramakrishna's devotion and samadhi, he wanted the Master to visit his Samaj. Mathur Babu, the good son-in-law of Rani Rasmani who built the Dakshineswar temples, took Sri Ramakrishna to this grand old man of the reform party in Bengal. He begged Sri Ramakrishna to favour by his presence the anniversary of the Samaj which was coming soon, but took pains to impress upon him the necessity of coming in good dress and being careful about it. The Master replied with a smile that it was beyond his power to keep thinking about his dress if that state—meaning samadhi—came upon him. The minister, however, satisfied himself by extracting Sri Ramakrishna's promise, while parting, that he would at least have a shirt on. The next day Mathur Babu got an intimation from the above gentleman that it was inadvisable to bring Sri

Ramakrishna, because it would look vulgar and awkward if he should go into samadhi in such an assembly, which he was sure to do with his clothes out of order!

I cannot but mention here an anecdote about Sri Ramakrishna's mother. Mathur Babu, being impressed by his greatness, was the first ardent and devoted follower of Sri Ramakrishna. He saw that Sri Ramakrishna's near relatives were very poor; so he wished to make some provision for them. But he could not fulfill this wish of his by proposing it to the Master, for the latter had already sharply rebuked him for the suggestion and told him never to mention it again. Mathur Babu, disappointed, tried Sri Ramakrishna's old mother next. She was then living with Sri Ramakrishna in the same garden. He asked her what wants she felt so that he might find some means to remove them. She replied, 'My son, I cannot indeed make out any want that I have in this world, I am so happy here. I am passing the latter portion of my days on the bank of the holy Ganga, and taking the *prasāda* of Mother Kali. What more can I wish?' But Mathur Babu would not be so easily turned away. He tried again and again but in vain. He received the same answer every time. At last she said, 'Well, since you are so insistent to offer me something, buy me two pice worth of tobacco leaves, the ashes of which I can use as tooth powder.' Mathur Babu was surprised with the reply, and joyfully exclaimed with joined palms, 'If you were not so, why should Sri Ramakrishna be born of you!'

Sri Ramakrishna's tenacity in holding to truth was exemplary. He used to say, 'In this *kali yuga*<sup>4</sup>, if one has *nishtha* or devotion to speaking the truth, one has no need of performing any other *tapas* (austerity). He who tenaciously holds on to it, easily realizes in his own con-

---

<sup>4</sup>Age of *kali*. (It may be noted that the sanskrit spelling being different, it is not the Divine Mother Kālī, but the demiurge, Kali, embodiment of sin. See *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, 1.16)

sciousness God who is the essence of Truth. In my *sādhana* stage I told Mother, "Take this your *jñāna* (knowledge) and this your *ajñāna* (ignorance); take this your *shuchi* (cleanliness, both internal and external) and this your *ashuchi* (uncleanliness), give me instead pure *bhakti*; take this your virtue and this your vice, give me instead pure *bhakti*." When I offered all these I could not say "Mother, take this your truth (*satya*) and this your untruth." I gave away all to Mother but I could not part with truth, for I thought if that went, with what could I live? Once while he was taking his food, and talking of things spiritual as was his wont, he was asked if he would have a second helping because he was given a very small quantity to begin with. Inadvertently he replied 'No'. When he finished he saw that he had not taken half enough. They asked him to have some more. He said. 'When once I have said "no," I can't take any more now.' Once he told one of his devotees that he would go for a walk in the nearby garden of a gentleman on a certain evening. That afternoon there came many people from Calcutta to see him. The whole time was spent in talking on religious subjects with them. Late in the evening he remembered his promise. Could he rest without fulfilling it? No. A bhakta asked 'What harm will there be if you do not go?' He replied 'Then I shall lose my adherence and devotion for keeping truth at other times, which may be on more important matters. He had the gate opened by the porter to whom he in return gave some sweetmeat afterwards, and walked a little in that gentleman's garden and then only he was satisfied.

Once a distinguished leader of the Brahmo Samaj tried to dissuade from coming to Sri Ramakrishna a youth who was very eager to meet him. The gentleman asserted that Sri Ramakrishna's head had gone wrong, that he was mad, and that such often became the lot of those, as in the case of many western philosophers, who devoted themselves lifelong to an abstruse subject too deeply. By and by these words reached Sri Ramakrishna. He invited the gentleman

to come and see him. Twice or thrice this preacher sent word that he would come on such and such a date positively, but every time he failed to keep the engagement. After a long interval he turned up. Sri Ramakrishna spoke to him in his usual sweet way, 'Well, did you say my head had gone wrong? But you see, when I say that I shall go to see someone on a certain day, I never fail to do so. While you, an educated man with sound brain, promised to come here twice or thrice but failed. Further you state that too much meditation was the cause of the derangement of my brain, and cited parallel cases of occidental thinkers. But may I ask you if it is possible to lose one's sanity by meditating upon that Consciousness which has made the universe conscious? But what wonder, with the weight of dead matter on them some western minds would be unbalanced?' It is needless to add that the preacher bowed and confessed his error.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE MODERN WORLD

Swami Gambhirananda

It may seem rather difficult to connect Sri Ramakrishna with the modern world. He was born more than a century ago in a country where science and technology had not developed. His formal schooling did not go beyond that of the primary school. And moreover, mathematics, which is an important subject in science and technology, was a bugbear to him.

At the threshold of youth Sri Ramakrishna came to Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. His language revealed a rustic background. The Brahmos of the time said that it was not very refined. And his dress! Devendranath Tagore, an aristocrat and the father of Rabindranath Tagore, invited him to his Brahma Samaj, but with the precondition that Sri Ramakrishna must come well dressed. Of course Sri Ramakrishna refused, and the invitation was withdrawn.

Another Brahma leader, Shivanath Sastri, said that Sri Ramakrishna, being too much merged in the thought of God, had lost his balance of mind, and that too much thinking of God had made him lose his head. As regards the generality of Hindus of that age, they respected Sri Ramakrishna and revered him as a saint, but at the same time they also said that so far as worldly affairs were concerned, 'he is mad!' So what can we expect from such a saint in the modern age?

As against that, we may point out that Jesus Christ and some other great souls were born in similar environments, and yet their influence, their inspiration, are as strong today as they were ages ago. Even now they inspire people to form new societies and to make endeavours for new kinds of development. On that analogy, Sri Ramakrishna also can have some claim on modern minds. But that is not our subject here.

Sri Ramakrishna can speak to modern people in his own right, because although he came from a village, although he was born in an underdeveloped country, his mind was, in a way, very progressive, very modern. He said, 'The coins of the days of the Muslim emperors and the Nawabs are not legal tender today;<sup>1</sup> the world has changed. If somebody is delirious with fever and you call in an old-time physician who depends on herbs and roots, and if, according to his prescription, you go on boiling them in water till the essence comes out, then let it cool down, then mix it up and then administer it to the patient—by that time the patient will be dead! So today it is not herbs and roots that are necessary but some readily available, patent fever medicine.<sup>2</sup> The world has changed.

Sri Ramakrishna was very progressive. You may remember his parable of the holy man and the woodcutter.<sup>3</sup> A woodcutter met a *brahmacharin* who said, 'Go forward!' At first the woodcutter didn't understand, but when it dawned on him that the person was a holy man and that what he said must have a deeper meaning, the woodcutter did go forward and he found a forest of sandalwood, very costly wood. He cut a few pieces of it, sold it in the market and became a rich man. He did not stop there. He proceeded farther, and came to a mine of silver, then a mine of gold, then a mine of diamonds. Sri Ramakrishna often used to repeat this story and ask his devotees to 'go forward'; they were ever to go forward.

Modern in life and thought, he visited the modern theatre, he went to see how a hot-air balloon was sent up, and he visited many institutions which were the creations of modern civilization. He appreciated them all.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Vide*, Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math 1956), p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide*, Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1997), p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Although the Divine Mother had promised him that many pure-souled devotees would come to him, with whom he would be able to talk about God, they were slow to appear. So, in despair he went up to the roof and called out, 'Where are you all? Do come!'

First came the Brahmo devotees. They talked in a strange way, unfamiliar to Sri Ramakrishna. He went to his Mother Kali and said, 'Mother, what is this?' And the Mother replied, 'Well, things will happen like this in the *kali-yuga*. You have to live with them.' He agreed to live with them, talk with them, mix with them; and he did all that. When a Nepali gentleman, Vishwanath Upadhyaya, criticized him asking: 'Why do you go to Keshab Chandra Sen? [Keshab had been to the West, to England, and eaten many forbidden things; he had lost his caste.] Sri Ramakrishna replied" 'But you, a *brāhmana*, can go to the Viceroy and the Governor who are non-*brāhmanas*, even non-Hindus? You mix with them for what? For money; I go to Keshab to talk about God. What fault is there?'<sup>4</sup> So he was modern.

Then came some other devotees. The Brahmo devotees could not accept Sri Ramakrishna wholly and fully; they thought he was just a good man living a holy life, nothing more than that. They did not find anything new in his message which could be put into action for the good of mankind. And there came other Hindu gentlemen who wanted to understand Sri Ramakrishna in terms of their own backgrounds, of what they knew about the old saints and prophets. They too failed to find any novelty in his message.

So Sri Ramakrishna wanted to meet 'young Bengal', the newly-educated young people, who had fresh minds and fresh energy, who could understand him with open minds and put his message into action. He wanted them. He was a modern man.

---

<sup>4</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 651.

Still, he was not willing to accept everything modern without question. Science in the first flush of its machine-age success thought that it could very well take care of the world, and God could be dispensed with. But then, it had not discovered many things which we now know: there were only some hypotheses, and those hypotheses passed off as scientific truths, based on the uniformity of nature.

Mathuranath Biswas, one of the proprietors of the Dakshineswar Temple, had a modern education. He talked a little scientifically, and he argued with Sri Ramakrishna. But Sri Ramakrishna once brought from the garden a twig of hibiscus on which were one red flower and one white, put it before Mathur, and said, 'Now, what about your uniformity of nature? How do you explain this?'<sup>5</sup> Well, science *may* explain this. Also science may explain another incident Sri Ramakrishna spoke of: 'Although scientists say lightning strikes only the tallest building in an area, I have seen a cottage burning just near a high brick building. How do you explain that?'<sup>6</sup> What he was hinting at was that it was wrong to run away with those hasty generalizations and think God had no place in this world. But that was how they thought in those days. Nowadays the situation has very much changed; scientists generally do not talk that way. They now confine themselves largely to their own field, leaving the field of religion to others.

Then again there have been others, also passing as scientists, who have deluded people in many other ways. Take, for instance, Freud. Psychoanalysts would tell you that human beings are basically beastly, full of evil tendencies that masquerade under decent ideas and supply the motive power for all actions. That was Freud's idea—that men are basically beasts. Then came the Marxists who said that the motive

---

<sup>5</sup>Vide, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 87. Also: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, p. 589.

<sup>6</sup>Vide, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, p. 589.

power for society was money, greed. Society was moved by economic considerations and nothing else. So, between them—the psychoanalysts and the communists—they divided the world; all human beings were to be treated as beasts, and human society was just a power in the hands of the moneyed classes, of vested interests.

But here comes Sri Ramakrishna as a protest against both these, and he says: 'The world is not really progressing through money and all these beastly considerations. Men are basically divine; they are moved by divine consideration, divine inspiration.' There *is* the world. There *is* Brahman. But lust and lucre come and deflect or pervert our vision. We may quote from the Upanishads, though we are applying it in another sense: 'By the golden vessel is the face of truth covered up.'<sup>7</sup> When we run after lust and lucre we don't get truth as such. Everything becomes distorted by our hankering for gold and an enjoyable life in this world.

People talk of *maya*—that the world does not really exist. I am not concerned with metaphysical questions, nor was Sri Ramakrishna. But he was very much concerned with the behaviour of men, whom he found motivated by this lust and lucre. Through their prepossessions, men form their own worlds, superimpose them on Brahman and on this external world; then misread the whole thing and create trouble for themselves.

As I told you, Shivanath Sastri criticized Sri Ramakrishna, saying that he had lost his head by thinking too much of God. And what was the latter's retort? 'Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world

---

<sup>7</sup>*Isa Upanishad*, 15.

appears intelligent.<sup>8</sup> Sri Ramakrishna saw that it was not religion that leads one astray, but rather, lust and lucre.

We form societies, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations—for what? For improving the world, making the world better for human living. And what do we do with them? Our selfish considerations deflect our views. We run after things that will be beneficial to our own nations, our own societies, to ourselves, and never think of the world as a whole, never think of others as beings like ourselves, who deserve our consideration.

Strange it is that this poor man, coming from an out-of-the-way village, could declare: 'There are two things in this world—one is *daya* (compassion) and another is *maya*. *Maya* is selfish love for one's own.' He goes further and says: 'Even loving one's own countrymen is *maya*. But loving the whole of humanity, loving the citizens of all countries, is *daya*: active sympathy for others, brotherliness towards others, helpfulness to others.'<sup>9</sup>

That is how Sri Ramakrishna talked. Would you not call him a modern man? —Perhaps much more, better than that, he was much more progressive than modern men are. I have been telling you that he considered men not as so many beasts, so many creatures made only of bone, flesh, and blood; not even as mere working animals or even thinking animals. He considered them to be none other than God in so many forms. In the Upanishads we read: 'Thou art woman, Thou art man; Thou art youth and maiden too. Thou as an old man who totterest along on a staff; it is Thou alone who, when born, assumest diverse forms.'<sup>10</sup> It was God whom Sri Ramakrishna thus saw in everything.

There was one, Hazra, who criticized Sri Ramakrishna, saying, 'You are a saint, a *paramahansa*. You should remain

<sup>8</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 615.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>10</sup>*Svetāsvatara Upanishad*, 4.3.

merged in *samādhi*, absorbed in God. Why do you think of these youngsters—Naren, Rakhhal, and others—who are not even *brāhmanas* but *kshatriya* boys, lower in caste?<sup>11</sup> He also said, 'You think of these young men with the hope of getting some help from them.'

Sri Ramakrishna was very much perplexed. He was so very simple, like a child. He went to the Mother of the Universe, Kali, in the temple, and said 'Here are people criticizing me like that. What do you say to that?' And the reply came, 'You love Naren and Rakhhal not because they are rich, not because they are learned, but because you see Nārāyana, God, in them.' Sri Ramakrishna returned assured and consoled.

Another critic was Naren himself. Sri Ramakrishna returned from the temple [as usual getting his doubts solved by the Mother] and told Naren, 'You rogue! You have been misleading me. I love you not because you are Naren or a young man, because I see Nārāyana in you. The day I shall cease to see Nārāyana in you, I shall not be able to look at your face even.'<sup>12</sup> And to others he said, 'You say that I love these young boys to get something out of them. What can Naren give me, please? He has not even a torn mat to spread for me to sit on. (So poor had Naren and his family become after his father's death that he had not even a simple meal every day.) So what do I expect from them? I see Nārāyana in them. Therefore do I love them, therefore do I talk with them.'

And this was no mere talk. 'Seeing Nārāyana' was a matter of realization. It was not dry philosophy, got from reading different books or learning by talking with intellectuals. Nārāyana was the Reality that Sri Ramakrishna directly realized in his own life. Then only did he talk.

Take the incident of two boatmen quarrelling on the Ganga. Sri Ramakrishna's room faced the river and he could

---

<sup>11</sup>Vide, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, p. 616.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 617.

easily see them. The boatmen started fighting, and one of them slapped the other very smartly on the back. Sri Ramakrishna cried out in pain. A little later came Hriday, his nephew and attendant, and he said, 'Uncle, who has beaten you like that? I see red finger marks on your back.' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Nobody has done it. But when those boatmen were quarrelling, I felt as though I myself had been beaten.'<sup>13</sup> That is seeing God everywhere. That is becoming identified with God everywhere. That was Sri Ramakrishna's realization. And he spoke from that realization only, and not as a philosopher, not as an intellectual. He saw, he realized, that Brahman is everywhere.

Another day somebody was walking on the lawn; Sri Ramakrishna at once told his attendant. 'Go, stop him! I feel as though he were walking on my chest,'<sup>14</sup> It was not a rich man's lawn either: just some newly grown panic grass (*durva*) near the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar; still he felt like that. That is seeing Nārāyana everywhere. And he talked about Nārāyana because he saw Nārāyana in everyone. In his eyes, human dignity was very, very high. He saw everyone as Nārāyana and he expected others to do so.

There was a gentleman, Mahimacharan Chakravarty, who now and then fed the poor. One day he came to Ramakrishna. Not mentioning the fact directly, Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the realization that should inspire such charity. He said to Mahima, 'When feeding people one should think that one is pouring oblations into the very mouth of God.' He was filling in a sort of lacuna in Mahima's life. At another time Sri Ramakrishna asked a rather Europeanized gentleman, 'What is the purpose of life? What do you want to do?' 'Sir, I want to do good to the world.' 'Do good to the world? How big is the world, sir, and how puny are you! Can you really do any good to

---

<sup>13</sup>Vide, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, 1956, p. 262.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 261.

the world? You can serve it. You can only serve Nārāyana who is in the world....<sup>15</sup>

That was giving a new turn to service, to 'doing good to the world'. To others also he often spoke like that, and corrected some wrong views that most of us still have. What are these? There was Sambhunath Mallick, who told Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, I have some money and want to spend it on starting some schools and hospitals.' 'What! Starting schools and hospitals? What is the purpose of life, please? If God came to you, would you ask God for hospitals and schools, or for devotion to His lotus feet? What is the purpose of life?'<sup>16</sup>

Still, Sri Ramakrishna also said, 'It is good to do charity. It is a very good thing, a good use of money, and if moneyed people don't use their money for such purposes, I would say fie on them.'<sup>17</sup>

He wanted money to be well spent, but that people should not forget the real purpose of life. Just this morning I was reading in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that Mahendranath Sarkar (the physician who treated Sri Ramakrishna) came with the intention of doing some good to others, and 'M' (writer of the *Gospel*) told him. 'Sir, if you came to the Kali Temple and, before seeing the Mother, went on distributing doles to the beggars, when would you see Her?'<sup>18</sup> M. was of course only repeating the Master's words.

Nowadays too, we are thinking of improving the world, bettering it, but we are forgetting God altogether. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Is religion only a form of municipal activity? Just cleaning the streets, having them well-lighted, and putting up fine buildings? Should religion end in that alone? Should there not be some direct contact with God?'

---

<sup>15</sup>Vide, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1964, pp. 313-14.

<sup>16</sup>Vide, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 836.

Sri Ramakrishna had it. He realized God and taught society that God must be placed before everything else. Do all kinds of charity, have all other things that you want for the good of society or even for your family or yourself, but when you forget God and run after these things only, you are misusing human life. Sankara says:

‘There are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God—namely, a human birth, the longing for liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.’<sup>19</sup>

We have got the human life. We have also got opportunities to approach great souls. We also have some amount of hankering for God-realization. Let us then not be deflected from our purpose in life by these small considerations. Not, I repeat, that we should not do good to others or do good to the world according to our capacity, but I maintain that it will not do to run after these things only, for name and fame which may often creep in unknowingly. I may be doing good work, very good work, using my money in a good way. But somehow this hankering for name and fame, for becoming well known, becoming a big man in society, may creep in and make me forget God. Sri Ramakrishna cautioned us about that, that always we must remember God and then God alone will be at the basis of all our action. When we forget God, all else is nothing.

Yet through all this, Sri Ramakrishna was still modern. He said, ‘In this Kali-yuga I find people’s minds are preoccupied with the means of getting food.’ He was talking in India where poverty was and is rampant; he was not talking in America. But if he were talking in America, perhaps he would say, ‘We have been multiplying our wants so much and we are so very busy fulfilling these wants that we have no leisure to think of God.’

So what is the way out? It won’t do simply to say, ‘Don’t run after these wants, don’t try to get food.’ As Sri

---

<sup>19</sup>*Vivekacūdāmani*, 3.

Ramakrishna said, long before Karl Marx, 'Empty stomachs and religion go ill together.' People must have food. Their minimum wants have to be supplied; otherwise they can't apply their minds to God.

So, how did Ramakrishna help us in this predicament? Well he, Swamiji (Vivekananda), and others of the modern age knew that people must be taken just where they are, just as they are, and they must be helped to think of God under any circumstance. All cannot be placed in ideal circumstances; that is an impossibility. So, being a modern man, Sri Ramakrishna often said, 'The rites and rituals and duties that are prescribed by the Vedas cannot all be practised in this modern age.' Then what is to be done? He said: 'You have to live in the world with your families. But just change your outlook. Don't think that it is your family, your children; rather think of them as a trust placed in your hands by God. You are doing God's work by feeding them, by serving them. You are just a servant.'

To give you a more concrete example: To Sri Ramakrishna comes an old widow of the Mallick family and she says, 'Sir, when I sit for meditation, my mind does not become concentrated.' Now look at the fun! An old widow, coming to a saint and saying that her mind cannot be concentrated. And where does it go? To her brother's little son! Would not a saint just dismiss her, saying, 'What a funny old lady you are, talking to me like that! Why should your mind go to a child and not to God?' But no. It was Sri Ramakrishna of the modern age, and he said to her 'Very good, if your mind goes to that child, think of that child as the little "Balagopala", as the Boy Krishna, who has come to you in that form.'

The lady accepted the instruction, began to think like that and through that boy did realize Sri Krishna in her life.<sup>20</sup> That is the new lesson, the new outlook, that Sri

---

<sup>20</sup>*Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, p. 343.

Ramakrishna places before us. We have to live in the world as ordinary citizens, but then Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Don't you forget God. If you want to break a jackfruit which has got sticky juice, then what to do? Just smear your hands with oil and then break it; then the juice will not stick to your skin.'

So first get some deep idea, some deep faith, some conceptions about God, and then do your duties in the world. Let the boat float on water, but let not water get into the boat. Live in the world like the lotus leaf, which floats on the water but not a drop of water can cling to it. We are serving God by serving our families and serving our nation and serving our fellowmen. It is God for whom we have been born in this world. It is for God that we live. That must remain predominantly in our mind everywhere and all the time. Then only is life meaningful, not otherwise. This is the lesson that Sri Ramakrishna teaches us. There are other lessons also.

How can human beings really live in peace? The hint has already been given to you. If we think of all of them as nothing but manifestations of God, then only can there be real brotherliness, not otherwise. If we think of people as black and white, intelligent and non-intelligent, or good and bad, etc., then selfishness, the desire to exploit people for our own purposes, will come in. Even the idea that they are God's people, will not take us very far. Because 'God' will be *my* God, the way that I think of God; and God's children will be those people who stick to *my* God alone and not to others' Gods. If we are to deal with humanity as a whole, if we are to expand our sympathies all over the world, then we have to think of one God—or rather of Brahman—who comprises everything, who is everywhere and lives through everybody. That idea of equality through the perception of divinity in all, can really bring peace to this world.

People sometimes say, 'We are afraid of religion; religion brings conflicts.' Well, what does *not* bring conflicts? Do not economic considerations, politics, geographical

considerations, etc., also bring in misunderstanding and conflict? Why then blame only religion?

I give the example of the newly-created Bangladesh. It was originally a part of Pakistan. Muslims separated from India forming Pakistan, to live as better Muslims. Bangladesh was predominantly Muslim, perhaps 80 per cent if not more, and Western Pakistan is all Muslim. Why did they divide? Why did the Western Pakistanis commit murder and brutality and arson in Bangladesh? It was not for religion. It was for something else. It is selfishness that really rules the world, that really spoils the world, and not religion.

Some people say, 'You can live better by giving up religion.' Well, don't you find that in America people have improved themselves along with their religion? Did not the ancient worlds, India and Greece and Rome, progress along with their religions? It is all false philosophy, all false theories that are being thrust on us by selfish people, by scheming, misleading politicians. It is not religion that spoils people. Religion is meant for bettering people, for improving their minds and making society better to live in. Religion stands for morality. Religion stands for God-realization. How can it make people worse? To say that it does is false philosophy taught in the name of religion.

Then again, as human beings we have our own aptitudes, our own capacities, our own sentiments. Would you bring us all together under the same canopy and make us live the same life, all of us? Well, that is just not possible. It never can be. We talk of some sort of democracy in religion—that all will move in a certain way, dress in a certain way, go to a certain church at a certain time, and pray in the very same way. But then, when prayer is going on, where are their minds? Somewhere in the playground, maybe. Somewhere with their family, maybe. Are they all meditating? Are they all praying? Well, it cannot be. That sort of democracy will lead us nowhere. You can't fit the same coat on Tom, Dick and Harry. Each one has to have his own choice. It is said in one of the hymns to Shiva:

People have different tastes. And according to their different tastes, they call on God in their different ways. Just like rivers flowing into the same sea, people, in spite of the differences in their tastes, all come to God.<sup>21</sup>

That is the idea of harmony preached by Sri Ramakrishna. Again I say, it is not a philosophy, not an intellectual thing got by reading books, or cogitating on the matter, but a felt reality, a realized truth that he places before us. He practised the different religions and found that they all led to the same goal, to the same God. Only after directly realizing the goal did he talk about it. And it was not he who talked, mind you. Again and again he says: 'It is not I. I am just an instrument in the hands of my Mother. It is the Mother talking through me. It is the Mother who has revealed this idea of harmony, of living together in spite of our differences.'

In politics nowadays they talk of coexistence. They have coined a word and are trying to adopt it. It is a good thing. But they are failing just because of their selfish considerations, just because of their petty politics. If they meant real coexistence, as they declare, well, that would be a practical application of this theory of harmony that Sri Ramakrishna has taught us. It is through this alone, through unity in spite of diversities, that we can really pave the way for peace in the world.

But Sri Ramakrishna has also taught us another thing, and it is this: If you want to be religious, then be sincere, be earnest be diligent. It won't do to live on the surface and just talk about these things.

Sri Ramakrishna once went to the Brahmo Samaj, the society of Keshab Chandra Sen. Keshab was delivering a sermon and he said, 'God, please grant us this: that we may

---

<sup>21</sup>Adapted from *Siva-Mahimnah-Stotram*, 7.

dive deep into the current of devotion, never to come out again.' Sri Ramakrishna heard it and then in his humorous way he said: 'Look here, Keshab! If you dive deep and never come out, then what will happen to those ladies behind the screen? [In those days our womenfolk in India wouldn't come out before men. They lived mostly behind screens.] What will happen to them? So do one thing: you dive now and then, and come out now and then and mix with them. That way you can live.'<sup>22</sup>

Religious leaders in those days did not really believe in direct spiritual realization, in really diving deep, in really meditating on God, as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'in your mind, in a corner of your house, or in a forest—not showing your spirituality to others.' But still they talked big. They believed in lecturing on religion whether they were actually religious themselves or not. And they believed in organizing societies and preaching in the name of religion. To such Sri Ramakrishna said, 'All these things will not carry you very far. If you are commissioned by God, then only will all these things be effective, not otherwise.'

He emphasized that if we want to be religious, we should not live just on the surface; we should not even think of organizing or making others religious. First, let us ourselves be religious. If you can light your own lamp, a hundred more lamps can be lighted from it. If your lamp itself has no flame in it, with what will you light others? If the salt has lost its savour, with what will it be salted? That is the question Sri Ramakrishna has put before us, and his answer is clear.

[Originally delivered as a talk at the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, on 22 October 1972.]

---

<sup>22</sup>Vide, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 511.

## THE MESSAGE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Bhuteshananda

The message of Sri Ramakrishna is so vast and deep that it is impossible to expound it in detail. I can only touch upon a few salient points of it here. Whatever fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna or whatever he did was for the good of the world. Therefore I believe that whatever of his teachings that I share with you will be helpful to you in your life.

From the early days of his life Sri Ramakrishna was mad after God. God realization was his only concern in life, other things were absolutely secondary for him. He said, 'Verily, I tell you, I know nothing but God.' He lived for God realization; however, he wished to have this realization not for his own enjoyment but for the joy of sharing it with others. Let me give you an illustration. One day he was in a mood of deep samadhi. The mood was persisting but he was trying to keep it under control. When a man enters samadhi and gets completely absorbed in God, it is impossible for him to communicate with others. So Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother of the universe, 'O Mother, do not make me forgetful of the external world. I want to talk to the devotees.' Ordinary people cannot understand the deep significance of this utterance. Samadhi is a state which all followers of spiritual life aspire for; it is the culmination of the pursuit of spiritual life. For Sri Ramakrishna samadhi had become natural and habitual. But when he was in the company of devotees, he tried to avoid getting absorbed in samadhi lest he should forget the world and deprive the people assembled before him of the great truth which he was eager to share with them. He was an unending fountain of the eternal wisdom derived from his various experiences of the ultimate Reality. At the same time, he was also a keen observer of the external world when he was not absorbed in samadhi.

There are some points that Sri Ramakrishna particularly emphasized. First, according to him God realization is the only aim of human life. Without God realization everything else is incomplete, and with God realization, nothing more remains to be attained here or hereafter. Now, what did Sri Ramakrishna mean by God realization? To put it briefly, it means an intuitive experience of the ultimate Ground of all existence in which the seer and the seen become one. God realization does not merely mean the vision of various divine forms, nor does it mean having some higher feelings which may be described by different people in different ways. Complete absorption of the individual self in the Absolute: that is what Sri Ramakrishna meant by God realization. As it has been beautifully described in the Upanishads: 'Just as pure water falling into a vast sheet of pure water becomes one with it, so also the self of a contemplative man who has realized God becomes one with God.'<sup>1</sup> That is to say, in that state the individual ceases to be an individual any more. He is not lost; rather, he himself becomes the Absolute. This experience of unity is the real meaning of God realization. However, there are various other forms of spiritual realization, and Sri Ramakrishna accepted all of them. That was the catholicity and breadth of vision that Sri Ramakrishna had about God realization.

The second salient message of Sri Ramakrishna is that not only should we have that realization in our soul, but we should also share it with others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there were some people who, when they got anything good to eat, would eat it all themselves, wipe their lips, and remain mum. They had no wish to share it with others. Sri Ramakrishna condemned such an attitude. The great realization that one achieves in the spiritual path has to be shared with others, only then will life attain full maturity. By sharing that realization with others, by helping

---

<sup>1</sup>*Katha-Upanishad* 4.14.

others to reach the same experience, our experience becomes fulfilled in the real sense of the term. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked his dearest disciple Narendra (who later on became Swami Vivekananda) about his goal in life. Narendra replied: 'It is my desire to remain absorbed in Samadhi continually for three or four days, only once in a while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food.' Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'You are a small-minded person. There is a state even higher than that, "All that exists art Thou": it is you who sing that song.'<sup>2</sup> The Master further said that he wanted him to be like a huge banyan tree with its branches spread all around giving shelter to thousands of weary travellers. This incident shows the general trend of Sri Ramakrishna's thought. He himself took great pains to disseminate spiritual ideas among the people and to help them in pursuing the highest goal. If the first half of his life was spent in gathering the treasures of spiritual experience, its second half was spent in sharing that wealth with other people.

We now come to the third message of Sri Ramakrishna. As he put it, *yato mat, tato path*, 'As many minds, so many paths.' All paths lead to the ultimate goal of God realization. This was not a mere intellectual conviction but a fact that he himself had experienced through the pursuit of different religious paths. He was a great experimenter in this respect. After he had had God realization in one way, he wanted to know how other people followed their paths, how they reached the goal and what that goal might be. So he followed each path, paying scrupulous attention to all the injunctions and traditions concerning it. And he invariably found that every path led to the same goal, namely, God realization. The realization itself is something incommunicable, because it is one's own innermost experience

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, revised edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), vol. 1, p. 162.

which is beyond the reach of words. But as far as words would go, he tried to describe his experiences in his own unique way, being endowed with all the knowledge of the different paths. He can thus be of immense help to the followers of different paths. That is the unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the history of world religions we never find any teacher doing spiritual experiments in the manner Sri Ramakrishna did. We find expressions of great catholicity in the scriptures of Hinduism, and perhaps of other religions as well. The ancient Vedas declare: 'Truth is one: sages call It by various names' (*ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*). Divine Incarnations and prophets have made similar statements. But history has no record that any of these great teachers actually practised the different paths and ultimately realized the same goal through each of them. As far as we know, Sri Ramakrishna alone did it, and this is what makes his life unique. The catholicity that he taught was not just an expression of a broad mind or philosophical outlook but had a deep experiential content. It was one of the most valuable experiences that he gained through his experiments. When he spoke of other paths, it was about his own experiences of those paths that he spoke. He respected every path and never criticized any path.

Tremendous faith is necessary for strict adherence to a particular path to the end. We must have unflinching faith in the goal. But if we can have equal respect for the paths that others are following, it is so much better. Sri Ramakrishna did not ask us to accept the truth of the harmony of all paths even on the basis of his own experiments. Rather he asked us to go on experimenting on our path as well as on other paths. He has taught us not to talk of the superiority or inferiority of any path before we are in a position to evaluate properly the worth of these paths. If we can follow the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, we can look upon the followers of different paths as fellow-travellers to the same goal as ours. This message of Sri Ramakrishna is of utmost

importance particularly in these days of communal hatred and conflict. It is usually the lack of proper understanding of your own religion that makes you pass judgement on other religions. Have respect for other faiths if you can, otherwise do not pass any judgement. What is really important is sincerity. Regarding this Sri Ramakrishna said:

Whatever path you follow—whether you are a Hindu, a Mussalman, a Christian, a Shakta, a Vaishnava or a Brahmo—the vital point is aspiration. God is our Inner Guide. It doesn't matter if you take a wrong path—only you must have longing for Him. He Himself will put you on the right path.<sup>3</sup>

The grace of God falls alike on all His children, learned and illiterate—whoever longs for Him. The father has the same love for all his children. Suppose a father has five children. One calls him 'Bābā', some 'Bā', and some 'Pā'. These last cannot pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those who address him as 'Bābā' more than those who call him 'Pā'? The father knows that these last are simply too young to say 'Bābā' correctly.<sup>4</sup>

Maybe, a person is not able to follow the right path; even then, if he is sincere to the backbone, God will see and guide him along that path until he reaches the goal. This is Sri Ramakrishna's view on different faiths. The differences between different religions can be eliminated, and all communal conflicts can be resolved if we take this teaching of Sri Ramakrishna seriously. Only then can we really be humble and tolerant and able to accept the different paths

---

<sup>3</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center, 1942), p. 673.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 673.

as equally valid. This kind of humility born of introspection is of utmost importance in our lives today.

For God realization we must identify ourselves with spiritual life only, and everything else should be regarded as secondary. We should concentrate all our energies in a systematic manner towards that goal which is God. This earnestness, this one-pointedness born of a living faith in one's goal, is absolutely necessary for progress in spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna never said that spiritual life must be pursued in one uniform way. He said that there is infinite variation in human temperament, and so there must be variety in the paths; only this can enable all people to reach the goal. If you rigidly insist on one path only, most of the people will have to go without spiritual life. This is absurd, and should never be done. God has created the universe in multiple ways with an infinite variety of forms. Similarly God has created various paths for the realization of the highest Truth so that everybody may find a path suitable to him. This is the simple understanding that Sri Ramakrishna insisted upon. He wanted to make spiritual life natural to everybody and he taught his disciples never to try to impose their own ideas on anybody.

Once Swami Vivekananda, who had already accumulated sufficient spiritual power, wanted to test it by transmitting it to one of his brother-disciples. He did it and the result was that the brother-disciple to whom his power was transmitted underwent a complete change. The brother-disciple had originally been following the path of duality, that is, maintaining the relationship of the worshipper and the worshipped with God. But when Swamiji transmitted his power to him, he became immersed in the idea of the unity of the universe and the soul's identity with God. Sri Ramakrishna called Swami Vivekananda and said: 'What is this?... Don't you see what harm you have done to him by injecting your attitude of mind into him? He has been progressing well till now with a particular mental attitude, the whole of which has now been destroyed.... What is

done is done. Don't act so thoughtlessly from now on. The boy, however, is lucky that greater harm has not befallen him.<sup>5</sup> Swamiji remembered this teaching throughout his life, and emphasized it in several of his lectures.

Sri Ramakrishna was a man of complete renunciation which he regarded as a spiritual aspirant's most valuable asset. 'Through renunciation alone have people attained immortality', says the Upanishad.<sup>6</sup> Sri Ramakrishna used to say, '*Tyāg chādā kichu habe nā*—Nothing can be attained without whole-hearted renunciation.' But at the same time, Sri Ramakrishna said that renunciation did not mean the same thing to everybody. A monk who has renounced worldly life can renounce inwardly as well as outwardly. However, a householder cannot do that, and for him it will be enough if he practises renunciation only inwardly. He can meet the requirements of normal social life and discharge his duties towards his family and society. But at the same time he must have complete detachment in his mind. Detachment is what renunciation really means. It should be noted that this sort of division of renunciation into 'outer' and 'inner' does not reduce the importance of either. Inner renunciation alone is not sufficient for a sannyasin. He is supposed to uphold the example of total renunciation to the world, and so he has to be a man of renunciation inwardly as well as outwardly. A householder need not renounce externally but he must practise internal renunciation. This is another important message of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna knew that all people are not equally anxious for God realization. He divided mankind into four groups: those who live in bondage, those who are trying to get rid of that bondage, those who have achieved freedom

---

<sup>5</sup>*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by His Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), vol. 1, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup>*Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad* 12.14.

from bondage, and those who never get involved in bondage but remain ever free. Explaining this classification, he said:

Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look, there goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.<sup>7</sup>

Most people are in bondage and remain ignorant of the fact. A disciple asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, is there no way out for such people?' The Master at once replied with great emphasis, 'Certainly, there is.' He then pointed out the different ways open to bound souls.<sup>8</sup> What are these ways? Taking God's name, keeping the company of holy men, constantly thinking of God, and now and then retiring into solitude. It is good to get away, once in a while, from your usual environment, where people remain entangled in worldliness, and think about God in solitude. That way you will learn to cultivate dispassion towards the world as well as an intense desire for God realization. Thus Sri

---

<sup>7</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

Ramakrishna has given hope to the people who are supposed to be always in bondage.

Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest optimist anyone can think of. He never thought that a person could be doomed for ever. There is always hope for everybody; he spoke only about that hope and never had a word of condemnation for anyone. Sri Ramakrishna saw even in the worst sinner the living presence of God. He recognized potential divinity and the latent power to manifest it in all people, only the sinner and the ignorant are not aware of it. Inner struggle is necessary to become aware that you have the possibility, the innate capacity, to realize your ultimate goal. This consciousness of the goal will make you constantly discontented wherever you may be, so much so that you can never be at peace until you have reached the goal. Sri Ramakrishna holds out the hope of salvation to everybody. For him there is no such thing as eternal damnation, because God resides in every being. There cannot be a being in whom God is not, in whom Divinity is not hiding itself, as it were, and waiting for its expression. Sri Ramakrishna asked people never to think of their sins but to think of the glories of God and of the way they might realize Him, and to have abiding faith in the ultimate victory of spiritual struggle. There is not a single soul for whom there is no ray of hope, for whom there is no prospect of God realization. This boundless faith in man is a most striking feature of Sri Ramakrishna's message. He was always a prophet of hope, a prophet of the ultimate victory of good over evil. Indeed, this is to be considered the main message of Sri Ramakrishna. The message of the Master is not meant only for any particular sect or particular religion. It is meant for everybody who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Sri Ramakrishna spread broadcast the idea that, wherever you may be, the Divine Spirit is throbbing in you and waiting for an opportunity to manifest through you. You are all the children of God. Not only that, you are simply the essence of God. Only the veil of ignorance that covers

the soul has to be removed, and the inner light will shine at once. Suppose, says Sri Ramakrishna, there is a room which has been dark for a thousand years. It now needs only the striking of a match for the darkness to go. It goes at once; it does not go bit by bit, although the darkness had been there for a thousand years. But that does not matter. It is only a dream; he has been dreaming that he is doomed. He has to be awakened from that bad dream. Just shake him, help him to break the dream. Then he will awaken and realize that the experience of the state of downfall as merely a bad dream, and the he is eternally free.

Sri Ramakrishna's message gives you hope, encouragement and an immense amount of inspiration so that you never feel satisfied with the condition in which you are. It makes you feel the 'divine discontent' and yearn to go ahead. Never remain satisfied with where you are; go ahead, and stop not till the goal is reached, says Sri Ramakrishna. To illustrate this point he gave a fine parable:

A woodcutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' he obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandalwood trees (by selling which he got a lot of money). After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine and, next, mines of diamond and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich.<sup>9</sup>

The idea is that we should not feel satisfied if we get some experience of joy in our pursuit of spiritual life. Spiritual life has endless possibilities. The more we advance, the higher will be our experience. And the higher our experience, the greater will be our ability to solve our problems and the more we will find peace and joy in life. This spiritual quest must go on until our death. Only when

---

<sup>9</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 109.

we completely merge ourselves in the Absolute and cease to be individuals, and become free from all limitations, can we claim to have achieved the goal of life. We have to reach that one ultimate Reality which is the Absolute, without which nothing exists and beyond which there is nothing more to be attained, as the Gita says.<sup>10</sup>

It is the ultimate goal which we have to seek, follow without wavering, without slackening our pace of enquiry, undeterred by any circumstances. Whatever that state may be the ultimate experience is beyond words. It is so deep and transcendent that it cannot be communicated through words. In fact, the question of communicating it does not even arise because, in that state, other people cease to be separate entities. You become the whole world, and the sole expression of that one ultimate Reality. That is the goal we have to seek. This goal may be experienced by people in different ways; do not be confused by that. Take it for granted that there are different kinds of experience because of the differences of the experiencing mind. But ultimately all these experiences are meant to lead you towards the ultimate goal—the realization of infinite, absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, *sat-cit-ānanda*. Beyond this no attempt has been made in the scriptures to describe the ultimate goal. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that everything in the world had been defiled by the mouth but Brahman alone had not been defiled in that way. All the knowledge that people boast of is in fact different kinds of ignorance, because they fall short of the ultimate Truth. True knowledge is that which removes all distinctions between you and the ultimate Reality. It is attained through complete purification of the mind.

I pray to Sri Ramakrishna that through his blessings we may all proceed towards the same goal, show respect towards others who are following different paths, be

---

<sup>10</sup>*Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6.22.

considerate towards those who remain forgetful of God, and feel it our duty to help them get rid of their worldly dream.

[Talk delivered at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama,  
Bangalore on 16 February 1986]

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
AND THE TIMES WE LIVE IN**  
Swami Ananyananda

*The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight, under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of the Hindu religion. He showed by his life what the rishis and avataras really wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realization. This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life, and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations.*

—Swami Vivekananda

I

It is a recurrent phenomenon in the religious history of nations that whenever they are caught in the voyage of life by storms of materialistic forces, and are forced to drift aimlessly along, having lost their track, a pathfinder appears on the scene. He rescues them from imminent danger and serves as their beacon light, showing them the right course and directing them along the path of progress and perfection in tune with their cultural and spiritual heritage.

In the case of India, this phenomenon has become so characteristic that her national mind unquestionably believes in its recurrence whenever and wherever there is need for such a rescue. Through the countless centuries of her colourful history, time and again such beacon lights, men of God, have appeared on her sacred soil to lead the nation on the path of godliness and righteousness. The belief has become so deep-rooted in the consciousness of her people that whenever a morbid and despondent situation arises, seriously affecting the spiritual life of the nation, they look up to the Divine Dispenser, recalling His unfailing promise, and look forward in all earnestness to the advent of a deliverer, who will lift them out of the morass

into which they have fallen. Such divine help has always come in the past, and will always come in the future.

India, in the mid-nineteenth century, stood in need of a thorough spiritual renaissance. It was a dire need. The nation was adrift. The glare of the materialistic way of life was becoming too strong to resist. The spiritual conscience of the nation became dormant and torpid, and agnosticism and scepticism began to spread their dreadful tentacles on the national mind like an octopus. The precious spiritual heritage of the nation was being lost sight of, and a blind imitation of ways quite alien to Indian spirit and culture was noticeable all over the land. In such a situation, there was the urgent necessity, a national desideratum, for one who would embody the highest and the best in the spiritual traditions of the country and lead her along the path of divine life and spiritual awareness.

That historic need was fulfilled in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna, who directed the course of our national life into healthy channels and restored the soul of India in its pristine purity to its proper place and position. In his own life of strenuous spiritual struggles and rare and extraordinary realizations, he rediscovered the ancient values of our hoary heritage and reinstated them in the heart of India. Gathering up into himself in a vast sweep, the spiritual forces of the land accumulated for centuries, and living an uncommon life of unbroken divine consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna appeared on the crest of a mighty wave that swept over this extensive country, carrying away all the dirt and squalor and watering her fertile soil with fresh waters of spirituality, so that a healthy and bounteous crop of men and women of character, deeply spiritual and divinely inspired, might grow on this sacred land of ours.

Referring to the advent of Sri Ramakrishna on the Indian scene and its appropriateness to the demands of the time, Swami Vivekananda, his foremost disciple who carried his message to different parts of the world, said: 'The time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of

both this head and heart; the time was ripe for one to be born, who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand, brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India, but outside of India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence. Such a man was born....The time was ripe; it was necessary that such a man should be born, and he came.'

In these words of Swami Vivekananda, we get a clear idea of the significance of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in relation not only to the new awakening that has dawned on the national consciousness of India, but also to the new spirit of fellowship, amity, and understanding that is growing among the different sections of humanity on the basis of their spiritual oneness.

During the past seventy-odd years, the message of Sri Ramakrishna has made its way to the different corners of the globe, silently in the typically Indian way, and the aura of his divine personality has attracted the minds of hundreds and thousands of men and women not only in India, but in other countries as well, bringing about a thorough spiritual transformation in their individual lives. Sri Ramakrishna is literally worshipped by them today as a Godman, as the goal of their spiritual aspirations.

## II

Christopher Isherwood, in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, calls him a 'phenomenon', and adds further: 'A phenomenon is often something *extraordinary* and *mysterious*. Ramakrishna was extraordinary and mysterious; most of all

to those who were best fitted to understand him. A phenomenon is always a fact, an object of experience.'

Yes, Sri Ramakrishna was extraordinary and mysterious—extraordinary in the sense that his life throughout presents characteristics, moods, and attitudes quite out of the ordinary, and mysterious in the sense that his whole life was profoundly spiritual and divinely inspired. Not merely in his day-to-day activities was he extraordinary, but even as a spiritual *sādhaka*, when he undertook diverse forms of spiritual disciplines, and later as a teacher of men, he was unique. There is the touch of this extraordinary character even in his message, for as Swami Vivekananda says: 'Other teachers 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.'

That Sri Ramakrishna was marked out for a divine mission on earth was discernible even from his early life. In the many incidents of his life both in infancy and boyhood at his village home, as well as in his life at Dakshineswar, where he was God-intoxicated, we notice an uncommon characteristic throughout. As a mere boy, while his friends were busy with the normal playthings appropriate to their age, he was found to be busy making images of gods and goddesses and practising meditation and worship, or reading to the simple-hearted villagers devotional stories from the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata*, and similar books. While his young friends went to school to learn the three R's, which are the accepted means of earning a livelihood in our workaday world, this precocious youth saw through the hollowness of this pursuit, and fought shy of the 'bread-winning education'. Even at that tender age, he became convinced that the aim of all secular education was only the advancement of the material aspects of life. His mental constitution and spiritual aspiration revolted against that kind of learning, and he finally resolved to give up such a

pursuit altogether and devote himself entirely to the quest of spiritual truth.

We would refer here to a few events in young Gadadhar's (that was the name given to him by his parents) life in his native village, which indicate not only his sensitiveness to things spiritual but also indicate the highly advanced state of his mind. At the tender age of six, Gadadhar had an extraordinary spiritual experience. We shall describe it in his own words: 'One morning, I took some parched rice in a small basket, and was eating it while walking on the narrow ridges of paddy fields. It was the month of *Jyaistha* or *Āsādhā* (spring). There appeared in one part of the sky a beautiful black cloud charged with rain; I was looking at it and eating the rice. Very soon, the cloud covered almost the whole sky, when a flock of milk-white cranes flew against that black cloud. It looked so beautiful that I became very soon absorbed in an extraordinary mood. Such a state came on me that my external consciousness was lost. I fell down, and the rice got scattered near the ridge. People saw it and carried me home. This was the first time that I lost external consciousness in *bhāva-samādhi*.'

The second time he had a similar spiritual experience was when he was eight years old, and the occasion was a visit to the shrine of Viśālākṣī at Anur, a village two miles north of Kamarpukur. He had accompanied a group of women devotees from his village, who were going there to offer worship to Mother Viśālākṣī. There on the way, as he was singing the glory of the goddess, he suddenly 'stopped singing; his body and limbs became stiff and numb. Floods of tears flowed incessantly from his eyes.' A short time passed this way. One of the ladies in the group, Prasanna, who was a person of exceptional insight, correctly guessed that an ecstatic influence of the goddess had come over this extraordinary boy, and suggested that her companions take the sacred name of the goddess in all earnestness and concentration of mind. No sooner had they uttered the name of the goddess a few times, than the face of Gadadhar

brightened, a sweet smile playing on it, and he regained external consciousness and gradually returned to the normal state.

On yet another occasion, in his boyhood, he had an exalted spiritual experience. That was on the sacred night of Shivarātri, when he was requested to play the role of Shiva in a religious drama. Originally, he was not to take part in the drama, but as the boy who was to play Shiva fell sick, Gadadhar was persuaded to substitute for him. He would have preferred to stay and worship Shiva that night in his own home, but he yielded to the importunities of his friends and agreed to play the role of Shiva. So they helped him to put on the makeup of Shiva. 'His hair was matted, his body sprinkled with ashes, the monk's rosary hung round his neck. He mounted the stage with slow, sedate steps and stood there motionless. At the sight of him, the audience was strangely moved and awed; for the boy's face wore a smile of extraordinary beauty, and his gaze was fixed as if in profound meditation....Gadadhar continued to stand there without moving, and now it was seen that tears were streaming from his eyes.' He appeared to have lost all external consciousness. The drama, of course, came to a stop, the audience dispersed. Gadadhar was carried home, and he returned to the normal state only the following morning.

We have referred in some detail to these three notable events in Sri Ramakrishna's early life only to show the peculiar characteristic of his mental and spiritual make-up. This flowered into full bloom when he went to the Kālī temple at Dakshineswar, where he spent practically the rest of his life giving his spiritual message to this grief-stricken and distracted world.

### III

At Dakshineswar, we see him first as a priest at the Kālī temple. What an extraordinary priest! From the way Sri

Ramakrishna conducted the worship of the Divine Mother, priesthood itself was given a new significance. To Sri Ramakrishna, whose spirit was ever in quest of truth, the one idea that was uppermost while doing the worship was: Is there anything behind this image? Is it true that there is a Blissful Mother in the universe? Is it true that She lives and guides the universe? Or is it all a dream? Is there any reality in religion?

The idea of having the vision of the Divine Mother possessed his mind so completely that, day after day, he would weep and say: 'Mother, is it true that Thou existest, or is it all poetry?' As the urge for God-realization became more and more intense, he lost all other interest in life. His mind was concentrated on the one idea of the vision of the Divine Mother. Nothing else mattered; even life itself became void of any meaning without the vision of the Blissful Mother. He would rather put an end to this miserable existence, if it were to continue without the vision of God. So one day, feeling most miserable for not having had the vision of the Mother, he rushed towards the sword that was in the shrine of Kālī, with the idea of putting an end to his life with it. And what happened then is best described in his own words: 'It was as if houses, doors, temples, and all other things vanished altogether, as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was a boundless, infinite, conscious sea of light! However far and in whatever direction I looked, I found a continuous succession of effulgent waves coming forward, raging and storming from all sides with great speed. Very soon, they fell on me and made me sink to the unknown bottom. I panted, struggled, and fell unconscious. But in my heart of hearts, there was a flowing current of intense bliss, never experienced before, and I had the immediate knowledge of the Light that was the Mother.'

This vision of the Divine Mother opened the flood-gates of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual reservoir, and thenceforth, his life was ever tuned to a divine presence which worked and spoke through his deeds and words. After this, a series of

diverse *sāadhanās* followed—an extraordinary phenomenon, again, in the life of Sri Ramakrishna—into the details of which we shall not enter here. Suffice it to say that the Shākta, Vaishnava, and several other forms of *sādhana*, which are found in the fold of Hinduism itself, were undertaken one after another, and through each of the paths he reached the goal in an extraordinarily short time. Not merely the various paths of the religion in which he was born, but even the religions that came to India from outside, like Christianity and Islam, he practised with all the earnestness of a seeker. Perfect *sādhaka* that he was, his progress was quick and the results were achieved in a remarkably short time. In all of them, he discovered that the selfsame Godhead was at the journey's end and that all religions were basically one. We also notice the extraordinary character of his spiritual life in another way. To begin with, he started as a *bhakta* of the Divine Mother, a simple-hearted child on the lap of the Mother, and reached his spiritual consummation when he attained *nirvikalpa samādhi* under the tutelage of Tota Puri. The range was vast, and in between he practised the various *bhāvas* and *mārgas* that are enumerated in our sacred scriptures. Thus throughout his life, at all stages, in all moments, and in various moods and attitudes, his mind was ever attuned to God, and he constantly enjoyed the bliss of divine presence.

#### IV

Having pointed out in the foregoing paragraphs the extraordinary character of Sri Ramakrishna's life and spiritual realization, we now turn to his message which has a direct bearing on the times we live in—we mean its implications not only in the lives of individuals and groups of people in a society, but even in the wider sphere of interrelationship and coexistence among different communities and nations.

In the vast landscape of his lofty teachings, all of which aim at bringing man nearer to God, there are three points

which stand out most prominently. The first of these concerns man's personal life and urges him to discover the divine essence that is latent in every being. The second relates to the mutual relationship between man and man in daily life. And, thirdly, there is a message which has direct application in the international sphere.

To consider the last first. By practising the various religions and experiencing the truth underlying them all, Sri Ramakrishna proclaimed the fundamental unity of all religions. This is his grand message to the world at large, which is torn by conflicts and dissensions and separated by high walls of sectarian dogmas. Its implications are far-reaching, and touch not only the religious realm, but other spheres as well. That is, that not only all religions, in essence, are one, but mankind too is essentially one, whatever differences there may be in the outer forms of life of different groups of people, in the language they speak, or in the mode of socio-political structure of their respective societies. In other words, whatever nationality one may profess, whatever political ideology one may uphold, whatever may be the colour of one's skin, whether men belong to the so-called advanced countries or live in the so-called backward and under-developed countries, in its essence humanity is one, as everywhere it has the same divine basis. As all religions are basically one, all men, through whom those religions find expression, are basically one, too. As it is foolish and unwise to fight in the name of one religion against another, so too, is it foolish and unwise for one section of people to fight against another section in the name of race, nationality, or a particular social or political ideology.

Diversity is the plan of nature. Nature wants to enjoy manifoldness, and so she has done away with monotonous uniformity. But this variety springs from unity, which is one and universal. While diversity is a state of flux, unity remains unchanged, like the unchanging screen on which an ever-changing motion picture depicts diverse emotions and

characters in multi-coloured forms and many situations. This is the profound significance of Sri Ramakrishna's message of the synthesis of all religions. This synthesis is to extend to all the spheres of human activity, and is not simply restricted to the religious. From such a synthetic outlook will flow mutual appreciation of social, cultural, and spiritual values between different sections of humanity, ushering in an era of respect, trust, fellowship, and co-operation in their struggle not only to achieve a happy life on the socio-economic plane, but also to achieve success in their spiritual life.

The second legacy that Sri Ramakrishna has left us is an immense spiritual force on the social plane: his message of service to man, of seeing God in him. 'If you wish to find God,' he said 'serve man, knowing him to be the veritable manifestation of God.' By his realization of the unity of all existence, Sri Ramakrishna had come to feel the presence of the Divine in all beings. Nay, everything was divine in itself, everything was of the form of *Satcidānanda*. To him there was nothing that was not worthy of adoration. So one day at Dakshineswar, when some people were talking of the Vaishnava teaching of compassion to all beings, he at once fell into a deep spiritual mood. Coming back to a semi-conscious state afterwards, he said to himself: 'Compassion to creatures! Compassion to creatures! Thou fool, thou to show compassion to others? Who art thou to show compassion? No. It cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognizing him to be the veritable manifestation of God—*Śiva jñāne jīve seva.*'

Significant words are these. Referring to these words of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, who was present there on the occasion, said: 'What a wonderful light have I discovered in those words of the Master! They throw an altogether new light upon the path of devotion. By realizing Him in and through all beings and serving Him through humanity, the devotee acquires real devotion. The embodied being cannot remain even for a minute without doing

any work. All his activities should be directed to the service of man, the manifestation of God on earth, and this will accelerate his progress towards the goal. However, if it be the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, brahmin and the pariah.' Ever since these words were uttered, we know how that power of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda has been directly and indirectly influencing our national life, leading our country by a new path of self-realization and setting before the world an ideal as to how all the activities of a nation, of a society, of a family, or of an individual can be completely spiritualized.

Finally, what is Sri Ramakrishna's message concerning man's personal spiritual life? In this respect, his own life and realizations, and his attitude to life in general, are the unfailing inspiration to every man struggling to achieve spiritual success. Sri Ramakrishna's life was the complete antithesis of the modern materialistic attitude to life. To him God alone was real. Only on the background of God, everything else had value or meaning. Otherwise, it was of no consequence. In his own characteristic way, he would say that any number of zeros put side by side have no value, but if the numeral 1 precedes the zeros, they get their value. Similarly, everything in this world is like a zero, and God is the numeral 1. If that 1 is not there, the zeros are of no consequence.

The purpose of human life, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is God-realization. Throughout the period of his spiritual ministrations, this was the burden of his teaching to all those that flocked to him seeking spiritual light and guidance. He would say: 'Live in the world like a maid-servant in a rich man's house. She performs all the household duties, brings up her master's child, and speaks of him as 'my Hari'. But in her heart, she knows quite well that neither the house nor the child belongs to her. She performs all her duties, but just the same her mind dwells in her

native village. Likewise, do your worldly duties, but fix your mind on God and know that house, family, and son do not really belong to you; they are God's. You are only His servant.'

To develop this detached attitude of mind, turning it away from lust and gold, and overcoming all the impediments, both internal and external that confront us on our spiritual path, we have to struggle hard by cultivating real devotion to God in all earnestness. Sri Ramakrishna would say that if we proceed one step towards God in all sincerity, God will come towards us sixteen steps. He demonstrated this truth in his own life; and all through his life, his one endeavour was not merely to take men nearer to God, but to bring God also nearer to man. To lift man to God-consciousness was, then, the mission of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, whether it was in the individual's own personal life or in the wider spheres of communities or nations. God is the fundamental truth behind the world, and the goal of man is to realize God.

The malaise of the times we live in is of the spirit. If humanity is to survive the danger that it has brought about by following a purely materialistic way of life, there should be an immediate readjustment on the spiritual plane. The modern mood and temper must undergo a thorough transformation, and man must begin to appreciate spiritual values and try to live up to them. To those who do seek them, Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary life of unbroken divine communion will be a shining example, and his words coming from deep spiritual realizations will be their constant inspiration.

If the life of Sri Ramakrishna has any message to give to the times we live in, it is this, that man should turn away from his material pursuits and should set out on the spiritual path and seek God, who is the source of all happiness, joy, and peace.

## THE MODERNITY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S RELIGION

Swami Smaranananda

To many people the idea of being modern is synonymous with the rejection of religion and all that is associated with it. Modernity is, to some others, a vague notion that is associated with rejecting the past and living a fashionable, snobbish life. In India, modernism is still an undefined concept. The modern age which began, in a sense, with the Industrial Revolution has taken rapid strides in the twentieth century. Today we are living in a world where technology is impinging more and more on social and individual life. In spite of this fact, India with a vast illiterate population, is at once associated with three ages: the ancient, the medieval and the modern.

Broadly speaking, the modern age has three characteristics: the spirit of scientific enquiry, humanism, and democracy; individual liberty; and the idea of collective security leading to universalism as different from nationalism. Basic to these characteristics has been the concept of continual progress, leading to an evolutive and dynamic life, making man go constantly in search of new modes of enjoyment, new time-saving devices, fresh conquests of the secrets of nature. With all, in every country, there is a tendency to seek constant change in an ever-changing world and to abhor a static condition.

If we look at Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings in the light of the foregoing outline of modern trends, we will find that his insight into the nature of man is remarkable. His prophetic vision had, as it were, anticipated the problems of modern man and given him solutions. No doubt, the solutions are necessarily in the background of man's eternal purpose—that of realizing his divine nature. Of course, this goal itself is liable of be questioned by the modern man. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna the goal was a self-evident

truth that had been realized by him through spiritual experience, and what was needed was an adjustment of modern man's life to this goal. How this can be done is illustrated by incidents in Sri Ramakrishna's own life of spiritual practices and realizations.

This is not surprising if we remember that Sri Ramakrishna's guiding light is meant for modern times. He came at a time which was, as it were, the twilight between the medieval and modern ages in India. Calcutta was then the capital of British India and leading modern intellectuals of this city were confronted by this humble brahmin from a remote village in Bengal, untrained and uneducated in modern ways. And they found him to be more than their match.

Sri Ramakrishna's rejection of education is very significant. He branded it as 'breadwinning education' and rejected it. Of course, the reference was to the knowledge of the priestly profession which his elder brother Ramkumar wanted him to acquire. But by this remark his penetrative mind had rejected all kinds of 'economics-oriented' education. Modern education, particularly in India, is only economics-oriented, or still worse, job-oriented. Young people in modern times have to devote the best part of their lives acquiring a university degree or proficiency in some trade so that they can earn a living when they grow up.

But man does not live by bread alone. The purpose of education should be to bring into blossom all that is great in the individual. Sri Ramakrishna had insisted that he would have only that knowledge by which God—the Ultimate Truth—could be known. This insistence puts a finger on the weakest point in modern education, the purpose of which is not to develop an integrated personality in the educated, but only to make him fit to earn his living after acquiring his academic qualifications.

In spite of this rejection of the economics-oriented education, we perceive in Sri Ramakrishna's actions the time-spirit of modernity operating.

*Scientific spirit*

At the back of the scientific spirit is the idea that nothing should be accepted without experimentation, without having verifiable proof in the form of direct perception by oneself or by some reliable authority. One is not prepared to accept anything merely on belief.

We find ample evidence of this spirit in Sri Ramakrishna. Only the tools of the experiment were different. Material knowledge could be obtained through experiment in a science laboratory. But for spiritual knowledge one must experiment with his own body and mind. This is what Sri Ramakrishna did. The religion he practised was not based on mere beliefs. He wanted to see the Divine Mother face-to-face, and succeeded in doing so.

During his days of intense hankering for the vision of the Divine Mother, he would sometimes sit before the image of Kāli and say to Her, 'Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all a fiction of the mind—mere poetry without any reality? If Thou does exist, why can I not see Thee? Is religion, then, a phantasy, a mere castle in the air?'<sup>1</sup> Once, to test whether the Mother was real, he took a piece of cotton wool and held it under her nostrils. Strangely enough, it moved. At last, after he had the first vision of the Divine Mother, he could have Her vision whenever he wanted and She became more real to him than the external world.

In all his spiritual practices, the attitude of a researcher was always prominent. In later life, when his disciples came to him, he always encouraged them to test everything before accepting. Narendra, the future Swami Vivekananda, once wanted to find out whether the Master's reaction to the touch of metal or coins was real. Therefore once he

---

<sup>1</sup>*Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 69.

slipped, unknown to the Master, a rupee coin underneath the mattress of his bed. When the Master came and sat on the bed, he jumped up in excruciating pain, as if stung by a scorpion. The disciples who were present tried to find out what was wrong with the bed and were astonished to find nothing more dangerous than a rupee coin! Narendra was shamefaced! But the Master reassured him by conveying his satisfaction over his disciple's attitude of testing before believing.

On another occasion he said to a disciple: 'You must examine a *sādhu* by day and by night before believing in him.'<sup>2</sup> Years later Swami Vivekananda would often say: 'Do not believe in a thing because you have read about it in a book. Do not believe in a thing because another man said it was true. Do not believe in words because they are hallowed by tradition. Find out the truth for yourself. Reason it out. That is realization.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus we see that the spirit of enquiry and reasoning was not stifled in the religion taught by Sri Ramakrishna. On the other hand, it was encouraged, befitting the scientific spirit of the modern age.

### *His humanism*

Man's concern for fellow-men was not much in evidence in the middle ages, though Buddhism and Christianity had introduced philanthropic activities as a part of their religious practice. It is the modern spirit of humanism that has set in motion great activities of social service in the modern world.

---

<sup>2</sup>*Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 400.

<sup>3</sup>Swami Nikhilananda: *Vivekananda A Biography* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 8.

Sri Ramakrishna's concern for suffering humanity was phenomenal. His concern for others was not restricted to the physical plane only. We in the modern world often believe that only such actions as medical service and the like are philanthropic acts. But man, it must be recognized, is not merely a physical being. He lives on three planes: physical, mental and spiritual. And humanity needs help on all three planes.

While compassion and love are basic to all kinds of service rendered to humanity, all people do not have the capacity to serve others on all the levels. For instance, an affluent man alone can make big charities. It is not possible for a beggar to do so. Similarly, only a man equipped academically and is learned himself can help others in acquiring education and mental development. The spiritual level is the highest level of human existence. And only a person who is spiritually advanced in a great measure can help others in that direction.

Sri Ramakrishna was a spiritual teacher *par excellence*. He had realized truth through hard spiritual practices over long years, and his realizations had proved to him the ephemeral nature of worldly existence. He could have withdrawn completely from the world, had he chosen to do so, designating it as *māyā*. But his immeasurable compassion for suffering humanity would not allow him to do that. He yearned for a band of earnest disciples who would spread his message and bring solace to others through spiritual awakening. And in the evenings, when the temple rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells during the evening service, he would climb to the roof of a building in the temple garden and cry out at the top of his voice: 'Come my boys! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you!'<sup>4</sup> A mother's yearning for her child or that of a lover

---

<sup>4</sup>*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 296.

for his beloved was nothing compared to the intensity of the Master's yearning for his disciples.

And when the disciples began coming, he gave himself for their sake without the least selfish thought. Even when he was lying critically ill at Cossipore during his last days, he could not be prevented from uttering a few words of spiritual solace and awakening to anyone who came to him.

Thus we see that the humanism of Sri Ramakrishna was tuned to the highest plane of human life—the spiritual. Nevertheless, his compassion for suffering humanity on other levels was also evident on various occasions. Thus when he went with Mathur to Baidyanath Dham on a pilgrimage, he was moved to tears by seeing poor people who had not even the wherewithal for a single meal. He asked Mathur to feed them sumptuously and give them clothes, and he refused to move from the place unless Mathur carried out his wish.

Sri Ramakrishna was not content with helping humanity himself; he wanted his mission to be carried forward by Sri Sarada Devi, his divine consort, and by his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda with the help of his brother disciples. His instruction to them in this respect is significant.

Once, during his last days at the Cossipore garden house, the Master in an indrawn mood said to the Holy Mother: 'You see, the people of Calcutta appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.'<sup>5</sup> He impressed upon her on various occasions that she would have to continue the work of spiritual ministration after his departure from the world.

The same concern for suffering humanity was evident when he admonished Narendra (the future Swami Vivekananda), who wanted to remain always absorbed in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. He said:

---

<sup>5</sup>Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1955), p. 120.

'For shame! How can you ask such a thing? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man!... This realization will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realize the One Divinity in all beings; you will do great things in the world; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor.'<sup>6</sup>

On another occasion, Swami Vivekananda was startled by the Master's words: 'Not compassion, not compassion, but service to man in the knowledge that it is service to God (*Śiva-jñāne jīva-sevā*)'.<sup>7</sup> When he heard these words at Dakshineswar, he told his companions that, to him, a new light had been thrown upon religious life that day.

Thus we find that Sri Ramakrishna's concern for suffering humanity knew no bounds. It was not the shallow humanism of modern thinkers. He had infused a new sense of fulfilment and a higher purpose to the concept of humanism, and made it embrace all the three levels of human existence—physical, mental, and spiritual.

### *Democracy and individual freedom*

Nothing, it might be imagined, could have been further from the thought of the God-intoxicated Sri Ramakrishna, than the political concepts of democracy and individual liberties. But if we take a close look at his life and teachings,

---

<sup>6</sup>Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1947), p. 268.

<sup>7</sup>*Vide*, Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, tr. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952), p. 821.

we find that the essence of these social ideals found a place in his thought and were applied to religion and spiritual life.

Democracy has for its base the concept of individual liberty. Man, by his very nature, seeks freedom and modern man wants the greatest opportunities for its expression. But even in the modern age, individual freedom has hardly any scope in most religions. Each cult demands rigorous adherence to its principles. Some religions hold that their way is the only true religion and that all others' paths are false, or at the most half-way houses. Such religions demand unqualified acceptance of all their dogmas. Any questioning is considered heresy. In the middle ages, in Europe, many people accused of heresy had to pay with their life. Therefore, religion seems very much opposed to the concepts of democracy and individual freedom.

But Sri Ramakrishna's religion, founded on great Vedāntic principles, is truly broad-based. It gives wide scope for each individual aspirant to practise whatever religion he pleases. In Sri Ramakrishna's religion the concept of *ista-devatā* (one's chosen deity), has a pivotal role to play. For religion, which demands man's whole being for fulfilment, cannot reach its culmination if curbed by inhibitions imposed by priestcraft. Only when it is practised out of one's own sweet choice can religion bear fruit. Therefore the concept of *ista-devatā* as opposed to that of *kula-devatā* (one's family deity) was encouraged by Sri Ramakrishna.

His dictum, 'As many schools of thought, so many ways of reaching the Goal', emphasized the fact that everyone was free to follow the path of that religious practice which appealed to him most. Every great *avatāra* (Incarnation) preaches the doctrine that is most suitable for the age in which he appears. Earlier Incarnations had emphasized the importance of the creed they proclaimed, often to the exclusion of other creeds. Only Sri Krishna who preached the synthetic gospel of the *Gītā* was an exception.

In the modern age, when the concept of individual freedom is in ascendancy, Sri Ramakrishna's liberal religious ideas have helped religion to withstand the onslaught of new ideas.

Alongside the concept of individual freedom, the idea of collective security and universalism is making headway in the modern world. Often it is thought that the concept of individual freedom is opposed to that of collective security and therefore it should be curbed by all means. Inherent in this conflict is the suspicion that individual liberty may deteriorate into licence, to the detriment of society as a whole. This suspicion is not baseless; instances of such misuse of individual liberty are not wanting.

Applying this idea to religion, some may consider it desirable that all humanity should be converted to one religion. Such belief has led in the past to the rise of proselytism and consequent religious wars and conflicts.

But religion in its higher reaches is essentially individualistic. Otherwise, there can be no spiritual practice. But that does not mean that one should impose one's religion on others. Collective security and universalism lie in allowing each man to have his own way, without impinging upon the other man's interests. This is particularly true of religion, where fanatical zeal to propagate one's own belief to the detriment of others retards spirituality.

It was to demonstrate true universalism, therefore, that Sri Ramakrishna accepted all kinds of religious beliefs and practised many of them in his own life at different times. He did not approve of criticism even of such religious practices which had in them the potentiality of debasing a *sādhaka* (religious aspirant) and leading him away from the goal. Thus, once when Narendranath railed vehemently against a particular sect given to immoral practices, he put in quietly: 'But, you see, there is a back door entrance also to every house. These religious practices are back door

entrances to spirituality. Some aspirants may find them suitable.<sup>8</sup>

Thus in Sri Ramakrishna's religion individual freedom and collective security were not conflicting ideologies but complementary to each other, and these two together led to universalism.

### *Social thought of Sri Ramakrishna*

It is also significant that Sri Ramakrishna was aware of some of the acute social problems of modern India. The simple unpremeditated solutions that came to be revealed in his conversations are unique. Thus we find that his solution to the caste problem is striking. He said that devotees had no caste—they all belonged to the same caste. Love of God purifies and unifies all. All distinctions of caste or social status, race or colour, disappear through its purifying influence. Therefore if men turn their attention to the essential aspects of religion, the social differences will melt away into nothingness.

Similarly, the position of women, which is even today an unsolved question in many countries, was raised to the highest level by Sri Ramakrishna. For him every woman was an embodiment of the Divine Mother and as such is worthy of respect. He himself had worshipped Kali, the Divine Mother, all his life. One of his chief preceptors was Bhairavi Brāhmani, a learned nun. He respected highly his own wife and worshipped her as the embodiment of the Divine Mother.

When one of his monastic disciples, then a young man, said concerning women, 'Oh, I cannot bear them!', he reproved him saying, 'You talk like a fool! Look down upon woman? What for? They are the manifestations of the

---

<sup>8</sup>Vide, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1959), vol. 8, p. 267.

Divine Mother. Bow down to them as you would to your own mother and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their influence....<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, today in India, the position of women is vastly different from what it was some fifty years ago. Nevertheless, there is great scope for improvement. And that can come about on the basis indicated by Sri Ramakrishna.

The modern man is often pragmatic in his outlook. He asks: 'If such and such a thing happens, what of that? How shall I benefit from it?' We find in Sri Ramakrishna's religion this element of pragmatism. He abhorred theories. 'What is the use of counting the leaves of mango trees?' he said. 'When you are in a mango grove, eat mangoes to your heart's content.' If God is truth, put forth all your efforts to realize Him instead of wasting time in idle argumentation.

Thus we find that the religion preached by Sri Ramakrishna was meant for the modern man, and significantly enough he came at the dawn of the present age. In his own words, 'The coins that were legal tender in Mogul times, cannot be so in British times!' Similarly, though the truths preached by prophets who preceded Sri Ramakrishna have eternal value and are applicable to all times, the methods or religious practices they advocated were meant for the times and climes in which they lived. Sri Ramakrishna's advent was in modern times, and he spent most of his life in a modern city, coming in close contact with modern men who were recognized for their accomplishments of head and heart. In this modern setting he presented the eternal verities of the *Sanātana Dharma* in language that was simplicity itself, spiced with his exceptional sense of humour. And these verities modern man needs most if he is to understand the world around him in a clearer perspective.

---

<sup>9</sup>*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 477.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND ISLAM

Swami Prabhananda

On Friday, 7 September 1883, Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room at Dakshineswar with his devotees, reminiscing about his earlier spiritual experiences. He said:

One day I had the vision of Consciousness, non-dual and indivisible. At first it had been revealed to me that there were innumerable men, animals, and other creatures. Among them were aristocrats, the English, Mussalmans, myself, scavengers, dogs and also a bearded Mussalman with an earthenware tray of rice in his hand. He put a few grains of rice into everybody's mouth. I too tasted a little.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna narrated the same experience again on 12 April 1885 as follows:

How many other visions I saw! But I am not permitted to tell them. Someone is shutting my mouth, as it were. I used to find no distinction between the sacred *tulsi* and the insignificant *sajina* leaf. The feeling of distinction was entirely destroyed. Once I was meditating under the banyan tree when I was shown a Mussalman with a long beard. He came to me with rice in an earthen plate. He fed some other Mussalmans with the rice and also gave me a few grains to eat. The Mother showed me that there exists only One, and not two. It is Satchidānanda alone that has taken all these various

---

<sup>1</sup>'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math. 1974) p. 222. (Henceforth 'Gospel').

forms; He alone has become the world and its living beings. Again, it is He who has become food.<sup>2</sup>

This experience which the Master had in the course of his practice of Islamic *sādhana* is a unique event in the history of religions. Apart from its mystical significance and theological interest, it has opened up a new vista for an all-embracing brotherhood on the social level and an all inclusive harmony of religions.

Although born and brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family, Sri Ramakrishna practised all religions. The desire to realize the ultimate Truth in different religious traditions led him to the practice of the spiritual disciplines of Islam, Christianity, and others. He not only utilized their techniques of worship and meditation but also followed their ways of life, acquired their attitudes, thought their thoughts, and realized the highest truths cherished by them. Thereby he proved by experience that the different religions of the world are but different paths leading to the same ultimate Reality. He was neither a syncretist nor an eclectic, but the prophet of a new way of harmonizing world religions on the basis of universally valid common principles, without ignoring the uniqueness of the values and customs of every tradition. This great achievement of the Master which holds immense possibilities for mankind has created a stir among thoughtful people the world over. But owing to negligence, narrow-mindedness, or indifference, it has not received the attention and study that it deserves. In this essay we shall try to analyse Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Islam and his experiences therein, and also to point out their implications.

Soon after the end of Sri Ramakrishna's continuous absorption for six months in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, he devoted himself to the practice of Islamic mysticism. This was a radical departure from the more traditional forms of Hindu

---

<sup>2</sup>Gospel, p. 723.

*sādhana* which he had been practising for twelve long years. One might think that by this time his mind had been solidly cast in an unbreakable mould, but just the opposite was the case. Having realized the unity of existence through his monistic experience, he transcended all strictures of caste, creed, and ceremony and became the embodiment of catholicity. Sri Ramakrishna made no difference between the Hindu, the Christian, and the Muslim, and was able to move freely with all.

But the spirit of universal acceptance is not enough to explain the purpose and significance of the Master's practice of Islam and other religions. For that we have to take into account his unique disposition of mind that sought variety in religious experience. His 'taste' for things spiritual was unlimited, and could not be contained or satisfied within the sectarian bounds of any one religion. About this he said, 'Do you know my attitude? I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature....I feel myself at home with every dish—fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder and pickled fish. And further, I equally relish rich preparations like fish-head, *kālia* and pilau.'<sup>3</sup> Defending his attitude, he explained the rationale of his approach to 'M': 'Let me tell you one thing. In a game of *satrancha* a piece can't reach the centre square until it completes the circle; but once in the square it can't be overtaken by any other piece.' His precepts were but the reflections of what he had realized in his life. He said, 'I had to practise each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the path of the Sāktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God towards whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.'<sup>4</sup>

Swami Saradananda has fixed 1866–67 (B.S. 1273) as the year when Sri Ramakrishna practised Islam, whereas

---

<sup>3</sup>*Gospel*, p. 520.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

Sashibhusan Ghosh places it in B.S. 1275 (1868–69). Circumstantial evidence, however, supports the former view. Romain Rolland too accepted the end of 1866 as the period when Sri Ramakrishna started on it. The Master was then only thirty.

Sri Ramakrishna's teacher in Islamic devotion was the Sufi mystic Govinda Rai<sup>5</sup> of Dumdum<sup>6</sup>. Sri Ramakrishna's biographer Swami Saradananda writes about Govinda Rai:

'Hriday told us that he was a kshatriya<sup>7</sup> by birth. He was perhaps learned in Persian and Arabic. Having studied various religious doctrines and coming into contact with different religious communities, he was at last attracted by the liberal doctrine of Islam and was formally initiated into it. Govinda, thirsting for truth, accepted the Islamic faith, but we cannot say how far he followed its social manners and customs. But, since he became initiated, he, we are told, engaged himself ardently in the reading of the Koran and in religious practices according to the process prescribed by that scripture. Govinda was an ardent lover of God. The method of worshipping God according to the teaching and mental attitude prevalent among the Sufis, followers of a

---

<sup>5</sup>Some have alleged that Govinda Rai was not a Muslim. Nalini Devdas writes, '...nor did he (Sri Ramakrishna) study Islam from a Muslim teacher. Govinda Rai, a Hindu deeply influenced by Sufi mysticism, introduced him to Islam.' *Sri Ramakrishna* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society), p. 25. This is far from true.

<sup>6</sup>Akshay Kumar Sen: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office), p. 117. According to Sashibhusan Ghosh, Govinda Rai lived near Dumdum. See *Sri Ramakrishna Deva* (Bengali), p. 317.

<sup>7</sup>According to Sashibhusan Ghosh, Govinda Rai belonged to the *Kaivarta* caste.

sect of Islam, seems to have captivated his mind; for he now became engaged day and night in practising devotional moods like the Dervishes, the devotees belonging to the sect.<sup>8</sup>

Hriday also tells us that Govinda Rai had made the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar his temporary home, accepting its hospitality and meditating under the shade of the Panchavati. Govinda Rai's Islamic name was Wajed Ali Khan.<sup>9</sup>

Among the Indian Muslims there are three major sects: Shia, Sunni, and Sufi. Of these the Sunnis are the largest in number. The Sufis are close to the Vedanta of the Hindus. According to liberal scholars, Sufis represent the mystical tradition of Islam but the 'fundamentalists' consider the Sufis a heretic fringe sect. A Sufi studies the life of Muhammad (*sira*) to comprehend his code of conduct (*sunna*), and to be intimate with the traditions (*hadith*) handed down from generation to generation. The Koran is the first pillar and the *hadith* the second. The third pillar demands of a Sufi that he diligently try to imitate the *auliya* (friends of God, the saints) and learn how these holy men conduct themselves. He must commit to mind and heart the words of wisdom and sanctity, and songs of devotion and heavenly love. A Sufi living a life of sincere obedience to the Will of God passes through the various states (*ahwāl*) and stages (*maqāmāt*) of the spiritual pilgrimage. A successful Sufi hopes to have a glimpse of immortality even in the mortal life by passing away from self (*fanā*) into the consciousness of survival in God (*baqā*). After death and judgement he aspires to dwell forever

---

<sup>8</sup>Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math), p. 299. (Henceforth, *The Great Master*).

<sup>9</sup>Kalijiban Debasharma, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilābhidhan* (Bengali). (Calcutta: Karuna Prakāshani), p. 74.

with the angels and prophets in the blissful presence of the Almighty.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna was attracted towards the humble and devout Sufi, Govinda Rai, who remained absorbed in his prayers at the Panchavati. Being charmed by the latter's sincere faith in and love for Allah, he felt a spontaneous urge to worship God in this way also. It is not known if he had received permission from the Divine Mother, as he had for his Tantric and Advaitic *sādhana*s. When he asked Govinda Rai to initiate him, the latter complied gladly.<sup>11</sup> Though we do not have the details of the initiation, it can be safely assumed that Sri Ramakrishna had to utter thrice the *Kalimah*, which reads *lā ilāhā illa'llahu : Muhammadun Rasūlu'llah* ('There is no deity but God; Muhammad is the Apostle of God.') Thus Sri Ramakrishna became a Muslim for the time being, and set his heart and soul to the practice of Islam. Fully equipped with attraction (*injiab*), devotion (*ibādah*) and elevation (*uruj*), the three aids<sup>13</sup> necessary to a Sufi for his journey to the temple of the Divine, Sri Ramakrishna could naturally be expected to progress fast in his spiritual practice. Spiritual virtuoso that he was, he took an incredibly small amount of time, as he did in the case of the Tantric disciplines, to attain the highest realization. He later on reminisced:

---

<sup>10</sup>A. J. Arberry, *Sufism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), pp.13–14.

<sup>11</sup>It was perhaps not a conversion in the traditional sense. Jane I. Smith writes: 'One way to understand it seems to be as conversion not to another tradition, even for a brief period of time, but rather conversion to a different set of circumstances in which to attain to the presence of God.' In Claude Allan Stark, *God of All* (Cape Cod, Mass.: Claude Stark, 1974), p. 183.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 261.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 609.

I then repeated the holy syllable 'Allah' with great devotion, wore cloth like the Muslims, said *namaz* thrice<sup>14</sup> daily and felt disinclined even to see Hindu deities, not to speak of saluting them, inasmuch as the Hindu mode of thought vanished altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood, and had the full realization of the result of practising according to that faith.<sup>15</sup>

Curiously enough, Sri Ramakrishna underwent such a total transformation of his mental structure during the practice of Islam that he did not even once enter the inner courtyard of the Kāli temple but lived in the *kuthibāri* (bungalow) of Mathuranath, from where he had the pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses removed.<sup>16</sup> He deliberately blotted out the thought of even Mother Kāli. It has been said that he was 'ready to eat forbidden food'. A horrified Mathuranath begged him to desist from this and, as a compromise, had food prepared by a brahmin under the direction of a Muslim. Sri Ramakrishna's behaviour, apparently like that of a devout Muslim during this period, sprang from his steadfast devotion to the Islamic spiritual practices. It reveals his extraordinary sincerity and earnestness. He was not a dogmatist who says, 'My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.'

We hear Sri Ramakrishna telling Naren and other devotees on 28 September 1884: 'I received the Allah mantra from Govinda Rai. Rice with onions was cooked for me in

---

<sup>14</sup>A Muslim normally offers Namaz five times. They are called Fajar, Zohar, Asar, Magrib and Isha. The Sufis usually offer Namaz three times combining Zohar and Asar, and Magrib and Isha.

<sup>15</sup>*The Great Master*, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup>*Sri Ramakrishnacharit* (Bengali), p. 80.

the bungalow (*kuthibāri*). I ate some.<sup>17</sup> During these three days of worship of God as Allah, the compassionate Ruler of the universe, he would frequently dive deep into an ecstatic mood while uttering 'Allah' and would have the vision of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>18</sup>

From Hriday, nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, it is learnt that during the period of his practice of Islam, Sri Ramakrishna went to the nearby mosque one day and said his *namaz*.

Another version of the same incident can be seen in *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*.<sup>19</sup> One day Hriday, not finding the Master in his room, went out in search of him and found him in a nearby mosque offering his *namaz*. Gurudas Burman's *Sri Ramakrishnacharit*<sup>20</sup> gives an almost similar description. Some additional information has been provided by Ramlal Chattopadhyay, another nephew of Sri Ramakrishna. At a short distance from the main entrance of the Dakshineswar temple there was a mosque, in front of which Sri Ramakrishna was seen one early morning. The caretaker who had come to open the door of the mosque noticed him. Sri Ramakrishna was wearing a cloth in the fashion of the Muslims. Among those who had assembled there for prayer one could readily recognize Sri Ramakrishna. Along with the Muslims Sri Ramakrishna offered the *namaz*. Thus he worshipped Allah there for three days.<sup>21</sup>

At 16/9 Trailokyanath Biswas Road, is located a mosque, popularly called the Mollapara Mosque, on a plot of land measuring 0.9 acre as described under *dag* no. 1679. The Wakf Commissioner's order dated 1 July 1952 in

<sup>17</sup>*Gospel*, p. 526.

<sup>18</sup>*Sri Sri Ramakrishnacharit*, vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup>*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, pp. 120–21.

<sup>20</sup>*Sri Sri Ramakrishnacharit*, vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>21</sup>Kamalkrishna Mitra, *Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga* (Bengali), p. 2.

respect of this mosque (in E.C. No.12055) mentions, 'The Wakf estate mosque is associated with the hallowed memory of the great saint Ramakrishna Param Hangsha Deb and it is reported that he used to cry *azan* in it.' The same order appointed an ad interim *mutwalli* (caretaker), Janab Seikh Jalal Ahmed and four Hindu gentlemen. The Commissioner of Wakf visited the mosque again on 19 July 1976. In his report the Commissioner wrote, 'Next...took me to Mollapara mosque, Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna Deb used to perform *namaz* and cry *azan* and also listened to *Holy Koran* from a Moulavi for sometime.' This Order appointed an administrative committee of five persons, four Muslims and one Hindu, for 'the purpose of upkeep and management of the Wakf estate appertaining to E.C. No. 12055.'

The present *mutwalli* of the Mollapara Mosque is Arique Hossain, aged 25, whose mother tongue is Urdu. He lives at the Baranagar Jute Mill School quarters, Calcutta-35. This mosque was perhaps established 200 years ago. In Mollapara there lived a large number of Muslim families. But the locality was practically deserted by the Muslims after the communal disturbances there in 1950, and scarcely a Muslim is found there now. The mosque has been enrolled as a Wakf property as per the Commissioner of Wakf's Order dated 1 July 1952.

Another interesting anecdote connected with Sri Ramakrishna and this mosque may be narrated here. One day at the mosque Sri Ramakrishna met an old *fakir* whose moustache, beard, and hair had all turned grey. Wearing a gaberdine on his person, a string of glass beads around his neck, and a staff in his hand, the *fakir* smilingly welcomed Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'You have come, very good, very good.' He also blessed Sri Ramakrishna by waving his hand.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga, p. 3.

Sri Ramakrishna's biographer, Swami Saradananda, says, 'At the time of practising Islam the Master at first had the vision of an effulgent impressive personage with a long beard; afterwards he had the knowledge of the all-pervading Brahman with attributes and merged finally in the attributeless Brahman, the Absolute.'<sup>23</sup> Analyzing the nature and content of Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic realization just mentioned, one can distinguish three distinct stages or phases. The first has to do with the Personal God with form about which Claude Alan Stark remarks:

It is a matter for speculation only whether the 'radiant Person with long beard and grave appearance' was the Prophet Muhammad himself, one of his companions, or a great Sufi saint who had chosen to maintain separate identity from Allah in a subtle body in order to continue as an instrument of salvation for others, much like the *bodhi-sattvas*, the Christian saints, or the Sikh gurus.<sup>24</sup>

The second stage of his realization refers to the Personal God without form, that is, Sri Ramakrishna's experience of Allah as *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman*. It refers to the formless aspect of God yet with name, quality, and attributes. The majority of Muslims worship God in this aspect.

The third stage relates to the impersonal aspect of the Godhead. In the phase of superconscious experience Sri Ramakrishna merged his identity with that of the Absolute.

<sup>23</sup>*The Great Master*, p. 299.

Kamakhyantha Bandyopadhyaya, a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote that on seeing this unexpected vision, Sri Ramakrishna gave up the pursuit of Islam. (cf. B.N. Bandyopadhyaya and Sajanikanta Das, *Samasāmayik Dristite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*, p. 106). This is not tenable.

<sup>24</sup>*God of All*, p. 75.

Naturally this reminds us of the unitive experience of Sufi mystics like al-Hallaj who boldly declared '*ana'l-haqq*—I am the truth'.

Thus we find that Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic experience involved harmonization of three distinct aspects of divinity: the personal God with form, the personal God without form, and the Impersonal. Normally, these aspects of the Reality can be realized by seekers of truth in evolutionary stages only.

An important fact deserves special mention. Contrary to his other visions, the radiant personage with a long beard did not merge into the person of Sri Ramakrishna. From this Sri Ramakrishna, according to Vaikunthanath Sannyal, came to the conclusion that Muhammad was not an incarnation of God, but a God-sent prophet.<sup>25</sup> This deduction by Sri Sannyal is perhaps not dependable, for every year a special offering is made to Muhammad as the God-incarnate, along with the other God-incarnates during worship on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday and this tradition must have had its origin in some authentic statement of the Master accepting Muhammad as an Incarnation of God.

On the evidence of Swami Saradananda, Govinda Rai, like the other gurus of Sri Ramakrishna, had a new spirit infused into his own religious life. Also, perhaps, he was blessed to realize, through the divine life and power of Sri Ramakrishna, those hidden truths which he had been unable to experience in spite of his *sāadhanā*.<sup>26</sup> No details, however, are known, nor is it known when he left Dakshineswar or how he passed the latter part of his life.

We may recall here more anecdotes connected with Sri Ramakrishna and his practice of Islam.

<sup>25</sup>Vaikunthanath Sannyal, *Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Navapatra Prakashan), p. 37.

<sup>26</sup>*The Great Master*, p. 539.

When he was a child, Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna's name in childhood) once travelled in the company of his mother, Chandramani, to his maternal uncle's home at Sarati Mayapur. On the way the mother and the child visited the famous *dargah* (sacred tomb) of a *pir* (Muslim saint) near Sarati Mayapur. There the child quietly sat in deep ecstasy for quite some time.<sup>27</sup>

Again, Gadadhar, then nine, went alone to witness the *namaz* on the occasion of *Id* at a village near Kamarpukur. On his way, close to the place of *namaz*, he was standing under a peepul tree when he had a divine vision, lost his external consciousness, and remained in that state for two hours and a half.<sup>28</sup>

There is a small mosque, called Geratala Mosque (also called Kassem Ismail Madan Wakf Mosque) at 142 and 142A Chittaranjan Avenue, Calcutta, at the northeast corner of the crossing of Chittaranjan Avenue and Mahatma Gandhi Road. It was enrolled under Wakf Commissioner's office on 9 May 1952 under enrolment No. 12057. Its present Mutwallis are Soleman Md. Doplay of 14, Pollock Street and Babubhai Azim Salehji of 19, Amratala Lane, Calcutta. One evening Manmathanath Ghosh, who had visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar several times, noticed something unusual on the road as he was returning home from his office. Dusk was approaching. A Muslim *fakir*, standing in front of the Geratala mosque, was calling out in a passionate voice, 'Come, my Beloved, come.' Streams of tears were rolling down his cheeks. Charmed by his divine fervour, Manmatha stood there looking at the *fakir* when Sri Ramakrishna suddenly appeared on the scene. Sri Ramakrishna was returning from the Kālighat Temple to Dakshineswar in a carriage in the company of his nephew, Ramlal. Getting

---

<sup>27</sup>Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup>Satyacharan Mitra, *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* (Bengali), 1897, pp. 17-18.

down from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna rushed towards the *fakir*. The two lovingly embraced each other for quite some time.<sup>29</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna, steeped in the love of the Divine Mother as he was, had a divine vision which is relevant here. On January 1883 he narrated his experience thus:

My Divine Mother is not only formless, she has forms as well. One can see Her forms. One can behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love. The Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms....She came to me another day as a Mussalman girl six or seven years old. She had a *tilak* on Her forehead and was naked. She walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.<sup>30</sup>

From the reminiscences of Sashibhusan Samanta, son of Pitambarachandra, store-keeper of the Dakshineswar temple, we have another interesting piece of information. It is said that Rani Rashmani was residing in the bungalow (*kuthibāri*), supervising the temple's construction, when one night she saw Baba Gazi Pir ('a Muslim warrior who later became a saint') in a dream. The spirit said: 'I reside under the shade of the peepul tree on the northeast bank of the pond of Gazi. I am adored by Hindus and Muslims alike. Pave my residence with bricks and arrange to offer me *sinni* (a kind of sweet) daily and a lamp in the evening. I shall bless you.' Rashmani carried out the behest and appointed a Muslim caretaker for the purpose. Sashibhusan, as a young boy, had seen Sri Ramakrishna visiting the place of Gazi Pir every morning and also occasionally in the afternoon and saluting the Gazi Pir. He also offered *sinni* to the

---

<sup>29</sup>See, Kumud Bandhu Sen, 'Two Episodes' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, September, 1955.

<sup>30</sup>*Gospel*, p. 108.

Gazi Pir.<sup>31</sup> The Gazi Pir is said to be known as *Aiam Gazi Pir* according to the local tradition.

As one of the proofs of the abiding influence of Islamic experience on Sri Ramakrishna's life, we may mention some Muslims among his devotees and admirers. Sashibhusan Samanta mentions the names of some of them. They are: Sheikh Abdul Sobhan, Sheikh Barkutulla, Sheikh Namdar, Sheikh Kamdar, Sheikh Macham Mollah, Sheikh Khatir Mistri, and Sheikh Maniraddi. Most of them lived in an around Mollapara. Again Ramlal, nephew and long-time attendant of Sri Ramakrishna, refers to an old Muslim *fakir*, Ustagar by name. He lived on the northern side of the main entrance to the Dakshineswar Kāli temple. He used to call on Sri Ramakrishna now and then. Both of them would take their seats on the northern veranda of Sri Ramakrishna's room and talk about Islam. On hearing the soul-stirring words of Sri Ramakrishna the *fakir* would sometimes shed tears of joy. On every such visit Sri Ramakrishna used to give him some food to eat. The *fakir* would accept it with humility, salute him and go back to his cottage.<sup>32</sup>

The anonymous author of the Bengali book '*Sri Ramakrishna-pradarsita Visvajanin Dharma*' published in 1895 mentions an equally interesting incident:

On the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's visit to our house Amritlal Sarkar, son of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, brought a Muslim physician to meet Sri Ramakrishna. After observing him for some time the physician was deeply moved. Though he did not touch Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he vigorously danced with his two hands raised, along with others, to the accompaniment of music in the courtyard. Later on, he partook of *prasād*

---

<sup>31</sup>Sashibhusan Samanta, *Dakshineswar Mahatirthe Sri Ramakrishna Dever Lilatattva* (Bengali), vol. 1, B.S. 1345, pp. 4-5.

<sup>32</sup>*Udbodhan*, vol. no. 3, p. 192.

and heartily thanked Amritlal for giving him the opportunity of having this kind of experience.<sup>33</sup>

At the request of Ramachandra Dutta, Dr. Abdul Waziz of Satkshira, Khulna (now in Bangladesh) went one morning with his friend Abbas Ali, deputy Magistrate, to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The visit brought a transformation in the life of Dr. Waziz and he became a staunch admirer of Sri Ramakrishna<sup>34</sup>

Sri Kumud Bandhu Sen, an old devotee of Belur Math who was well acquainted with all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, has narrated another incident which reveals the Master's love for the Muslims.

I was returning by bus to Belur Math one evening. On the way a gentleman sitting by my side turned to me and asked, 'Do you, sir, belong to the Sri Ramakrishna Math?' I answered, 'Yes, why? Would you like to tell me something?' He started, 'In my childhood I came to learn from my father who passed away some years ago, about an incident in connection with Sri Ramakrishna—something really mysterious. We are Mohammedans, you know, and our homestead was not far from Kamarpukur. We keep a small shop at Chandni in Calcutta. I will now repeat what I learnt from my father's lips:

Economically we belong to the middle class. We had a thatched house and a barn adjacent to it. But due to some evil turn of fate, our house and barn would catch fire every year. This happened not once or twice but several times, and we were terribly worried about

---

<sup>33</sup>The author of this article came across this book in the library of Vivekananda Ashrama Kasundia, Howrah-4.

<sup>34</sup>See Jnanendranath Biswas, *Yogodyan Mahatmya* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Navabharat Library, B.S. 1384), vol. 1, pp. 63-72.

it. I was one day relating this sad state of affairs to a brahmin friend of mine when we saw Sri Ramakrishna passing in a procession along the village road, dancing and singing the glories of God. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna my friend said to me, 'Seek the protection of that great soul. He might free you from all your strange plight.' I approached Sri Ramakrishna with great humility and saluted him. He then compassionately asked me, 'What's the matter, my child?' I replied, 'Sir we are a middle class family and are burdened with too many dependents but, as ill luck would have it, our house and barn invariably catch fire every year, and we are reduced to paupers. I seek your refuge. Please find some way out.' Sri Ramakrishna inquired where my house was. Pointing it out, I said, 'Please see, the ashes are still there.' Sri Ramakrishna then asked the members of his party to wait, and he himself proceeded to the spot along with me. On almost reaching it he asked me to bring some jujubes (a kind of fruit). Taking those jujubes in hand, Sri Ramakrishna asked me to go round the whole area on foot. I started accordingly, and Sri Ramakrishna followed me with those fruits in his hand. He was almost inaudibly muttering something and would throw the fruits at intervals. When I had covered the whole area I stopped. Sri Ramakrishna asked me if I had completed the round. On my answering him in the affirmative, he left me to join his party. After this never again did our house and barn catch fire and we, for our part, are immensely grateful to Sri Ramakrishna for that.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, Sri Ramakrishna mixed with all people irrespective of their caste, creed or station in life, and treated them

---

<sup>35</sup>Kumud Bandhu Sen, 'Two Episodes', in *Prabuddha Bharata*, September 1955.

as if they were his own. His attitude has been very clearly expressed by what he said to the Brahma devotees:

When you mix with people outside your Samaj, love them all. When in their company be one with them. Don't harbour malice towards them. Don't turn up your nose in hatred and say: 'Oh, this man believes in God with form and not in the formless God. That man believes in the formless God and not in God with form. This man is a Christian. This man is a Hindu. And this man is a Mussalman.' It is God alone who makes people see things in different ways. Know that people have different natures. Realize this and mix with them as much as you can. And love all. But enter your own chamber to enjoy peace and bliss.

'Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart, behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment.'

You can see your true Self only within your own chamber. The cowherd takes the cows to graze in the pasture. There the cattle mix. They all form one herd. But on returning to their sheds in the evening they are separated. Then each stays by itself in its own stall.<sup>36</sup>

This significant statement not only shows Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with the people of other religions, but also teaches how one can practise the harmony of religions without hampering one's own spiritual growth. The misunderstanding, discord, and violence which have at times embittered Hindu-Muslim relationships in India can be permanently resolved only by sincerely practising this advice of the Master.

On the question of Hindu-Muslim relationship Sri Ramakrishna had his own view. He did not dismiss the

---

<sup>36</sup>*Gospel*, p. 604.

problem, as some well-intentioned liberals do. Admitting the stark reality, he said: 'There is, as it were, a mountain of difference between them. Their thoughts and faiths, actions and behaviour have remained quite unintelligible to one another in spite of their living together for so long a time.'<sup>37</sup> Swami Saradananda thinks that Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Islam has opened a new way for the people of these two alien religions to come closer to each other. But how soon? To find out Sri Ramakrishna's answer to this we may refer to an incident. Once, Sashi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) was studying the scriptures of Islam, perhaps with a desire to locate the points of accord between the two religions. Sri Ramakrishna one day said to him, 'It will take a long time to achieve the harmony, for there lies a mountain of difference between the two. However, it will come in the future.'<sup>38</sup>

The dilemma of religious plurality, though a serious one, cannot be resolved by theological speculation or by reference to scriptural authority. Sri Ramakrishna, who crossed the boundaries laid down by the dogmas of faith, culture, and practice, arrived at the heart of the problem and found a solution. Based on his own experience he argued:

I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas, Shaivas, all quarrel with one another. They have not the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Shiva and the Primal Sakti, and that it is He, again, who is called Jesus and Allah. There is only one Rama and He has a thousand names.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>*The Great Master*, p. 261.

<sup>38</sup>*Thakur Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 144.

<sup>39</sup>*Gospel*, p. 374.

Though the terms 'Brahman', 'Vishnu', and 'Allah' may vary considerably in conceptual orientation, Sri Ramakrishna outstepped the limitations of concepts and thought-forms and directly realized God as He is. The realization, whatever may be the form of the realization—dualistic or non-dualistic—is a solid meeting ground for the people of the two faiths. But over and above the unity of religions, Sri Ramakrishna's overriding concern was for the unity of God and the approaches to God.<sup>40</sup>

But, according to Swami Saradananda, the three facets of Sri Ramakrishna's realization, culminating in the non-dualistic Vedanta, have demonstrated the fact that Hinduism and Islam can be happily united only at the level of non-dualism. But will that be possible? Islam, which is dualistic to most Muslims, will hardly conform to this view point. No less important is the question that has been raised by Jane I. Smith. She writes:

To begin to do justice to the Islamic perspective one must come to terms with the fact that by his own admission Ramakrishna could never affirm the Muslim creed which says that there is no God but Allah. His failure to attest to this would mean that from the Muslim point of view he had never really participated in the Islamic experience, that he was not a Muslim and could not be one without witnessing to that most basic of credal formulations.<sup>41</sup>

It is, of course, true that ordinary Muslims may be disappointed to find that Sri Ramakrishna did not even memorize a few hundred verses from the Koran or the *Masnavi* of Rumi. But Sri Ramakrishna dared to cut across

---

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Jane I. Smith, 'Sri Ramakrishna's Approach to Religious Plurality', in *God of All*, p. 188.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189.

the traditional and orthodox bounds of Hinduism to participate in the communion with God through Islamic mysticism. Muslim fundamentalists who do not give enough credence to Sufism are likely to ignore Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic practice and experience. Also it may legitimately be argued that Sri Ramakrishna had not fulfilled the specific social conditions of actually being a Muslim. But no serious student of religion should fail to note the deep significance of Sri Ramakrishna's communion with God in the context of Islam. This is not only unique in the history of hagiography but also offers a welcome solution to the dilemma of religious plurality.

It is also to be noted that Sri Ramakrishna's daring experimentation has drawn appreciation from Islamic scholars too. One such scholar, Muhammad Daud Rahbar, writes:

I pay tribute to Sri Ramakrishna's device to attain intimacy with Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian life. He demonstrated his own kind of desires and overtures, as against other possible ways of going about the enrichment and broadening of experience. He went about in a certain mystical way. It is valid, interesting, and meaningful because its motivation was pure.<sup>42</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's contact with Islam was not limited to a period of only three days. Besides his casual contact with Islamic tradition in the early days, his realizations following his Islamic practices left an abiding influence on his life and teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna's experiences in Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam suggest a method and a model of dialogue for men and women of divergent religious beliefs and practices. Sri Ramakrishna found out that different religions are paths

---

<sup>42</sup>*God of All*, p. 197.

leading to the same goal, the attainment of everlasting peace. He said, 'All people are seeking the same Truth; the variance is due to climate, temperament and names.' Historical circumstances led to the development of different religions, and also to the accumulation of error and superstition in them. Sri Ramakrishna used to say:

Mother, everyone says, 'My watch alone is right.' The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Muslims, all say, 'My religion alone is true.' But Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path.<sup>43</sup>

Through this yearning Sri Ramakrishna reached the state of *vijñāna*. He understood that every religion was both a pathway and a stumbling block. He encouraged every sincere aspirant to overcome errors and superstitions and press on to the Truth at the core of religion. He gave this answer: 'Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere.'<sup>44</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna kept everyone's ideals intact. He asked a Vaishnava Hindu to hold to his attitudes, and a Muslim to his. Thus he revalidated the Vedic declaration: 'Truth is one, wise men speak of It differently.' Though the Reality is one and the same it appears differently through name and form. The mature spiritual experience of *vijñāna* ensures the realization of this truth. As a true *vijñānī* Sri Ramakrishna could lay aside his own perspective, even his own convictions and beliefs, and take on the life and beliefs of his

---

<sup>43</sup>*Gospel*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>44</sup>*Gospel*, p. 561.

Muslim neighbour. He thereby paved the way for a loving interreligious relationship.

The principle of *vijñāna* taught and experienced by Sri Ramakrishna harmonizes non-dualism and dualism as two poles of existence. Through it Sri Ramakrishna proved existentially, though not perhaps metaphysically, that all religions are paths that lead to the same goal. This constitutes the basis of his spiritual, practical, and humane solution to the ever-increasing problem of communal strife between Hindus and Muslims. In this doctrine of *vijñāna* Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna's torchbearer and commentator, found a deeper social significance. In a letter dated 10 June 1898, Swamiji wrote to Sarfraj Husain:

...practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally. On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone. Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind.... For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.<sup>45</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's approach was not to synthesize Hinduism and Islam into one religion, nor did he simply strive for the revival of Hinduism as has often been alleged. What he wanted was a rejuvenation of the spirituality behind every historical religion, not only for man's emancipation but also for his all-round development. Emphasizing

---

<sup>45</sup>*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978), vol. 6, p. 415.

the baneful influence of credal religions, Swami Vivekananda wrote,

My Master used to say that these names, as Hindu, Christian, etc., stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now only stand as a baneful influence under whose black magic even the best of us behave like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and must succeed.<sup>46</sup>

To secure a permanent cure, the spirituality behind historical religions needs to be emphasized and a better rapport between the followers of different faiths needs to be established.

---

<sup>46</sup>*Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), p. 218.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE UNKNOWN

Swami Bhajanananda

### *The timeless adoration*

When the sun sinks behind the western skyline, when shadows thicken and merge in the enveloping gloom, when from the horizon the carpet of stillness spreads across the twilight world, a simple ritual is performed in scores of ashramas and in thousands of homes in adoration of a Being known to the world as Sri Ramakrishna. In a special room, or corner of a room, set apart for his unseen presence, incense is burnt and lights are waved, and often there is group singing of songs and hymns of praise and supplication.

A religious ritual is a sacrament. Behind it there is a sacralizing agent whose power sustains it for centuries. Through the ritual, past events are recreated in the minds of devotees and they encounter divine phenomena afresh. When the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna do *pūjā* or *ārati* in their dwelling places, each place of worship becomes in a mystic sense his room at the Dakshineswar temple garden. Time, as it were, stands still and history is transcended when Sri Ramakrishna accepts, as his devotees believe, their worship day after day. For the time being, there then exists only an eternal now. Such is the miracle that faith works through religious rituals.

A ritual, however, is only a temporal expression of the timeless aspiration of the human soul. Birth after birth, through trackless centuries, man has been knowingly or unknowingly adoring the Divine in some form or other. It is in response to this timeless aspiration of the human soul that the Divine incarnates himself again and again on earth. The God-hungry soul seizes upon these manifestations and tries to derive new meaning and direction regarding its own progress in life. Every word that an Incarnation utters

becomes a message of light, every gesture of his a promise of hope, every action a sacrament, and every place he visits a centre of pilgrimage. This is true of all the great Incarnations of the past, Rāma and Krishna, Buddha and Christ, and has now come to be true in the case of Sri Ramakrishna.

Kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema

—*Who is that god to whom we offer our oblations?*

Who is this Sri Ramakrishna to whom thousands of people now accord adoration? Who is Sri Ramakrishna whose deathless reality is now intimately connected with the lives and destinies of countless people all over the world? If this question is put to his devotees and followers, it is likely to embarrass a good number of them, while those who attempt to answer it soon find that they are failing to give clear expression to their deepest convictions about him. It is said that when Girishchandra Ghosh once requested Swami Vivekananda to write a life of Sri Ramakrishna, the great Swami hastily shrank back and told him, 'Ask me to dry up the ocean, I shall do that; ask me to pulverize the mountains, I shall do that; but please do not ask me to write the life of Sri Ramakrishna.'

If even a person of Swami Vivekananda's eminence felt so diffident about his understanding of his Master, one may not find it surprising that the ordinary devotees of Sri Ramakrishna fail to comprehend his real nature. But the truth is, more often than not, the acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna by his devotees is not the result of elaborate reasoning or deep cogitation. With many it is largely a case of divine invasion of the devotees' hearts, though they may attribute it to the reading of a book or a chance hearing of a talk or a casual visit to an ashrama. And when this happens, they feel a compelling urge to accept and worship a phenomenon which they do not fully understand.

However, an unconscious acceptance of a spiritual ideal is often not strong enough to take the spiritual aspirant far the spiritual path. Faith in God is too precious a thing to be allowed to remain in the dark subterranean chambers of the mind. Faith must be illumined by experience, and devotion must become a fully conscious, self-directed approach.

The early Vedic Aryans worshipped several deities. Soon some enquiring minds among them began to ask themselves: 'Who is that Deity to whom we offer oblations?'<sup>1</sup> Questions of this kind urged them to undertake an investigation into the nature of the reality behind the phenomenal world, and in the Upanisads we find how this search culminated in the discovery of Brahman as the ultimate Truth. Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, or for that matter, devotees of any Personal God or Avatara, are sure to find their understanding of their object of adoration expanding when they too undertake a similar enquiry.

*'What do you think of me?'*

Sri Ramakrishna himself during his life time seemed to have encouraged such a spirit of enquiry among his intimate disciples. He used to ask them now and then what they thought about him. For instance, we find in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* the Master asking M., the author of the book, on the latter's third visit to him, 'Let me ask you something. What do you think of me? How many *annas* of knowledge of God have I?'<sup>2</sup>

There was a twofold purpose in asking this question. In the first place, the answer he got gave him an insight into

---

<sup>1</sup>*Rig-Veda*, 10. 121. Sāyana's interpretation of this line is, however, different from the one given above.

<sup>2</sup>M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, (hereafter *Gospel*), p. 17.

the working of the disciple's mind and an understanding of the latter's belief pattern. Secondly, the question was calculated to stimulate the disciple's mind to make an effort to understand the person whom he adored, and keep his relation with him an ever-fresh conscious experience. True love never becomes static, conditioned or stale. It is always a fresh conscious experience involving the total personality. This becomes possible only when love is based on understanding, and the lover constantly encounters his beloved afresh.

The vast majority of people lose touch with Reality because they allow themselves to drift with the stream of life. A true spiritual man, on the contrary, encounters life and confronts Reality every moment of his life. Devotees often run the risk of taking their relationship with their Chosen Ideal for granted. They often remain satisfied with the thought that they already possess enough love for their Chosen Ideal. Similarly, meditation is often attempted with the assumption that the object of their meditation is known to them. If they know all about their objects of meditation, why should they meditate on them at all? This kind of presumption, which is born of ignorance, destroys the initiative for seeking the Truth, and blocks the path of progress. That is why the Upanishad teaches: 'Truth is known to him to whom It is unknown; he does not know to whom It is known. It is unknown to those who know well, and known to those who do not know.'<sup>3</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'The devotees who come here may be divided into two groups. One group says, "O God, give me liberation." Another group, belonging to the inner circle, doesn't talk that way. They are satisfied if they can know two things: who I am [meaning himself]; second, who they are and what their relationship to me is.'<sup>4</sup> This is

---

<sup>3</sup>*Kena Upanisad*, 2.3.

<sup>4</sup>*Gospel*, p. 413.

an important statement which comes to Swami Vivekananda's definition of true religion as 'the eternal relationship between the eternal soul and the eternal God'. The relationship between the devotee and his Chosen Ideal becomes eternal only when it is based on a true knowledge of the real nature of the worshipper and the object of worship.

### *Aura of mystery*

It is in the context of the above statement that we, as devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, have raised the question: Who is Sri Ramakrishna? When we try to undertake such an enquiry, we come to the surprising discovery that, apart from some factual information about the external activities of Sri Ramakrishna during his brief life-span, he largely remains unknown. We do not really know the Being who lived on earth as Sri Ramakrishna. Even when we try to analyse the known facts of his life on earth, we come face to face with a mystery at almost every step.

An aura of mystery surrounds Sri Ramakrishna's life right from his birth. According to his biographers, before he was born his father had a dream at Gaya in which the deity Vishnu appeared before Khudiram and told him that he would soon be born as his son. Meanwhile Sri Ramakrishna's mother had a wonderful spiritual experience in her native village, Kamarpukur. One day while standing before a temple of Lord Śiva, she saw a flood of celestial light issuing from the image and entering her person, and she soon began to feel that she was with child. Now, this raises the interesting question: of whose manifestation Sri Ramakrishna really was—whether of Vishnu or of Śiva. Or, was it a case of religious harmony right in the mother's womb? The authorized biographies of Sri Ramakrishna do not attempt an explanation of this strange phenomenon.

His boyhood was full of mysterious experiences and events. Practically the whole of his youth was spent in spiritual practices the intensity, diversity, and amplitude of which have no parallel in the history of hagiography. Those who came to teach him remained to adore him. The halo of divinity that he radiated was patent enough even to some of the great scholars of the day who openly declared him to be an Incarnation of God. He drew his disciples and devotees to him with an irresistible power, and to each of them he revealed himself in a different way. His patron Mathur Babu saw in him Śiva and Kālī. To his teacher Bhairavi Brāhmani and some householder disciples he was Sri Gaurānga. To the great woman devotee known as Gopal's Mother he was Sri Krishna. Swami Vivekananda saw in him the fulfilment of his highest ideals. Once he had an experience in which he saw Sri Ramakrishna as Gopī Rādhā, and this profoundly influenced his life. In the sacred shrine of Jagannāth at Purī, Swami Turiyananda had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna as that Deity. Swami Shivananda saw him as Śiva in a vision which he had at Benares. Swami Abhedananda had a wonderful spiritual experience in which he saw all the great Incarnations and deities merging in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

This protean capacity to assume diverse divine forms is a special attribute of Sri Ramakrishna's being and marks him out from other great Incarnations and prophets of the world. But this only thickens the mystery that envelops his real nature, and thwarts our attempts to categorize him according to known patterns of religious belief. He was unique and universal at the same time.

### *Temporal and eternal aspects*

Sri Ramakrishna is now being accepted as an Incarnation of God not only by thousands of his followers, but also by a large number of other people in different parts of the

world, among whom may be counted several eminent thinkers and famous men. A modern biographer of Sri Ramakrishna can now feel less hesitant and apologetic in discussing this aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's life and experience than his early predecessors. That Sri Ramakrishna's life and experiences are extraordinary and extend beyond the bounds of ordinary sainthood is clear to all who care to study them. The main difficulty lies not in calling him an Incarnation of God but in knowing what that term really means. And it is here that we meet Sri Ramakrishna the Unknown, for the mystery of the Incarnation has not so far lent itself to easy solution. A right understanding and evaluation of the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna should be based on the acceptance of the mystery of the Incarnation. The mystery that surrounds the real nature of Sri Ramakrishna is ultimately bound up with the mystery of the Incarnation.

The main function of an Incarnation is the redemption of mankind. The word redemption is, however, used here not in the narrow Christian sense of saving a man from original sin. It is used here only to indicate the superhuman capacity of a divine Person to cut the bonds and destroy the ignorance of millions of souls by infusing spiritual power and knowledge into them, and lifting them to higher planes of existence where they enjoy supreme peace and bliss. The vast majority of ordinary mortals are unable to achieve all this by their own individual efforts. An Incarnation is a reservoir of great spiritual power, and he creates, with himself as the centre, a field of spiritual forces. Whoever is drawn into this field by the irresistible will of the Incarnation spontaneously gets illumination and freedom. This is essentially how Swami Vivekananda explains the doctrines of Incarnation and Grace.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>See, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), vol. 7, pp. 241-42.

The salvific work of an Incarnation begins on a colossal scale only after his withdrawal from his physical framework. The purpose of his embodiment is to reveal to humanity an adorable human form, to set up a new ideal of life, to deliver a new message of hope—all suited to the contemporary needs and temper of the people. But all these, however necessary they are, have only a limited value. They serve only to turn suffering men and women away from their futile worldly pursuits and draw them to a particular religious focus. The real work of an Incarnation begins only after people have been brought into his focus of influence. The earthly life of an Incarnation is only a guidepost pointing to his transcendental essence. This is what Sri Ramakrishna means when he says that the Incarnation is like a hole in a wall through which one can see the other side, which is otherwise inaccessible to one's vision.

To identify the reality of an Incarnation solely with his earthly life and activities and exclude his transcendental dimension is to mistake the gate for the mansion. This is the mistake that Protestant theologians have been committing with regard to the life of Jesus. By over-emphasizing the historicity of Jesus and restricting the significance of the Incarnation to certain incidents in his earthly life, some of the modern Protestant theologians have sought to deprive him of his mystical and spiritual dimensions.

The historical aspect of an Incarnation is only the temporal dimension of his eternal spiritual Reality. His mission on earth derives its authority and significance from his transcendent power and purpose. This point should not be lost sight of when we study the life and mission of Sri Ramakrishna. His extreme renunciation of 'lust and gold', his superhuman spiritual struggles and experiences, and the depth and sweep of his message—all these were extraordinary and glorious indeed. But they only point to his own transcendental glory which is hidden from our mortal eyes. What the famous *Purusha Sūkta* says may be said to be true in this case also, perhaps in a more restricted sense: 'All this

(created universe) manifests only one-fourth of the glory of the Purusha; the remaining three-fourths lies in the immortal celestial plane.<sup>6</sup>

### *Embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas*

It takes centuries for mankind to comprehend an Incarnation. For centuries millions of people have been inspired by the lives and teachings of Buddha and Christ and hundreds of books have been written on them. Yet, they still continue to stimulate fresh studies, and new books are still being brought out throwing new light on the contemporary relevance and significance of these old Masters. When a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna one day complained to Swami Vivekananda that his method of preaching and social service, was western in type and incompatible with Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, Swamiji replied with great fervour: 'The thing is this: Sri Ramakrishna is far greater than his disciples understand him to be. He is the embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas capable of development in infinite ways. Even if one can find a limit to the knowledge of Brahman, one cannot measure the unfathomable depth of our Master's mind.'<sup>7</sup>

An Incarnation who is the 'embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas' takes centuries to work himself out. Through innumerable institutions and religious traditions, through the creative minds of saints and sages, artists, thinkers, philosophers and leaders of society, his ideas find expression for a very long period of time, inspiring, comforting and guiding suffering humanity until they all to the last man find themselves safely through the portals of

---

<sup>6</sup>*Rig-Veda*, 10.90.3.

<sup>7</sup>Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1974), p. 505.

immortality. In this sense the life and mission of Sri Ramakrishna may be said to have only just begun.

For a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna the most important problem of his life is the quest for the real Sri Ramakrishna. A true devotee of his does not remain satisfied with reading or hearing about his life and teachings. Making use of the knowledge thus gained, he tries to seek the Reality of which this knowledge is only a shadow. He soon finds that this mystic quest is leading him on to the depth of his soul which is the gateway to the world of the Spirit. It is there that the real Sri Ramakrishna is to be sought.

The real Sri Ramakrishna is unknown but *not* unknowable. He can be known only if he reveals himself. And he reveals himself to the sincere aspirant in the secret depths of his heart and fulfills the timeless yearning of his soul. Diverse and mysterious are the ways by which the Incarnation reveals himself to the blessed, and leads them from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, and from death to Immortality. What even these blessed souls feel about him has been expressed by Swami Abhedananda, who was certainly one among them, in the following verse: 'O Lord, I do not know your real nature. Whatever be the Truth you reveal yourself in, to That I offer my salutations again and again.'<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>'Sri Rāmakrishna Gunāmritam', 9; in Śwami Abhedananda, *Songs Divine*, trans. P. Seshadri Aiyer (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1944), p. 58.

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA:  
THE SYMBOL OF NATIONAL UNITY**  
Swami Sundarananda

In his inimitable language a great pioneer of the Indian national movement made a eulogistic statement about the advent of Sri Ramakrishna:

Religion always, in India, says Sri Aurobindo, precedes national awakening. Shankaracharya was the beginning of a wave that swept round the whole country culminating in Chaitanya in Bengal, the Sikh Gurus in the Punjab, Shivaji in Maharashtra, and Ramanuja and Madhvacharya in the South. Through each of these a people sprang into self realization, into national energy and consciousness of their own unity. Sri Ramakrishna represents a synthesis, in one person, of all the leaders. It follows that the movements of his age will unify and organize the more provincial and fragmentary movements of the past. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the epitome of the whole. His was the great superconscious life which alone can witness to the infinitude of the current that bears us all oceanwards. He is the proof of the power behind us and the future before us. So great a birth initiates great happenings.

Scrutinizing the validity of the above prophetic assertion of a great *yogi* we find that at the beginning of the last century a powerful current of western materialism based on scientific achievements began to pour into India. At the very onset it threatened to inundate the whole country, carrying away like straw the teachings of the saints and sages handed down from time immemorial. But as has been the case on previous occasions, so also at that critical time in the history of the Hindus, a great personality incarnated in

the person of Ramakrishna. His illustrious disciple Vivekananda set forth the ways of assimilation and absorption of western ideals in the light of the teachings of the great prophet of the harmony of all religions. He reviewed western civilizations and its achievements entirely from the standpoint of Indian thought and freed us from the dominating influence of the West. He said, 'What Indians have to take from the West, they must take as Indians.' In introducing his Master Ramakrishna, the Swami said,

Here has been a manifestation of an immense power, just the very beginning of whose workings we are seeing, and before this generation passes away, you will see more wonderful workings of that Power. It has come just in time for the regeneration of India, for we forget from time to time the vital power that must always work in India.... Such a hero has been given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round this name.

It is a well-known fact that the great success achieved by Swami Vivekananda was in no small measure due to the limitless store of spiritual wealth which Ramakrishna possessed. Ramakrishna was a great reservoir and Vivekananda was a cleansing and life giving stream which flowed from it. Ramakrishna's mission was embodied in Vivekananda, whose dynamic message brought about the all-round regeneration of India and is still permeating the aims and objects of the various organizations—spiritual, social, political, and educational—which have sprung up all over India. His clarion call is still inspiring hundreds and thousands of young men with a spirit of selfless patriotism to make astounding sacrifices for the low, the downtrodden, the untouchable, the diseased, the poor, the starving, and the illiterate.

Ramakrishna is a perfect incarnation of Hindu genius and his greatest contribution to the world of thought is his declaration of the harmony of all religions after actual realization of their highest truths. In one life of fifty years and odd, Sri Ramakrishna lived 'the five thousand years of national spiritual life, and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations.' Out of his direct perception of the truths of all the religions, he declared the existence of the one and only supreme Being, and not more than one, who is worshipped as Brahman by the Hindus, Buddha by the Buddhists, Christ by the Christians, and Allah by the Muslims just as the same water is named differently in different languages. Sri Aurobindo says:

The world moves through a new synthesis of religious thought-life—free from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all forms of religion, because it was an unshakable faith in One. The religion which embraces science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, and yet is none of these, is that to which the world spirit moves. It is such a synthesis embracing all life and action in its scope that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda have been preparing.

In Vedanta we find this kind of non-sectarian world religion, and Ramakrishna was the living embodiment of this universal Vedanta. Scriptures teach mere theories; Ramakrishna was realization personified. In the whole history of humanity he was the only God-man who discovered the common basis of all religions whereas each of the other religious sects asserts its own infallibility, the perfection and supremacy of its own over all the rest. Says Swami Vivekananda,

In Asia, religious ideals form the national unity. The unity in religion, therefore, is absolutely necessary

as the first condition of the future of India.... We see how in Asia, specially in India, race difficulties, linguistic difficulties, social difficulties, national difficulties all melt away before this unifying power of religion.... It is not only true that the ideal of religion is the highest ideal, in the case of India it is the only possible means of work; work in any other line, without first strengthening this, would be disastrous. Therefore, the first plank in the making of a future India, the first step that is to be hewn out of that rock of ages, is this unification of religion.... With the giving up of quarrels all other improvements will come..

Our life-blood is spirituality. If it flows clear, if it flows strong and pure and vigorous, everything is right; political, social, any other material defects, even the poverty of the land, will all be cured if that blood is pure.... You are bound by it, and if you give it up, you are smashed to pieces.

The problem of Hindu-Muslim communalism, with its disastrous consequences, amply justify the prophetic remark of the great patriot-saint of modern India. It is a far cry for India, as the Swami has rightly said, to establish relations of equality with foreign nations until she succeeds in restoring equality within her own bounds. It is now quite clear that the survival of the republican India completely depends upon the establishment of unity and equality among her diverse sects. The only means of restoring this condition is the harmony of all religions. That the solution of the communal problem does not lie in any political or economic programme, or in religious neutrality, or even in the adoption of the method of political secularism, has been satisfactorily proved by the strenuous efforts made by our much respected political leaders. Mahatma Gandhi repeatedly said in his speeches and writings that on the acceptance of different religions as part and parcel of one eternal faith depended the solution of the problem.

'In Ramakrishna's message of reverence for all prophets and the synthesis of all religions', says T. L. Vaswani, 'is the hope of the future. It is India's message to the nations.'

Nowadays in republican India no reasonable man expects the survival of any particular religion, however great and good it may be, upon the extinction of the rest, nor can the very existence of religion be wiped out from this land of spirituality. Neither patched-up pacts nor camouflaged neutrality in the name of secularism, but the synthesis of religions, which teaches mutual respect, toleration, and love as embodied in the life of Ramakrishna, can alone secure national unity in India on a solid basis.

It will be utter folly to make naked materialism, under the grab of secularism, the only basis of our national life. 'For I must tell you frankly,' said Swami Vivekananda, 'that the very foundations of Western civilization have been shaken to their base. The mightiest buildings, if built upon the loose sand foundations of materialism must come to grief one day, must totter to their destruction some day. The history of the world is our witness. Nation after nation has arisen and based its greatness upon materialism, declaring man was all matter.' On the other hand, in India hundreds and thousands of men have abandoned material comforts as dust and ashes and even kings and emperors have spurned their thrones and willingly taken to the path of renunciation and voluntary poverty with a view to realizing God—the highest object of human life and the essence of all bliss and absolute peace. The general masses of the people here cannot be expected to banish all religious and philosophical ideas from their minds and hearts in order to take to secularism as the be-all and end-all of their lives. Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, 'Politics (which includes economics) without a religious backing is a dangerous pastime resulting in nothing but harm to the individual.' Therefore, those who are out to build Indian national unity on secular principles alone, discarding religion, are unwittingly wandering into chaotic totalitarianism which aspires to

mechanize man and reject eternal life-values, fondly thinking this would be in the interests of the State.

'National union in India,' declared Swami Vivekananda, 'must be a gathering-up of its scattered spiritual forces.' Ramakrishna was the living personification of Indian national unity—unity in diversity. No exotic arrangement, however efficient it may be, can unite a people suddenly. But a change of heart is necessary to unite them and that can be effected through religion—which has been the guiding principle of the people of India from time immemorial. Consequently, under the banner of Ramakrishna's harmony of religions will be built the solid national edifice of unity in independent India and his message stands for this unity, brotherhood, and peace among her people.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

Swami Akhilananda

Today there is a wave of psychological interest. Everyone in America, at least every thinking person, puts tremendous value upon the study of psychology. Why? Because we all realize that psychology works. Psychology gives something to our everyday life. Psychology regulates the use of the mind that we may influence other minds. We can influence others in various ways. Consequently, particularly in America, people are placing great store upon the study of psychology. It is time that modern psychology which has been developed very much in Europe and in America, is giving us something which we did not have before. The concrete use of mind was not achieved until a few years ago. Modern psychology, in spite of its defects, narrowness, and incompleteness, has done a great deal so far as our practical life is concerned. You go to a department store. All salesmen and women use psychology so that they can play with the minds of others. Wherever you go, you find the effects of the study of psychology. You go to a doctor, and he will tell you that without the understanding of psychology he cannot cure most ailments. You go to a psychoanalyst, and he will try to discover your complexes and help you accordingly.

What do the psychologists say about the spiritual experiences and life of Sri Ramakrishna? Suppose we present his experiences to the modern psychologists. I am sure that in Europe and America, perhaps with the exception of one or two, they will declare that this man had hallucinations, that the experiences he used to have about God were nothing but self-hypnosis, delusion, epilepsy or some other form of mental disturbance. Most modern psychologists assume that the 'idea of God' is due to childhood dependence on the father. God is nothing but

'Father-transference' to overcome fear and other weaknesses. The Behaviourists go a step further and want to eliminate the idea of God from human life. Some psychoanalysts dogmatically give even obnoxious and shocking theories regarding the idea of God. A few years ago, one of my best friends in America had occasion to talk to one of the greatest psychiatrists of New England. He is usually consulted in serious cases. When my friend spoke of religious problems, the psychologist suggested that these were just foolish ideas of man, that at times man adopts these religious ideas either to console his mind or to get a little encouragement and strength from the fictitious idea of God. Many psychologists will actually look down upon you if you talk of religion or of God, and will think you peculiar. I know what my friend thought when, with so many things to discuss, she met the psychologist who asked, 'Do you have any visions or experiences?' He wanted to establish another pathological case based on one of his pet theories.

Let us evaluate the experiences of the great mystics and also the experiences of the great psychologists, and let us find which ones are scientific in the religious field and which are not. All the great spiritual leaders and spiritual personalities, such as Sri Ramakrishna, were sometime or other regarded by the common run of folk as men of hallucination or as insane persons. Why? Because they were unusual; because their experiences were not the experiences of psychologists and other ordinary people living on the sense plane. After all, what does the psychologist study? Until a few years ago, psychologists were limited to the conscious activities of the mind, to just the surface of the mind, and nothing more than that. Only of late, just for the last twenty-five or thirty years, a few psychologists have been talking of the subconscious mind and describing something as subconscious, but even here their general conclusions are very vague, insufficient, and incomplete. The methods of their study are not yet thorough and convincing.

One of the greatest psychologists of the modern world, Dr. Jung, in his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, tells us, without the least shade of doubt, after so many years of study and of experimentation, after many years of medical and pathological practice, that western psychology is a beginner's attempt in comparison with the oriental system of yoga, particularly of the Hindu system of yoga. He understands the validity of spiritual realization and experiences. Similar statements are made by other profound thinkers, such as Dr. William Brown of London, who does not discard religion and studies the subject thoroughly and not from a narrow point of view. Of late, fortunately, Dr. Alexis Carrell is shedding new light for the West on spiritual experiences. He tells us emphatically, in his *Man the Unknown*, that spiritual experiences are valid; moreover that man's life and experience are incomplete without them. It was here, right here in America, that one of the greatest psychologists of the West did not decry spiritual experiences, mystic realizations as mere facts of pathology and hallucination. It was in Boston, that Professor William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, did not discard these experiences as pathological, although he did not have a final understanding because, as he admitted, he did not have a complete understanding of the mind nor had he followed spiritual practices. But he was not a narrow person, and he presented to us without any prejudice certain facts for psychologists and scientific thinkers to judge and evaluate. He discussed and presented not only the experiences and methods of the Christian mystics, but also those of the Hindu, Mohammedan and other mystics.

I do not deny that there are many pathological cases that assume religious ideas. Many insane persons are in the business world, in banking or commercial fields. Others are conducting factories, or rather conduct factories and then become insane. They may be obsessed by some particular idea and lose balance. Does that mean that your banking or commercial ways of living make people insane? Would you

discard your banking system because such and such a person became insane while being a bank president? You might meet some persons who have an extreme form of hallucination regarding money, friendship, or something else. There are persons who actually think so many foolish things and do so many destructive acts in the name of friendship, in the name of love and in the name of so many other beautiful tendencies of man. Would you say that friendship is the cause of insanity or that love is the root of insanity? If any scientist or any psychologist concludes that religion produces insanity, he is certainly narrow and unscientific. He is concluding more than is warranted by partial facts. He is not following the proper methods of investigation and generalization.

Psychologists try to measure spiritual experiences by methods applicable to other sciences. Different scientific studies are to be followed through various methods. For instance, you do not apply the same method of study to psychology as to physics. Similarly, mystic realization or spiritual experience has its own individual method. If by following these prescribed methods systematically and exactly you fail to realize the truth, then, and only then, can you legitimately conclude that God is meaningless, that He is a mere Father-transference, a fictitious idea created by weak persons to have a feeling of shelter and solace in their troubles. Many modern psychologists are committing this great blunder when they generalize and actually look down upon all spiritual experiences or ignore the higher mental and spiritual states.

Now, how will the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna be regarded by western psychologists? They only study a few conscious activities or perhaps get a glimpse of some of the subconscious tendencies. Sri Ramakrishna's life and experiences, as they belong to the superconscious, opens up a new realm of psychology. Modern psychologists have not even the slightest idea of that realm. Consequently, they will conclude that these experiences of Sri Ramakrishna are

hallucinations. Spiritual experiences illumine the whole mind, and lead us to a state where we transcend the limitations of time, space and causation. We transcend the limitations of name and form. We transcend the limitations of the phenomenal world. It is true that very few persons have these unusual and extraordinary experiences, but nevertheless, those who have them find them to be more valid than ordinary phenomenal experiences. You will all agree with me that today you think about certain things in one way, and the next day you change your ideas. Your emotional reactions constantly vary. Today you think that certain persons are wonderful, and tomorrow your mind changes and you discard that idea about them. This is because you have not the deeper understanding of them. We have only superficial understanding from external expressions, which may have different inner causes. For instance, a gift may be made to another by reason of different inner urges: love, feeling of service, greed, expectation, spite. You may love the person, so you give, or you may feel that the person is in need, or you may give to the person as in service or worship of God. You may again give something in expectation of receiving something in return. You may give to make another jealous, or because of being angry with another, or in spite and so on. When modern psychologists try to study the unconscious mind, they really grope in the dark. Although they may sometimes hit upon the right unconscious motive or urge, yet their understanding of the unconscious is often very unsatisfactory, incomplete and vague. Their research is based purely on the objective study of the mind and is often coloured by preconceived notions of the nature of urges and contents of the unconscious. But a man of higher unfoldment or of mystic realization has complete understanding of every fact, of every person. He sees through your body and mind the reality behind you. He deals with the inner region, the inner man. None but a man of spiritual realization can give us the total experience of man's existence. By virtue of his own

inner illumination, he has the penetrating understanding of the inner nature of others.

The life and experiences of Sri Ramakrishna take us very far away from modern psychology, psychoanalysis or experimental psychology. A new study is required. If we want to develop a complete psychology, we have to discipline ourselves first. We have first to have superconscious realization and experiences. Then alone shall we be in a position to give the world a complete psychology. Until you can discipline your mind, and train yourself wholly and completely, you have no access to the mystic experiences of the superconscious realm. Until you take up the methods that will lead you to mystic realization, you have not the slightest idea of the existence of superconscious realization nor of its effect.

The Yoga systems of India give us a deeper understanding of the complete mind, subconscious, conscious and superconscious. It is true that the yogis present the life of Sri Ramakrishna as an actual demonstration of the highest form of psychology. If you want to study the complete and total field of man's mind, you have to interpret and study in the light of the experiences of the type of this great man. I am not asking you to accept him or anyone else, nor am I asking you to present him to the world without verifying his experiences. Sri Ramakrishna himself tells us, 'Come along, have the experiences.' You all know that when Swami Vivekananda, his great disciple who was the lion of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, challenged him with the question, 'Have you seen God?' Sri Ramakrishna answered, 'Yes. I have seen Him and I can show Him to you.' That was the declaration made not only to Swami Vivekananda, but to the whole world, to you and to me. Yes, a man can experience God, and that man can also show you God. Sri Ramakrishna not only had superconscious experiences but also knew the methods and taught them to his disciples. This knowledge can be given to others. There is no exclusive idea about this. I saw many of

the disciples of this great Master who had superconscious experiences. Their love, unselfishness, purity and other wonderful qualities proved to me without the least shade of doubt that super-conscious realizations were valid, practical, dynamic and they can also be demonstrated.

I have presented to you the one personality who lived the life of a Hindu, a Christian, a Mohammedan, a Buddhist, and a Jew and realized the truth by following different methods. Consequently, we are totally convinced that even today God can be experienced and realized by any person, regardless of his church affiliation or religious creed. The only thing that is required is intense love for that realization and the strong urge to realize God. Since we are all born in this age and have consciously or unconsciously imbibed scientific tendencies, let us be thoroughly scientific and make a worthwhile experiment on the realization of God or on spiritual experiences. Let us also find that God is true, in our own inner consciousness, in our own everyday life, in our actions and thoughts. We shall then find that God consciousness will unite us, will make us serve the veritable expressions of God as so many human forms.

Sri Ramakrishna's realizations were not static but dynamic. He went out with his intense love to serve the veritable expressions of God in human and other forms, because he realized that the Infinite was not only present in a few persons but was also present in all beings, even in plants and in inanimate objects. This is a very significant fact and is the practical solution of our modern problems.

The mystic experiences of Sri Ramakrishna did not make him lose what he possessed before, but made him more efficient, practical, methodical, systematic, and intelligent. A new vista was, moreover, opened to him. He gained an immediate and direct knowledge of a new realm previously unknown to him or to others. His joy and peace knew no bounds. Above all, mystic experiences made him love his disciples and all persons with whom he came in contact, nay, all beings.

Let me present a few instances and facts to modern psychologists and to others for their consideration. One day, a man was walking upon newly sprouted green blades of grass. Sri Ramakrishna without knowing what was going on, called out, 'Oh me! They are beating me, they are pressing my chest!' On inquiry it was found that a man was treading ruthlessly on the tender blades of growing grass. When he desisted, the pain stopped. Once, at a distance, out of sight of Sri Ramakrishna and unknown to him, a bullock was severely beaten. Scars of the assault appeared on the back of Sri Ramakrishna without his knowing the cause. Another time two boatmen were quarrelling and came to blows. Sri Ramakrishna felt those blows on his own person.

Would the psychologists believe these facts? I ask the psychologists this question: How did these things happen? You could not say that they were hallucinations. You could not say that this man's mind was wrong. You could not say that this was a case of auto-suggestion or of self-hypnosis. It was that this mystic had identified himself completely with the whole of existence, with the whole realm of reality. Consequently, he felt the fighting of the men, the beating of the bullock and the maltreating of the grass keenly within himself. This is possible only when a man unites himself with the source of existence, with the source of life.

When a man realizes the oneness of life and existence, then alone does he feel thus. Is not this love wonderful? If the mystic experiences of Sri Ramakrishna can make him love even blades of grass, effectively not sentimentally, I would certainly not only worship him, but I would also crave to become as close as possible to his life. Is not this experience worthwhile? Would you call a man of that experience a pathological case? I wish we were all of that type. I wish we could all attain even one hundredth part of that oneness. Then our maladies, our sufferings, our hateful and destructive tendencies would vanish in no time. This world would be a place of joy and peace, of harmony and synthesis.

Mystic realizations make you the source of love, the source of peace. Real spiritual realizations will unite you with the whole of existence, with the whole of reality. In fact, superconscious realizations are really the background and the dynamic forces of unselfish work and social justice. This is the real basis of Sri Ramakrishna's humanism. Modern humanists forget the real place of man and isolate him from God—the Real Existence, the background. Some are atheistic and the rest are agnostic and find no need for God. Their incentives and motives are not deep enough to convince the minds of men and to induce them to carry on humanitarian activities. Sri Ramakrishna's experiences furnish the real background of social work. He shows that the work should be done in the spirit of service and worship. Then the work performed by the aspirant will lead him to the highest realization of Truth. Of course a man of spiritual unfoldment himself does humanitarian work, being already established in the knowledge of the oneness of life, while the aspirant works to gain that realization. The Great Master one day emphasized to his disciples in the course of conversation, 'not compassion for man, but service to man.' He emphasized that we are to regard man as the veritable embodiment of God, *Nārāyana*.

Man has greed, injustice, and selfishness because he feels he must look after his own interest and the interest of his own family. Selfishness is the basis of all troubles in the family, among nations, and in internal affairs. All claims of exclusive rights and privileges are also due to selfishness. A man of superconscious realization removes all barriers of selfishness from his life because he feels in all the presence of God, the All-loving Being. As a result, such a man serves every one as a veritable expression of God. A man of such spiritual unfoldment is an object-lesson to all. His very life and actions make others unselfish and inspire them to give love and service to God and man. Such a life is, therefore, of great pragmatic value to the world, apart from the personal joy and happiness afforded to the mystic himself.

If you want to verify these experiences, you must identify yourself with the oneness of existence. Then alone are you in a position to evaluate, and then alone can you effectively help and serve others. You will then be a source of power, inspiration, and love. Your human relations will be enjoyable and uplifting.

So, I implore you to assimilate that life. Then you will understand the experiences of Jesus, Buddha, Saint Francis, Saint Paul, Swami Vivekananda, and of many others. You will also understand that the different religious methods are true and are leading different types of men to God. Finally, you will realize the inner divinity of all, and thereby you will change your attitude and behaviour to others and influence them effectively to do the same. Let us do it right now. We have heard the clarion call that you and I can have that realization which Sri Ramakrishna had. Let us make our lives blessed by realizing the Truth, by realizing God, by identifying ourselves with the oneness of life and existence.

## RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

### Mahatma Gandhi

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object lesson in Ahimsa.<sup>1</sup> His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.

---

<sup>1</sup>Non-injury.

## RAMAKRISHNA - VIVEKANANDA

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose

In the eighties of the last century, two prominent religious personalities appeared before the public, who were destined to have a great influence on the future course of a new awakening. They were Ramakrishna Paramahansa... and his disciple Swami Vivekananda.... Ramakrishna preached the gospel of the unity of all religions and urged the cessation of inter-religious strife.... Before he died, he charged his disciples with the task of propagating his religious teachings in India and abroad and of bringing about an awakening among his countrymen.

Swami Vivekananda therefore founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an order of monks, to live and preach the Hindu religion in its purest form in India and abroad, especially in America, and he took an active part in inspiring every form of healthy nationalism. He tried to infuse into the new generation a sense of pride in India's past, of faith in India's future, and a spirit of self-confidence and self-respect.

Though the Swami never gave any political message, every one who came into contact with him or his writings developed a spirit of patriotism and a political mentality. So far at least as Bengal is concerned, Swami Vivekananda may be regarded as the spiritual father of the modern nationalist movement. He died very young in 1902, but since his death his influence has been even greater.<sup>1</sup>

I cannot write about Vivekananda without going into raptures. Few indeed could comprehend or fathom him—even among those who had the privilege of becoming intimate with him. His personality was rich, profound and complex, and it was this personality—as distinct from his

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Indian Struggle* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964), p. 21.

teachings and writings—which accounts for the wonderful influence he had exerted on his countrymen and particularly on Bengalees. This is the type of manhood which appeals to the Bengalees as probably none other. Reckless in his sacrifice, unceasing in his activity, boundless in his love, profound and versatile in his wisdom, exuberant in his emotions, merciless in his attacks but yet simple as a child—he was a rare personality in this world of ours....

Swamiji was full-blooded masculine personality—and a fighter to the core of his being. He was consequently a worshipper of Shakti and gave a practical interpretation to the Vedanta for the uplift of his countrymen.... I can go on for hours and yet fail to do the slightest justice to that great man. He was so great, so profound, so complex. A Yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with Truth, who had for the time being consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity—that is how I would describe him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet. Modern Bengal is his creation—if I err not.<sup>2</sup>

How shall I express in words my indebtedness to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda? It is under their sacred influence that my life got first awakened. Like Nivedita I also regard Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as two aspects of one indivisible personality. If Swamiji had been alive today, he would have been my Guru, that is to say, I would have accepted him as my Master. It is needless to add, however, that as long as I live, I shall be absolutely loyal and devoted to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.<sup>3</sup>

It is very difficult to explain the versatile genius of Swami Vivekananda. The impact Swami Vivekananda made on the students of our times by his works and speeches far outweighed that made by any other leader of the country.

---

<sup>2</sup>*Prabuddha Bharata*, July 1932, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup>*Udbodhan*, Ashwin 1354 (Bengali Year), p. 459.

He, as it were, expressed fully their hope and aspirations. [But] Swamiji cannot be appreciated properly if he is not studied along with Sri Paramahansa Deva.

The foundations of the present freedom movement owes its origin to Swamiji's message. If India is to be free, it cannot be a land specially of Hinduism or of Islam—it must be one united land of different religious communities inspired by the ideal of nationalism. [And for that,] Indians must accept whole-heartedly the gospel of harmony of religions, which is the gospel of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda....

Swamiji harmonized East and West, religion and science, past and present. And that is why he is great. Our countrymen have gained unprecedented self-respect, self-confidence and self-assertion from his teachings.<sup>4</sup>

The harmony of all religions which Ramakrishna Paramahansa accomplished in his life's endeavour, was the keynote of Swamiji's life. And this idea, again, is the bed-rock of the nationalism of Future India. Without this concept of harmony of religions and toleration of all creeds, the spirit of national consciousness could not have been built up in this country of ours, full of diversities.

The aspiration for freedom manifested itself in various movements since the time of Rammohan Roy. This aspiration was witnessed in the realm of thought and in social reforms during the nineteenth century, but it was never expressed in the political sphere. This was because the people of India still remained sunk in the stupor of subjugation and thought that the conquest of India by the British was an act of Divine Dispensation. The idea of complete freedom is manifest only in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda towards the end of the nineteenth century. 'Freedom, freedom is the song of the Soul'—this was the message that burst forth from the inner recesses of Swamiji's heart and

---

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Phalgun 1337 (Bengali Year), p. 70.

captivated and almost maddened the entire nation. This truth was embodied in his works, life, conversations, and speeches.

Swami Vivekananda, on the one hand, called man to be real man, freed from all fetters, and, on the other, laid the foundation for true nationalism in India by preaching the gospel of the harmony of religions.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>*Nutaner Sandhan*, Calcutta, pp. 24-6.

## RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

Rabindra Nath Tagore

Friends,

When I was asked to address this distinguished gathering I was naturally reluctant, for I do not know if I can be called religious in the current sense of the term, not claiming as my possession any particular idea of God, authorized by some time-honoured institution. If, in spite of all this, I have accepted this honour, it is only out of respect to the memory of the great saint with whose Centenary the present Parliament is associated. I venerate Paramahamsa Dev because he, in an arid age of religious nihilism, proved the truth of our spiritual heritage by realizing it, because the largeness of his spirit could comprehend seemingly antagonistic modes of *sādhanā*, and because the simplicity of his soul shames for all time the pomp and pedantry of pontiffs and pandits.

I have nothing new to tell you, no esoteric truth to propound to you. I am a mere poet, a lover of men and of certain. But since love gives a certain insight, I may perhaps claim to have sometimes caught the hushed voice of humanity and felt its suppressed longing for the Infinite. I hope I do not belong to those who, born in a prison-house, never have the good luck to know that it is a prison, who are blissfully unaware that the costliness of their furniture and profuseness of the provisions for their comfort act as invisible walls in a castle of vanity that not only rob them of their freedom but even of the desire for it.

The degree of this freedom is measured according to our realization of the Infinite whether in the outer world, or in the inner life. In a narrow room we may have as much space as is necessary for living and for the exercise of our muscles; the food may be more than sufficient, it may even be sumptuous; yet our inborn craving for what we may call

the more, the unattained, if not altogether killed, remains unsatisfied. We are deprived of the Infinite, which is freedom of range, both in the outer world as well as in the ceaseless variety of the world of our experience.

But a more profoundly intimate perception of the Infinite lies in that intensity of our consciousness, which we can only attain when we realize ultimate value in some ideal of perfection, when in the realization of some fact of our life we become aware of an indefinable truth that immensely transcends it. We, in our human nature, have a hunger for *bhuma*, for immensity, for something a great deal more than what we need immediately for the purposes of life. Men all through their history have been struggling to realize this truth according to the unfolding of their idea of the boundless, and have been gradually changing their methods and plans of existence, constantly meeting failures, but never owning final defeat.

We find that animals have their evolution along the line of the race. They have their individual life which ends with their death. But even in them there is a touch of the Infinite which urges them to outlive their own life in the life of the race, accepting sufferings and making sacrifices for its sake. The spirit of sacrifice in the parents is this touch of the Infinite—the motive power which makes the race-life possible, which helps to develop those faculties in them that will enable their descendants to find better opportunity for food and shelter.

But in human beings has been further evolved a sense of the Infinite that goes far beyond the struggle for physical life which merely occupies extended time and extended space. Man has realized that a life of perfection is not merely a life of extension, but one which has its selfless enjoyment of the great and the beautiful.

After we have evolved this sense of the beautiful, of the good, of something that we call truth—which is deeper and larger than any number of facts—we have come into an altogether different atmosphere from that wherein the

animals and trees have their existence. But we have come into this higher realm only very lately.

Ages and ages have passed, dominated by the life of what we call the self, which is intent upon seeking food and shelter, and upon the perpetuation of the race. But there is a mysterious region waiting for its full recognition, which does not entirely acknowledge loyalty to physical claims. Its mystery constantly troubles us and we are not yet fully at ease in this region. We call it *spiritual*. That word is vague, only because we have not yet been able to realize its meaning completely.

We are groping in the dark, not yet clear in our idea of the ultimate meaning at the centre of this world. Nevertheless through the dim light which reaches us across the barriers of our physical existence, we seem to have a stronger faith in this spiritual life than in the physical. For even those who do not believe in the truth which we cannot define, but call by the name of spirit—even they are obliged to behave as though they did believe it to be true, or, at any rate, truer than the world which is evident to our senses. And so even they are often willing to accept death,—the termination of this physical life—for the sake of the true, the good and the beautiful. This fact expresses man's deeper urge for freedom, for liberation of itself in the realm of the limitless where he realizes his relationship with the truth which relates him to the universe in a disinterested spirit of love.

When Buddha preached *maitri*—the relationship of harmony—not only with human beings but with all creation, did he not have this truth in his mind that our treatment of the world is wrong when we solely treat it as a fact which can be known and used for our own personal needs? Did he not feel that the true meaning of creation can be understood only through love, because it is an eternal expression of love which waits for its answer from our soul emancipated from the bondage of self? This emancipation cannot be negative in character, for love can never lead to

negation. The perfect freedom is in a perfect harmony of relationship and not in a mere severance of bondage. Freedom has no content, and therefore no meaning, where it has nothing but itself. The soul's emancipation is in the fulfilment of its relation to the central truth of everything that there is, which is impossible to define because it comes at the end of all definition.

The distinctive feature of materialism is the measurability of its outward expression, which is the same thing as the finiteness of its boundaries. And the disputes, civil and criminal, which have raged in the history of man, have mostly been over these same boundaries. To increase one's own bounds one has necessarily to encroach upon those of others. So, because the pride of power is the pride of quantity, pride of the mere number of its recruits and victims, the most powerful telescope, when pointed in the direction of power, fails to reveal the shore of peace across the sea of blood.

Such is the tragedy that so often besets our history when this love of power, which is really the love of self, domineers over the religious life of man, for then the only means by which man could hope to set his spirit free, itself becomes the worst enemy of that freedom. Of all fetters those that falsely assume spiritual designations are the most difficult to break, and of all dungeons the most terrible are those invisible ones where men's souls are imprisoned in self-delusion bred by vanity. For, the undisguised pursuit of self has safety in its openness, like filth exposed to the sun and air. But the self-magnification, with its consequent thwarting of the best in man, that goes on unashamed when religion deadens into sectarianism is a perverse form of worldliness under the mask of religion; it constricts the heart into narrowness much more effectively than the cult of the world based upon material interests can ever do.

Let me try to answer the question as to what this *Spirit* is, for the winning of which all the great religions were brought into being.

The evening sky is revealed to us in its serene aspect of beauty though we know that from the fiery whirlpools which are the stars, chaotic outbursts clash against one another in a conflict of implacable fury. But, *ishāvāsyam idam sarvam*<sup>1</sup>—over and through it all there is spread a mysterious spirit of harmony, constantly modulating rebellious elements into creative unity, evolving ineffable peace and beauty out of the incoherently battling combatants perpetually struggling to elbow out their neighbours into a turmoil of dissolution.

And this great harmony, this everlasting 'yea', —this is Truth, that bridges the dark abyssms of time and space, reconciles contradictions, imparts perfect balance to the unstable. This all-pervading mystery is what we call spiritual in its essence. It is the human aspect of this truth which all great personalities have made their own in their lives and have offered to their fellow-beings in the name of various religions as means of peace and goodwill—as vehicles of beauty in behaviour, heroism in character, noble aspiration and achievement in all great civilizations.

But when these very religions travel far from their sacred sources, they lose their original dynamic vigour, and degenerate into the arrogance of piety, into an utter emptiness crammed with irrational habits and mechanical practices; then is their spiritual inspiration befogged in the turbidity of sectarianism, then do they become the most obstinate obstruction that darkens our vision of human unity, piling up out of their accretions and refuse deadweights of unreason across our path of progress—till at length civilized life is compelled to free its education from the stifling coils of religious creeds. Such fratricidal aberrations, in the guise of spiritual excellence, have brought upon the name of God whom they profess to glorify, uglier discredit than honest and defiant atheism could ever have done.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Isā Up.1*

The reason is, because sectarianism, like some voracious parasite, feeds upon the religion whose colour it assumes, exhausting it so that it knows not when its spirit is sucked dry. It utilizes the dead skin for its habitation, as a stronghold for its unholy instinct of fight, its pious vaingloriousness, fiercely contemptuous of its neighbours' articles of faith.

Sectarian votaries of a particular religion, when taken to task for the iniquitous dealings with their brethren which so deeply injure and insult humanity, immediately try to divert attention by glibly quoting noble texts from their own scriptures which preach love, justice, righteousness, and the divinity immanent in Man—ludicrously unconscious of the fact that those constitute the most damaging incrimination of their usual attitude of mind. In taking up the guardianship of their religion they allow, on the one hand, physical materialism to invade it by falsely giving eternal value to external practices, often of primitive origin; and moral materialism on the other, by invoking sacred sanction for their forms of worship within the rigid enclosure of special privileges founded upon accident of birth, or conformity, irrespective of moral justification. Such debasement does not belong to any particular religion, but more or less to all religions, the records of whose impious activities are written in brother's blood, and sealed with the indignities heaped upon them.

All through the course of human history it has become tragically evident that religions, whose mission is liberation of soul, have in some form or other ever been instrumental in shackling freedom of mind and even moral rights. The desecration of truth in unworthy hands—the truth which was meant to raise humanity morally and materially out of the dusky region of animality, is moreover followed by condign punishment, and thus we find that religious perversity is causing more blindness of reason and deadness of moral sensibility than any other deficiency in our education; just as, the truth represented by science, when

used for ignoble traffic, threatens us with annihilation. It has been the saddest experience of man to witness such violation of the highest products of civilization, to find the guardians of religion blessing the mailed fist of temporal power in its campaign of wholesale massacre and consolidation of slavery, and science joining hands with the same relentless power in its murderous career of exploitation.

When we come to believe that we are in possession of our God because we belong to some particular sect, it gives us a complete sense of comfort to feel that God is no longer needed, except for breaking with the greater unction the skulls of people whose idea of God, fortunately or unfortunately, differs from our own in theoretical details. Having thus made provision for our God in some shadow-land of creed, we feel free to reserve all the space in the world of reality for ourselves—ridding it of the wonder of the Infinite, making it as trivial as our own household furniture. Such unmitigated vulgarity only becomes possible when we have no doubt in our minds that we believe in God while our life ignores Him.

The pious man of sect is proud because he is confident of his right of possession of God. The man of devotion is meek because he is conscious of God's right of love over his life and soul. The object of our possession needs must become smaller than ourselves and, without acknowledging it in so many words, the bigoted sectarian nurses the implicit belief that God can be kept secured for himself and his fellows in a cage which is of their own make. In a similar manner the primitive races of men believe that their ceremonials have magic influence upon their deities.

Thus every religion that begins as a liberating agency ends as a vast prison-house. Built on the renunciation of its founder, it becomes a possessive institution in the hands of its priests, and claiming to be universal, becomes an active centre of schism and strife. Like a sluggish stream the spirit of man is choked by rotting weeds and is divided into shallow slimy pools that are active only in releasing deadly

mists of stupefaction. This mechanical spirit of tradition is essentially materialistic, it is blindly pious but not spiritual, obsessed by phantoms of unreason that haunt feeble minds with their ghastly mimicry of religion. This happens not only to mediocre individuals who hug the fetters that keep them irresponsible or craving for lurid unrealities, but to generations of insipid races that have lost all emphasis of significance in themselves, having missed their present in their ghostly past!

Great souls, like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, have a comprehensive vision of Truth, they have the power to grasp the significance of each different form of the Reality that is one in all—but the masses of believers are unable to reconcile the conflict of codes and commands. Their timid and shrunken imagination, instead of being liberated by the vision of the Infinite in religion, is held captive in bigotry and is tortured and exploited by priests and fanatics for uses hardly anticipated by those who originally received it.

Unfortunately, great teachers most often are surrounded by persons whose minds, lacking transparency of atmosphere, obscure and distort the ideas originating from the higher source. They feel a smug satisfaction when the picture of their master which they offer, shows features made somewhat in the pattern of their own personality. Consciously and unconsciously they reshape profound messages of wisdom in the mould of their own tortuous understanding, carefully modifying them into conventional platitudes in which they themselves find comfort and which satisfy the habit-ridden mentality of their own community. Lacking the sensitiveness of mind which is necessary for the enjoyment of truth in its unadulterated purity they exaggerate it in an attempt at megalomaniac enlargement according to their own insensate standard, which is as absurdly needless for its real appraisal as it is derogatory to the dignity of its original messengers. The history of great men, because of their very greatness, ever runs the risk of being projected on to a wrong background of memory where it

gets mixed up with elements that are crudely customary and therefore inertly accepted by the multitude.

I say to you: that if you are really lovers of Truth, then dare to seek it in its fullness, in all the infinite beauty of its majesty, but never be content to treasure up its vain symbols in miserly seclusion within the stony walls of conventions. Let us revere the great souls in the sublime simplicity of their spiritual attitude which is common to them all, where they meet in universal aspiration to set the spirit of man free from the bondage of his own individual ego, and of the ego of his race and of his creed; but in the lowland of traditions, where religions challenge and refute each other's claims and dogmas, there a wise man must pass them by in doubt and dismay.

I do not mean to advocate a common church for mankind, a universal pattern to which every act of worship and aspiration must conform. The arrogant spirit of sectarianism which so often uses either active or passive, violent or subtle, methods of persecution, on the least provocation or without any, has to be reminded of the fact that religion, like poetry, is not a mere idea—it is expression. The self-expression of God is in the variedness of creation; and our attitude towards the Infinite must in its expression also have a variedness of individuality, ceaseless and unending. When a religion develops the ambition of imposing its doctrine on all mankind, it degrades itself into a tyranny and becomes a form of imperialism. This is why we find a ruthless method of fascism in religious matters prevailing in most parts of the world, trampling flat the expansion of the spirit of man under its insensitive heels.

The attempt to make the one religion which is their own, dominate all time and space, comes naturally to men addicted to sectarianism. This makes it offensive to them to be told that God is generous in His distribution of love, and His means of communication with men have not been restricted to a blind lane abruptly stopping at one narrow point of history. If humanity ever happens to be

overwhelmed with the universal flood of a bigoted exclusiveness, then God will have to make provision for another Noah's Ark to save His creatures from the catastrophe of spiritual desolation.

What I plead for is a living recognition of the neglected truth that the reality of religion has its basis in the truth of Man's nature in its most intense and universal need and so must constantly be tested by it. Where it frustrates that need, and outrages its reason, it repudiates its own justification.

Let me conclude with a few lines from the great mystic poet of medieval India, Kabir, whom I regard as one of the great spiritual geniuses of our land:

The jewel is lost in the mud,  
 And all are seeking for it;  
 Some look for it in the east and  
 Some in the west;  
 Some in the water and some  
 Amongst stones.

But the servant Kabir has appraised  
 It at its true value,  
 And has wrapped it with care  
 In a corner of the mantle of his  
 Own heart.

## ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Jawaharlal Nehru

Swamiji and friends, I am grateful for this invitation to come to this celebration and I am glad to take this opportunity to express my homage to the memory of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I do not know that I am particularly fitted to speak about the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, because he was a man of God and I am a man of earth and engaged in earthly activities which consume all my energy. But even a man of earth can admire and perhaps be influenced by a man of God, and so I have been admiring Godly men, though sometimes I do not altogether understand; and though I do not fully understand what they said, I have admired these great men of God, and have been influenced by reading what was written about them by their disciples. These extraordinary personalities have powerfully influenced their generation and the succeeding generations. They have powerfully influenced great men and changed the whole tenor of their lives.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. He appears to be in the tradition of the great *rishis* of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit. For India never ignored, in the course of her long history and in spite of the other activities of the world, the spiritual values of life, and she always laid certain stress on the search for truth and has always welcomed the searchers of truth by whatever names they may call themselves. And so India built up this tradition of the search for truth and reality, and at the same time she built up the tradition of the utmost tolerance to those who earnestly strive for the truth in their own way. Unfortunately, recently, that tradition of tolerance has been rather shaken and we have sometimes fallen into evil ways and have become narrow-minded and thought that we

people who walk in a certain narrow path alone are right and others are wrong.

That has never been the tradition of India. What made India great was her broadmindedness. It was her conviction that truth is many-sided and of infinite variety. How can any man presume to say that he only has grasped the entire truth? If he is earnest in the search for truth, he may say that he saw a particular facet of truth. But how can he say that somebody else has not seen truth, unless he follows a similar path? So India encouraged the pursuit of truth, and of moral values, and that was perhaps the most distinctive feature of India's culture. And in spite of the many ups and downs of her history, something of the original impress continues throughout these long ages.

One of the effects of Sri Ramakrishna's life was the peculiar way in which he influenced other people who came in contact with him. Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet when they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God and ceased to scoff and 'remained to pray'. They gave up, many of them, their ordinary vocations in life and business and joined the band of devotees. They were great men and one of them, better known than the others, not only in India but in other parts of the world, is Swami Vivekananda. I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and the writings of Swami Vivekananda. But I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him and I think that it would do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches, and they would learn much from them. That would, perhaps, as some of us did, enable us to catch a glimpse of that fire that raged in Swami Vivekananda's mind and heart and which ultimately consumed him at an early age. Because there was fire in his heart—the fire of a great personality coming out in eloquent and ennobling language—it was no empty talk that he was indulging in. He was putting his heart and soul

into the words he uttered. Therefore he became a great orator, not with the orator's flashes and flourishes but with a deep conviction and earnestness of spirit. And so he influenced powerfully the minds of many in India, and two or three generations of young men and women have no doubt been influenced by him. Other things have happened in this country and a very great man came—Gandhiji, who shook up the whole of India—another great man in the old line of *rishis* of India.

Much has happened which perhaps makes some forget those who came before, and who prepared India and shaped India in those early and difficult days. If you read Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches, the curious thing you will find is that they are not old. It was told fifty-six years ago, and they are fresh today because what he wrote or spoke about dealt with certain fundamental matters and aspects of our problems or the world's problems. Therefore they do not become old. They are fresh even though you read them now.

He gave us something which brings us, if I may use the word, a certain pride in our inheritance. He did not spare us. He talked of our weaknesses and our failings too, he did not wish to hide anything. Indeed he should not, because we have to correct those failings. He deals with those failings also. Sometimes he strikes hard at us, but sometimes points out the great things for which India stood and which even in the days of India's downfall made her, in some measure, continue to be great.

So what Swamiji has written and said is of interest and must interest us and is likely to influence us for a long time to come. He was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word and yet he was, I think, one of the great founders—if you like, you may use any other word—of the national modern movement of India, and a great number of people who took more or less an active part in the movement in a later date drew their inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced the India

of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda.

We are faced in India and in the world with many problems, terribly difficult problems. How are we to deal with them? There is the politician's way of dealing with them, the statesman's way if you like—I am not talking to you about the opportunists. Unfortunately, the politician or statesman has, to some extent, to be an opportunist in the sense that he has to deal with things as they are, with the materials that he has. He cannot put across something which the people do not understand or cannot live up to. He has to face that difficulty always, and what is more, especially in an age which calls itself democratic—and democracy I believe is fundamentally good—but democracy also means that what you do must ultimately be understood and appreciated and acted upon by a large majority of people. If the large numbers of people do not understand or do not appreciate it, then even the truth that you possess cannot be put across to them. So the politicians and statesmen have to make, very often, compromises even with the truth because the people's receptivity of truth is not enough. I do not know whether this is good or bad. But it so happens, and looking at it from a statesman's or a politician's point of view, there appears to be no alternative, for if he were to do something else, he would be pushed away, and others with a clearer perception of the limitations of the majority will take his place. Now, on the other hand, the prophets deal with truth in a different way. The prophet sticks to truth whatever the consequences and often because he sticks to truth, he is stoned to death or shot or killed in some other way. That is the way of the prophet. That has been the way and that will still be the way of the prophet. Of course the prophet is stoned to death or killed, but the killer does not kill the truth. Truth is greater even than the prophet and the prophet lives in that truth even more vividly than if he had been alive.

Always there are these two approaches. The approach of the prophet and the approach of the political leader or statesman. Neither approach can be said to be, at least in terms of today, or in terms of a limited period, a wholly effective approach. In long-distance terms one might say, perhaps, that the prophet's approach is the best; but one cannot carry on politics or public affairs of a country these days through long distance terms, though generations later the truth will be appreciated, because a prophet would cease to have the opportunity to carry on if he did that. Though the prophet's way may theoretically be the best, it does seem a little difficult to give effect to it during his time. On the other hand, the politician's and the statesman's way, however well meant, leads from compromise to compromise. It is a slippery path. Once you enter that path, each succeeding compromise might lead you farther away from the truth. What one may want to do may be ignored in the existing circumstances. Shall we hold on to the truth as we see it or shall we think so much about the existing circumstances as to forget the truth itself? That is the problem that humanity, and people who are responsible for the ordering of things in this world, have continually to face and it is a very difficult problem, and all one can say is that in so far as it is possible the statesman should adhere to truth, or, at any rate, he should aim at the truth, even though he may indulge in temporary compromises. Once he loses sight of that, then he might go astray, very far. It is difficult to deal with day-to-day affairs without paying any heed to the understanding and receptivity of men's minds to the truth. It is important to know how far that truth is understood and finds some kind of reception in men's minds. If the politician does not do so, if his words pass over their heads, then even the prophet's words have no meaning to these people. Therefore one has to interpret that truth and limit it, even to some extent, from the point of view of man's receptivity to it.

Now we live in an age when scientific and technical advances have gone very far indeed, more especially in a country like the USA. Technically and industrially they are a very advanced country and they have achieved there a high standard of material and physical life. I have no doubt that culturally too, they are advancing in many ways. Nevertheless, it must be said of the world that man's mental or moral advance has not kept pace with his technical and scientific advance; and that is a dangerous thing because science and technology are weapons of tremendous power. We have got these weapons, if you like, in the atomic power. Atomic energy can be used I think, when it can be produced in simpler ways, for the tremendous benefit of the human race. Atomic energy can also be used for destruction of the human race on a colossal scale. Science and technology are just things which are neither good nor bad; it is the user of them that can be good or bad. And if a human being gets these tremendous weapons it becomes very important that he should know how to use them properly. That means that he should be morally and spiritually advanced to know how to use them properly for proper needs. He should know what he is aiming at ultimately. Now it can be said that humanity as a whole, individuals apart, has not advanced to that standard yet, despite all the religions, all the churches, temples and mosques to the contrary. And that is the misfortune of the age. We fight for our petty dogmas and petty customs amongst ourselves, calling ourselves religious men and the like, while we do not even know how to behave towards our neighbours properly and decently, and the world hovers on the edge of repeated catastrophes.

We find, therefore, in the world two types of forces, call them if you like, forces of destruction and forces of construction. For the moment, if I say that I have faith in the forces of construction, I cannot justify that statement except by saying that it is an act of faith on my part, there is no particular logic behind it; it is just that I believe in it,

although I cannot justify it. Nevertheless, whether we believe in it or not, we should make up our minds clearly as to how we are going to strengthen these unifying and constructive forces and oppose those forces which destroy and disrupt. And I think we can only do that if we have a certain moral foundation, certain moral concepts which will hold together ideals and our general life. If we have none then the disruptive forces, I think, are bound to gain advantage.

Now to come back to what I began with. Men like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, men like Swami Vivekananda, and men like Mahatma Gandhi are great unifying forces, great constructive geniuses of the world (*loud and prolonged cheers*) not only in regard to the particular teachings that they taught, but their approach to the world and their conscious and unconscious influence on it is of the most vital importance to us. You may or you may not accept some particular advice of Mahatmaji on economic or other grounds. But his fundamental approach to life, his constructive unifying approach as applied to various problems of India, that is of vital importance. If you do not accept that, then you really are on the side of destruction and disruption. His approach—quite apart from the particular advice that he gave—his approach was fundamentally the approach of India, of the Indian Mind and of the Indian genius. (*Loud cheers*) Although Sri Ramakrishna was a man of God and religion, and did not say anything about politics, it is his fundamental approach that counts. And while I am a man of politics, not dabbling much in or saying much about other matters, spirituality and the like, nevertheless, I do feel that our public affairs and our life in general would become much the poorer in quality if that spiritual element and the moral standard were lacking. India, like the rest of the world, faces these difficult problems and questions, and all of us, whether as individuals, communities, groups, or nations, are being put to very severe tests. Because I have faith in India, I believe that

India will not only survive these tests, but will make good; because, I think, that in spite of our weaknesses there is a fundamental vitality which has enabled us to carry on all these millennia of years and which will now function much more effectively and vividly, having got the opportunity now. I have that faith; but faith is not enough. We have to work for it, and we have not only to work for it, but work for it with that clear vision before us. That vision we may apply to India, but it is essentially a larger vision to be applied to the world. It is not a narrowing vision. Our nationalism must not be a narrow nationalism. Swami Vivekananda, though a great nationalist, never preached anything else. His was a kind of nationalism which automatically slipped into Indian nationalism which was part of internationalism. So, it is that broad approach that we must learn from those great men and if we learn it and act up to it to the best of our ability, then we shall honour their memory and we shall serve our country with some advantage, and possibly also serve humanity. *Jai Hind.*

[Speech delivered on the 114th Birth Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, on 20 March 1949.]

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
AND THE MODERN WORLD**  
Sir S. Radhakrishnan

It is not necessary to speak of the great influence of Ramakrishna on modern thought. It has become a part of India's history, and there is no necessity to emphasize Ramakrishna's achievements. But it is out of a sense of self-respect that we are gathered to celebrate the centenary of that great saint who has given the message, 'Truth is one, sages call it by various names.' The holding of the Parliament of Religions is most significant. It was not unknown in ancient times.

*Example and precept*

In these days of communal differences, which are due not so much to religious motives as to economic and political causes, the Parliament of Religions is an important step to bring about a better understanding. The special contribution of Ramakrishna was that he put to the test religious views by the logic of life, and established the equality of all religions by example and precept.

The idea of a Parliament of religions is consistent with the spirit of mutual appreciation and toleration which is associated with the great mystic traditions of the Hindu religion.

The concepts of religion are sought to be explained by various persons according to their views and experiences. Those who worship ignorance are described, in the Upanishad, as entering darkness and those who worship knowledge as entering great darkness. There are people who are conceited in their ignorance just as there are persons who are conceited in their knowledge. At present, though people find satisfaction of their physical and

psychological needs, though they have wealth, they have still a hunger within, which they cannot satisfy. The happenings in the world, the victory achieved by the sword, the great calamities that have visited mankind, must make men think seriously, whether beneath all these there is any fundamental spiritual assurance, whether there is anything Real behind the apparently transient.

So long as human beings are composed of the perishable and Imperishable, they cannot but ask themselves the question whether the transient is the only reality, whether the temporary is the only permanent.

There are others conceited in their knowledge, claiming to provide a solution for all problems, claiming to dispel the great mystery, thinking that they possess omniscient knowledge. Neither group is capable of seeing reality. For there is something beyond ignorance and knowledge. After all their intellectual discoveries and rational explanations, men are at one time or another inescapably confronted with the question: 'Is there not something beyond all this? Is there no other power or purpose behind these passing clouds?'

When such questions are raised, men cannot be satisfied with such explanations as that the relative is the absolute, the transient is the permanent, and similar expressions. The wonder of existence is a puzzle that confronts man for ever.

### *The failure of reason*

The results of reason have been great, but greater have been the failures of reason. We are today more enlightened. The barbarians of old received solace and consolation from the thought of the 'mystery of the divine'. Science has put an end to that. But our life has become dull and prosaic.

But a world perfectly understood is no world at all, a problem completely solved is no problem at all. Likewise,

a God that is fully understood is no God at all. The fundamental difference between the Eastern and Western outlook is that the East recognizes the mystery that is divine and admits man's inability to fathom that mystery. It has contented itself with efforts to explore that mystery. The West thinks it is possible to explore all realities, but it is puzzled when certain realities do not offer a solution.

For a correct approach to reality, it is necessary to abandon the conceit of ignorance and the conceit of knowledge. The proper attitude is that of the mystical tradition of the East. One might grasp reality through revelation, through intuition, but not through the method of the intellect. It cannot be reached through a sharpening of the intellect by mere learning. Mere individual development can never take men to the heart of reality.

### *Man's stupidity and selfishness*

One of the speakers has referred to the affront to civilization that has been perpetrated in Africa. That is a question that has occurred to me many times. How is it that in spite of the great intellectual attainments and scientific advance made by men it has not been possible to translate their great aspirations and higher ideals into actuality? The answer to that question lies in the mistaking of dogma for true religion.

When I ponder over this question I have always been reminded of the statue of Rodin—a physical and intellectual giant, perfect in every respect, but bending down his head in a thoughtful mood. What was wrong with that colossal man? It speaks of the utter impotence of man, because of his split personality. Man still has in him the germs of stupidity and selfishness. The world needs eradication of these germs. So long as they exist, wars are inevitable. There is division in the world, because there is division in the soul of man. He is still some kind of uncontrollable

animal, a clever animal, but nothing more than that. The intellectual progress has not touched the fundamental weaknesses of mankind. He has not the courage to say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!'

People care for the hygiene of the body. They seem to care little about the hygiene of the soul.

So long as these germs are there wars are inevitable. Wars take place in the world because there is war in the soul of man himself. There is dissension in the inner self. The split-self continues to exist. Mankind remains no more than a horde of clever animals.

### *Ramakrishna's conception of religion*

Ramakrishna's conception of religion was practice of the presence of God. It is this mystical tradition with which ancient religion was associated. There are the religious scriptures. They are to be understood. Their meaning and comprehension is an experience in itself. The divine music of these scriptures cannot be translated into words which will express the inexhaustibility of truth. The silent worship, when one is in communion with God, is an experience which provides a negative explanation of the existence of the Supreme Power. But man, being human must find a logical embodiment of that supreme Truth. This truth is transcendental and refuses to be defined by formulas and categories. To this extent, the existence of God is proved—only in a negative way.

Critics, again, may say that mere non-being is nothing. That only proves the intellectual inefficiency of such critics. Simply because one does not find an empirical embodiment for the fundamental Reality, it appears altogether non-existent to the feeble-minded.

Then the critics might attempt to translate the Reality in the highest terms of human intelligence. Life can understand life. Spiritual matters can be comprehended by

spirituality. Every individual has the divine spark in him. If he cannot comprehend the Supreme Truth, he can at least apprehend it. If man's highest category is *purusha* (Person), then the Supreme Reality can be described as the *uttama purusa* (Supreme Person). This *Uttama Purusha* supplements the characteristics of the human being.

Thus, though the Reality cannot be conveyed through the medium of language, these may be considered the means of doing that: First there is the austerity of silence. Then there is the method of negative description, and finally the apprehension of God through the divine in one's Self.

### *Religious toleration*

All these are ways of expressing one and the same truth. All the religions of the world take their stand on the supreme Truth. But this kind of toleration is not to be mistaken for a dislike of dogma. It is not a revolt against conservatism. It is to be regarded as a positive course of nature, a spiritual development which recognizes the roots of all religions in one and the same fundamental Truth.

It would be untrue to say that God revealed Himself exclusively to any one person or sect. The greatness of the teaching of Ramakrishna lies in the fact that he was able to appreciate and recognize the essential background and unity in all the different faiths and religions.

### *The present condition of India*

As regards the present-day conditions of India the question arises. Why in spite of our pretensions to spirituality, are we in such conditions as obtains all over the country?

Up to the age of the Renaissance and the Reformation in the West, the East kept pace with the West on the path of progress. Thereafter the East lagged behind, while the

West continued on its march. This is due to the resistance to change offered by the East, and the readiness to change which characterizes the West. This has resulted in the progress of the West and the stagnation of the East. The difference between the East and the West is the same as the difference between the old Egyptian and the young Greek of ancient times. The Greek kept an open mind, without shutting out ideas, whereas the Egyptian priest represented orthodoxy, represented a long memory of the past pressing down on him.

*In the name of orthodoxy*

At present in the name of orthodoxy the Indians close their minds, shut out new ideas which have contributed towards progress. When religion in the country was progressive, the Indians possessed mental resilience, and flexibility and elasticity of temper.

In every age there were reformers, who were repudiated by orthodoxy; the great Rishis and teachers of the past who had contributed towards progress, were denounced by others. Shankaracharya, who is today claimed to represent orthodoxy, was in his days denounced as a heretic by Mandana Mishra. That very heretic has at present become the champion of orthodoxy.

If today Indians find themselves in a condition of stagnation, it is because they have given up that attitude of instinctive challenge to authority, a sort of rebellion against things repugnant to reason. Such an outlook would have carried them forward on their march.

*Priests v. prophets*

Today, some people believe that a parliament of 'no religions' would solve the problems of the world, because

religions have failed to solve them. But such a solution is impossible. No doubt the organized religions are the outcome of the efforts of priests who have no real insight of truth. The religion as organized by the priests is not the same religion as founded by the prophets.

But the absence of religion will not solve the problems. People cannot be mere contented cattle, even if all their worldly need are satisfied. In every human being there is the dream of a higher life, and if this dream is not operative man cannot call himself a human being. So long as higher aspirations exist in man, so long as there exists a perpetual endeavour, a ceaseless striving for something higher, nobler, and better, man cannot but be a religious being.

### *The greatest prayer*

God never addresses congregations. Prayer is a private communion which each individual has to establish with God in his own way. Beneath all the different variations and details, religion has one authentic voice calling for universal compassion. Great religious teachers never said that if a man did not accept their respective teachings, he would be doomed. The basic truth was laid down in every religion that the performance of good to humanity constituted the true religious life.

True religion must establish universal brotherhood. The greatest prayer is:

May all cross the difficult places of life,  
May all see the face of happiness,  
May all attain Wisdom,  
May all rejoice everywhere.

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
AND THE PROBLEMS OF MODERN INDIA  
C. Rajagopalachari**

All of us, not only myself, but all of us, are very fortunate in being present here today to participate in this anniversary. One of our greatest men was born 111 years ago and passed away 61 years ago, and it is the anniversary of his birth we are celebrating today. Therefore, we are very lucky; at any rate I feel I am very fortunate, in having been able to come and share in this joy. We have heard four addresses by four eminent men and I am sure you would join with me in thanking them for giving us these beautiful and eloquent addresses on this occasion. Specially I mention Prof. Humayun Kabir, because in his appreciation and participation we have a living instance of that active tolerance or toleration to which Swami Siddheswarananda referred in his address. All the rest of us who spoke, including myself, are good Hindus. But Prof. Humayun Kabir, a Mussalman of our times, has found it not only possible to join us but found joy in joining us on this occasion. I therefore consider it a great piece of good fortune that we have secured an active example of a principle which was enunciated by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If only we could appreciate, and participate in functions of people of other religions, as Prof. Humayun Kabir has found it possible to do on this occasion, there would be no problem before us in this country. But I shall not dwell on that. I am sure without more introductory remarks on my part you will silently appreciate what I wish to explain.

During the last century, the nineteenth century, and during this twentieth century, many great men have devoted themselves to explaining our own Hindu religion to people. Their particular problem has been to explain the beauties and the truths of Hindu religion at a time when it

was rather down in luck. For various reasons Hinduism was in bad luck during the nineteenth century, and many people came forward to defend Hinduism from the attacks of modern times. Almost all of them had to put Hinduism into the 'clothes' of other religions. They had to invoke the assistance of other religions in order to explain the truths of Hinduism in the nineteenth century. I need hardly take up your time explaining that. It is enough if I say that the Brahma Samaj put Hinduism, so to say, in a Christian bottle in order to make you people drink Hinduism as good medicine. In order to serve Ayurvedic medicines these days, you know, they have to put it in glass bottles as modern medicines are served. Otherwise, if it is given in the form of pills or *choornams* wrapped in brown paper or palm leaf or plantain bark, you would not accept it. In the same manner, Hinduism was served out during the nineteenth century by many great men who been sent down (if I may be permitted to use a Hindu phrase), in order to save Hinduism, and they had to appeal to or make use of foreign religions in order to make us understand the truth and the beauty of our own religion. The Brahma Samaj used Christianity. Other people use some other religion in order to make Hinduism presentable.

Theosophy came to help and tried to present Hinduism in terms of modern mysticism and modern science, and to some extent in terms of world religion. In fact we had, so to say, to make Rama and Krishna do apprenticeship under Christ in order that people might accept them. I am putting these things in an amusing way, but it was a great thing to do. It was appropriate for the times. Christianity and modern science and what has been loosely called free thought—all these came in to attack Hinduism, and, therefore, these methods had necessarily to be employed.

But the greatness—the uniqueness, if I may say so, of Sri Ramakrishna was this, that he was a hundred per cent Hindu. He had nothing to draw from other religions. He found no necessity for it. He did not adopt that method of

presenting our religion, and he succeeded no less. Of course he did not think of it as a preacher or as an adventurer. I am simply describing what happened, that is all. He was truly a cent-per-cent Hindu, or if I may use northern Indian phraseology, a *sixteen-anna-in-the-rupee* Hindu. That is the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna's work and service to us. Even in sixteen-anna Hinduism there is a great deal of difference. He was not one who presented Hinduism as a great logician or scholar. He was not a Vedantist or a philosopher: that is to say, he did not present himself like that. There are some things which become 19-carat gold without knowing it, and he was like that. He did not pose as a philosopher or as a scholar. He did not go about lecturing on the comparative greatness of Hindu philosophy as against other philosophies. He was a common Hindu. He did not say, 'I do not believe in idol worship, I am a Vedantin.' He did not say, 'I do not believe in going to temples—I believe only in the Upanishadic form of Hindu religion.' He did not make any statement like that. He was simply like a blade of grass, like any other blade of grass in this country.

We are all Hindus, very common Hindus. We bow down before idols. We perform *pujas* and partake in festivals. We dance and we think that if we make sweet-meats on a particular day and offer them to the Deity we attain merit—some particular kind of merit. We follow all the common practices, and we are all like one another. We are all like the grass growing everywhere on the soil, and there is no distinction between the grass growing in the Himalayas or Cape Comorin, or, if you go still further south, even in Ceylon. It is the same grass everywhere. We are all Hindus in that sense and we are all alike in that sense. Now, Sri Ramakrishna was just one blade of grass like any other blade of grass. There was nothing different about him from the rest and he did not, so to say, assume the air of—'I am not a blade of grass, I am a mango tree or I am a coconut tree', or something like that. He was like the

grass that grows on the earth, not distinct from any other grass, but like the rice plant which is also a type of grass but which yields rice, Sri Ramakrishna was that type of grass which yielded fruit and food in the form of true religion. He was truly a rice plant, and may we grow more and more such grass of that variety in our country, and yet more of them.

Then, there is another thing. He did not write himself down. He read no books. Other people wrote down what he thought and what he said, and we have got a record of the things he said. There was a previous example of that. But there is no need to search for examples. He did not think of that precedent either. The hero of the New Testament, the great Jesus Christ, did not write any book. He did not have any printer to publish what he taught. But there were people about him who did it for him and left a record of what he thought and what he did. Similarly, without knowing it and without thinking about it, I am sure Sri Ramakrishna lived a life and thought and said things which people recorded, people who were with him and who lived in an atmosphere which made them feel that they must record those things for other people, and we have those records.

I refer to this for one reason. Often people have come to me and asked me for something to help them to become good people. 'I want to become good. What shall I do? What shall I read?' Foreigners have asked me: 'What shall I read which will give me an insight into the doctrines of Hinduism?' and many of our own people have asked me, not to understand religion like that, but something which will enable them to become good, which will enable them to improve in their life, and I have told all of them—both the foreigners who wanted to understand the doctrines of Hinduism, and the many Hindu friends and relations who wish to become better men. After much thinking and trying to find something or other, I could not find anything better than this: 'Go and get from the Ramakrishna Mission the

book called *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, and whether it is in English, Tamil, or any other language you like, read that and you will understand Hinduism and you will become a better man.' This was what I told them all. I remembered it today. I did not know then that I would be asked to speak to you today. So I mention this book, as it were, unself-consciously; there hasn't been any previous plan about it. I have seen many books. I have read some of them and understood a few of them. I have tried to read others and understand them, but failed. There are many books on Hinduism, both ancient and modern, books like the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. But they are books for scholars. You may read them and be benefitted. But nothing explains the true core of Hinduism so well as the written records of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In fact if you want a good commentary on the *Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad Gita*, I would say to you, try to read *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*. Do not try to read Shankaracharya's commentaries. You are not learned enough for that. We may not benefit much by that. If you have not much time or leisure, read only the text and keep quiet. Do not argue about it, and you may be benefitted. But if you really want an understandable commentary you have to read Sri Ramakrishna's sayings, and you will find that the whole book from page one to the last page is a living commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. There is no need to read anything else. Why is this? It is because Sri Ramakrishna is so completely representative of Hinduism that unconsciously he becomes a commentary on the doctrines of the great classics of Hinduism, and a record of his sayings becomes the best exposition of the Hinduism we all love. It is the best commentary we have in modern times. I want all of you who are here to remember, and also persuade others to remember what I have said and to read this book, and not merely attend this anniversary function. Read it and, I need not say, love it. I am not big enough to ask you to do that. I am not a great saint to tell you to live this way or that

way. But if you read that book I am certain you will improve in life and that is why I recommend to you, friends, to read that book. It is not a very big book, and you can accomplish the task of reading it from beginning to end without pretending about it, *but really read it*, it will do you a lot of good. Tell your friends about it and persuade them to read it. Of course it is not a book which will teach you how to read or write good English, It is not meant for that purpose. But it is a book which will teach you how to think properly and how to live properly, and that is what we all wish for in these days. Now I am a politician. Most of the people, I must say, all the people who spoke to you today are politicians including Swami Siddheswarananda himself. Otherwise why should he go to Paris? There is some politics in it. He wants to carry the greatness of India to foreign places and explain it to the people there. He wants to make them understand about the greatness of India. He is therefore a politician. And as for the rest, I need hardly say they are all seasoned, experienced and eminent politicians. Prof. Humayun Kabir may not be a member of the Legislative Assembly; but he is Secretary to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Now I am also a politician, and we all want to raise India through politics. But though I am a politician, let me tell you my friends, we are not going to save India through politics. We are not going to make India happy through politics. We are not going to free India through politics. If we have any chance of making India free in the true sense, if we have any chance of making India happy in the true sense, *it is only if we all become good men*; and if we want to become good men and women, the only way is to worship Sri Ramakrishna, worship him in the full sense of that English word. Worship does not mean falling down before an idol with a coconut or plantain in your hand. That is only the technical manner of worship as we understand it. The true and correct manner of worship is a mental approach, which is expressed by leaving shoes behind and going with flowers or fruits in your hand to a person or an

idea. It is the approach with that frame of mind with which you approach God. That is worship: the approach to one from whom you really expect help, from whom you really hope to benefit, the approach of a child to its mother. That is the worshipful attitude, of love and reverence and all such things combined. When you combine respect with love you may get something beyond the word 'worship'. Now if you approach Sri Ramakrishna's memory and personality in that frame of mind, that is, if you go to him after cleansing yourself of your dust as you would do before going to a temple, leaving behind your shoes—and after all what do shoes stand for but suspicion, doubt, half-heartedness, and such things?—If you leave behind all these and go to him with loving respect, you can surely live a better life. You should go with loving respect, not fearful respect, not the respect with which you go to before a police officer or a judge who dispenses justice rightly. You approach them with fearful respect. They may be angry. The judge may be just, but his decision may go against you. I do not mean respect in that way. You should go with loving respect, and if you do that, when you open your book with that attitude, you will have no doubt, you will have no desire to criticize or compare and contrast it with something else. The child approaches its mother not with the thought of comparing her with its grandmother. It goes to its mother with full belief and faith, not blindly, but with a purpose. Similarly if you approach Sri Ramakrishna's sayings in a worshipful and loving attitude, then you will see a new meaning and a new practicality in everything that he says.

Do not listen to me merely because this is the first time you are hearing me and are curious about it. What I wish to tell you is something very important and you should all try to understand it in that very way in which I see it. It is this: *There is nothing more practical than religion.* Do not imagine that religion or philosophy is unpractical and unworldly. If you try to understand religion in that attitude, you will gain nothing from it. You will only become a

pedant. You may become a scholar and deliver lectures on the subject to other people. You may draw a salary of Rs.1,000 or pass some examinations on the subject. But you will not really become a man who serves others, nor would you benefit by it. But if you take it up with the frame of mind that religion is practical and is an easy thing, then alone will you benefit by studying the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. I do not want you to read any *mīmāṃsās* (philosophy books) in order to understand religion. I want you to read the very easily understood saying of Sri Ramakrishna, which he spoke to his friends and his disciples and which they understood at once and easily, and which they recorded. There is nothing abstruse in it; and if there was anything abstruse they have left it out. So it is quite easy and capable of common understanding. You read these sayings, and take it from me that they are all practical common sense, and you will benefit by it. Religion if approached in this way is not abstruse philosophy but a practical way of living which we should and could understand.

I will give you one example. It is commonly said that we should not be jealous of other people, you should not be envious of other people. But to follow this precept is very difficult. You may be thinking, 'It is all right in principle, but how can I help not being jealous of others? I could save only one lakh of rupees while the other man has saved ten lakhs. I cannot help being jealous. It [the advice] is not practicable.' Or you may be thinking, 'I have got only one hundred rupees while the other man has got one hundred and fifty rupees and he has got it without the merit which I certainly possess. How can I help not being jealous?' That is the problem with a large number of people. But let me ask you, 'What do you want to attain?' You want to be happy, through [the possession of] one hundred rupees or through ten lakhs. Now to be jealous of another man is the most unpractical way of being happy. You cannot be happy by that method. Whereas if you read *The Sayings of Sri*

*Ramakrishna*, even if you are drawing only one hundred rupees with dearness allowance—and to read his sayings you need not be a beggar or a saint or a Sanskrit scholar—I say, you will find a way to be happy. That is a surer way of being happy than by trying and trying to get a salary which some other man is drawing and which you will not get. It will only make you more unhappy if you do that. I have only given you one example. You will find innumerable examples like that in Sri Ramakrishna's sayings.

You will find, whether you are old or young, how practical and easy it is to attain happiness through religion, and that is the reason why I recommend this book to you even though I am a politician: and it is only if we do that, if we follow the way of life as taught by Sri Ramakrishna, that then and then only can we free India. Only then can we raise India. Only then we make India truly free. We can, of course, get some Acts passed in Parliament or in the Constituent Assembly or somewhere else. We can somehow make them agree, or deceive them, or persuade them to give you what you want. These are all different processes, and as far as they go they are right: that is how we can live in this world. As explained by Seth Govind Das it is not through violence but only through persuasion that we can attain happiness in society in this world. Violence cannot bring happiness to us. It is only by acting on men's minds without violence that we can help people to live happily together. That is true. But it is not by persuading others to accept a Charter that we will be free. We can be free only if we become good men. That is the only way of living together and being happy. One man can be good, somehow or other. But when lots of people have to live together, millions of people—and many of them belonging to different religions and following different ways of life; if we are to be happy, we can be so only if we Hindus understand true Hinduism and try to follow the plain and simple teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

There is another thing, another example, which I wish to tell you in order to illustrate the uniqueness of his message. Nowadays it is fashionable among so-called educated Hindus to believe and to preach that animal sacrifices are bad and that true Hinduism does not want it, and therefore you should not have it. That is a right and very good feeling. But if you look down upon a Hindu who goes through a form of religion which involves some of these crude practices, then you are not a Hindu in the true sense of the term. If you think that you have risen above the other man and that you are a superior person and you look down upon that man, I say you are not a true Hindu. Never did Sri Ramakrishna do that. He could understand every variety of Hindu life. He could sympathize with every variety of Hindu life. He could enter into the correct feelings of the other man. When, therefore, a peasant in a village in the south goes to the Mariyamman temple, which is but the temple of another form of the very Kāli whom you all revere, if he goes there and takes a goat with him—poor man, he does not think of the feelings of the goat—and with a *sixteen-anna* worshipful attitude he goes through the form of worship which he was taught by his father and mother or grandfather and grandmother, takes the poor goat's body home as *prasād* from the Mother and eats it, as many others do without going through this form of worship, we have no right to look down upon such a man. He does not go to the temple simply to kill and eat the goat. He could as well do it without going to the temple. He does not eat it as we eat a plantain or a coconut. He says, 'I must first offer it to the Mother in the temple and then take it home.' That is Hinduism. If anyone says it is not Hinduism and looks down upon such a man, I shall say to him, 'My dear man, you are a fighter, you are a reformer, you are a soldier, but you are not a religious man.'

Sri Ramakrishna approached Hinduism in that catholic way. By catholicism I do not mean Roman Catholicism, but

catholicism with a small 'c' and not a capital 'C'. Whether you worship an idol, whether you worship a principle, whether you worship God with a coconut or a plantain or with food or rice, or with *betel* leaves or *bel* leaves, you are a Hindu. Or if you are a Vedantin and remain at home and close your nostrils and restrain your breath (practising *prānāyāma*) and try to achieve superior forms of thought by transforming your desires, and so on; or if you are a Vaishnava you go about dancing in joy—mind you, in joy and not through misery, not through tears as some people try to do, by weeping and wailing—you cannot attain God through that, for God is the personification of joy—and if you want extra stimulus by going in for that, by getting thirty or more persons to join you in your dancing, by getting the aid of music and noise and stimulating your ecstasy. All this is Hinduism. And if there was one great saint and seer who gave us this message without changing Hinduism, without trying to put it into new clothes and without excluding any form of worship such as is known and practised in India, it was Sri Ramakrishna.

So, my dear friends, I am very fond of this great teacher. This is what makes me fond of him. Of course I cannot claim to be his disciple or missionary or anything of that kind, but I get great pleasure in describing him in this simple form. I take great pleasure in describing him to you—the common man. The Swamis, who have devoted their lives to the service of others, to the spreading of the message and gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, know much more about his teachings than I do. But this is what I have learnt from him. And since the Swamis were good enough to ask me to preside on this occasion, I must say it in my own way. I am what I am and I have great affection and worshipful regard for Sri Ramakrishna as one of the modern Rishis of our country. We read in the books of many Rishis of the olden days and our idea of the Rishis of those days is that they had long beards and that they used to live in jungles and forests. They were all so powerful that if they

said 'Brāhma, come down', Brāhma came down, or 'Vishnu, come down' and Vishnu came down. But they have gone into legend now. There is nobody like that in our times. That is our difficulty. If we want to know about them we have to open some books and try to find some illustrations and these illustrations have now got into the cinemas, and we go and see the cinemas where the various Rishis go about in their various dresses. But Sri Ramakrishna was a real Rishi of our times. In our own time a Rishi came and lived with us. There is no doubt about this. So hereafter, too, some Rishis may come if we are all good people (or very bad people). For if we are all good people, any one of us will become a Rishi, and if we are all bad people a Rishi will come to save us. So there is hope for our country and we have a precedent here.

Sri Ramakrishna was really a great Rishi who was actually seen by many, and seen by many whom I have seen and touched. I may tell you, though I did not deserve it, that I am a lucky man in that I have actually seen and touched the great Swami Vivekananda and the great Swami Ramakrishnananda, when they came to Madras. I was then a student of the Law College, an impertinent Law College student, thinking I was very clever and all that. It was then that Swami Vivekananda came to Madras, returning from Chicago, and I was in that company when addresses were being drafted, and Swamiji wanted to start a Math here and another one there. I was a young man then as most of you are now. I was a student of the Arts College in the last flicker of the nineteenth century, the last decade.

At that time the Theosophists were having a chequered career. Some of them had got into disfavour, and doubts were expressed about some of them. The word *mahātma* was not in use then. Gandhiji was not yet a mahatma. At that time Max Müller, the great Sanskrit scholar wrote an article, 'A True Mahatma'. I read that article in the *Nineteenth Century*. He wrote about Sri Ramakrishna and he wrote of him as a true *mahātma*, so I had just an inkling of Sri

Ramakrishna's life even then. But that did not tell me anything. It was only later, when Swami Vivekananda came and we all met him and the gospel of service was preached by him, and the Ramakrishna Mission was established, and his sayings were published, that I really saw what it was and what it meant. I tell you, my dear friends, after going through all the politics and seeing the troubles of the country and listening to many others about the sufferings in our country, I have definitely come to the conclusion that we cannot improve the lot of our country unless we really become good Hindus, that is, unless Hindus become good Hindus, Muslims become good Muslims, and Christians become good Christians, we cannot save our country. And to become good Hindus or Muslims or Christians there is no better way than to follow the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

You cannot understand another man's religion. That is quite clear, and that was explained very ably by the first speaker Swami Siddheswarananda. He explained very clearly how difficult it is to understand the other man's religion. So it is no use attempting to change his religion. Let us not talk about it. Sometimes changes come on account of various reasons. Most people change on account of circumstances. Do you mean to say that people have changed by persuasion? Some king changed his religion and so all or many of his subjects, too, changed their religion. How did England become a Christian country? Some king become a Christian and so all the people also embraced Christianity. It was not forcible conversion in the modern way, but the result of some force, process, or public opinion, and so on. Everybody is a Hindu and so let me also become a Hindu. All this is no use. We cannot understand the other man's religion.

But that was not what Sri Ramakrishna did. He wanted to live the other man's religion and to understand the other man's religion. And so, in order to understand the truth of the religion of the Muslims, he lived like a Muslim, even

dressing like one. So I say if you want to understand about Christianity, you cannot understand it only by reading the *Bible*. I promise you that. You will only understand how to criticize Christianity, that is all. You cannot understand how I live in my house by looking through a window from outside. You will see a few things, but you can never understand how exactly I live. You will go away with a wrong impression. Similar is the case if you try to understand other people's religions. Unless you *live* that religion, live in that culture, not in one generation but in two or more if you can manage it—until then I say you cannot understand the other man's religion. So let us not worry about other people's religions. They are neither better nor worse. It is no use thinking in this strain. To a Hindu, Hinduism is the best religion; to a Christian, Christianity is the best religion; and to a Muslim, Islam is the best religion. As soon as a Christian hears the name of Jesus it simply transforms him. He becomes a new person altogether. The word Rama means nothing to him. You may tell him that Rama is the name of God many times. But the feeling raised in his mind is quite different from that which is raised in your mind. The word Allah raises different feelings in Prof. Humayun Kabir's mind from that which it raises in your mind. Therefore, friends, do not compare and contrast religions. Let us understand and live our own religion and we will be better men and women. That is what Sri Ramakrishna asks us to do.

Swami Siddheswarananda in his lecture gave his technique very correctly as he is a true disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He told you his technique of trying to understand their religion and to live among them. That is also the best way of making them understand *our* religion. He was wrong in one respect—in that he tried to explain it in one speech. There should be a series of lectures on the subject—How to understand other people's mind and how to live among them. That is the problem that he is actually solving. We must learn to do that in our own country. We

have to do here in India a job of that kind. Our job is not simply to compliment Swami Siddheswarananda and send him back to Paris. We have to live among men of different religions in our own country and we must try to learn and understand the other man's religion. We must, therefore, fully absorb that understanding which is called tolerance. Tolerance, as I tolerate trouble, is not real tolerance. I tolerate a lot of trouble. A boy is making a noise and I tolerate him. That is not real toleration and understanding. Why does the boy go about making a noise while I am trying to sleep? Because he is not sleepy and it is his nature to move about and make noise. Therefore he must be allowed to play and make a noise while you must try to sleep in spite of that. We must try to understand everybody else around us. That is true toleration. If we understand that, everything follows thereafter. It is when we do not understand that, that all the trouble arises. If we understand that, everything becomes easy in this country. And you can understand this best by reading Sri Ramakrishna's sayings. Therefore friends I recommend to you to read his sayings.

Thank you so much for listening to me and I hope you will carry home with you what I have said to you and bring it into practice.

[Speech delivered on the 112th Birthday Celebration of  
Sri Ramakrishna, at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama,  
New Delhi on 16th March 1947.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SERVICE TO HUMANITY

Professor Humayun Kabir

I feel that in meeting here today in memory of one of the greatest men India has ever produced, the community in Delhi are doing an honour to themselves. In remembering the service and the examples of Sri Ramakrishna we today have before us the example of a personality who tried to live and explain the different aspects of human functioning. We have very few equals to him in our country's history. I do not want to talk to you at length or devote myself to describing the various aspects of his character. I want just to speak to you as one who does not know very much about the background of his *sāadhanās* or the different ways in which he expressed himself throughout his life. I speak as a common man who has been impressed by one particular aspect of his character and teachings. That is what I want to place before you—I mean his emphasis upon service.

We had reference today again and again to his preaching of toleration. In his own life he tried to realize truth in its different manifestations, to recognize the value of the contribution of different types of human endeavour towards the achievement of salvation. But the aspect to which I want to draw particular attention, the aspect which has impressed me, is his emphasis on toleration and on service. To my mind his emphasis on toleration is only a development of the aspect of service to humanity which you find paramount in all his life and which inspired all his activities and all his sayings. Once he told Swami Vivekananda, another of the greatest personalities of modern India, 'If you go to serve people in a spirit of condescension, you will never do any good by that. So long as you serve people, there is no question of your trying to show mercy, there is no question of showing compassion as is ordinarily understood. What

is wanted is compassion in the true and literal sense of the word, compassion by which you identify yourself with others. And it seems to me that his emphasis on toleration rests on his emphasis upon compassion in the sense of identifying oneself with humanity, identifying oneself with the individual of whatever colour, whatever creed, whatever religion, whatever race, of whatever nationality. And in his life he exemplified this sense of identification with all human beings. Anyway, to my mind that is also the greatest teaching of true democracy and Sri Ramakrishna in his own way emphasized the dignity of the individual.

Previous speakers have placed before you the different aspects of his character, that he was humbler than the humblest, that he accepted truth from whatever source it came. But all this was due to the recognition of the dignity of the individual and that was again due to his sense of identification with others. This gave him a stateliness which you find associated with men you call ascetic. By an ascetic we sometimes mean one who denies himself all the pleasures of life. But in his case there was no question of a sense of constraint. There was no negative attitude. He was as simple as a child. This we could see in all his sayings, in his beautiful parables by which he illustrated his vision of truth. Whatever type of man one might be, he recognized the individual and identified himself with those whom he came into contact with. In this respect you can find very few people who have surpassed him. The greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, the beauty of Sri Ramakrishna, thus lies in this sense of identification with human beings, the recognition of the value of the individual.

If that sense of the dignity of the individual can permeate to some extent our lives as well, then and then alone can we have any lasting peace in this world. This has inspired the whole of the Ramakrishna Mission. The wonderful humanitarian service that its members are carrying on in different parts of the world, in spite of all kinds of difficulties, individual suffering and tribulation is

because they have got something of the spirit of the Master, and they have precisely tried to put into practice what he taught.

[Speech delivered on the 112th birthday celebration  
of Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Mission,  
New Delhi on 16th March 1947.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE AWAKENING SOUL OF INDIA

*(Extracts from 'The Karmayogin')*

**Sri Aurobindo**

The 'Utasv' (Celebration) of Ramakrishna Parmahamsa is an event that annually stirs Calcutta to its depths. Year after year the number increases of those who believe that the birth of the sage of Dakshineswar was the critical event of the present age in India. Some believe this for one reason, others for another. The devotee sees in him the last of the Avataras. The historian sees the keystone of the idea that constitutes Hinduism. The partisan feels that he satisfies all parties and conflicts with none. The philosopher finds in him the living embodiment of the highest Vedanta. And even amongst the workers there are some who derive from the spectacle of his birth the faith that inspires and sanctions all their struggles.

The world could not bear a second birth like that of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa within five hundred years. The mass of thought that he has left, has first to be transformed into experience; the spiritual energy given forth has to be converted into achievement. Until this is done, what right have we to ask for more? What could we do with more?

Religion always, in India, precedes national awakenings. Shankaracharya was the beginning of a wave that swept round the whole country, culminating in Chaitanya in Bengal, the Sikh Gurus in Punjab, Shivaji in Maharashtra, and Ramanuja and Madhvacharya in the South. Through each of these, a people sprang into self realization, into national energy, and consciousness of their own unity. Sri Ramakrishna represents a synthesis in one person of all the leaders. It follows that the movements of his age will unify and organize the more provincial and fragmentary movements of the past. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is the epitome of the whole. His was the great superconscious life

which alone can witness to the infinitude of the current that bears us all oceanwards. He is the proof of the Power behind us and the future before us. So great a birth initiates great happenings. Many are to be tried, as by fire, and not a few will be found to be pure gold; but whatever happens, whether victory or defeat, speedy fulfilment or prolonged struggle, the fact that he was born and lived here in our midst, in the sight and memory of men now living, is proof that—

God hath sounded far the trumpet  
That shall never call retreat!  
He is sifting out the hearts of men  
Before His judgment seat;  
Oh, be swift my soul, to answer Him:  
Be jubilant, my feet!  
While God is marching on!

(5th Chaitra, 1316)

### THE AWAKENING SOUL OF INDIA

...The nineteenth century in India was imitative, self-forgetful and artificial. It aimed at a successful reproduction of Europe in India, forgetting the deep saying of the *Gītā*: 'Better the law of one's own being, though it be badly done, than an alien Dharma well followed; death in one's own Dharma is better, it is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another's nature.' For death in one's own Dharma brings new birth, success in an alien path means successful suicide. If we had succeeded in Europeanizing ourselves we would have lost forever our spiritual capacity, our intellectual force, our national elasticity and power of self-renovation. That tragedy has been enacted more than once in history, only the worst and most mournful example of all would have been added. Had the whole activity of the country been of the derivative and alien kind, that result would have supervened. But the life-breath of the nation still moves in the religious movements of Bengal and Punjab, in

the political aspirations of Maharashtra, and in the literary activities of Bengal. Even here it was an undercurrent, the peculiar temperament and vitality of India struggling for self-preservation under a load of foreign ideas and foreign forms, and it was not till, in the struggle between these two elements, the balance turned in favour of the national Dharma that the salvation of India was assured. The resistance of the conservative element in Hinduism, *tamasic*, inert, ignorant, uncreative though it was, saved the country by preventing an even more rapid and thorough disintegration actually taking place and by giving respite and time for the persistent national self to emerge and find itself. It was in religion first that the soul of India awoke and triumphed. There were always indications, always great forerunners, but it was when the flower of the educated youth of Calcutta bowed down at the feet of an illiterate Hindu ascetic, a self-illuminated ecstatic and 'mystic' without a single trace or touch of alien thought or education upon him, that the battle was won. The going forth of Vivekananda, marked by the Master as the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake, not only to survive but to conquer.—(12th Asharh, 1316.)

[*Karmayogin* was a nationalist paper during the days of the first outburst of nationalism in Bengal. Sri Aurobindo Ghose was its editor.]

## RELIGIOUS PROGRESS IN INDIA— RAMAKRISHNA'S PLACE THEREIN

From *The Indian Review* (Madras)

The history of religious progress in India is a fascinating subject, but we shall consider it only in so far as it is necessary to narrate it for explaining Sri Ramakrishna's place in the history of Indian thought. When the ancient and sublime religion of Aryavarta was in danger of being buried under ceremonialism and sacerdotalism, Buddha appeared on the scene. He tried to reconstruct religion on a purely ethical and philosophical basis. But this was too difficult for the masses to comprehend and superstition worse than those ever prevalent before came to dominate the minds of the people. At this time Shankara appeared and brought new life to the simple and sublime Vedāntic faith and his work was carried on by Sri Rāmānuja and Madhvāchārya. After the inroad of Islam into India, there were various reconstructions by Rāmānanda, Kabir, Nānak, Chaitanya and Dādu. They introduced a democratic element into religion and emphasized the supreme importance of Bhakti. Since then a new force began to operate in Indian society. When the English came to India, a new leaven was introduced into the old civilization. They came here as the most modern exponents of Greek culture with its insistence on the value and beauty of the outward world and its emphasis on the importance of political life. Utilitarian and scientific modes of thought began to exercise a great fascination over the mind of educated India. But, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out again and again, the genius of India is essentially religious, and reconstruction began to be attempted. Raja Rammohan Roy wanted to found a new theism, Swami Dayānanda Saraswati wanted to go back to the simple faith of the Vedas... Brāhmoism also was founded as a protest against ceremonialism and did not attempt at a synthesis. Hence it also had no chance of establishing

itself in the land. Thus at this time, when the whole land was in a ferment and faiths were rising and declining with astonishing quickness, there was born a man who was destined to continue the traditional faiths of the land and give it a new vigour and life by a new synthesis of his own. He is the last of the great batch of teachers who handed on the lamp of spiritual knowledge in undimmed lustre from time immemorial in our land. —(1908)

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA

From *The Bengalee*

The great teacher, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who was the inspirer of the loftiest spiritual ideals of Vivekananda, exercised a profound and enduring influence upon the spiritual life of his generation. Not only Vivekananda, but the great Keshab Chunder Sen imbibed some of the most fruitful of his spiritual ideals, and not a little of the catholicity which marked his latter-day teachings, from the saint and hermit who lived in the quiet seclusion of the garden at Dakshineswar and incarnated in his personality—the spiritual aspiration of ancient and modern India. Among the great spiritual teachers of the world Ramakrishna Paramahansa will take his place in the front-rank. In deep and hourly communion with the impalpable, the invisible spirit pervading the universe, he had more spiritual insight and illumination than has been vouchsafed to any except the most gifted; and Vivekananda was his chosen disciple. Ramakrishna was the Teacher and Vivekananda the Preacher. Ramakrishna was the fountain of inspiration; Vivekananda drank deep at the fountain and tempered the spiritual enthusiasm of the Master with an intellectuality that was his own and that had been broadened and strengthened by converse with the East and the West. Carlyle has told us in one of those sayings that will live, that 'the history of a nation is the history of its great men'. There is a large substratum of truth beneath this saying. The history of any particular epoch is the history of the forces, social, religious, and political, which are operative in the age and are moulding the life of the community. A great man embodies the dominant forces of time in any particular department of human action. He expresses them with emphasis. He gives them a direction all his own and imparts to them a volume and intensity which derives its impulse from the fervour of his enthusiasm. Ramakrishna

and Vivekananda are great men in this sense. They are shining spiritual guides who will, for all time to come, influence the spiritual aspirations of the educated and the thoughtful among our countrymen. (*Editorial, April 29, 1913.*)

[*The Bengalee* was edited by Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee]

## THE ALL-PERVADING HUMANISM OF RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA

Sri V. V. Giri

I deem it a privilege to be here today to offer my respectful homage to the sacred memory of Ramakrishna Paramahansa on the occasion of the 134th birthday celebrations of this great saint whose influence and message transcend the boundaries of our motherland, and also whose philosophy goes beyond the limitations of any sect or religion. I had the privilege of reading a few works on Ramakrishna Paramahansa when I was in jail in the forties, and I also read the collected works of Swami Vivekananda recently. I could to some extent comprehend the principal tenets and teachings of these great personages.

What struck me most in reading about Ramakrishna was his simple and common approach to problems. His philosophy is one that can be understood even by an ordinary man not well-versed in the nuances and technicalities of a highly intellectual approach to the problems of religion. The quintessence of the message of Ramakrishna, if I may sum it up in one word, is 'Humanism' and that naturally has drawn me closest to his teachings. What Ramakrishna preached is as relevant today as it was when he propounded it, and I have no doubt in my mind it will continue to inspire mankind for ages. His many allegories and anecdotes from the day-to-day life of the people are simple, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa could drive a point home which even the most ordinary person could understand.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa was indeed a realized soul who could sift the chaff from the grain and separate the pure milk from the water. The essence of all philosophies, he could sum up in a few simple words and he could draw many adherents and followers because he preached what he practised and practised what he preached. An embodiment

of infinite religious ideas, Ramakrishna rendered the monastic Order founded by him broad-based and comprehensive in its outlook. While many other religious movements did not succeed in full measure because of their sectarianism, the Ramakrishna Mission, because of its robust universality, is spreading not only in our country but throughout the world. Ramakrishna was indeed a wonderful gardener, for he made a bouquet of different flowers radiating many hues and colours and exuding varieties of fragrance.

The life and teachings of Ramakrishna constitute one of the few unifying forces in the welter of present-day conflicts and tensions. The imperative words which fell from his lips are reaching human hearts and reverberating throughout the nooks and corners of Mother Earth, for his message transcends time and space and has a direct and universal appeal, attracting all types of people, no matter what their background or their faith is. He was the fountain-head of spiritual enlightenment and sublimity. He attained a state of *bhāvamukha*—a state in which the mind dwells on the Divine plane both in its absolute and relative aspects—and yet, without the least distraction from this union, he applied himself actively to the mundane affairs of life. He was established in a state of inward bliss, mental equipoise, and radiant joy.

‘The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face.’ This is how Gandhiji depicted Ramakrishna’s greatness. He was the embodiment of all religions. By sheer dint of his relentless *tapasyā*, dynamic vigour, scintillating intellect, profound insight into the mine of spiritual values, Ramakrishna carved out for himself an abiding niche in the hearts of the people. His utterances and actions bear the stamp of a spiritual genius. Ramakrishna left behind him a band of spirited disciples to carry out his work for the well-being of humanity. After the passing away of Ramakrishna in 1886, a monastic order bearing his name was organized

by his devout disciples, headed by the illustrious Swami Vivekananda. From its inception it set up a two-fold activity of preaching Vedanta and social work irrespective of caste, creed, or colour.

The greatest contribution of Ramakrishna was to draw as his principal disciple young Narendranath who, after being ordained, became Swami Vivekananda, and who brought name and fame not only to Hinduism but to India. The refreshing catholicity of thought, the capacity to perceive in every religious system sublime elements which elevate and ennoble life, the intense, stormy religious fervour which Ramakrishna possessed in such a remarkable degree, and the deep mysticism which was evident behind his devotional ecstasy—all these were transferred to Narendranath as if by a magic touch. The young disciple, in turn, was prepared to carry out the mission of arousing the Indians from their stupor that they might shed fear and face the world with confidence.

Swami Vivekananda, the cyclonic Hindu as he was called, was more concerned with removing poverty from the earth, and the emphasis he laid on his Master's teachings of work and patriotism placed him on a lofty pedestal much above the common sannyasin. Strength of character and physical well-being were given proper emphasis as the major requirements for developing the personality of an individual. He said: 'What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one of burning love—selfless. That love will make every word tell like a thunderbolt. Awake, awake, great souls! The world is burning in misery. Can you sleep?' Again Swamiji thundered, 'Strength is the one thing needful. Strength is the medicine for the world's disease. Strength is the medicine which the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned.'

Swami Vivekananda did not preach a philosophy of inaction. He stressed the fact that work was worship. 'Work work and work'—that was his motto. He said, 'If a man

curses the world, goes into a forest, mortifies his flesh and kills himself little by little by starvation, makes his heart a barren waste, kills out all feelings, and becomes harsh, stern and dried up—than man has missed the way.' There is a strong current of humanitarianism and consideration for the poor and the downtrodden running through all his thoughts, writings, and speeches. Positive fearlessness, incessant work, and continuous striving towards the goal should be the guiding spirit of every activity. According to him, 'If there is a sin in the world, it is weakness; avoid all weaknesses, weakness is sin, weakness is death.' Here is a new interpretation of religion, exploding the myth that religion or spirituality is only a negative approach to life.

Vivekananda often mentioned in his work the economic fetters and social barriers which stifled all progress. He therefore wanted misery and poverty to be banished from every hearth and home. His foremost desire was to wipe away the tears from every eye. He believed in the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden, in popular education, and in young Indians standing on their own feet. While he emphasized material progress, he did not ignore spiritual enhancement.

In all these things, Swami Vivekananda drew inspiration from Ramakrishna, for Ramakrishna Paramahansa taught that saintliness was not exclusive of patriotism or humanitarian service. He elevated spirituality to the lofty pedestal of social service, catholicity of outlook, and compassion. No wonder, Romain Rolland described Ramakrishna as the fulfillment of the spiritual aspirations of the millions of Indians during the past three thousand years. Service to man is the highest form of worship. All religions ultimately lead their sincere devotees to the same Godhead. Ramakrishna thus sowed the seeds of '*Daridranārāyanaseva*'<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Lit., service of the poor, knowing them to be forms of Nārāyana, God.

—the sapling of which was nurtured and watered under the tender care of Swami Vivekananda who proclaimed, 'We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas.'

I have had the privilege of participating in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in different parts of India and in Ceylon. They are the first to reach the people in times of need and necessity. Whether it is floods or drought, the members of this holy Order are there to render succour to the suffering millions. It only shows the training that is imparted by the Ramakrishna Mission and is indeed true to the gospel of Ramakrishna whose one religion was all pervading humanism.

I must confess here that I cannot consider myself to be religious in the accepted sense of the term. My only religion is humanism for, after all, religions preach the same fundamental doctrines of Truth, Charity, Goodness, and Love. If we only realize this, the bickering and antagonisms that prevail between those that claim to be the faithful followers of different religions will end. This is indeed the message of Swami Vivekananda also. He fully realized that true religion is to provide solace to the starving man.

Swami Vivekananda has graphically portrayed his guru's fascinating personality: 'His face was distinguished by a child-like tenderness, profound humility and remarkable sweetness of expression. No one could look upon it unmoved.' Such was the radiance attained by Ramakrishna who adhered to his own dictum: Whatever the faith we profess or the method we adopt, if we do it with a pure heart and with devotion, we can attain Supreme Bliss. True devotees of any religion will honour the followers of any other religion with great humility. All religions will lead us to the Supreme Reality.

The best way in which we can celebrate the birth anniversary of a saint and seer like Ramakrishna Paramahansa is to recapture the essential unity of all religions and put down the ugly forces through persuasion and

education. That alone will be the true homage that we can pay to Sri Ramakrishna. Let us resolve towards the realization of this objective.

[Speech delivered at the Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Public Meeting on 23 February 1969, at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S LINK WITH THE PAST

Professor V. K. R. V. Rao

It seems to me that if we consider the teachings of the Paramahansa, we can find three or four distinct features in them which have been found, severally, in the teachings of other great religious teachers, and which, perhaps, have been expounded individually with greater force, and possibly commanded much large and wider audiences; but I do not think that you will find all these teachings combined in the same person and in the same manner as you will find in the Paramahansa.

To begin with, he made it very clear, right from the outset of his own religious experiments, and the subsequent message which he gave to the world (and I think this is where the Hindu in the Paramahansa comes in, and that is why I think the Ramakrishna Mission will always be a branch of Hinduism and it will be a Hindu mission, because he saw, like all Hindus, to whatever part of the country they may belong, that you cannot remain satisfied with a conception of God as a mere impersonal, abstract, and theoretical idea) that if you want to know God, or see God, or walk with God, or experience God, you cannot do so merely by thinking of a God as a nameless, colourless, and odour-less mystery, who is everything and who is nothing, and so on. You know the series of phrases which are used in the *Upanishads* to describe what is indescribable. You cannot approach God by thinking of Him as a philosophic abstraction. You can approach Him only if you think of Him in concrete, material, personal terms. It does not matter in what personal terms God may appear to you. You can think of Him as Mother, in which form God appeared to the Paramahansa. You may think of Him as any one of the gods, and you know there are a large number of them with whom we who come from different parts of India are familiar. If I may illustrate, to some of us who come from

the south, God is known as Venkatachalapati of Tirupati; some others may think of Him as Vishwanātha of Kāshi; some others may think of Him as Purandara Vittala of Pandarpur. It does not matter what name you give Him as long as you try to approach the conception of God in a personal manner. And I think it is this approach to the knowledge of God, this approach to religion, (which is typically and peculiarly Hindu) which has been misunderstood by all other religions, or which, at any rate, does not form part either of the Christian faith, or of the Muslim faith, or of the Buddhist faith. We think of God as a living person whom we can feel, touch, see, enjoy, rejoice over, love, and lose ourselves in. It is exactly this idea which seized Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He could get into ecstasies of transport; he could talk, sing, dance with joy at the sensation created in him by the approach, touch, and the feeling of the Mother whom he worshipped. That, I think, is one of the most characteristically Hindu parts of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

At the same time, he did not say his particular God was the only God. He did not say, 'You can think of God only in terms of Mother, or only in terms of a particular Deity whom you are accustomed to worship.' He only said, 'You may approach God through the particular Deity with whom you are familiar.' When foreigners come and say, 'You have got so many thousands of gods. How can you reconcile all these thousands of gods with the truth that there is only one God?'—it only shows that foreigners are not able to go beyond the superficial elements of the Hindu custom and belief. Our individual gods are only a means of approach to God who exists not only in the temples but also outside the temples. He exists not only in places where He is worshipped, but also in places where he is despised. God exists everywhere, in air, in water, in the atmosphere, in man, in woman, in children, in animals, in plants, in birds, in everything that is living and that is non-living. This universality of God is another cardinal, fundamental creed

of the teachings of Paramahansa. He said, 'You cannot think of God as an impersonal entity or as being in a place where you cannot go to see him without showing or sending in your visiting card. If you want to think of God, if you want to know what is meant by God, you must think of him in terms of a person who exists here, there, and everywhere.' Logically, the moment you begin to accept the view that you recognize God in every place, in every living animal, in every living thing, it follows that you have got to treat all creation in the same manner.

Just try and draw the practical inferences from this conception of the universality of God. The moment you see that God is present everywhere, in everyone, there can be no such thing as untouchability, there can be no such thing as caste, there can be no such thing as specially privileged priests, there can be no such thing as inequality. There can be nothing excepting the simple acceptance of the fundamental principle that all living things are equal in the sight of God. If all living things are God, then all living things obviously must be equal. That, of course, is the philosophy which has been preached by a number of Hindu philosophers. You find it in the Hindu philosophy, you find it in the Hindu mythology. The famous story of Prahlada and Narasimha is familiar to most Hindus, where, you know, it was supposed to have been proved concretely that God could be found even in a pillar.

Everybody knows that the Hindus believe in the universality and the presence of God. As a matter of fact, not only do we believe in the universality of God but, according to the teachings of the Gita, we are asked to dedicate ourselves completely to God in everything that we do, whether it is an act of worship, whether it is an act of *punya* or prayer, or anything else that we do. Even when we pray to God, at the end of the prayer we have got to say, 'All merit that might have been acquired by this prayer is not for me but is given to God.' That is nearly the same thing which every Hindu is taught from the beginning.

Even when he takes food, to him it is religious. There is a religious element in sleeping; there is a religious element in marriage. Everything that a Hindu does has got to be coloured by the fact that everywhere there is God and that whatever he (the Hindu) does has got to be done as a dedication to the service of God.

That is another characteristic teaching of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, which leads to the philosophy of love, love of all creatures. You know, for example, it has been related in the life and teachings of the Paramahansa that later he became so sensitive to others' pain, such an embodiment of this principle of the universality of love, that even if somebody living somewhere else was punished, he would actually feel and see the lashes on his own body. That was only a symbolic way of pointing out how thoroughly Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had imbibed and typified and concretized the philosophy of the universality of God.

Not only did he combine these two things—which to some would seem to be inconsistent—that one should approach God in a personal manner and that God is here, there, and everywhere, but he also went further and did a thing which no religious teacher had done before. At any rate, it does not seem to have been done effectively before, looking at the way in which their teachings have been practised by the followers. He said, 'Don't think for one moment that there is one patented way of approaching God; don't think that there is one regular, royal, well-marked, and well-planned route which is the only route by which you can approach God.' Time and again, he made it clear in his own life, in his own religious experiments, and in his teachings and sayings, that all religions were but different methods, different ways of approach to God, by whatever name He might be known; and that is something which appeared very easy for the Hindu to grasp, because, even if you take hold of any Hindu at random, you will find that he does not recognize God by one name. If you go to one

part of the country, God will be known by a particular name; if you go to another part, even in a neighbouring district or in the same street, perhaps even in the same house, you will find God being addressed by different names. Nobody is more familiar than the Hindu is with the multiplicity of names by which you can recognize God and you can approach Him. It is this, I think, which makes tolerance, and the acceptance of many ways of knowing and approaching God, so fundamentally and naturally a part of the teachings of Hindus and of Ramakrishna. He says, 'Whether it is a question of Islam, or Christianity, or any other religion, do not for one moment think that a person is an infidel, irreligious, and condemned to eternal perdition, simply because he does not follow your way of approaching God.' He contended in different ways, by parables and by homilies, that all religions were nothing but different paths, or ways, or means for achieving the same object, and in doing that, of course, he necessarily preached the philosophy of tolerance, and the equality of all religions. He also did something much more important. As far as his aims and his teachings were concerned, he made it clear that no person could be denied the right of salvation or could be put into a category of non-savable souls simply because he did not follow the belief that one particular way was the only correct way of knowing and approaching God. That again is associated with his personal approach to God and with the fact that he knew, from his own experience, that if one wants to know God, one has to think of him in one's own natural way. And if one thinks of Him sufficiently, devotedly and with intensity of concentration, sooner or later one begins to feel the identity of oneself with God.

These three tenets had been preached earlier, and I do not say they were new philosophies; but they were not all preached by the same man, nor had they been brought together to form a consistent whole. And, even more important than that—and this is something which particularly the Hindu religion requires—is the pointing out that

salvation is not a personal affair, that salvation does not mean withdrawing oneself from all worldly responsibilities and obligations. You know that the ideal which was most popular not only in the East but also in the West, was the ascetic ideal—the ideal of a person withdrawing himself from all his surroundings and social obligations and seeking his salvation in complete withdrawal from life in general. The Paramahansa definitely discouraged his disciples from taking this attitude to life. He himself returned from the *samādhis* into which he frequently fell, because all the time he was conscious of the fact that one could not bring about a reform in this wise. As you know, he was a person who refused to give his chief disciple permission to remain in a state of religious and spiritual ecstasy where he would have become lost to human life in general.

I do not think it is really necessary for me to say anything more about the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. But I can think of no more complete set of philosophy and religious practice that can be easily understood by the man in the street, particularly if he has a Hindu background, and that can effectively lead him to a discovery of his spiritual self, than is embodied in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

[Speech delivered on the 108th birthday celebration  
of Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Mission,  
New Delhi in 1943.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

'They call Him by a multitude of names, Who is but one'; 'A single Fire that burns on many altars'; 'Even as He showeth, so is He named'; these are affirmations taken from the sacrificial hymns of the *Rig-Veda*. 'As He is approached, so He becomes'; 'It is because of His great abundance—or because He can be so variously participated in—that they call Him by so many names.' By way of comment, we cite St. Thomas Aquinas; 'The many aspects of these names are not empty and vain, for there corresponds to all of them one single reality represented by them in a manifold and imperfect manner.' (*Summa*, 1, 13, 4, and 2) Nothing, perhaps, so strangely impresses or bewilders a Christian student of Saint Ramakrishna's life as the fact that this Hindu of the Hindus, without in any way repudiating his Hinduism, but for the moment forgetting it, in about 1866 completely surrendered himself to the Islamic way, repeated the name of Allah, wore the costume, and ate the food of a Mussalman. This self-surrender to what we should call in India the waters of another current of the single river of truth, resulted only in a direct experience of the beatific vision, not less authentic than before. Seven years later Ramakrishna in the same way proved experimentally the truth of Christianity. He was now for a time completely absorbed in the idea of Christ, and had no room for any other thought. You might have supposed him a convert. What really resulted was that he could now affirm on the basis of personal experience, 'I have also practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects... The lake has many shores. At one the Hindu draws water in a pitcher, and calls it *jal*, at another the Mussalman draws it in leather jars, and calls it *pānī*, at a third the Christian finds what he calls "water".'

Such an understanding may be rare, but is absolutely normal in the East: As the *Bhagavad-Gita* expresses it, 'There is no deity that I am not, and in case any man be truly the worshipper of any deity whatever, it is I that am the cause of his devotion and its fruit...Howsoever men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine'. 'Similarly speaks the *Bhakta Māla*: 'No one is ignorant of the doctrines of his own religion...Therefore let every man, so far as in him lieth, help the reading of the scriptures, whether those of his own church, or those of another.' And similarly also in Islam, 'My heart has become capable of every form...it is a convent for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the place of pilgrimage at Mecca, the tables of the Torah, the book of the *Koran*. I follow the religion of Love, whichever way His camels take.'

Such an understanding is rarer still, and one may say abnormal to the western type of humanity. If the modern Christian does not quite endorse the conduct of Charlemagne's heroes at Saragossa—'The synagogues they enter and the mosques, whose every wall with mallet and axes they shatter: they break in pieces small the idols...the heathen folk in crowds to the font baptismal are driven, to take Christ's yoke upon them...Thus out of heathen darkness have five-score thousand been redeemed, and be now true Christians', it is at least quite certain that for every man that has died by religious persecution in India, ten thousand have died in Europe, and equally certain that the activity of Christian missions still quite frankly endorses a programme of conversion by force—the force of money, not indeed paid out in cash, but expended on education and medical aid bestowed with ulterior motives. 'Force', as Lafcadio Hearn once wrote, 'the principal instrument of Christian propagandism in the past, is still the force behind our missions.' No greater offenders are to be found than missionaries against the commandment, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' I do not however

at all wish to dwell upon this point of view, but rather to point out that although religious tolerance in Europe has never as in Asia been founded upon the belief that all religions are true, but rather founded on a growing indifference to all religious doctrines, an intellectual basis for a willing tolerance of other forms of belief is by no means wanting in Christianity. 'John' indeed speaks of the 'True Light that lighteth every man.' Even St. Thomas admits that some of the Gentiles who lived before Christ's temporal birth may have been saved. For as Clement of Alexandria had long since said, 'There was always a natural manifestation of the one Almighty God, amongst all right-thinking men.' Eckhart speaks of 'One of our most ancient philosophers who found the truth long, long before God's birth, ere ever there was Christian faith at all as it is now', and again much more boldly, 'He to whom God is different in one thing from another and to whom God is dearer in one thing than another, that man is a barbarian, still in the wilds, a child.' Note that 'Merlyn made the round table in tokening of the roundenes of the world for by the round table is the world sygnifyed by ryghte. For all the world crysten and hethen repayren unto the round table...(that) by them which should be felawes of the round table the truth of the Sancgreal be well knowen.' (Malory, XIV. 2) The truth is with Blake when he says, 'The religions of all nations are derived from each nation's different reception of the poetic genius which is everywhere called the spirit of prophecy...As all men are alike (though infinitely various), so all religions, and as all similars have one source.' The Vedic and Christian traditions are never tired of employing 'Truth', 'Being', and 'Beauty', as pre-eminently fitting essential names of God.

Now we are well aware that in this human world there cannot be a conceptual knowledge or expression of truth except in some *way*; just as there can be no perceptible beauty except of some *kind*. What is true in all truths, or what is beautiful in all beauties, cannot itself be any one of

these truths or beauties. As Dionysius says, 'If anyone in seeing God understood what he saw, he saw not God himself, but one of those things that are His.' Belief in Revelation or Audition does not mean that the very words in which the truth is expressed in any case contain the truth but rather that they point to it, for as St. Thomas says, 'Everything has truth of nature according to the *degree* in which it imitates the knowledge of God', 'Our intellect considers God *according to* the mode derived from creatures', and finally 'The thing known is in the knower *according to* the mode of the knower.' All concepts of God, even the most nearly adequate, are thus man-made; as we say in India, 'He takes the forms that are imagined by His worshippers.' Very surely He is not to be thought of as confined by or fully expressed by any of these forms, who is Himself the single form of every form, and transcendent with respect to each and every form; it is from this point of view that many a Christian teacher has affirmed that 'Nothing true can be said of God.' The value of concepts, of any expression verbal or visible, *per verbum in intellectu conceptum*, is one of use; the concept is of value not as a thing in itself, but as dispositive to an essential vision, *not* in any likeness. The beauty of the formula, the verbal or visual icon, poignant as it may be in Christian gospel or Vedic liturgy, is not an end in itself, but referred to him who uses it, is an invitation. The purpose of any art, and no less of that highest art of theology, in which all other arts, whether literary or plastic subsist *per excellentiam*, is to teach, to delight, and above all to move (Augustine's *docere, delectare, movere*). And exclusive attachment to any one dogma, any one group of verbal or visual symbols, however pertinent, is an act of idolatry; the Truth itself is inexpressible.

If the image is His whose image it is, the colours and the art are ours. Whoever claims that his own manner of understanding and statement is the only true one, is moved not by the vision of God, but by spiritual pride. Such a

believer, as Ibnu'l 'Arabī says, 'Praises none but himself, for his God is made by himself, and to praise the work is to praise the maker of it: Its excellence or imperfection belongs to the maker. For this reason he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just...If he understood the saying of Junayd "The colour of the water is the colour of the vessel containing it", he would not interfere with others, but would perceive God in every form and in every belief. He has opinion, not knowledge: Therefore God said, "I am in my servant's opinion of Me," that is, "I do not manifest Myself to him save in the form of his belief." God is absolute or unrestricted as He pleases; and the God of religious belief is subject to limitations, for He is the God who is contained in the heart of His servant.' The oriental Gnostic has no fault to find with any Catholic doctrine; judged by Vedic standards, one can say that Christianity is true and lovely, true so far as any formulation can be true, lovely in so far as any thing, as distinguished from One who is no thing, can be lovely.

Moreover, it can be positively affirmed that every notable Christian doctrine is also explicitly propounded in every other dialect of the primordial tradition: I refer to such doctrines as those of the eternal and temporal births, that of the single essence and two natures, that of the Father's impassability, that of the significance of sacrifice, that of transubstantiation, that of the nature of the distinction between the contemplative and active lives and of both from the life of pleasure, that of eternity from aeviternity and time, and so forth. Literally hundreds of texts could be cited from Christian and Islamic, Vedic, Taoist and other scriptures and their patristic expositions, in close and sometimes literally verbal agreement. To cite a trio of instances at random, whereas Damascene has to say that 'He Who Is, is the principle of all names applied to God', in the *Katha Upanishad* we have 'He is, by that alone is He to be apprehended': whereas St. Thomas says, 'These things are said to be under the sun which are generated and

corrupted', the *Satapatha Brāhmana* affirms that 'Everything under the sun is in the power of death'; and whereas Dionysius speaks of That 'Which not to see or know is really to see and know', The *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brāhmana* has it that 'The thought of God in him by whom it is unthought, or if he thinks the thought he does not understand.' All traditional teaching employs side by side the *via affirmativa* and the *via remotionis*, and in this sense is in agreement with Boethius, that 'Faith is a mean between contrary heresies'. Sin is defined by the Thomist and in India in one and the same way as a 'departure from the order to the end'. All tradition is agreed that the last end of man is happiness.

On the other hand, while there can be only one metaphysics, there must be not merely a variety of religions, but a hierarchy of religions, in which the truth is more or less adequately expressed, according to the intellectual capacities of those whose religions they are. Nor do I mean to deny that there can be heterodox doctrines, properly to be condemned as heresies, but only that any and every belief is a heresy if it be regarded as the truth, and not merely as a signpost of the truth. Pantheism, for example, is equally a heresy from Christian, Islamic, and Hindu points of view; a confusion of things as they are in themselves with things as they are in God, of the essence of the participant with the participated Essence, is an egregious error, and yet not so great an error as to assume that the *being* of things as they are in themselves is altogether their own being. The distinction of essence from nature of the Sāṅkhya system is true from a certain point of view, and yet false when regarded from the standpoint of a higher synthesis, as in the Vedānta, and similarly in Christianity, where from one point of view essence and nature are the universe apart, and yet in the simplicity of the First Cause are one impartite substance.

It is perfectly legitimate to feel that a given religion is more adequately true than another; to hold, for example, that Catholicism is more adequately true than Protestantism,

or Hinduism than Buddhism. Real distinctions can be drawn: Christianity maintains for example that metaphysics, though the highest of the other sciences, is inferior to the sacred science of theology; Hinduism is primarily metaphysical, and only secondarily religious, hence the controversies as to the true significance of 'deification', and hence it is that however much a Hindu may find himself in enthusiastic agreement with the angelic and celestial doctors (Thomas and Bonaventura), he is more at home with certain giants of Christian thought whose orthodoxy is suspect, I mean Erivgena, Eckhart, Behmen, Blake; and more at home with Plotinus than with the representatives of exoteric Christian orthodoxy; more at home with St. John than with St. James; more in sympathy with Christian Platonism than with Christian Aristotelianism, scarcely at all in sympathy with Protestant theologies, and far more in sympathy with Qabbalistic interpretations of Genesis and Exodus, than with any historical approach. So that we do not for a moment mean to maintain the impropriety of all dogmatic controversy. We must bear in mind that even within the framework of a presumably homogeneous faith it is taken for granted that one and the same truth must be presented in various ways suited to the audience, and that this is not a matter of contradictory statement, but of 'convenient means'. What we do maintain is that all paths converge; that the Wayfarer, having already trodden a given path, will under all normal circumstances sooner reach that point at which all progress ends—'One reaching God, all progress ends'—than if he retraces his steps and starts afresh.

What we must *not* forget is that no one can finally pronounce upon the truth of a given religion who has not lived it, as Ramakrishna lived both Christianity and Islam, as well as Hinduism; and that, once convinced that only one's own truth is true, 'It is,' as Professor Briggs of Drew University lately remarked, 'the easiest thing imaginable to take the concepts of others faiths, abstract them from their contexts, and demolish them.' For example, how easily the Islamic

definition of Christianity as a polytheistic religion could be deduced from the considered statement of St. Thomas, that 'We do not say *the only God*, because deity is common to several.' (*Summa*, 1.31.2c, Dominican Fathers' translation.) In the same way a pantheistic definition of Christianity could easily be deduced from St. Thomas': 'A thing has being by participation....We must consider...the emanation of all being from the universal cause, which is God' (*Summa*, 1.44.1 ad 1 and 45 lc, Dominican Fathers' translation.)

What is, then, the last analysis the value of comparative religion? Certainly not to convince us that one mode of belief is the preparation for another, or to lead to a decision as to which is 'best'. One might as well regard ancient or exotic styles of art as preparations for and aspirations towards one's own. Nor can the value of this discipline be thought of as one conducing to the development of a single universally acceptable syncretic faith embodying all that is 'best' in every faith; such a 'faith' as this would be a mechanical and lifeless monstrosity, by no means a stream of living water, but a sort of religious Esperanto. Comparative religion can demonstrate that all religions spring from a common source, as Jeremias says, the 'dialects of a single spiritual speech'. We cannot therefore take the formulae of one religion and insert them in another without incongruity. One can recognize that many formulae are identical in different religions; confront for example St. Thomas, 'Creation, which is the emanation of all being from the not-being which is nothing'. (*Summa*, 1.45.lc) with the Vedic 'Being is engendered from non-being'. (*asatah sad ajāyata*, R.V. 10.72.3), and such comparisons can be validly employed (even by the most orthodox) as what St. Thomas calls 'extrinsic and probable proofs' of the validity of a given dogma.

But of greater value than this is the clarification that results when the formulae of one tradition are collated with those of another. For as we have already seen every tradition is necessarily a partial representation of the truth

intended by tradition universally considered; in each tradition something is suppressed, or omitted, or obscure which in another may be found more extensively, more logically, or more brilliantly developed. What then is clear and full in one tradition can be used to develop the meaning of what may be hardly more than alluded to by another, or even if in one tradition a given doctrine has been definitely named, a religion of the significance of this definition may lead to the recognition and correlation of a whole series of affirmations in another tradition, in all of which the same doctrine is implicit, but which had previously been overlooked in their relation to one another. It is thus a great advantage to be able to make use of the expression *Vedic exemplarism*; or, conversely, to speak of Christian *yoga* immediately brings out the analogy between St. Bernard's *consideratio*, *contemplatio*, and *raptus*, Sanskrit *dhāranā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*.

To many a Christian, no doubt, Sri Ramakrishna's primary attachment to the cult of the Great Mother gives offence. Nothing is indeed more usual than to consider that Christianity, whether for better or worse, adheres to purely masculine interpretations of divine being; the Christian speaks of a Father, but not of a Mother in Heaven, whereas in India the ancient love of the Magna Mater maintains itself at the present day on equal terms with that of the Propator. And yet the doctrine of the maternity of the divine nature is repeatedly, however reservedly, affirmed in Christian theology, fundamentally in that of the 'two natures', more explicitly in that of the temporal *and* eternal nativities and in that of the Generation of the Son as a vital operation from conjoint principles,—'*Procession verbi in divinis dicitur generatio... quae est operatio vitae... et propter hoc proprie dicitur genitum et Filius.*' (St. Thomas, *Summa*, 1.27.2, cf. 1.98.2c. 'In every act of generation there is an active and a passive principle.'). It is inasmuch as 'Eternal filiation does not depend on a temporal mother' (*ib.* 3.35.5 ad 2), that Eckhart can speak of the 'Act of fecundation latent in

eternity', and say that 'It is God who has the treasure and the bride in Him', that the 'Godhead wantons with the Word', and that 'His birth *Mary Ghostly* was to God better pleasing than His nativity of her in the flesh'. One sees that when St. Thomas speaks of 'that Nature by which the Father begets' (Summa, 1.41.5) the reference is really to the Magna Mater, the Vedic Aditi, not to mention other names of the One Madonna, and sees what is really meant by the otherwise obscure assertion that notwithstanding primary matter 'recedes from likeness to God, yet...it retains a certain likeness to the divine being' (*ib.* 1.14.11 and 3). *Natura naturata* indeed 'retains' a certain likeness to '*Natura naturans, Creatrix, Deus*': Mother Earth to Mother Nature, Mary in the flesh to Mary ghostly. One need only consider Genesis 1.27: 'To the image of God He created him; male and female he created them' in connection with Galatians 3.28, 'According to the image of Him that created him, where there is neither male nor female' to realize that whereas Essence and Nature in *divines* are one simple substance without composition, the very fact that the conjoint principles can be separately exemplified is proof that the Supreme Identity can be truly spoken of either as Father or as Mother, or as Father-Mother, just as in the Vedas the Divine 'Parents' are indifferently 'Fathers' (*Pitarā*, du. masc.) or 'Mothers' (*Mātarā*, du. fem.), or as 'That One, spirated, despirated' (*tadekam ānīt avātam*, Rv. 10.129.2, where no gender is implied, cf. Eckhart's 'Where these two abysses hang, equally spirated, despirated, there is the Supreme Being').

Thus we may go so far as to assert on behalf of true 'comparative religion', that however self-sufficient a religion may be, if it be followed to the very end to which it is directed there can hardly be supposed a way so plain that it could not here and there be better illuminated by other lights than that of the pilgrim's private lantern, the light of any lantern being only a refraction of the Light of lights. A diversity of routes is not merely appropriate to a diversity

of travellers, who are neither all alike, nor start from one and the same point, but may be of incalculable aid to any traveller who can rightly read the map; for where all roads converge, there can be none of them that does not help to clarify the true position of the centre of the maze, 'short of which we are still in duality'. Hence we say that the very implications of the phrase 'religious tolerance' are to be avoided: diversity of faith is not a matter for unwilling 'toleration', but of divine appointment. And this will hold good even if we sincerely believe that other faiths are inferior to our own, and in this sense relatively 'evil': for as Augustine says, 'The admirable beauty of the universe is made up of all things. In which even what is called evil, well-ordered and in its place, is the eminent commendation of what is good' (*Enchir* 13), whom St. Thomas quotes with approval, adding that: 'The universe, the present creation being supposed, cannot be better, because of the most beautiful order given to things by God.' (*Summa*, 1.48.1 and 1.25.6 ad 3). As Augustine also says, 'There is no evil in things, but only in the sinner's misuse of them' (*De Dod. Christ* 3.12). As to the sinner's 'misuse', who can assure us of that, with respect to which it has been said, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'?

In the matter of direction towards the Kingdom of Heaven 'within you'<sup>1</sup> the modern world is far more lacking in the will to seek, than likely to be led astray by false direction. From the Satanic point of view there could hardly be imagined a better activity than to be engaged in the 'conversion of the heathen' from one to another body of dogmas: That, surely, was not what was meant by the injunction, 'Go thou and preach the Kingdom of God'—or was He mistaken, when He said 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you'?

---

<sup>1</sup>Sanskrit *hridayākāṣe antarbhūtasya khe.*

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA: A LIFE OF MANIFOLD SPIRITUAL REALIZATION

Dr. S. C. Chatterjee

One day, a Brahmo devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna: 'Sir, why are there so many different views regarding the nature of God? Some people say that He has forms and qualities, some others say that He is formless and qualityless; then again, among the former class of people, we find different ideas about the forms and qualities of God. Why is there so much confusion and perplexity about the nature of God?' In reply, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'A devotee describes God just as he sees or perceives Him. Different men speak of God differently, because they have different experiences of Him. In fact, there is no ground for confusion and quarrel here. If you can only realize Him somehow, He will help you understand everything. How can a man expect to know all about a country which he has never seen or where he had never been?'

What Sri Ramakrishna once said with regard to the nature of God seems to be applicable to his own self. His wonderful divine life presents a rare combination and synthesis of various types of religious experience and spiritual realization. It is almost impossible for ordinary men to appreciate it fully or to describe all its sides and aspects adequately. So it is that today we sometimes find very different ideas and opinions about him current even among educated and enlightened men. Of course, all of them admit and proclaim that he effected a permanent reconciliation and unification of all faiths. But they do not seem to realize clearly what in Sri Ramakrishna's life was the real ground of this reconciliation. He was the living embodiment of almost all types of spiritual realizations—a fact which put him in a position to appreciate and honour all the religions of the world. Losing sight of this fact, some men consider him to be only a great devotee (*bhakta*) of

Mother Kālī; some call him a great *karma-yogin*; some a profound *jñāna-yogin*; some regard him as an unequalled Advaitin, while others find in him just a Dvaitin or Viśist-ādvaitin. Again, some people, who are more critical, discern in him an inconsistent and illogical combination of devotion to Goddess Kālī and belief in Advaita Vedānta. As an extraordinary phenomenon, Sri Ramakrishna was so very perplexing.

What then are we to say about these different and conflicting descriptions of the life of Sri Ramakrishna? Taken as exclusive and complete, they are all false and fallacious. But if taken as a partial view of his life, touching only one of its many aspects, each is true, though none gives us the whole truth. In one of his parables, Buddha said: 'Some blind men formed their ideas of an elephant by touching its different parts. They came to quarrel among themselves, because each thought that his knowledge was the only true and complete knowledge. The quarrel was over as soon as each of them realized that his knowledge was only of *one* of the many parts of the animal.' The story of a chameleon, which Sri Ramakrishna often used to tell, is more apt and instructive: 'Once, a man told his friend that he had seen on a certain tree a beautiful animal of red colour. The latter said that he had also seen it, but its colour was not red, but green. A third man averred that it was yellow. Some other persons remonstrated that it was not yellow, but blue; not blue, but chocolate; and so on. Then they went to the tree and saw a man sitting under it. On their asking, he told them that he lived under the tree and knew the animal well; and that all they had asserted was true, it was sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, and so on, and sometimes it was seen to have no colour at all. Similar is the case with the different partial estimates which different men form of Sri Ramakrishna's manifold spiritual life. Each is true in a sense, but none brings out its full significance.

In Sri Ramakrishna's life of spiritual practices (*sādhana*), we find a combination and unification of innumerable

spiritual experiences and realizations. This will become clear from a brief survey of his long spiritual career. He began as a worshipper of Goddess Kāli in the temple garden at Dakshineswar near Calcutta. During the first four years of his spiritual practice he had to depend on his own unaided efforts without any spiritual guide, but with full confidence in the Divine Mother as present in the image of Kāli. Through his intense love for the Mother, his burning desire to see Her, and his incessant service and sincere self-surrender to Her, he attained supreme spiritual realization. He had a beatific vision of the Divine Mother as an unlimited and infinite ocean of the light of Consciousness. The same Mother he saw in the image of Kāli, which became for him a living and loving Goddess—no more a stone image, but a breathing and pulsating life, a true mother fondling, talking and playing with him from time to time. Image-worship thus received a new meaning and a new life in Hindu society and in religious history.

Then followed Sri Ramakrishna's many spiritual endeavours, leading to various other realizations. Adopting the attitude of a faithful servant (*dāśya-bhāva*) as in Hanuman, he strove to attain a vision or direct experience of Sri Ramachandra, and his effort was crowned with success in no time. Adopting the attitude of a loving female friend (*sakhī-bhāva*), he had a vision of Sri Krishna. In similar ways, he had vision of Shiva, Sri Radha, and Sri Chaitanya as well as other deities and incarnations of God. At a certain state of his *sādhana*, he adopted and practised the religion of Islam and had a vision of Mohammed, the prophet of God. On seeing the Madonna with Jesus in her arms, he had a vision of Christ as an embodiment of love and light, and he remained absorbed in the contemplation of Christ for three days and nights. Although there is no record of his adoption and practice of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, he had great regard for these faiths and their founders, and recognized these religions also as true ways of attaining spiritual perfection in life.

The fame of the temple garden at Dakshineswar spread far and wide soon after its dedication. Many saints and sages, men and women of great spiritual realization visited the place. Under the guidance of one of them, Sri Ramakrishna launched on the practice of what is known as *hathayoga* (i.e. *yoga* of bodily purification and breath suspension). He was about to be lost in the trance of unconscious absorption (*jada-samādhi*) and meet physical death. But that was not to be. His life was protected by the Divine Mother, destined as it was for a higher cause—a noble mission in the world at large. Then, under the guidance of one Yogeswari Bhairavi Brāhmani, Sri Ramakrishna passed through all the forms of Tantric *sāadhanā* mentioned in the Shākta Tantras with unexpected and unprecedented success. This had the desired effect of firmly establishing him in the final truth of the Tantras, namely, that the Divine Mother is the ultimate Reality manifest in the universe and that all things and beings are but Her forms and revelations. During this period, he had a number of visions of the various forms of the Divine Mother. Then followed his practice of the five kinds of *sāadhanā*—*dāśya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, etc.—according to the Vaishnava Tantras, under the direction of perfected saints. These types of Vaishnava *sāadhanā* he performed with punctilious care and full paraphernalia, and attained unique success in them all. In Vedānta *sāadhanā*, under the supervision of Totāpuri, we have Sri Ramakrishna's last *sāadhanā* and final realization. To his utter dismay, Totāpuri found that the disciple attained in a day that which he had achieved in forty long years' struggle. In a short time, his mind was concentrated, and he plunged deep into the trance of superconscious absorption (*nirvikalpa-samādhi*), only to be awakened from it after three days and nights through his preceptor's anxious, repeated efforts. The final outcome of all these spiritual practices was Sri Ramakrishna's realization that they all led to the same goal, that the Divine Mother of Śākta Tantra and the Brahman of Advaita Vedānta were one and the same Reality in different

aspects or states, and that so many religions were so many paths to God.

Sri Ramakrishna's was a life of manifold spiritual realization. He was extraordinary and mysterious. He combined and unified in himself many apparently incompatible and contradictory spiritual experiences and philosophical ideas. He was at the same time and in the same sense a Śākta or devotee of Mother Kālī, a Vaishnava or devotee of Visnu, and a Śaiva or devotee of Śiva. He was as ardent a believer in Advaita as in Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita. He was as good a follower of the path of *bhakti*, as of *jñāna* and of *karma*. Regarding him, Swami Vivekananda said: 'It was given to me to live with a man who was as ardent a dualist, as ardent an advaitist, as ardent a *bhakta*, as a *jñānī*.' But the question is, How is this possible and reasonable?

Some men with limited knowledge and narrow spiritual experience think that this is neither possible nor rational. They dogmatically declare that if the Śākta religion be true, the Śaiva or the Vaishnava must be false, and *vice versa*. Similarly, if Advaita be true, Dvaita or Vishishtadvaita must be false, and *vice versa*. So, too, with regard to the paths of *bhakti*, *jñāna*, and *karma*. The truth of any one of them implies the falsity of the other two. But Sri Ramakrishna's life gives the lie direct to all such dogmatic faiths and philosophies and seeks to resolve their conflict, and that not without reason. There is a profound philosophy behind it, and a rational justification can be given of it. Let us indicate how.

The *Rig-Veda* declares: 'The One Reality is called by the wise in different ways: Agni, Yamā, Mātariśvan.' This means that the different gods are only manifestations of one underlying, universal Reality. It also implies that although reality is one, it has various aspects, many forms and manifestations. As such, Reality is many-faced and many-sided. This is true not only of absolute Reality, but also of every object in the world. Any object in the world has

innumerable positive and negative characters. It is also many-faced and many-sided. If this be so, then Truth must be manifold, and different faiths and philosophies will be but expressions of different aspects of Truth.

Man with his limited capacity has to approach Reality from one point of view or level of experience. He cannot apprehend Reality from all possible points of view or levels of experience at the same time. Hence a man's knowledge of Reality is relative to the particular standpoint or level of experience from which he approaches it. He receives just that revelation of Reality which his standpoint or experience-level, in other words, his way of approach, entitles him to have. If he approaches Reality through the senses and from the level of sense experience, there will be a manifestation of it as a world of many sensible objects existing in space and time, and possessing sensible qualities like taste, smell, touch, colour and sound. Materialism and atheism arise out of a crude common sense or a scientific interpretation of sense experiences, e.g. Charvaka and modern western materialism. If he approaches Reality by way of the rational mind and from the intellectual level of consciousness, Reality will be manifested as one ultimate Mind or Spirit Reality related to other minds or selves and many material objects, which are different forms but either dependent on, or independent of it. It is possible that pluralistic and dualistic philosophies and religions, like the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya-Yoga, and Dvaita Vedānta, are developments from this approach to Reality. Again, if he approaches Reality with the meditative mind and from the level of *saṁprajñāta* or *savikalpa-samādhi*, he would get a revelation of it as one absolute Subject or Self, which is different from, but inseparably related to, and qualified by, a world of many finite selves and material objects.

At the level of *saṁprajñāta-samādhi*, there is a direct experience of the Self (Ātman) and consciousness (chaitanya) as different from (bhinna), but inseparably related to (avicchedya), each other. To understand and interpret this

kind of relation between self and consciousness, we have to apply the category of 'substance and quality' or 'substantive and adjective'. Hence Reality is here revealed to us as a subject qualified by certain predicates. It is perhaps from this level of experience that some Upanisadic texts and Rāmānuja's Vishishtadvaita describe Reality or Brahman as *saguṇa* and *saviśeṣa*, qualified and determinate. But if one approaches Reality not through the mind, but through pure consciousness, i.e. from the level of *asamprajñāta* or *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the revelation of Reality would be different and distinct from that of any other level. At this level, there is a direct experience of the Self (Ātman) and consciousness (*chaitanya*) as non-different (*abhinna*), i.e. of self as being consciousness itself and of consciousness as being self itself. More correctly speaking, there is no distinction of self, consciousness, and experience-of-non-difference, but one homogeneous experience, or subject-object-less pure consciousness. To interpret this unique experience philosophically, we have to apply the category of the 'non-dual', and say that Reality is simply non-dual consciousness, neither subject nor object or the unity of subject and object. This revelation of Reality from the level of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is the basis of the Upanisadic texts and of Advaita philosophy which declare that Reality or Brahman is *nirguṇa* and *nirviśeṣa*, unqualified and indeterminate.

The different revelations of Reality we get from different levels of experience must be accepted as genuine and true so far as they go. Each revelation gives us the same Reality in one of its many aspects and characters. The same water is revealed as cold when perceived through the sense of touch, as tasteful or tasteless when perceived by the sense of taste, as with or without odour when perceived by the organ of smell, and as blue or colourless when seen by the eyes. So we cannot say that water has the quality of touch only and not of smell, and that it has a certain visual quality and no tactile and other qualities. All the qualities belong to it and get manifested in some way or other.

Similarly, we should accept the different revelations of Reality through different types of spiritual experience as genuine and faithful, and therefore as worthy and adorable. So there need be no quarrel and dispute among the followers of different faiths and philosophies of the world. Sri Ramakrishna, as we have seen, passed through and possessed all types of spiritual experiences. It was given to him, not to anyone ever before, to live a life of manifold spiritual realization and give the world a message of hope and harmony: 'So many religions are so many paths to God.'

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA Sir Jadunath Sarkar, C.I.E.

Today this Parishad is sanctified by having a picture of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva in its bosom. During his lifetime he had shown the way to Freedom to thousands of devotees. Everyone had recognized in him one who had really seen God. Amongst those who had seen him and recognized the manifestation of the Great Power in him are to be found not only Hindus but also Brahmos like Keshab Chandra Sen, and rationalists like Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar. Whether we believe in an *avatāra* or not, all of us recognize that light can be transmitted through the help of sparks of fire. It is many years since the earthly life of Paramahansa Deva came to an end. But the light that he brought to this world is still burning. Even today millions of people, men and women, rich and poor, scholars and the illiterate, the happy and the miserable, the high caste and the low, reading his life and hearing his teachings, have been able to tune their life to a higher key. His life has brought solace to many a heart afflicted with sorrow and has shown that the Kingdom of Heaven can be brought to this earth.

The father is recognized most through the son; that is why the greatest gift of Sri Ramakrishna is Swami Vivekananda who has brought about a new epoch in Bengal and India by inseparably combining with the Jñāna and Bhakti Yogas of his Guru, that Karma Yoga which is so very essential today. Let the portraits of these two great prophets of this age shed their pure light and remain for ever effulgent for this nation on its road to Freedom.

[At the unveiling ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna's portrait at the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, on 14th December, 1935.]

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE SPIRIT OF MODERN SCIENCE

Professor P.S. Naidu, M.A.

Mahendranath, in his *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, narrates a beautiful story<sup>1</sup> which reveals very clearly the great Guru's attitude towards western science. Our divine Master never condemned any true source of knowledge, but at the same time never hesitated to show up, in his characteristically humorous way, the absurdities and vanities of materialistic science. A friend pays me a visit, and remarks in the course of his conversation with me: 'I say, did you hear of the big conflagration in the bazaar yesterday?'

'Is that so?', I reply, and pick up the day's paper. I scan the columns of the paper, and find no report of the conflagration. 'Look here, my friend, the newspaper makes no mention of your fire; so it cannot be true.'

'But', retorts my friend in great indignation, 'I saw it with my own eyes!'

'Maybe! But your eyes count for nothing. The paper is silent on the matter, hence I cannot believe the story.'

This is a beautiful parable. I am the scientist, and the newspaper represents my senses and the apparatus in the laboratory where I make sense-perceived observations. My friend is one who has had an experience of the supersensuous reality. I cannot believe him, because my scientific instruments do not register his experiences. The test tube, the microscope, and the measuring rod are the sacred utensils of the scientist, and the senses are the gods he worships. In spite of its boasted trust in human reason, it must be said, to the discomfiture of science, that it is a slave of the senses. The last court of appeal for science is the

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, vol. 1, p. 395.

visual sense.<sup>2</sup> Anything that cannot be demonstrated to the visual sense, either directly or indirectly, does not exist for the scientist. So, when the scientist condemns some experience as being mystical or mysterious, he simply means that the gross human senses cannot bear witness to it. This is the type of science that Sri Ramakrishna condemned, and, fortunately, this is the type of materialistic science, the beginning of whose end we are witnessing today.

In spite of its materialistic and mechanistic tendencies western science makes certain assumptions, whose implications, when carefully thought out, cut at the very foundations of materialism. What electricity is, no scientist is able to tell us. We know only its outward behaviour under certain conditions. What genes are no one knows; their effects alone are visible to us. Yet we believe that electricity and genes are tangible realities. But when a similar method of reasoning is adopted in the psychic realm, the scientist cries out, 'Oh, you are mystical and mysterious!' The scientist is intolerant of anything that he cannot shake up in a test tube, photograph through a spectroscope, or examine under a microscope.

Yet, this is only one aspect of European science. There is a deeper and more profound aspect which is finding expression, slowly but surely, in the writings of contemporary physicists, biologists, and psychologists. Eddington,<sup>3</sup> Jeans,<sup>4</sup> Schrödinger,<sup>5</sup> and Parsons<sup>6</sup> have made 'matter' immaterial; Haldane<sup>7</sup> and Driesch<sup>8</sup> have discovered a

<sup>2</sup>Vide, Sir Arthur Eddington's *Nature of the Physical World*, where he speaks of measurement in science as 'pointer-reading'.

<sup>3</sup>Eddington, Sir Arthur, *New Pathways in Science*, Cambridge, 1935.

<sup>4</sup>Jeans, Sir James, *New Background of Science*, Cambridge, 1933.

<sup>5</sup>Schrödinger, *Science and Human Temperament*.

<sup>6</sup>Parsons, *The Universe of Our Experience*, London, 1933.

<sup>7</sup>Haldane, *Philosophy of a Biologist*.

<sup>8</sup>Driesch, H., *History and Theory of Vitalism*, London, 1914.

supra-physical guiding principle in the workings of the sub nuclear elements of the living cell; Jung<sup>9</sup> and McDougall<sup>10</sup> have established the harmonic nature of the human psyche. The outlook of the most thoughtful physicists, biologists, and psychologists at the present day is distinctly non-materialistic, and the profoundest thinkers among them have repudiated the claim that mechanism is the sole principle explaining natural phenomena. The attitude of contemporary science may be summed up in the words (used by their author for a different purpose) of the Rev. Wendell Phillips, 'But these things are real. I don't understand them... I don't understand many things; but these things are real. I believe that the Orient is going to show us of the West how real they are... What is matter? What is mind? What is the spirit? We do not know. We are just beginning to find out... There are sixty-four octaves of light. We have just one. Our little pitiful human eyes can see just one octave. The photographic plates are sensitive to six of these octaves—and there are sixty-four—.'<sup>11</sup> Yet it is these pitiful eyes and photographic plates that science trusts as absolute guides to truth. If we know so little about the physical world, how little then do we know about the spiritual world?

Our object in this article is not mere destructive criticism. We do not wish to show from the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna that the modern mind, fed on the half-baked and un-baked conclusions of mechanistic science, is producing a thoroughly absurd scale of values, though this could be done and ought to be done soon. We

---

<sup>9</sup>Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, London, 1934.

<sup>10</sup>McDougall, W., *Religion and the Sciences of Life* (Only the relevant works of these prolific writers have been mentioned here. These eminent authors represent the new idealistic trend in contemporary science. Vide also Sullivan's *Contemporary Mind*).

<sup>11</sup>*Prabuddha Bharata*, June, 1936.

wish to establish that in our beloved Master's life we find the manifestation of the purest and the most exalted spirit of true science.

The spirit of science is enshrined, not in its practical achievements, the inventions and the discoveries, which really are so many scars on the face of fair science, not even in the theoretical achievements, but in the scientific method, which is the greatest achievement of the human intellect. And Sri Ramakrishna pointed out the sublime heights to which this method could be raised. In the example of his own life, Sri Ramakrishna proved that the hypothetico-deductive method of science could be used for the demonstration of spiritual truths. We have no hesitation in affirming that our Master was the most exalted experimentalist of his day, and for that matter, of all eternity. We should not, however, forget that his experiments were conducted in the spiritual, and not in the material realm.

Partial and incomplete analyses of the method of science were made by Bacon, Mill, Newton, and Kepler.<sup>12</sup> But it was Whewell alone amongst the classical scientists who approached anything like completeness in his analysis of the method pursued by the positive sciences in their search after truth. An exhaustive analysis of the method has been made by two modern writers, Enrique<sup>13</sup> and Dubs.<sup>14</sup> The main outline of their arguments is identical with the position taken by Dewey in his famous little book *How We Think*. The method of science, in brief, consists of four stages. The first is the gradual shaping of a problem through careful observation and sifting of evidence, and the formulation of a provisional solution to the problem; the second is the development of the solution, and the

---

<sup>12</sup>*Vide*, Enrique's account of Inductions in his *Historic Development of Logic*; Dubs' *Rational Induction*.

<sup>13</sup>Enrique, *Historic Development of Logic*, New York, 1929.

<sup>14</sup>Dubs, *Rational Induction*, Chicago, 1930.

reasoning out of its consequences; the third is experimental verification of the consequences; and the last is the final acceptance, and modification or rejection of the solution suggested at the commencement of the investigation. The mind of the scientific worker is filled with information about the subject in which he is specially interested; so, whenever he is confronted with a novel situation his well-informed mind analyzes the complexities of the relationship and suggests an explanation.

Some time ago there appeared in the special engineering supplement of a local newspaper a picture of an amazing piece of machinery. But for the legend at the bottom of the picture, the lay reader could not have guessed what it was. It was part of a huge oil-refining plant consisting of a maze of several hundred pipes, valves, and stop-cocks. To the mind of the mechanical engineer the picture would suggest a proper meaning. Knowledge and training are necessary to grasp the meaning of a scientific problem. Where there is no knowledge, no doubt arises, and consequently there is no progress. When the scientifically trained mind grasps the situation and locates the difficulty, a tentative solution is immediately suggested. This provisional hypothesis is the starting point for all scientific research. Proceeding on the assumption that his provisional explanation is true, the research worker develops its practical bearing by making use of deductive reasoning. Next comes the crucial stage of actual testing in experience. It is here that the elaborate technique of the laboratory experiment of the scientist plays its important part. All the ingenuity of the trained research student is to be displayed here in inventing novel techniques and setting up delicate pieces of apparatus. If the result of the third stage agrees with the conclusions of the second, then the scientist, in great joy, invites others to repeat his experiment and test for themselves the accuracy of his hypothesis. After several such confirmatory and collective tests the hypothesis is accorded the status of a theory.

Sri Ramakrishna employed this hypothetico-deductive method in his realization of Ultimate Reality. We have already pointed out that unless one is well informed, one is not competent to undertake scientific research. In the spiritual domain, too, this preliminary qualification is absolutely necessary; but such qualification, it must be admitted, is to be obtained not through any individual effort alone, but as the result of spiritual experiences in past lives. Sri Ramakrishna possessed this qualification in a pre-eminent degree since he was a divine incarnation. The environment in which he moved was steeped in spirituality. The influence at home was conducive to the spiritual pursuit. Outside the home he moved in very congenial company. Kamarpukur was on the pilgrim route to Puri Jagannāth, consequently it was a great meeting place for pilgrims and wandering monks and *sādhus* of a high order. Our Master 'delighted in spending hour after hour with them, listening to their religious discussions, learning songs from them and joining in their prayers....' 'Association with these itinerant monks and listening to their readings from the scriptures inclined the naturally emotional mind of the boy more and more to meditation. So we find him in his boyhood, long before he passed through the terrible asceticism in the Kāli temple of Dakshineswar, giving evidence of the transcendental nature of his mind.'<sup>15</sup>

With such a fine mind, so delicately in tune with the object of his quest, Sri Ramakrishna began his first observations—the preliminary to his great investigation. He listened to the scriptures with zeal and delved into the *Purānas* with earnestness, identifying himself with the great heroes and heroines of old who sought and found God—Rādhā, Sitā, and Hanumān. The songs of Rāmprasād were then well known. Sri Ramakrishna's penetrating eye saw in them

---

<sup>15</sup>*Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1929), pp. 26-27.

unmistakable evidence of a soul that had 'met God face to face'. While he was thus gathering material, through his penetrating faculty, for the great hypothesis, to the establishment of which he was to devote his whole life, he had on two different occasions, unique experience of the reality of God. While walking along the balks of the rice fields he noticed the magnificent sight of a long line of snow-white cranes flying against the sombre background of a massive rain-cloud. This beautiful sight raised his mind to the dizzy heights of supersensuous levels, where he saw—who can describe the glimpse he had of Brahman! On another occasion he was called upon to take the part of Śiva in the sacred pageant enacted during the holy Śivarātri celebration. We are told that as he stepped onto the stage he lost consciousness of the world around him and was so steeped in God-consciousness that 'he seemed the living embodiment of Śiva'.

When the scientist's mind is intensely concentrated on the object of his research, there comes to him a rare moment of inspiration, when, through a flash of intuition, the relationship between the elements of the analysed complex which he is seeking, is revealed to him during an infinitesimally short interval of time. This intuition is called scientific imagination. (Imagination and science are considered to be poles apart, yet we need not quarrel over the name so long as it is admitted that the real source of scientific hypothesis is supra-rational.) Newton, Maxwell, Einstein and Heisenberg had these rare moments of intuitive insight, during which they caught the first glimpse of the theories which were to make their names immortal. It must, however, be admitted that the first glimpse, though intensely vivid, is yet so evanescent and tantalizing that a long and painstaking course of research is necessary to take permanent possession of the truth thus revealed. It has been pointed out that Sri Ramakrishna had two such rare moments of intuitive insight. As the result of these experiences the hypothesis began to take shape in his mind

gradually that 'God alone is utterly and absolutely real, all else is utterly and absolutely unreal'. With a mind illumined by the first rays of supersensuous knowledge, and heart athirst for a fuller realization of God, our Master entered the holy atmosphere of the Dakshineswar temple where the Divine Mother had manifested Herself in the image of Bhavatārini. The moment he took upon himself the office of the priest of the Mother, he was seized with a divine madness. He was thoroughly convinced that the Divine Mother was real and could be realized by Her devotees in this earthly life. With the formulation of the hypothesis: 'God alone is real and nothing else is real'; and, 'He can be realized *here* and *now*', the close of the first stage of discovering truth was reached. As the result of the combined influences of the holy *samskāras* that his mind carried with it; of the very congenial and spiritual environment in which he grew up, and of his own study and observation, Sri Ramakrishna came to the conclusion that God was much more real and tangible than the concrete objects of this world, and that a true devotee could 'see Him and talk to Him'.

The second stage was a short and easy one: 'If God is real, He should manifest Himself to me. Rāmprasād, Chaitanya, and a host of other devotees saw Him. So nothing stands in the way of my realizing Him.' So argued our Master with the simple faith of a child, but with the burning zeal and persistence of a most devoted scientific investigator.

The third stage was the most remarkable one, both for its practical achievements and for the conviction which it brought home to the sceptical minds of the boastful rationalists. This was the ascertaining with indubitable certainty the efficacy of the yogic *sādhana*s. Sri Ramakrishna set about to verify the truth of his hypothesis with great earnestness and single mindedness of purpose. The temple at Dakshineswar, with the dense jungle of the Panchavati was his laboratory. Day after day he persisted in conducting

his experiments with such zeal that he often became oblivious of his surroundings and unmindful of his bodily needs. 'Mother, Mother', he cried, 'when wilt Thou reveal Thyself to me?' He spent nights in the awesome burning cremation ground<sup>16</sup>, meditating on the Divine Mother. His one object was to realize for himself the truth, which so many devotees of the type of Rāmprasād has realized before him. Alone and unaided he conducted his experiments with such severity of mental concentration that he was blessed with the divine vision at last. But he was still an amateur in spiritual investigations. Through the grace of Mother Kali, which he enjoyed in a very special degree, he had reached his goal in a short time. But the path which he had trodden alone and unaided, had to be retraversed under expert guidance. Just as the research worker is guided in his early investigations by experienced masters of science, so Sri Ramakrishna had to take his training in sādhanā under Bhairavi Brāhmani and Totapuri, two adepts in the life of renunciation who had realized God, the former in the Tantric way and the latter in the Advaitic way. He performed his experiments under their expert guidance, and we are told that it did not take him longer than three days to secure the desired result.

It is necessary to stress, at this point, the difference in science as well as in religion, between unaided individual investigation and the systematic pursuit of truth under the guidance of experienced men who have attained high levels in the realization of ultimate reality. One of the first tasks, which the research student has to undertake, is to acquaint himself thoroughly with the work already done in the field in which he is going to specialize, and to place himself under the supervision of a specialist in that field. In the

---

<sup>16</sup>According to records, at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna did his sadhana at *Panchavati* and in the adjacent jungle. He used to frequent cremation grounds while at Kamarpukur. —*Publisher*

absence of this necessary first step, the student may get lost in his research, and his whole life may be wasted. In the spiritual realm too, a guru is absolutely necessary, not only to guide the aspirant aright and to give timely encouragement and human sympathy when the student is depressed by failure, but to impart that dynamic force which alone would lead one to the goal. Our Master took to himself the human gurus not so much for his own benefit as to show the right mode of procedure to others striving after realization. He desired to show the importance of the scriptural injunction that every seeker of God should secure first the blessing of a guru.

The third stage of experimental verification having been completed, Sri Ramakrishna proceeded to the last and fourth stage of affirming the hypothesis and raising it to the level of an established fact. When the scientific worker obtains the expected results he is filled with unspeakable *ānandam* (bliss). The effusion of his bliss is such that he is eager to make others share in his joy. He publishes his results and the means whereby he attained them, calling upon his brother scientists to verify his conclusions and enjoy the results for themselves. The papers and learned journals broadcast the glad tidings to the intellectual world. In the case of spiritual experiences, no such earthly vehicle is needed for spreading the welcome tidings. It is enough if the adept sits in his cell and sends out pure thought waves of love into the world without. Those whose minds are in tune with these waves will respond immediately, and drawn by an invisible hand they will flock to his abode for enlightenment. After the completion of his *sādhana*, Sri Ramakrishna used to pace in the evenings on the terrace of the garden house crying out, 'My children, do come quickly. Oh, how I long for your company!' And they came, the future disciples, drawn by an invisible but irresistible force, first in batches of twos and threes, then in small groups, and finally in great seething masses of humanity. And like a true and loving guru he illumined the hearts of them all.

The motley group was composed of men and women of widely differing types of mentality—there were delicate impressionable youths, fiery rebellious boys who believed nothing and questioned the *śāstras* with a false zeal born of hollow western rationalism. There were thoroughly worldly men steeped in sense pleasures old men who had turned to God in their declining days like voracious meat-eaters who turn vegetarian when their teeth fall out—and there were women, too, the noblest of their kind. And all were illumined, and all went home convinced of the utter sincerity and exemplary selflessness of Sri Ramakrishna.

‘Sir, is God real and can I see Him?’ asks an enquirer in great haste and expects an immediate answer.

‘Yes!’, replies our Guru with a smile, dispelling all doubt. ‘God is real; I see him just as I see you or any other object about me.’

‘Can I also see Him as you do?’

‘Yes, you can, but...’; and there follow some of his most charming and inimitable sayings regarding the qualifications a seeker after God must have.

‘If the intensity of your longing for God is equal to the intensity of a man who is longing for air about to drown; or the combined intensity of a mother’s longing for her only child in the grip of a deadly illness, or of the miser’s longing for his wealth—in short, if your longing for God is at least a tenth of the longing which Sri Rādhā had for Sri Krishna, then you will see God.’

The chief characteristics of the scientific mind are: *i*) respect for facts, *ii*) a practical attitude, *iii*) persistence and patience in following the clue, *iv*) intolerance of obscurity, *v*) impatience with inadequate evidence and, *vi*) the capacity to suspend judgement. Sri Ramakrishna possessed these characteristics to a preeminent degree. Facts, concrete facts, were the objects of his passionate quest. He revelled in the concrete. Abstract, intellectualistic rational studies were repellent to his finely tempered mind. ‘What is the use of studying a cart-load of books? You should realize truth in

your concrete experience.' Next, he was highly critical, never accepting anything until he had thoroughly tested it. He encouraged his disciples to develop a critical attitude. 'Prove me,' he would say, 'as you would prove a coin, and then only accept what I say.' Of his persistence and patience in following up clues, we need say nothing. His long and arduous course of *sāadhanā* bears witness to his single-minded pursuit, despite stupendous obstacles, of the goal that he had set for himself. Sri Ramakrishna's mind was the mind of the scientist *par excellence*.

Sri Ramakrishna raised the hypothetico-deductive method of science from the low level of materialism at which it was (and still is) being pursued by the West, to the sublime spiritual heights where it was pressed into service in his *sāadhanā* of yoga. Without any hesitation we may conclude that Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was the master experimentalist in the realm of *pure spirit*.

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA  
AND HIS RELIGIOUS MESSAGE  
TO THE MODERN WORLD**

**V.C. Seshacharry, B.A., B.L.**

It gladdens my heart to see the several hundreds of people gathered here under the one common impulse of offering respectful homage to the high and exalted memory of the most distinguished of Mother India's modern saints, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This is indeed a rare occasion, which is sure to produce in our hearts a thrill of exquisite joy and ineffable bliss.

We seem to live in an age of ferment when competitive commercialism with its ever aggrandizing policy is still keeping at bay co-operative industrialism. Scarcely have the waves of godless education and rank materialism made their appreciable advance on modern humanity, than we find ourselves caught in an overpowering deluge which threatens to annihilate our charming solitude, our lofty isolation and our sweet simplicity, all calculated to promote ever-growing peace and harmony in man's bosom. Look in whatever direction you like, whether in fields of social, political, or religious activity, you are faced with the spectacle of humanity being impelled by sordid selfishness, instead of by sublime spirituality. This, then, is the sorry spectacle of the unfathomable abyss into which the bulk of humanity has plunged itself today.

The comity of nations has become a mere mockery, and individualistic and nationalistic competition has worked for exclusion and elimination of the weak. Might has become the right of the strongest, and in this sharp conflict, the weakest must inevitably go to the wall. In ancient days fierce crusades were conducted in the name of religion and God, and now after ages of enlightened civilization with humanistic ideals, we feel and realize that we are less human. Never in the history of the world did we witness

such unspeakable agitation, fierce ferment, and universal unrest.

It is worth one's while to reflect on the various currents and cross-currents along which humanity is drifting to-day. What lends absorbing interest to this reflection is the query: does the present situation make for chaos and confusion, or for cosmos and harmony? Is life an empty dream signifying nothing, or a living reality pregnant with purpose? The answer comes in faint echoes from a distance: that the discord of today will become the concord of tomorrow, and the present harrowing pain and suffering will lead us to future joy and pleasure ineffable. Increasing difference must ultimately land us in increasing unity. The depths of hell may spell for us the heights of heaven. The world of today, gowned weary with its interminable woes and worries, fondly longs for lasting harmony and eternal peace. The throes of present torment will cease and will bring us into a region of quiet and joy. Selfishness, difference, discord, and competition will yield place to altruism, unity, fraternity, and co-operation.

India, the mother of all religions, has ever stood for a spiritual synthesis of life constructed on renunciation and love. Time and again, she has proclaimed from her Himalayan heights the expansive and harmonizing power and potency of spiritual life. There are, no doubt, pessimists who are inclined to the view that the varied social barriers and class and caste differences which still exist in our land may work for separation and division and not for union and solidarity. According to them, the western contact has introduced a new militant culture, which is highly fascinating on account of its siren voice and sweet seduction. But to those who have clearness of vision, and can see things in their right perspective, the existence and operation of forces which are already working to bring about the union and strength of the Indian nation as a whole are matters of easy discernment. It must also be conceded that, from one point of view, complexity and heterogeneity are matters of easy discernment. It must also be conceded that, from one point

of view, complexity and heterogeneity are essentially the stepping-stones to a larger simplicity and homogeneity. In this sacred land of ours which has always been recognized as the spiritual battleground of humanity, warring ideals and keen conflicts can be quelled and reconciled by the peace-inducing light of true Vedanta.

In recent years there has sprung up in our land a school of thought which seems to gain in prestige by attempting to proclaim that religion should be divorced from social and political life, on the ground that it encourages mysticism and quietism and that philosophy which teaches man to realize God within himself is an apathetic feeling of inertia which is calculated to kill all national activity. The futility of this theory is quite apparent and needs no lengthy argumentation to refute it. In western countries and continents where individualism and self-sufficiency have been marching on the crest of the wave of advancing materialism, we see today the ruinous results of such ungodly tendencies and inclinations.

To us it is almost axiomatic that the vitality of a nation depends entirely on its religious ideals and upon its religious men who not only preach such ideals but also practise them. This Bhāratavarsha was at its best at the time of its greatest sages. The birth of a sage in our land signifies a high watermark in the tide of enlightened civilization. It is a cosmic event and the whole world which till then seemed to wear a dull aspect feels rejuvenated and thrills with joy at the occurrence of such an auspicious event. We shall now take our thoughts to the sublime life-history of the Messiah of this age—Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, and try to find solace from his gospel of unity and strength, peace and love.

Four score and two years have rolled by, the garden of humanity put forth its fairest, which in the fullness of time grew into a lovely blossom in the person of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the fragrance of whose living memory is wafting aloft in sweet-smelling waves, to enrich and enliven

human thought all over the world. Truly did Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna sum up in his life the highest and noblest ideals of philosophy and religion. The practical realization of the precepts he preached enhances the value of his teachings to his direct disciples and the thousands upon thousands of thinking people who have in recent years caught the inspiration of his life and quaffed it deep, almost to the point of intoxication. To him religion was the bedrock, the solid foundation on which the edifice of a nation's greatness was to be built. If I but attempt to faintly lisp his message to the modern world I feel that I shall not be able to do justice to its sublimity. But it will prove a source of immense satisfaction to me if I but succeed, in however small a measure, in rousing a spark of religious fervour and devotion in the bosom of everyone present here today.

On the memorable date of the 18th February, 1836, the baby eyes of Sri Ramakrishna opened to the light of earthly existence, in a little village called Kamarpukur in the District of Hooghly in Bengal. This village has now become famous as the birthplace of this greatest of Indian sages of modern times, whose life and teachings have penetrated into every nook and corner of this earth and have enlightened many a dark home.

He was born in a highly respectable though poor Brahmin family. The only wealth they possessed was spirituality. Sri Ramakrishna's father, Khudiram Chattopadhyaya, was a pious devotee and his affectionate mother, Chandramani Devi, was the personification of love and kindness. In Gadadhar, the early name of the boy, there were signs of future greatness marked out in indelible characters both in his childhood and in his youth. He learned the three R's at his village school and even as a child was taught to lead a pure and pious life by his parents. He showed a remarkable aptitude for learning religious songs and it was a source of immense delight to him to recite them. His manners were sweet and simple, and men, women and children were all fond of him and

loved to be in his company. In youth he became imbued with the life and teachings of the various incarnations of God. We shall not be far wrong if we say that every fibre of his being was attuned to the highest philosophical and religious ideals, so much so that when he was only seven years old he saw within himself a transcendent vision of glory. To the ignorant it seemed as if he were in a state of unconsciousness. But to students of religion it spelt verily the higher consciousness of the stage of *samādhi* which represents the highest rung in the ladder of yoga.

You had only to look into his eyes to catch a glimpse of the serenity of his soul, the eyes being verily the soul's windows. He practised in himself a universal tolerance, a great harmony and supreme love. When he was barely seventeen, he repaired to Calcutta with his elder brother for further study and to look after his household. And when the pious Rani Rasmani built the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, a village four miles from Calcutta, Pandit Ram Kumar, the elder brother of Sri Ramakrishna, was appointed the officiating priest of the temple, and later Sri Ramakrishna himself was appointed assistant priest there. The image of Mother Kali had a fascination for him and riveted his attention. Thinking that marriage might bring him round to worldly pursuits, his people married Sri Ramakrishna to Sri Saradamanī Devi, the daughter of Ramchandra Mukhopadhyaya of Jayrambati, the bride being only five years old. After the marriage Sri Ramakrishna returned to the temple garden at Dakshineswar, and the worship of Mother Kali became his daily routine. By his earnestness and passionate love he was soon blessed with a vision of his Divine Mother, and on many occasions he enjoyed the ecstatic bliss of superconscious realization. The carnal idea of marriage never appealed to him, and his consort was looked upon as a helpmate in his spiritual endeavour. The marriage itself was but a union of souls for the achievement of higher ends.

Sri Ramakrishna received his grounding in the Tantra Shastra from a devout brahmin lady who recognized him as

an incarnation of Sri Chaitanya, the super man of Nadia. He now reached a turning point in his life. One day he met in the temple garden the monk Totapuri who initiated him into sannyasa and preached to him the sublimity of the Vedanta philosophy. In three days he reached the culmination of this *sāadhanā*, attaining the highest, or *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Soon the teacher recognized that his disciple was verily a crucible of spirituality in which all dross was burnt up leaving behind only the immaculate pure gold.

Sri Ramakrishna desired very much to acquaint himself with all the priceless teachings of the great religions prevailing in India and abroad, including various forms of Vaishnavism, Christianity and Mohammedanism and he believed that in order to assimilate them and make them part and parcel of his nature he could not do better than live the life according to the teachings of the prophet of each religion. Strange to say, he succeeded in realizing the highest ideals of each religion in an incredibly short time, and thus qualified himself for the lofty role of world-teacher that he was destined to play. His ever-increasing piety, his God-intoxicated life, his extreme renunciation of lust and gold, the ceaseless flow of his words of wisdom, simple, clear and convincing, his wonderful insight into human character, his universal toleration and world-embracing love, these and a thousand other qualities of head and heart soon brought round him a growing number of admirers. Among them was Keshab Chandra Sen who brought him to the notice of the Calcutta public. Towards the end of the year 1882, Narendra, later known as the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda—the foremost of his disciples, joined him, together with a number of others, and grew in the likeness of his much revered and beloved master. Supreme monarch of the spiritual kingdom, Sri Ramakrishna applied himself heart and soul to form the character of these boys so that they might realize their inmost nature and serve as teachers of mankind.

Sri Ramakrishna entered final beatitude in August 1886, leaving the world much better than he had found it.

Having very briefly dwelt upon the early life of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and invited your attention to the several steps which the Bhagavan took in his spiritual career for the attainment of the goal of Vedanta, or in other words, the union between the Undifferentiated (the Universal) Soul and the Differentiated (the individualized) Soul, I now wish to present before you, in however meagre a way, the message conveyed by his wonderful teachings and interesting parables. The foremost topic is the idea of the Unity of Godhead which the Bhagavan has proclaimed in his characteristically lucid words of wisdom:

Many are the names of God and infinite are the forms that help us to know Him. By whatsoever name or form you desire to know Him, in that very form and under that very name will you see Him.

Different creeds are but different paths to reach the one God, various and different are the ways that lead to the temple of the Mother Kali at Kalighat. Similarly, various are the ways that lead to the house of the Lord. Every religion is nothing but one of the paths that lead to God.

Another topic of interest on which the Bhagavan has discoursed is the philosophy of the Unconditioned, in regard to which he has said:

Knowledge leading Godward is the last and topmost step of the stairs leading to the roof. The Absolute is the roof. The phenomenal world is made up of that which leads Godward and that which does not. Thus God the Absolute is above and beyond the phenomenal world.

The Absolute again is like the unfathomable ocean. Nothing can be predicated of It—the Being beyond the bounds of Reality, of all existence! The last feeble attempt to describe that Being—the attempt made in the Vedas, is to call Him by the name of *Bliss Everlasting*.'

This is why the Great Mystery defies all attempts at explanation. The Absolute, the Unconditioned, cannot be stated in terms of the Relative, the Conditioned. The Infinite cannot be expressed in terms of the finite.

God the Absolute cannot be thought of apart from the idea of God with attributes or God Personal and *vice versa*. The Unconditioned, the Absolute, the Noumenon, the Substance, on the one hand, and the Conditioned, the Relative, the Phenomena, the Attributes, on the other hand, are correlatives—the one cannot be thought of apart from the other.

*Vijñānis* are they who have realized God in *samādhi*, both as the Impersonal or Undifferentiated and as the Personal or Differentiated.

The above statements will enable the student of Vedānta philosophy to realize how hard it is to tread the path of Jnana Yoga which is intended only for the few who are accustomed to living in the world of thought.

A third topic is faith or *śraddhā*, regarding which the following are the Paramahansa's aphorisms:

Faith is omnipotent, reason is weak. Faith will work wonders, reason cannot go far enough and must stop at some point or other.

Before faith the powers of nature will shrink and give way. You get over seas and mountains with perfect ease and utter indifference. He who has faith has all and who lacks faith lacks all.'

It is therefore evident that faith is the cardinal stone of the path of Bhakti Yoga, the path intended for the large majority of people who cannot ascend the steep and narrow path of Jnana Yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna's ideas in regard to Karma Yoga are well expressed in the following passages:

Work for the sake of one's own worldly good—riches, honour, fame—is degrading; worldly activity will only bring an increasing ignorance.'

That being so, let all work be done as it ought to be. If work is done unattached it will lead to God. Work so done is a means to the end, and God is the end. To work without any attachment is to work without the expectation of any reward, or fear of any punishment in this world or the next. It is possible for the ideal man alone to live a perfect life of work without attachment. Let us, however try our best to do the duty that is nearest us. Let us purify our motives for work by earnest prayer and self-surrender.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was of opinion that among the three paths that of Bhakti was the one which is suitable for the ordinary householder, because all that it required was intense devotion, firm faith, and great love on the part of the devotees to their Ishta Devata (Chosen Ideal).

The teachings given on the most abstruse subjects of philosophy were always made clear by the Bhagavan in his homely sayings which contained their inner truth.

Numerous are the themes, and of kaleidoscopic variety, on which Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna discoursed to his dear and devoted disciples. The disciples lived, moved, and had their being in their Master, and each reflected a portion of his wonderful and many-sided personality.

In his ringing voice, Swami Vivekananda speaks of his Master's message to the modern world thus:

Stand you up and realize God! If you can renounce all wealth and all sex, it will not be necessary for you to speak. Your lotus will have blossomed, and the spirit will spread. Whoever approaches you will be warmed, as it were, by the fire of your spirituality.

Care not for doctrines or for dogmas, for sects or for churches. All these count for but little, compared with that essence of existence which is in each one and called spirituality. The more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good.

The more such men any country produces, the higher is that country raised. That land where no such men exist is doomed. Nothing can save it. Therefore my Master's message to the world is, 'Be ye all spiritual! Get ye first realization!' And to the young and strong of every country he would cry that the time has come for renunciation. Renounce for the sake of humanity! You have talked of the love of man, till the thing is in danger of becoming words alone. The time has come to act. The call now is, Do! Leap into the breach, and save the world!

The message of Sri Ramakrishna Deva is one of intense light and love, of infinite harmony and toleration, and of selfless service and sublime renunciation; its peace-producing and soul-refreshing charm has reached each nook and corner of this vast globe. May his great memory ever stay with us! May his sublime message ever spur us on to unselfish work! And may we ever walk in the light of his footsteps and prove each one of us a tiny centre of active beneficence in our own families, communities, and nations! May the sweet notes of his lyre ever ring melodiously in our hearts and may we ever carry with us in all our activities of life his sweet cheer and sweeter grace!

## SIGNIFICANCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S LIFE AND MESSAGE

Professor Sheo Narayan Lal Shrivastava, M.A.

It is not within the powers of an ordinary individual to fully understand and properly appraise and evaluate the titanic spiritual personality of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva. However, it is Sri Ramakrishna himself who has facilitated the task of those who would like to understand him and his message, for he has described in his own words his superhuman *sādhanās* (religious austerities) and his high-soaring mystical realizations. His descriptions are in simple and easily understood language, abounding in suggestive similes, metaphors, and parables; and these have been collected and authentically recorded by his immediate disciples. So, although we may fail to fathom the depths of the personality of Sri Ramakrishna, we cannot be in the dark or be mistaken about the vital message he has bequeathed to us.

As is well known, the first decades of the nineteenth century were a period of world-wide scepticism in matters religious and spiritual. They were the balmy days of scientific naturalism which found it very inconvenient to destroy the neatness of its mechanistic world-picture by the 'superfluous' admission of God or any spiritual principle in nature. India, too, to some extent at any rate, was drawn into the welter of this godless naturalism, and what is at once interesting and significant to note is that the first disciples of Ramakrishna were university-educated men, with a good grounding in western science and thought and with a leaning towards agnosticism and rationalism. We can well imagine what a power Ramakrishna must have been to transform them into mighty spiritual figures.

At such a critical time of human history was Ramakrishna born, on 18 February 1836, of poor brahmin parents, in an obscure village of Bengal called Kamarpukur. Of

education, as we understand the term, he had none. He was, no doubt, sent to school in his early boyhood, but he would often play truant from there. And ultimately, seeing that the object of going to school was not knowledge for its own sake but for earning money, he left it altogether in disgust. He remained unlettered, and yet he rose to be, as his great French biographer M. Romain Rolland aptly remarks, 'the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people...a symphony built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past.' How was it possible? The answer to this question—the story of Ramakrishna's breathless struggles and intense heart-searchings—forms one of the most glorious and unforgettable chapters of human history.

Now, what was the secret of Ramakrishna's life? It was, in brief, the burning eagerness in his heart to know God and to see God. It was his all-consuming passion for God-vision that moulded his life from the very start of his career as a worshipper of Kāli in the temple of Dakshineswar. He was not content with merely worshipping in conventional ways the external image of Kāli, but wanted to see God, whom he called his Divine Mother, face to face. Day after day, he would stand before the image of Kāli and pray, not only with his lips but with his whole heart and soul: 'O Mother! dost Thou really exist? If thou dost exist, why am I not able to see Thee?' Each day that passed without the vision of God was a day full of torture for Ramakrishna. It would make his heart bleed. In his intense longing to see God he became, as it were, completely mad. He forgot the conventional ways of worshipping and would cry for the Divine as any child would cry for its lost mother. So intense became his passion that one day, finding his life unbearable without the sight of God, he took up the great sword lying in the temple and was about to end his life with it, when, in a moment, the desired vision came and Ramakrishna saw the Divine everywhere and in everything around him.

God or death!—that was his boldness; and Sri Ramakrishna was even prepared to meet death to find out the supreme truth. People want to get God very cheaply, but who has ever got him that way? What a marvellous life was Ramakrishna's that he should have thought from his very school-going age that God was the worthiest object of quest in life and that all else was vanity!

From very early times learned men and philosophers have been discussing (and are still discussing) the proof of God's existence. Now, is there not a ring of absurdity in speaking of a proof of God's existence? Proving a thing means deducing it from something which is more certain than it. Would not then, the proof of God require something more certain than God from which God's reality could be deduced? Proof of the nature of a logical deduction about God cannot be from the very nature of the case. The only proof of God's existence is in *seeing* Him and realizing Him as a factual content of living experience. Nothing short of a direct and soul-felt contact with Him can convince the speaker of His reality. The old philosophical arguments for the existence of God—the ontological, cosmological, and teleological ones—are all, as Kant showed, unable to establish the existence of God as a *fact*. They can at best indicate God as a necessary logical postulate of experience, an Idea of Reason, in the Kantian phrase. Ramakrishna realized God not as a logical postulate, but as an indubitable fact of experience—a verity. So when young Narendra (afterwards known as Swami Vivekananda) met Ramakrishna and asked: 'Have you seen God, Sir?' the answer was, 'Yes! I see Him more intensely than I see you and I can also make you see Him.'

Thus Ramakrishna knew of God, not from books and argumentation, but from the great Book of Life itself. His was the knowledge derived not through the weak instrumentality of the plodding intellect but through what Goethe called 'the scholastic of the heart and the dialectic of the soul'. Page after page, chapter after chapter, Ramakrishna

turned in the Book of Life, till he came to the Epilogue—the vision splendid of the One Real—the Advaitic religion. But the infinite plasticity of his being did not pin him down to any one particular phase of mystical religion. His soul frequently alternated between realizations of mergence in the Unity and the sweet delights of communion and fellowship with the Divine. The breadth of his spiritual experience embraced all the phases and stages of realization. ‘God tastes infinite joys in infinite ways,’ said Browning. Ramakrishna tasted the joy of God in infinite ways. He played the whole gamut of the music of spiritual experience, realizing the truths of the Dvaita, the Visishtādvaita, and the Advaita in an ascending hierarchy of mystical perception.<sup>1</sup> To him God was both impersonal and personal, accordingly as one realizing Him in His ultimate essence as the sum total of all existence, as the All, or, as personalized, according to the pragmatic and practical demands of the concrete religious consciousness.

That is why Swami Vivekananda remarked that his life was a living commentary on the texts of the *Upanishads*. Scholars have always been scratching their brains to determine what philosophy the *Upanishads* taught. Is it the Dvaita of Madhvacharya, or the Visishtādvaita of Rāmānuja, or the Advaita of Śankara? Well, there are passages in the *Upanishads* which lend support to all these views. This does not mean that the *Upanishads* are vague and inconsistent. They mark out the Dvaita and the Visishtādvaita as stages, halting stations, in the soul’s journey to the ultimately Real—the Advaita. The super mystic Ramakrishna had traversed through all these different stages and thus his life had become a living commentary of the *Upanishads*. The

---

<sup>1</sup>The three classical modes of regarding Reality, Existence, and God in religion and philosophy, particularly Hindu philosophy—dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism (advaita) respectively.—*Publisher*

mystic soul reconciles in his living experiences what the dry doctrinaire remains wrangling about.

Nor did the all-consuming avidity of Ramakrishna for diverse spiritual experiences allow him to remain contented with the practice and mastery of *sādhanas* prescribed within the pale of Hinduism. He began practising the *sādhanas* of other faiths also. He had himself initiated into Islam and during the time he was performing the spiritual practices of the Islamic faith, he lived, ate, and dressed like a Mohammedan, forgetting, as it were, for the time being, all Hindu ways and manners. And he found that the Islamic faith could also take one to the Divine.

A similar thing happened with his practise of Christianity. His interest in Christianity began with the reading of the *Bible* to him by one Sambhucharan Mallick. Then one day he happened to see in a neighbouring house a beautiful picture of the Madonna and the child Christ, and the sight threw him into a transport of ecstasy. Afterwards he put himself in a completely Christian atmosphere, stopped going to the temple, and gave up for the time being all his Hindu ways. He realized the Divinity of Christ and accepted him as an incarnation of God.

Thus, one by one, Ramakrishna practised all the great religions of the world<sup>2</sup> and came to the conclusion that they all, if followed in their essentials with sincerity and earnestness, were equally efficacious in leading man to the Divine; and therefore there should be no quarrel, fanaticism or bigotry in matters religious.<sup>3</sup> The differences in racial and individual psychologies of different peoples and individuals will naturally lead them to seek the Divine in different ways, and these differences should be tolerated and not fought about.

---

<sup>2</sup>Including the principle paths within Hinduism.

<sup>3</sup>Including the principal paths within Hinduism.

How unfortunate it is that religion should have been a dividing factor of mankind, causing so many wars and so much bloodshed! With his colossal spiritual capacity and universality of outlook, Ramakrishna demonstrated to the world by his unique life that the Infinite can be approached in diverse ways, and he became the harbinger of a new era of religious toleration.

In the dark and dreary arena of the modern world where living and thirsting for God has become an almost obsolete ideal of life and where men and nations are running a frenzied race for power and self-aggrandizement, the wonderfully God-centred life of Ramakrishna, untouched by the faintest taint of worldly longing and carnal desires, stands as a beacon light of unsurpassed brilliance and lustre. Ramakrishna's life is a challenge to the scepticism of the times and a mighty vindication of what the highest blessedness for man can be—the blessedness of Godly life. The great lessons which we learn from the life of Ramakrishna are: that God *is*, and He can become an object of direct experience to man if only man has in his heart a yearning for Him so intense that he prizes nothing on earth higher than Him; that the essence of religion is to come face to face with the Divine; and that all the great religions of the world are different pathways for taking man to the self-same goal.

Another great message of Ramakrishna, of which India and the entire world stands in burning need today is his gospel of seeing God in all living beings, and serving them as such. Service of suffering humanity is to be understood—not as the humanist or the utilitarian conceives it to be, 'a good turn to others'—but as a worshipper of God would understand it, seeing Him tangibly manifested in all living forms. Thus viewed, service comes to mean not doing good to others or 'helping' the world, but a spiritual gain to one's own self. '*Jīva is Śīva*; all living beings are God'—was a wonderful proclamation given by Ramakrishna one day in a state of absorbing God-consciousness. It was this

message which made Vivekananda, a mighty patriot, writhe in agony for the suffering millions of his country. It is this message which is the foundation of the great Ramakrishna Mission with its numerous acts of philanthropic and social services.

And again, it is this message which is needed by the modern world to set right its attitude towards the phenomenon of evil and suffering in human life. The problem of evil has, of late, been dragged into the very midstream of philosophical discussion, especially in the West. Some eminent western philosophers<sup>4</sup> have ventured the opinion that the existence of evil in the world, manifested especially in the form of want and suffering in human life, is not compatible with the omnipotence of God. Had God been omnipotent, it would have been within his power to have avoided the existence of suffering and cruelty in the world. But since he could not do so, He also must be labouring under conditions over which He has no control. So, these philosophers say there is a 'limited God'. God is not an omnipotent being, but merely a being *primus inter partes*.

Now, instead of heaping curses upon God for His not removing want and misery from this world, let us pause to consider if the existence of evil and suffering in the world can also be turned to the spiritual advantage of man. Why may it not be so when man gets an opportunity to attain His spiritual perfection by *serving* that Divinity in suffering humanity? Why should not this be reckoned a part of the Divine plan? Why should we not think it to be a spiritual failure to turn away from the call of the Divine in the living forms that suffer? It was given to Ramakrishna to perceive and proclaim this wonderful truth to the modern world.

---

<sup>4</sup>Notable among them are William James, Dean Rashdall, Dr. McTaggart, and Professor James Ward.

## THE VEDANTA OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND VIVEKANANDA : THE RELIGION WE NEED

Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao

In the course of human history there have been repeated attempts to challenge and ridicule the claims of religion and liberate men from folly and weakness of will. The contemporary challenge is the most powerful and has influenced all sections of the community, the educated and the uneducated. The challenge takes up two lines of attack. Religious truths and categories like God, soul, immortality, sin, are declared to be unverifiable and unknowable, and so on, through the ordinary modes of knowledge. They are dogmatic declarations, based on the facile imagination of people, and have no existence in reality. Secondly, the practice of religion in the past, and even today, by various sects has produced untold misery. It is frankly anti-humanistic. Religions teach us to fly away from the social agonies of the age to mountaintops and monasteries. It is indifferent to the welfare of here and now. It has developed an escapist other-worldliness. The various dogmatic theologies of the world have degenerated into arrogant sects, and vie with one another in the art of competitive indoctrination of masses through horrible methods. Each of these sects claims to be in exclusive possession of the truth and declares its rivals as heretics. It is the anti-rational and anti-humanistic nature of religion that has made the critics debunk it. Some have been exasperated by the exploitation of the masses' ignorance by vested interests in religion. They declare, 'A militant atheism is better than dishonest religion.'

This challenge is not without truth, but it is not conclusive. The challenge has been accepted by the great saints of the world in every generation. Particularly in India, there has been no age when a representative of authentic religion did not appear. Sri Ramakrishna is our great *rishi*. He is an illustrious example of the mystical tradition

(perennial philosophy) which runs through the religious history of this country from the days of the *Rig-Veda*. In the words of Romain Rolland, 'he is the consummation of the two thousand years of spiritual life of three hundred million people.' He is a branch of the true vine. 'He did not come to destroy or fulfil but to bear testimony.' He did not speak like a scribe from his books or as a bespectacled scholar from his research thesis. He spoke from his authentic religious experiences. His message is faithful to the past, full of possibilities for the future, deeply rooted in our national consciousness, thoroughly representative of the authentic and true in religion. He is the starting point of the renaissance of Hinduism. This illiterate temple priest did not take anything on trust. He was the unwearied experimenter of all religions and forms of worship. He was initiated into Tāntric, Vaisnava, and Vedānta methods of spiritual discipline. He then practised with success the Islamic and the Christian forms of spiritual life. After a full and vivid first-hand personal experience, he declared the 'unity of all religions' and the 'fellowship of all faiths'. This is the corner-stone of the religion we need. Ramakrishna said, 'I had to practise all the religions once: Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, and I have walked the path of the different denominations of Hinduism—of the Sākta, Vaisnava, Vedānta, and other sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are travelling, only they are coming through diverse ways.'

This declaration of the Paramahansa sums up the true character of the spiritual religion of India. The centre of religion has shifted from authority, church, and scriptures to *spiritual experience*. It alone affirms the truth of religion. This way of looking at religion makes it rational and non-dogmatic. It deals a final blow to all that stands between God and man.

The fact of spiritual realization discloses the truth that the different religions of the world aim at one and the same God. The quest is the same for all. The goal is the same. The

way to it differs from religion to religion. The language, the mode of presentation, the dogmas, the rituals, etc. differ, because of the differences in the human psychological temper. All religions are pathways to God. No one need run down any or seek to convert others. Each should grow to his best. Some of us are attracted by the 'way of knowledge', some choose the 'way of devotion', and others incline to the 'way of deeds'.

The fellowship of faiths, the fundamental oneness of all religions takes the sting away from the acts of bigots. It engenders a universal toleration, an active love and charity to all fellow men. It removes the ills of religion: hatred and strife, conversion, crusades, and inquisition. Sage Ramakrishna lived and practised the teachings of all faiths, and accepted all denominations. There was no air of condescension in the Sage's behaviour towards different religions.

Like all the great world teachers, he too spoke in parables. He used parables with remarkable effect to convey spiritual insight. His method was to instruct through simple observations of everyday occurrences. He was also full of worldly wisdom and a tinge of quaint humour. His direct teaching and homely arguments attracted all to his fold.

For the first time Max Müller gave him the title *Mahatma* in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*. Max Müller had himself collected the sayings of Ramakrishna. Sri Rajagopalachari<sup>1</sup> styled Ramakrishna's sayings as an Upanishad.

Referring to the nature of the ultimate Reality as personal and impersonal, Ramakrishna said, 'A dyer used to dye clothing in a special manner. He used to ask his customers, "How would you like me to dye your cloth?" If the customer answered red, the dyer dipped the cloth in a vat and then took it out saying, "Here is your cloth dyed

---

<sup>1</sup>Sri C. Rajagopalachari, *Sri Ramakrishna and the Problem of Modern India*. 216.

red." When another customer wanted yellow, the dyer dipped the cloth in the same vat and took it out: Lo, it was yellow! He used the same vat for other colours also, and obtained the desired results each time. A customer who was observing all this, told the dyer, "My friend, I have no preference for any particular colour. I would like mine to be dyed with the colour you are dyed!" The Lord now shows Himself in one form, now in another, and sometimes in no form, always according to the need of the devotee. Only the divine Dyer knows in what colour He himself is dyed.' The spiritual experience is the same but the credal formulations are relative to the minds of men, and therefore different.

Ramakrishna brings out the true characteristic of Indian philosophy, namely, that it is not merely an intellectual exercise but an integral transformation. It is not mere speculative enjoyment. He says, 'Learning—books on philosophy, grammar, and so on only hinder and puzzle the mind. The *granthas* (books) are only *granthis* (knots). Mere speculation is of no use. An almanac foretells heavy rain, but however much you squeeze the book, not one drop of water will come out of it.'

Ramakrishna gives us the fundamental tenets of the eternal gospel. Religion is one; the followers of all the living faiths are guided and illumined by one light. We are all pilgrims to the same light.

To enter the spiritual life, we must first purify ourselves through the practice of charity and devotion to the Lord in utter sincerity. Ceremonial purity and ethical excellence are absolutely necessary. Ethical life purges us of our egoism and enables us to have an all-embracing love of God. Love of God transforms actions into unstinted service and charity towards our fellow men. Humanism, to be effective, must be rooted in religion. The *Katha-Upanishad* declares, 'He who has not desisted from evil ways, who is not tranquil, and who is not of concentrated mind; not even he whose mind is not composed, can reach the Lord through right knowledge.'

Divine love is the result of a good, unselfish life. Sri Ramakrishna was once asked, 'When shall I be free?' His pithy answer was, *when 'I' shall cease to be*. There you have in a nutshell the great mystic doctrine of 'self-naughting' as the means of salvation. The crucifixion must precede the resurrection.

Ramakrishna never dwelt upon the vileness of man's mortal nature, and the enormity of his sin. He declared that God and man are organic; they share an identity. Man is not a fallen creature tied down to a body of lust without any glimmer of divinity.

Vivekananda's definition of religion sums up the point: 'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man....Each soul is potentially Divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity 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.' The optimistic note of Ramakrishna's Vedānta emphasizes the dignity and divinity of man.

The message of Ramakrishna was spread by Vivekananda in three continents. He introduced the missionary zeal and dynamic drive necessary for religion to make it a reality. He imparted to the monistic Vedānta of Śaṅkara a practical shape by emphasizing the positive aspect. He called it *practical vedānta*. He realized God in all. This realization, he sought to translate through the Ramakrishna Mission and its service in different fields—education, medical service, social work, and so on.

Seeing India's poverty, he made the pertinent observation that 'an empty stomach is no good for religion.' Seeking to broaden our sympathies to include the whole world, he repeatedly said, 'Cease to look upon every little village superstition as a mandate of the Vedas....I do not believe in a God or religion that cannot wipe the widow's tears and bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth.' He said that his master stood for 'man-making religion' and

education. He wrote, 'For our motherland a synthesis of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedāntic brain and Islamic body—is the only hope.' On another occasion he declared that our great national sin was the neglect of the masses; that it was one of the causes of our fall in the past; and that if we continued the neglect the result would not be different.... Now there can be no happiness for any of us until it is won for all.'

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement has restored the true meaning of the Vedānta. It is the religion we need. It is catholic in outlook, universal in application, and humanistic in practice. It declares that religion can never absolve us from our duty. True religion is the basis of a good character. It satisfies the demand of the intellect and the needs of humanity. Some of our erstwhile agnostics like Aldous Huxley are among its admirers today.

The religion of Ramakrishna is the urgent need of India and humanity. In the philosophy of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda we have the splendid example of a new orientation of the monistic philosophy of Śankara. It emphasizes the identity of worship and service. The movement has introduced a missionary zeal and imparted to the monistic Vedānta a practical shape through the service of man as God. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is the source of inspiration to all the savants of India. In the field of philosophy and religion Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo have been considerably influenced by Vivekananda. In the field of politics many have been influenced to make a religion of practical politics by the inspiration of the Paramahansa's message.

In an over-organized world like ours, the only possible way to keep away the attrition of time is the companionship of great mystics like Sri Ramakrishna. They are, in the words of another great Incarnation, 'the salt of the earth'. In their absence, there is nothing to keep our earth together, nothing to prevent it from falling to decay. The mystics are the channels through which a little knowledge flows down

into our human universe of ignorance and illusion. A world totally devoid of idealism and mysticism would be a world totally blind and insane.

To an unbelieving world, subject to untruth and lovelessness, with its alarming creation of nuclear weapons of destruction, given over to power and pelf, Sri Ramakrishna has given the gospel that true religion is a force and not a mere form. It is our inward power that helps us to overcome failure, fear, and frustration. The need of the world is that type of religion which has been preached by the great sage.

'The world revolveth not round the inventors of new noises, but it revolveth inaudibly round the inventors of new ideas.'

# SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF INDIA

Ashok Kumar Bhattacharya

## I

### *Contemporary Life of India: Social and Religious*

The Bengal where Ramakrishna was born a hundred years ago was like a swamp of religious and social traditions left by the ebb tide of age-long spiritual ideals of the East. When the early days of Ramakrishna were being spent amidst the hallowed calm of Dakshineswar in passionate search for the Mother, there was gathering on the horizon of Bengal a storm that grew out of the conflict between the ideals of Hinduism and Christianity, enhanced by the attempts of Swami Dayananda Saraswati to revive the Sanātanist sect. People were at a loss to pick and choose from amongst them the right course of life, with the consequence that many were carried away by the charm and novelty of the doctrines of Brahmoism which sought to reconcile to some extent the two dominant religions of the East and the West and rescue educated young Bengal of that age from the danger of an alien influence. Rammohan Roy, the champion of Brahmoism, born in an orthodox Brahmin family and brought up amidst Islamic culture, was above all a rationalist and a moralist. He could accept neither the polytheistic ideal of religion found in his ancestral creed, nor the monotheistic principles of faith as preached by Christianity.<sup>1</sup> He was a great monotheist in that he went the length of denying the Trinity of Christ just as he denied the Hindu divinities. To him it appeared that the only religion was 'the worship and adoration of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Romain Rolland: *Life of Ramakrishna*, (1930) p. 108.

eternal, unsearchable and immutable Being, who is the author and preserver of the universe.' He proclaimed his religion as 'universal' and he endeavoured to preach universal brotherhood through it. But it may be said that it was only as good a form of religion as Christianity, preaching a particular set of beliefs and vying with other existing faiths.

As a reaction measure against the westernization of the country, in matters both intellectual and religious, a well-organized agitation was started in northern India under the heroic lead of Dayananda. The sole aim of this movement was to bring back to the ancient soil its long-forgotten Vedic faith and its practices. In the course of the journey which he undertook preaching his faith, Dayananda went to Bengal. Though the success of this Vedic resuscitator was not so glowing in Bengal, mainly because of the classical Sanskrit language in which he spoke, yet the movement had its visible effect on the Bengali public.

When these cross-currents of religious thought were in full sway in this land already overwhelmed by western ideas and ideals of life, the saint of Dakshineswar came with a spiritual message fully adapted to the sceptical and scientific age in which he was born. His was a message that he worked out in his own life without thrusting it upon those that came to him. His ideal of religious life was free from any scheduled restrictions of caste or creed, of place or time. The Divine can be worshipped by a man in and out of the temple, be he a believer in the formless God or in God with forms. What is needed is only a purified soul—a humble resignation to and absolute faith in the Supreme Being.

*Ramakrishna's ideal of religious life, harmonizing  
the prevailing social and religious surroundings*

The message of Ramakrishna to India and to humanity is that there is a meaning and purpose behind the sum total

of human experience in life. As a member of the family, as a man of society, he was more alive to the welfare of humanity than to anything else and his teachings to the world are of great social value. His prime task was to revivify the Hindu society which had been shorn of its ideal of unity, religion, and social service. The social condition of Bengal, in particular, as Ramakrishna saw it, was anything but satisfactory. Prejudice of caste, hatred and competition between religious sects, and above all, the evils of materialism introduced by western education gradually eating into the life of the country—all combined to stir up in the mind of Ramakrishna the ideal of a universal religion where the lost children of the ancient sages might find shelter. He made people feel that religion was no tyranny to be exercised over society and was no object of dread in its thousands of bindings. A faith that could take within its fold the priest and the 'pariah' with the same rights and privileges was the faith propounded by Sri Ramakrishna.

## II

### *Essential Elements in the Teachings of Ramakrishna*

From the Vedic age through the Buddhist era down to the present time, the one common string that has bound together all the religions preached in this sacred land of India has been the spirit of renunciation. During the Vedic Age man's course of life was marked by graded renunciation in its different stages; in the Buddhistic period the spiritual ideal of man was recast according to the Buddha's principle of renunciation which enjoined on all a somewhat rigorous denial of pleasures, regardless of whether one was a householder or a mendicant. The people of India in the modern age, caught in the snare of worldly enjoyments, disgusted, were looking for an ideal of renunciation to satisfy their spiritual hunger, for spirituality is an instinct of the Indian mind. And Ramakrishna came with this long-

looked-for message—a renunciation that did not demand leaving of the householders life in favour of the forest and practising penances there, but which only reminded man of his inseparable relation to God and his inner and truer Self in the midst of humdrum life. ‘When you are at work use only one of your hands and let the other touch the feet of the Lord.’<sup>2</sup> ‘Live like a mudfish but let not the mud of the world stick to you.’ Be in the world and at the same time out of it.

But the remarkable feature of this principle of renunciation is that it is always coupled with the spirit of service. To him, life within this world is the fit field for both. Renunciation as such separates man from man, but renunciation through service unites humanity in the tie of universal brotherhood. He imbibed the teachings of the *Gītā* and saw the manifestation of God in every man and thing.<sup>3</sup> He was thus a follower of the *Gītā* on one side and also a worshipper of Kāli on the other. He was a synthesis, as it were, of the *Gītā* and the *Chandi*—the eternal spiritual bequests of India. Indeed, he was a devotee of Kāli, as she is manifest in the *Chandi*, not in the aspect of the destructive force of Shakti, but as the eternal fountain of Love and Beauty as embodied in the Divine Mother.

Ramakrishna’s spiritual legacy to India is marked by synthesis and toleration. The greatest truth about religious life as revealed to Sri Ramakrishna is perhaps his conviction of the one eternal religion running through all humanity. The religion manifests itself in different races and in different countries in quite different forms in obedience to the diversity of their environment, culture, and temperament. The numerous faiths, therefore, that seem to prescribe distinct paths to God and spirituality are the different

---

<sup>2</sup>Romain Rolland: *Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 215. Interview with Keshab and his disciples.

<sup>3</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 350.

phases of the One Universal Religion that existed in the past and will exist for all time to come.<sup>4</sup> Further, one individual may seek God through activity (*karma*), another through devotion (*bhakti*), and a third through knowledge (*jñāna*). It is just as one can view truth from different angles of vision.<sup>5</sup> But all the paths lead to the same goal; all seek God, though the roads vary. Ramakrishna combined all and despised none. For so many ideas of God, so many religious beliefs, were to him the forms of the same effort to attain the Godhead. Every faith was equally potent to lead man to the spiritual goal, provided he had a sincere and devoted heart to follow it.<sup>6</sup> This universality of his ideas about God and religion and his unprecedented toleration of other faiths found expression in a thousand and one memorable utterances.<sup>7</sup>

At an age when religions in India, swelling in number as they were, and far from being held in sacredness by their respective followers, were vying with one another; when society, suffering from the ignorance of its masses, was the hotbed of vice and superstition, when individuals absorbed in elaborate rituals lost sight of their distant aim, Ramakrishna, simplicity and sincerity incarnate, purified the heart of Hinduism and made it a living force once again by removing all its excrescences that were threatening to stifle it. To think of God as the nearest, to take him as the dearest, formed the essence of that simplest faith which the poor priest of Dakshineswar wanted at this psychological moment to bring home to the heart of Bengal. 'Why do you give these statistics?' he once reprehended Keshab Chandra Sen. 'If you think of Him and His gifts as something

---

<sup>4</sup>Vivekananda: *My Master*.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Saradananda: *Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga, Gurubhava, Uttarardha*, second ed., p. 47.

<sup>7</sup>*The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, II, 17 and 248.

extraordinary, you can never be intimate with Him... Do not think of Him as if He were far away from you."<sup>8</sup> Religions in India are characteristically pervaded by the idea of realization and in this sceptical age it is unnatural that religion should be anything other than realization. And the life of the Paramahansa is one of such intense personal realization. The spirit of religion loses its hold both upon the devotee and its followers if it does not proceed from the realization of God. The devotee must think of God, 'feel God' and 'talk to God'. This is the truest and most tangible of all religions that can touch the heart of humanity. But it must be remembered that Ramakrishna, in presenting to the world his religion of renunciation and service, of toleration, synthesis and realization, has only re-echoed the sacred note sounded in this ancient land thousands of years ago. Indeed, his attempt has been an unconscious revival rather than a studied renovation.

### III

*Ramakrishna's teachings as contrasted with Buddhism,  
Christianity, and some forms of the Hindu faith*

The man-God of the nineteenth century felt the identification of himself with the Divine. His filial relation with God, the 'Mother', was the outward expression of his inner identification with the Absolute.<sup>9</sup> He felt the immanence of God in every being and believed that every being is an expression of the Divine and that every man can attain godhead.

It has been urged by most European writers that Hinduism is essentially mystical and that the teachings of Ramakrishna, embodying as they do the essentials of

---

<sup>8</sup>*Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 365.

<sup>9</sup>Dr. Mahendranath Sirkar: *Eastern Lights*, Ch. XI.

Hinduism, share in mysticism as well. But Hinduism, and for that matter, Ramakrishna's teachings, does not suffer in comparison with other forms of religion which have influenced the religious life of humanity at large. For all true religions are mystical. *If all true religions consist in becoming conscious of the identification of the individual with the Universal—the finite with the Infinite, such a consciousness cannot but be supra-sensuous and supra-rational.* The realm of the individual and the finite is the realm of the senses and of reason. The senses and reason have their function within the bounds of the finite existence, which can be understood and interpreted in terms of the categories of time, space and causality, but the realization of the Infinite is beyond categorical knowledge and can be effected by intuition or inner vision alone. It can be effected by the inner spiritual awakening which no discursive reason, however subtle in its application, can bring about. Man's spiritual hunger and thirst urge him to that inner grasp of the Infinite which is beyond all intellectualism. Hinduism is therefore none the poorer for its mysticism.

The much too rationalistic tendency in Christianity has made it accept the reality of this phenomenal world, and the spiritual life which cannot be analysed by reason is only to be reached through a transcendental experience. The visions of the mystic are beyond the field of reason and make up a separate form of existence. There is a wide gap, as it were, between this mundane life and the delightful experience of a wider existence—the two can never be reconciled. In Buddhism the existence of this secular world has been altogether denied. The Buddhist, at his highest, has the transcendental experience of unsullied bliss while the world of ordinary experience shrivels into nothingness. This is what is called *nirvana*. The Buddhist in the state of nirvana is, therefore, above the biological and psychical demands of life and makes his existence a matter of mystic realization. Mysticism thus forms the essential medium through which the Buddhist claims to taste the spiritual

*summum bonum*. Hinduism here is more comprehensive in its ideal than either Buddhism or Christianity. It takes cognizance of the relative reality of the phenomenal world without bringing in an idea of separation between the world of phenomena and the world of Reality. The mystic element in Hinduism and in the teachings of Ramakrishna, which are essentially the revival of the same, is distinctly inclusive in its acceptance of the world outside. Ramakrishna, consistently with the principles of Hinduism, has not given the go-by to the world of time, space and causation but rather asserted that the finite and the individual can become the Infinite and Universal in and through its participation in the workings and progress of the spatio-temporal world. When the Hindu sadhaka has been through this spatio-temporal world and realized the Absolute, he enters into a wider life beyond and above the reach of reason and the senses but not antagonistic to them.<sup>10</sup> Ramakrishna realized this higher truth of Hinduism but preferred to practise its simpler form whose Deity was the Mother Kāli and his sonship to Kāli was at once a glory, a light, and a delight to him.

### III

*Ramakrishna's social and religious ideal is the need of the hour*

Ramakrishna laid no claim on any one as his follower though everyone that came into contact with him was anxious to follow him. He laid no claim on any religion as his personal bequest<sup>11</sup> though his legacy to the religious world appears to be of the richest and finest type.

---

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Dr. M.N. Sircar: *Hindu Mysticism*.

<sup>11</sup>Swami Premananda once heard him pray: 'Mother, do not let me become famous by leading those who believe in beliefs through my voice.'

Consequently, unlike Christianity or Buddhism which owed its origin to the life of its promulgator, Ramakrishna's religious life aims at a revival of the Hindu ideal as it was revealed to the ancient sages. It is universal in the sense that it bears no idea of proselytizing nor does it find fault with any of the positive religions.

It was the land of India which once took inspiration from the giant intellect of Sankara and it was here that Chaitanya's message of love opened up a new vista of spirituality to India of the middle ages and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of the intellect of Sankara and the heart of Chaitanya. The time was ripe for one who was to sound the symphony of all religions—to recognize variation within unity and integrate the quarrelling masses with a spirit of service and toleration. And the present spiritual atmosphere of India, after her vicissitudes of religious experiences and social filtration, is largely the gift of Ramakrishna who saw and felt what the hour needed. The world has come to see in this cosmic man the fulfilment of its religious aspirations.

#### IV

##### *What Ramakrishna did towards the elevation of the social and religious life of modern India*

The ideal of service that often moved the great Master haunted the lion-heart of Vivekananda afterwards, when the task of carrying the great message abroad fell on his able shoulders. The task was a tremendous one and Vivekananda took it up after his return from the far-off Western countries. India, more than any other country in the world, is the homeland of the poor and the suffering. Visitations of natural calamities greatly enhance the helplessness of the country and the need of rescuers is felt more keenly in this land of ours than anywhere else. Vivekananda felt the need in his heart and made the cause of the poor, the ailing, and

the downtrodden, a part of his creed.<sup>12</sup> His clarion call to service found a ready response and the greatest gift of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is the establishment of an attitude of social service all over India. It has set up a country-wide agitation and the people of India have accepted the principle of service as a creed of their own. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the greatest organization of its kind in India, has not only taken upon itself relief work of all manner and dimensions, but as a stout step towards national uplift it has opened at many places of India centres for home-industry<sup>13</sup> and has even undertaken the education of the masses where possible to reclaim the fallen from the lowest depths of privation. The institution, inspired with the ideal of Vivekananda and his Master, continues to contribute immensely to the uplift of Indian society in its ethical and social standards.

The Vedic age was long passed leaving its excrescences which went on accumulating only to encrust Hindu society thicker and thicker. The caste system which formed the backbone of social unity lost its original significance, and men in the higher ranks of society developed a superiority complex. The reaction which followed found expression in the life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya. Chaitanya's overflowing love for all was a step forward towards the religious franchise of those of low caste. But it was left for Ramakrishna in this modern age to deal, though only in principle, a stronger blow to this standing evil. Like Chaitanya he not only absorbed the low castes within his religious fold, but roused a sense of respect for their religious aspirations. His direct disciples included low caste

---

<sup>12</sup>*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by his Eastern and Western disciples, vol. 2. Ch. 73.

<sup>13</sup>The reference is specially to 'Madras Students' Home' and its activities.

devotees,<sup>14</sup> for he held that the realization of God, the ultimate aim of humanity, was no personal privilege of any individual, high or low in society. Yet, as Vivekananda, who represented the practical aspect of the Great Master, asserted, the difference between the high and the low, the brahmin and the non-brahmin, is only a difference of social functions and abilities. The moment the non-brahmin acquires the abilities and character of a brahmin he is to be exalted to brahminhood.<sup>15</sup> This liberalization of caste, especially in matters religious, on the one hand, and the vindication of the strong underlying principle of caste-distinction on the other, mark at once the revolution in spiritual outlook that the Paramahansa ushered into Indian society without detriment to the ancient ideal of the land.

To study Ramakrishna in isolation from Vivekananda is quite an impossible task. Though in nature the two were exactly opposite, yet the one was the supplement of the other. If Ramakrishna was all inspiration, Vivekananda was all activity; if Ramakrishna was the maker of a religion, Vivekananda was its missionary. And the greatest mission that Vivekananda carried to the different parts of India was the awakening of Indian youth to a sense of national pride and national respect. He infused into the mind of young India the ideal of the sanctity of religion as the very basis of Indian life, and in this respect he followed strictly his great Master. Ramakrishna, no less than Vivekananda, was the real leader of the youth. The contemporary youth of Bengal was attracted by this Godman of the nineteenth century and a batch of 'bold sanniyasins' arose out of them. And Vivekananda's move for social service was in reality a movement

---

<sup>14</sup>As an instance, it may be cited that along with Ramachandra Dutt, one of the earliest disciples of Ramakrishna, came his servant, Latu by name, who was to be one of the direct and leading disciples of the Master.

<sup>15</sup>Vivekananda: *The Reform of Caste*.

for the youth of India. He proclaimed in every corner of India and also abroad the call of service to the young generation, and, happily for India, this awakening of the youth of the country at a time when Indian nationality was at its ebb, served to stir up patriotism in this lost land.<sup>16</sup> Since then Indian national consciousness began to be felt all over the country and attempts were made to bring about national unity through social service. This impetus to service, which has since taken shape in innumerable useful institutions, we all owe to that maker of modern India, that great disciple of a great Master—Swami Vivekananda. The Master sowed the seed and the disciple gave it sap and nourishment.

But it was not the young men of India alone that occupied the Master's thought. The womanhood of India also shared a large measure of his sympathetic estimation. Ramakrishna saw and felt the deplorable condition of the Indian women of his time and endeavoured to revive their lost glory. He inculcated the ideal of the *Chandi*<sup>17</sup> and learnt to see in every woman the manifestation of his 'Mother', the Primordial Power (*ādyaśakti*) of the universe. His relation with his wife was the sacred relation of a mother and her child and he even went so far as to worship her, having enthroned her in his 'Mother's' seat.<sup>18</sup> In his religious life he acknowledged with all humility a woman, Bhairavi Brāhmani by name, as his preceptress. His life, in a word, showed splendid devotion to the moulding of the Indian social outlook on womanhood as nothing else than divinity.

---

<sup>16</sup>Vivekananda's call to Indians: Hero, take courage and be proud that you are an Indian and say with pride: 'I am an Indian and every Indian is my brother.'

<sup>17</sup>Cf. *Chandi*, 11.6.

<sup>18</sup>Romain Rolland, *Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 99.

Leaving his indelible impress upon the life of the Indian people, nay, upon the world at large, the Messiah of the East took his exit from the world-stage. The river, that with its sacred waters sanctified all that was unholy in the religious and social body of India, re-entered the ocean of eternal unity, sanctity, and equality. Ramakrishna's ideal of a universal religion, his call to Indians to extricate themselves from the meshes of social prejudices and, finally, his simple ways of religious life to attain God are the most striking of his gifts to mankind for which he is worshipped today and will be in ages to come. Ramakrishna was above all a man; humanity was more marked in him than in any other prophet of the past. As a human being he was always on the alert for the uplift of human society, and he could not afford to keep himself aloof. He has disengaged his self from the narrow adjunct of his body, only to pervade the universe with his truer spirit. His bodily appearance we have been deprived of, but we seem to hear his inspiring voice calling us to a better and a truer life: *Uttishthata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata*—'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.'

[This essay won the first prize in the  
Sri Ramakrishna Centenary All-India Essay Competition  
among College Students.]

## TWO CULTURAL MOVEMENTS: RAMAKRISHNAISM AND MARXISM

Prof. Akshaya Kumar Banerjee, M.A.

There are at present two dynamic international cultural movements, which are progressively attracting the attention of the advanced thinkers in most of the nations of the civilized world. The one is the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement and the other is the Marx-Lenin movement. Ramakrishna Deva and Karl Marx flourished in the same age in the centres of two distinct civilizations, and their lives and precepts also were likewise distinct. The movements originating from their teachings are in all outward appearance fundamentally different from each other. Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of the soul of India in the modern age, and Karl Marx may be said to have represented the soul of modern Europe. The outlook of the one was naturally, and perhaps necessarily, distinct from that of the other. Their philosophies of life and society were outwardly antagonistic to each other. They looked upon the human race and the course of its evolution from two opposite points of view. The solutions they offered for the most puzzling problems of the modern age were based on essentially different principles. Nevertheless, both these movements owe their origin to and derive their strength from the same inner urge of the soul of the human race to be free from the continual state of strife and warfare—civil, military, individual, communal, national, economic, political, social and religious—which appears to have somehow become the characteristic feature of humanity in the course of its evolution, and which in modern times is becoming more and more hideous and soul-destructive with the development of the intellectual and organizing powers of men and the progress of their conquest of natural forces and their exploitation of the material resources of the world.

The inner aims of both these movements are to establish peace, harmony, and unity in human society, to bring

about a reconciliation between individual and collective interests, to replace the spirit of competition by the spirit of service, the spirit of the assertion of rights by the spirit of obedience to the call of duty, and the spirit of self-aggrandizement (whether individual or communal or national) by the spirit of devotion to collective welfare, for the regulation of human activities. The human soul has an inherent demand for peace, harmony, and unity which is within the nature of every individual as well as in the relation of every individual with his environment. The growth of life depends upon the progressive realization of harmonious relationship, within and without. The absence of it implies impending death. True to the general principle of development, the spirit of humanity always and everywhere longs for more and more perfect adjustment of relationships and more and more lasting peace and harmony between men and men, nay between men and all animals and all forces of the world.

Unfortunately the reigning spirit of the modern world—some people may call it the Satanic spirit—has put down or led astray this spirit of humanity and brought it to the brink of a precipice. In the name of 'lasting peace' on their lips men are falling upon one another, with all the murderous propensities and capacities they have studiously developed with the progress of their knowledge of the world and worldly forces. And through the path of mutual destruction, whether by the slow process of exploitation or by the swift method of violent warfare, all the parties (exploiters as well as the exploited, the victorious as well as the vanquished) are rapidly advancing towards the permanent peace of death. This is the form which modern civilization has assumed. The immortal spirit of humanity is afraid of death. It has naturally revolted against this form of so-called civilization and is seeking for ways of escape from annihilation. Movements have been started under the banner of peace and unity in different countries, and human hearts are more and more responding to their appeals.

Of all such movements, two—the one originating from the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the other originating from the philosophy and activity of Karl Marx—appear to be the most dynamic and full of potentiality. Their modes of appeal are of course different, the one being truly Indian and ethico-spiritual and the other characteristically European and economic-political. Sri Ramakrishna's message to the modern world is that societies and states have to be reconstructed on a spiritual basis—on the basis of the essentially spiritual nature of man and its inherent demand for self-fulfilment in the spiritual realm in and through its unconstrained self-expression in this sensible world. Karl Marx's message is that the society and states should be reconstructed on an economic basis—on the basis of the equal rights of men to live and to enjoy this world as members of the same social organism. The appeal of the message of Sri Ramakrishna is specially to have spiritual and moral consciousness of those who *have*, and that of Marx to the consciousness of the economic and political rights of those who *have not*.

Sri Ramakrishna seeks to awaken the consciousness that the true fulfilment of *having* lies in *giving*—that the voluntary employment of whatever one *has* in this world in the loving service of those who *have not* is the sole and sure path for the attainment of one's best and highest interest—that what is ordinarily regarded and admired as self-sacrifice is the true form of love for and devotion to one's true Self. The true interest of the individual, when the spiritual consciousness is awakened, is experienced to be identical with his serviceableness for the collective interest of society, especially for the interests of the poor and downtrodden fellow members of the society. Perfection of the self and the happiness of others ought to be the principle of life, since the former is attainable through contributions to the latter.

The philosophical basis of this message is furnished by Vedanta, which proclaims in no uncertain voice that the same Supreme Spirit—the same God—dwells as the soul

(*ātman*) in every human body, nay, in the body of every living creature, that all men—indeed, all creatures—are essentially Divine, and that the realization of this Divinity in one's own self and in all, is the *summum bonum* of human life. Accordingly, the voluntary offering of what one *has* in the service of others amounts to the worship of one's own true Self in its manifold appearances—the worship of the Divine in the human—the worship of the Infinite and Eternal in Its finite and mortal embodiments, the progressive realization of the identity of one's own Self with the universe. The deep-seated yearning of the human soul for self-realization, to be free from the veil of ignorance and consequent narrowness of vision, becomes a dynamic force impelling the individual to sacrifice all objects of sense desire and attachment for the welfare of society, which is perceived as a more permanent and magnificent embodiment of his Self—a *virāt puruṣa*—containing within Itself short lived and individualized embodiments of the same Self. Thus the awakening of spiritual consciousness brings about a happy reconciliation between giving and gaining, between sacrifice and enjoyment, between altruism and egoism, between self-dedication for the good of all and self-fulfilment, between what is called socialism and what is called individualism.

The appeal of this message to the *have-nots* also is no less significant. In truth, the differentiation between *haves* and *have-nots* is artificial and arbitrary. There is no rational ground for any real classification of the human society between *haves* and *have-nots*. Every man, however poor and distressed, possesses something and has a sense of ownership of and attachment to it. He would not like to part with it, except for some greater gain. On the other hand, no man, however rich and high-placed in the eyes of others, is without wants, without a sense of *have-not*, without any look of envy upon others. It is only in a comparative sense that we can speak of the *haves* and the *have-nots*. The spiritual message of India seeks to awaken in the mind of

every one who possesses anything, however little or however great, the moral consciousness of duty towards all—duty to the society to which he belongs and which represents in a grander and more permanent form his own true Self. It teaches the highest as well as the lowest to dedicate what they have to the worship of their true Divine Self in the form of loving service to their fellow beings and inspires them with the idea that this is the most appropriate means of their rising higher and higher in the scale of humanity and ultimately realizing their Divinity. To those who are depressed with the sense of *have-not*, who are economically poor and socially and politically downtrodden, and who as a result of the unfortunate circumstances in which they have been placed have lost all faith in and respect for themselves, the special appeal of this message is that it rouses a dynamic consciousness of humanity and Divinity in themselves. It helps them to shake off the depressed and slavish mentality and stand on their own feet with self-respect and self-confidence, and march onward in the path of self-realization by dint of their own disciplined endeavours, without entertaining any feeling of envy or malice towards their more fortunate brothers and sisters. It teaches them that they are not really dependent upon the mercy or cruelty of those who have by dint of their own efforts become comparatively prosperous and powerful in society, that they have not been deprived of their fortunes by the latter, nor can they hope to attain power and prosperity by any malicious attempt at depriving them of theirs. They are the masters of their own destinies. They have by their own past misdeeds brought their misfortunes upon themselves. They can get rid of these misfortunes, and become as great as or even greater than those they envy, by the proper performance of their duties, by the awakening of the Divine powers which are latent in them, and by the cultivation of self-confidence, self-reliance, self-discipline and self-exertion. Arise, awake, rouse Brahman within yourselves, render service to society according to your

resources, and advance onward and onward in the path of Self-realization, which is another name for God-realization—this is the divine message to the poor.

This message teaches the rich to see God in the poor as well as in themselves, and teaches the poor also to see God in themselves as well as in the rich. Self-respect and mutual respect should reign in human society. A spirit of mutual service, mutual love and regard, mutual co-operation for the self-fulfilment of each, should determine the course of activity of every individual and every section of humanity. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is an organized attempt to awaken this spirit in the modern mind.

Art and literature, science and philosophy, agriculture and industry, trade and commerce, which have developed immensely in the modern age through competition and rivalry amongst individuals and groups under the urge of selfish instinct, should have their proper places in the society to be reconstructed on a spiritual basis. The spirit of worship to God, and self-discipline for Self-realization through loving service to humanity, should guide and control their course of development. They should not be, as they generally are in the existing order of society, an organized means of domination and exploitation of the weak by the strong, of the less intelligent by the more intelligent, of peasants and labourers by aristocrats and capitalists.

The wise, powerful, and prosperous people, who would be born and brought up in the spiritual atmosphere of the reconstructed society, should be saturated and enlivened by the noblest moral and religious ideas and sentiments radiating from the God-centric lives and teachings of the spiritually enlightened members of that society, and should always be conscious that the true success of their lives lies in their spiritual self-fulfilment, which can be attained only through the application of their wisdom, power and prosperity to the welfare of their less talented and less fortunate fellow beings with a devotional attitude of worship to God.

Spiritual idealism, which is in truth implanted in the depth of every human heart, has to be made dynamic in the spheres of human thoughts and desires and actions through art and literature, laws and customs, education and organized propaganda, so that the people of the upper layers of society may be inspired by the idea that their knowledge, their wealth, their organizing genius, their social facilities, their political advantages, are really Divine trusts to them, and that they would prove unworthy if they considered them as their own and utilized them for their own earthly benefit and self-aggrandizement. The Divine purpose can be truly accomplished only if they avail themselves of these opportunities for offering worship to Him in the form of sincere service to the society—in earnest attempts to remove ignorance and illiteracy, poverty and distress, disease and weakness, fear and hatred, depression and self-diffidence, slavery and inequity.

Differences of intellectual powers and organizing talents, differences of physical strength and mental courage, differences of temperament and character, these must always exist in every form of society, and there must accordingly be differences of position and prestige, influence and authority, and also of prosperity and enjoyment, in spite of all attempts at equalizing the people by offering equal opportunities to all. But peace, harmony, and unity have to be established in human society in the midst of these differences. It is voluntary service and sacrifice on the part of the superior grades of people, it is their willing acceptance and recognition as equal and kindred to them the people who are inferior from the earthly point of view, that can bring about real peace, harmony and unity in society. The inspiration for this can come only from spiritual idealism—from the consciousness that the spiritual interest of human life is superior to the material interest, that the ideal of God-realization is far higher and nobler than the ideals of pleasure, power and personality in the world, and that the ideal can be best realized in and through the

dedication of earthly possessions to the service of the *have-nots* with a religious attitude of mind. Such spiritual idealism would find expression in economic socialism without any class-war or violent revolution.

In the absence of this religious spirit reigning in the consciousness of the people and in the constitution of the society, there is bound to be a field of endless battle among divergent earthly interests. The spirit of competition, rivalry, envy, malice, hatred and hostility is sure to create warring divisions among men, exploitation by those who are for the time being in an advantageous position, and revolutionary conspiracy of the exploited to dislodge them from that position and take vengeance upon them. This cannot but vitiate the normal order of society. Those who become earnest friends of the poor exploited masses today and employ their opportunities and organizing abilities to create a revolution against the exploiters and oppressors, will, if successful, themselves form a class of exploiters and oppressors tomorrow. Thus revolution and counter-revolutions will go on. It is only the religious spirit that can keep in check the spirit of exploitation which is inherent in man's animal nature. The predominance of man's spiritual nature over his economic (i.e. animal) nature alone can bring peace to human society.

Sri Ramakrishna, by his *sādhanā* and realizations, freed religion also from many of the current misconceptions about it. Religion, he proclaimed, does not consist only in a particular dogma or creed, or in particular conceptions about God and His relation to man and the world, or in any particular mode of worship or self-discipline; nor in any particular sets of rites and customs and practices, nor in any particular forms of church-organization. Religion essentially means the realization of the spiritual or Divine nature of the human self—the realization of Divinity in humanity. Different creeds which pass by the name of religion and which apparently conflict with one another, are only diverse *paths* to Religion. Religion is one and universal, though religions—i.e. the paths

to Religion—are many. Every religious man, whatever path he may adopt, must have respect for all paths, since they lead to the same goal. The ideal immanent in every recognized religious system is the progressive spiritualization of human nature—the progressive realization of Divinity which pertains to the true Self of man.

Accordingly, every form of religious discipline—intellectual, emotional, moral, and practical—is meant for gradually awakening in man the consciousness of unity between the individual self, the social self, and the universal Self, the feeling of love for all as the true expression of his love for his own higher Self, the spirit of charity and service to all as the true way of the fulfilment of his own practical life. It is from the standpoint of this universal spiritual ideal that every system of religion has to be accepted, respected, and loved. A follower of any particular system of religion has to live a spiritual life in accordance with its injunctions, but he has to judge his progress by the universal standard. The higher a man rises in religious life, the wider and deeper must be his sympathy and love, the more vivid must be his experience of the Divinity within himself and in all men, the more deeply must he feel the identity of his own interest with the interest of society, the more natural and spontaneous must be his charity and service and sacrifice.

Karl Marx, though inspired by the same ideal of peace, harmony and equality and prompted by the same revolt of the human heart against the present state of disunion and discord and relentless struggle in human society, approached the problem from an altogether different point of view and with an altogether different conception of human nature. His conclusions were based on the data obtained from the empirical study of European history. He found no ground for putting faith in the innate goodness of the human soul or for regarding man as essentially a spiritual being. To him a man was an animal like other animals in his inherent demands and essential requirements. A man belonged to a superior order of animals, mainly in this that

his nature was much more complex, his requirements were much more various, he was endowed with free intelligence and organizing powers, he could exercise considerable influence upon the course of events which contributed to his happiness and misery. Destinies of men as well as their ideals and sentiments, their moral and religious consciousness, their desires and ambitions, their sense of values and criteria of rightness and goodness—all these were the products of the economic and political situation in which they were placed and which again they had the power to modify and change. Men were the products as well as the makers of history. Marx accordingly decided that in order to emancipate society from the present state of inequality, inequity, and continual civil and military warfare, the present structure of society had to be radically changed.

Having no faith in the spiritual nature of man, Marx found no ground for believing that people who were placed in advantageous positions by the present order of society, who became wealthy and powerful and learned by ingeniously availing themselves of the opportunities offered by the present situation in their own favour at the expense of the millions of their fellow beings, could in any way be prevailed upon to sacrifice those advantages and part with their wealth and power of their own accord for the sake of any spiritual ideal or for any advantage to be gained in an imaginary life after death. They might make charities, they might show active sympathy with the poor and the depressed, they might try by means of generous measure to win the admiration and devotion of the poor labourers at whose expense and through whose foolish co-operation they were flourishing. All these were good and noble contrivances for the consolidation of their power and authority and to the stabilization of their economic prosperity. But they would never be ready to exchange their positions with those upon whom they showered their charities or to recognize them as their equals. It is only under compulsion that rich men embrace poverty and men in authority are deprived of

their position. Individuals may at times be prepared to make voluntary sacrifices, but classes or communities never.

Hence such a situation has to be created that the rich and the high may be compelled to come down to the level of the common masses, at least so far as the articles of physical necessity and ordinary comfort are concerned. There should be no distinction between rich and poor, high and low, strong and weak in society. Such distinction can be obliterated and real equality can be brought about in human society, if *the right to private property is not recognized by the state and by society*. This is a great revolutionary idea, because the conception of private property has all along been regarded almost as innate in the human consciousness and *a priori* true. Perhaps the most remarkable contribution of Marx to human ideology is that he initiated or inspired a movement against private property. All property truly belongs to the society. The members of society ought and must devote the energy and talents with which they are endowed by nature (for the development and application of which opportunities are offered by the social order) to the enhancement of the prosperity, power, and prestige of society as a whole. But they should never regard themselves as the proprietors of what they produce or acquire. They should work as limbs of society, and the fruits of their work must go to society for the enjoyment of all. Every man should obtain from society what he requires for his maintenance, for his education and self-development, for his work and service to society. The dignity and honour of a man should lie in the value of the contributions he makes to society, and not in what he enjoys, not in his wealth and grandeur, power and authority, high birth and prestige. Destruction of private property and establishment of social ownership of all property was conceived by the Marxian school as the most effective means of bringing about harmony, peace, and unity in human society.

But how can such an object be achieved? Appeal to the moral and spiritual sense of the privileged classes would be

of no avail. Moral and spiritual ideas, as history has conclusively demonstrated, can never be strong enough to destroy or even subdue their materialistic greed and ambition for power and authority. Religion, far from producing universal brotherhood and establishing peace and harmony and equality in human society, has all along been a principal ground of inequality, hostility, and vanity and the unrepentant oppression of the weak by the strong. History has records of the most inhuman atrocities in the name of religion. In what appears outwardly as a peaceful society, the rich and shrewd privileged classes exploit religious precepts to keep in order the poor toiling ignorant masses contented with their distressful conditions. The Sermon on the Mount is quoted for eulogizing poverty, meekness, humility, privation, and so on and giving these people hope of the Kingdom of Heaven. But those who quote it practise just the opposite of these virtues and try to lull the victims of their oppression to sleep with such sweet words and soothing stories. Religion thus operates as opium to the oppressed millions and keep them ignorant of their inherent rights and dormant powers.

Hence the Marxian movement attempts to release the human mind from what is regarded as the dehumanizing magical influence of religion and appeals to the lacerated hearts of the exploited masses to be conscious of their miserable conditions, to be conscious of the valuable contributions they make to the development of the social and national fortune by the sweat of their brow, and to be conscious of the cruel treatment they receive in return from those who are puffed up by their labour, to be conscious of their rights to get suitable and sufficient means of livelihood, education and self-development as members of society and to be treated as equals and friends by those who serve society with their intellectual capacities, to be conscious of the powers which lie latent in them and which they can make the privileged classes feel through proper combination and organization. Thus it seeks to create a

revolutionary mentality in the masses, to rouse their spirits against the fortunate classes, to unify the *have-nots* on the basis of their common grievances against the *haves* and the dynamic consciousness of their common miserable lot. They have to wrest the powers and privileges from the *haves*.

Thus the necessary conclusion is that the destruction of the notion of private property, which is the fundamental curse of the present order of society, and the socialization of the fruits of the labours of all grades of people, which is the only solution to present problems, and the only way to the establishment of peace, harmony, and brotherhood, can be expected to be accomplished not through any religious idealism and voluntary sacrifice on the part of the privileged classes, but through the awakening and organization of the exploited masses in revolt against the former, and the wresting of political authority and power for creating a new order by them. This is the message of the Revolution of Marx and his school of thought.

This message naturally appeals to the hearts of the sufferers all over the world, who are numerically far stronger than the enjoyers in the present order of society. It is also far easier to work up feelings of envy and malice than those of universal love and yearning for God-realization. The message has got an additional dynamic power from the success of the revolutionary movement in Russia under the great leadership of Lenin,<sup>1</sup> (though the Russian movement may have important points of difference with the Marxian message). In industrialized Europe the labourers can be more easily roused and organized against the capitalists than in the agricultural countries, where most men have some property. The big imperialistic and capitalistic wars offer in their after-effects great opportunities for the revolution of the masses. Such visible successes and possibilities of success tend to popularize the message. In India the national movement of

---

<sup>1</sup>At present disintegrated—*Publisher*.

Mahatma Gandhi is based on the same spiritual principle as is typified in the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda movement. But it is as yet far from attaining any tangible success in the form of the acquisition of political power in the country. Hence Sri Ramakrishna's message has not yet been able to enter into or even approach the hearts of the rank and file in different countries. But the superiority of this message is being recognized by the noblest thinkers all over the world.

We cannot prophesy how the Ruler of the destiny of the human race will shape its history after the present war (World War II) which really seems to be a war for the destruction of the present order of society. If the present war cannot serve its purpose and create a new mentality in the surviving population, we shall have to wait for another more dreadful and devastating war in the course of a generation. From the grave of the present civilization based on the conception of the intrinsic worth of money, power, and animal pleasure, a new civilization based on the higher nature of man must arise. Both the thought currents referred to above will contribute to the creation of this new order. Apparently the Marxian movement is an antithesis to the Ramakrishna movement. But the life of humanity demands a living synthesis of the two. Peace and unity, which the human soul demands, must be attained not only on the moral and spiritual planes, but also on the economic and political planes of human existence. But no real peace and harmony and equality and unity can ever be brought about by class-hatred and class-war, by State control and the so-called proletariat dictatorship, by emphasis upon the baser aspects of human nature and external pressure for their subjugation. The spiritual nature of man alone can be the basis of unity, and this must be awakened in all men. Social, political and economic revolutions based on moral and spiritual idealism appears to be what the present situation demands for emancipating human society from the whirlpool of mutual hostilities and continual mental and physical wars which characterize the present order of civilization.



Painting by Frank Dvorak



**IN THE EYES OF HIS  
WESTERN ADMIRERS**

O Master, long have we waited in this far-off land  
On the western rim of the Western World  
By the shores of the Western Sea.  
Yea, long have we waited, dear Master.

Waiting, waiting, waiting—hungering and thirsting for  
Thee, though in this present life we knew not of  
Thee as Thou didst come again to the children of  
men.

But, at last, by devious ways and over weary paths,  
our wandering feet brought us to one of Thy  
devoted children who have come in Thy name to  
bring to the Western World Thy message of Love  
and Liberation, of Soul-Freedom and God-Con-  
sciousness....

And so, O Ramakrishna, Master,

We, thine other children, thy children of the West,  
beside thy children of the East, salute Thee!

On this, Thy natal day, with thankful and reverent  
hearts we come to lay at Thy dear feet the offering  
of our love.

—Nina MacDonald

## RAMAKRISHNA'S LIFE— THE STORY OF A PHENOMENON

Christopher Isherwood

This is the story of a phenomenon.

I will begin by calling him simply that, rather than 'holy man', 'mystic', 'saint', or 'avatar'; all emotive words with mixed associations which may attract some readers, repel others.

A phenomenon is often something extraordinary and mysterious. Ramakrishna was extraordinary and mysterious; most of all to those who were best fitted to understand him. A phenomenon is always a fact, an object of experience. That is how I shall try to approach Ramakrishna.

Modern advertising has inflated our value-judgements until they are nearly worthless. Every product and person is said by its publicist to be the best. I want to avoid the competitive note here so I will say only this: Ramakrishna's life, being comparatively recent history, is well documented. In this respect, it has the advantage over the lives of other, earlier phenomena of a like nature. We do not have to rely, here, on fragmentary or glossed manuscripts, dubious witnesses, pious legends. What Ramakrishna was or was not the reader must decide for himself; but at least his decision can be based on words and deeds Ramakrishna indubitably spoke and did.

You will find a full bibliography at the end of the book. But I must also mention here the two great works which provide almost all of my source material. This book is really no more than an introduction to them, and I shall quote from them and paraphrase them throughout it. One is *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by M.; the other is *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* by Swami Saradananda. M. is the pseudonym of Mahendra Nath Gupta, the headmaster of a Calcutta high school, who first met Ramakrishna in 1882 and thereafter visited him regularly during the remaining

four years of Ramakrishna's life. After each visit, M. noted down everything which had been said and done in his presence by Ramakrishna and those who were with him. The result is a very big book, which is probably close to totally accurate reporting. Saradananda was still in his teens when he met Ramakrishna and became his disciple. It was not until many years later that he began to write the articles which accumulated to form *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, a biography which covers all of Ramakrishna's life except its last few months. Although Saradananda did not begin his work until more than twenty years after Ramakrishna's death, there is no doubt of its authenticity. Many of those who had known Ramakrishna were then still alive, and Saradananda carefully compared his memories with theirs. *The Great Master* has also the value of having been written by a monastic disciple, who has actually shared the extraordinary experiences he describes. 'Nothing beyond my spiritual experience has been recorded in the book,' Saradananda once told a questioner. This seemingly cautious answer is in fact a claim so tremendous that it silences all suspicion of boastfulness; a man like Saradananda could not have made it unless it was literally true.

As for myself, it would be dishonest to pretend I am addressing you as an impartial biographer. I myself am a devotee of Ramakrishna; I believe, or am at least strongly inclined to believe, that he was what his disciples declared that he was: an incarnation of God upon earth. Nevertheless, I am not writing this book primarily for confirmed believers or unbelievers. The sort of reader I *am* writing for is the one who is not afraid to recognize the marvellous, no matter where he finds it; the sort of reader who is always on the lookout for a phenomenon.

I only ask you approach Ramakrishna with the same open-minded curiosity you might feel about any highly unusual human being: a Julius Caesar, a Catherine of Siena, a Leonardo da Vinci, an Arthur Rimbaud. Dismiss from your mind, as far as you are able, such categories as

holy-unholy, sane-insane, wise-foolish, pure-impure, positive-negative, useful-useless. Just say to yourself as you read: this, too, is humanly possible. Then later, if you like, consider the implications of that possibility for the rest of the human species.

## RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS SAYINGS

Professor Max Muller

Many times the question has been asked of late, what is a *mahātman*, and what is a *sannyāsin*? Mahatman is a very common Sanskrit word, and means literally great-souled, high-minded, noble. It is used as a complimentary term, much as we use noble or reverend; but it has been accepted also as a technical term, applied to what are called sannyasins in the ancient language of India. Sannyasin means one who has surrendered and laid down everything—that is, who has abandoned all worldly affections. 'He is to be known as a sannyasin,' we read in the Bhagavad-Gita, 5.3, 'who does not hate and does not desire.' As the life of a brahmin was, according to the laws of Manu, divided into four periods, or asramas—that of a pupil, of a householder, of a hermit, and of an independent sage—those who had reached the fourth stage were called sannyasins, a word difficult to render in English, but perfectly familiar to everybody in India.... It has sometimes been denied that there are any sannyasins left in India, and in one sense this is true. If the scheme of life traced out by Manu was ever a reality, it has long since ceased to be so....[But] we meet at all times, both before and after the Buddhist reform, with men who had shaken off all social fetters; who had retired from their families and from society at large, lived by themselves in forests or in caves, abstained from all enjoyments, restricted their food and drink to the very utmost, and often underwent tortures which makes us creep when we read of them or see them represented in pictures and photographs. Such men were naturally surrounded by a halo of holiness, and they received the little they wanted from those who visited them or who profited by their teachings. Some of these saints—but not many—were scholars, and became teachers of their ancient lore. Some of course, were impostors and hypocrites, and have brought

disgrace on the whole profession. But that there were sannyasins, and that there are even now, who have really shaken off the fetters of passion, who have disciplined their body and subdued their mind to a perfectly marvellous extent, cannot be doubted.... It is generally supposed that these same persons, these so-called sannyasins, are also very learned and wise persons....[But] in the case of sannyasins of the present generation we look in vain either for great learning, even learning by heart, or for original thought and profound wisdom.... There was, for instance, Dayananda Sarasvati, who tried to introduce some reforms among the Brahmans. He was a scholar in a certain sense. He actually published a commentary in Sanskrit on the Rig Veda, and was able to speak Sanskrit with great fluency. It is supposed that he was poisoned because his reforms threatened to become dangerous to the Brahmans. But in all his writings there is nothing that could be quoted as original beyond his somewhat strange interpretations of words and whole passages of the Veda.

The late Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a far more interesting specimen of a sannyasin. He seems to have been, not only a high-souled man, a real *mahātman* but a man of original thought. Indian literature is full of wise saws and sayings, and by merely quoting them a man may easily gain a reputation for profound wisdom. But it was not so with Ramakrishna. He seems to have deeply meditated on the world from his solitary retreat. Whether he was a man of extensive reading is difficult to say, but he was certainly thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Vedanta philosophy. His utterances which have been published breathe the spirit of that philosophy; in fact are only intelligible as products of a Vedantic soil. And yet it is very curious to see how European thought, nay a certain European style, quite different from that of native thinkers, has found an entrance into the oracular sayings of this Indian saint....

In the extracts from Ramakrishna's teachings, some of which have been published by his pupils in their journal,

the *Brahmavadin*, these ancient metaphors have for the first time been blended with European thought; and from all that we learn of his personal influence, this blending had a most powerful effect on the large audiences that came to listen to him. He has left a number of pupils behind who after his recent death are carrying on the work which he began, and who are trying to secure, not only in India, but in Europe also, a sympathetic interest in the ancient philosophy of India, which it deserves as fully as the philosophy of Plato or Kant....

It was not easy to obtain any trustworthy information about the circumstances of the Mahātman's life, a life singularly uneventful in his relations with the outer world, though full of stirring events in the inner world of his mind....

Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, the leader of the Brahma Samaj, and well known to many people in England, tells me of the extraordinary influence which the Mahātman exercised on Keshub Chunder Sen, on himself, and on a large number of highly educated men in Calcutta. A score of young men who were more closely attached to him have become ascetics after his death. They follow his teaching by giving up the enjoyment of wealth and carnal pleasure, living together in a neighbouring Matha (College), and retiring at times to holy and solitary places all over India even-as far as the Himalayan mountains. Besides these holy men, we are told that a great number of men with their families are ardently devoted to his cause. But what is most interesting is the fact that it was the Mahātman who exercised the greatest influence on Keshub Chunder Sen during the last phase of his career. It was a surprise to many of Keshub Chunder's friends and admirers to observe sudden change of the sober reformer into the mystic and ecstatic saint, that took place towards the end of his life. But although this later development of the New Dispensation, and more particularly the doctrine of the motherhood of God, may have alienated many of Keshub Chunder Sen's

European friends, it seems to have considerably increased his popularity with Hindu Society. At all events we are now enabled to understand the hidden influences which caused so sudden a change, and produced so marked a deviation in the career of the famous founder of the Brahma Samaj, which has sometimes been ascribed to the breakdown of an over-excited brain.

It is different with a man like Ramakrishna. He never moved in the world, or was a man of the world, even in the sense in which Keshub Chunder Sen was. He seems from the very first to have practised that very severe kind of asceticism (yoga) which is intended to produce trances (*samādhi*) and ecstatic utterances. We cannot quite understand them, but in the case of our Mahātman we cannot doubt their reality, and can only stand by and wonder, particularly when so much that seems to us the outcome of a broken frame of body and overwrought state of mind, contains nevertheless so much that is true and wise and beautiful...

The state of [his] religious exaltation...has been witnessed again and again by serious observers of exceptional psychic states. It is in its essence something like our talking in sleep, only that with a mind saturated with religious thoughts and with the sublimest ideas of goodness and purity the result is what we find in the case of Ramakrishna, no mere senseless hypnotic jabbering, but a spontaneous outburst of profound wisdom clothed in beautiful poetical language. His mind seems like a kaleidoscope of pearls, diamonds, and sapphires shaken together at random but always producing precious thoughts in regular, beautiful outlines. To our ears, no doubt, much of his teaching and preaching sounds strange, but not to Oriental ears, or to ears accustomed to the perfervid poetry of the East. Everything seems to become purified in his mind. Nothing, I believe, is so hideous as the popular worship of Kālī in India. To Ramakrishna all that is repulsive in her character is, as it were, non-existent, and there

remains but the motherhood of the goddess. Her adoration with him is a childlike, whole-souled, rapturous self-consecration to the motherhood of God, as represented by the power and influence of woman. Woman in her natural material character had long been renounced by the saint. He had a wife, but never associated with her. 'Woman', he said, 'fascinates and keeps the world from the love of God.' For long years he made the utmost efforts to be delivered from the influence of woman. His heartrending supplications and prayers for such deliverance, sometimes uttered aloud in his retreat on the riverside, brought crowds of people, who bitterly cried when he cried, and could not help blessing him and wishing him success with their whole hearts. And he succeeded, so that his mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kāli, made him recognize every woman as her incarnation, and honour each member of the other sex, whether young or old, as his mother. In one of his prayers he exclaims: 'O Mother Divine, I want no honour from man, I want no pleasure of the flesh; only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna. Mother, I am without bhakti (devotion), without yoga (concentration); I am poor and friendless. I want no one's praise, only let my mind always dwell in the lotus of Thy feet.' But what is the most extraordinary of all, his religion was not confined to the worship of Hindu deities and the purification of Hindu customs. For long days he subjected himself to various kinds of discipline to realize—the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the *Koran*. For Christ his reverence was deep and genuine. He bowed his head at the name of Jesus, honoured the doctrine of his sonship, and once or twice attended Christian places of worship. He declared that each form of worship was to him a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion; he showed, in fact, how it was possible to unify all the religions of the world by seeing only what is good in every one of them,

and showing sincere reverence to every one who has suffered for the truth, for their faith in God, and for their love of men. He seems to have left nothing in writing, but his sayings live in the memory of his friends. He would not be a master or the founder of a new sect. 'I float a frail half-sunk log of wood through the stream of the troublous world. If men come to hold by me to save their lives, the result will be that they will drown me without being able to save themselves. Beware of Gurus!'<sup>1</sup>

I am quite aware that some of his sayings may sound strange to our ears, nay even offensive. Thus the conception of the Deity as the Divine Mother is apt to startle us, but we can understand what Ramakrishna really meant by it, when we read his saying:

'Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than any one else.'

How deep Ramakrishna has seen into the mysteries of knowledge and love of God, we see from the next saying:

'Knowledge and love of God are ultimately one and the same. There is no difference between pure knowledge and pure love.'

The following utterances also show the exalted nature of his faith:

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, that he who yearns for God, finds Him.'

'He who has faith has all, and he who wants faith wants all.'

'So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get Divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that thou hast acquired and become as ignorant about it as a child, and then thou wilt get the knowledge of the True.'

---

<sup>1</sup>'A Real Mahatman', *The Nineteenth Century*, August 1896.

‘Where does the strength of an aspirant lie ? It is in his tears. As a mother gives her consent to fulfil the desire of her importunately weeping child, God vouchsafes to His weeping son whatever he is crying for.’

‘As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God.’

‘God is in all men, but all men are not in God: that is the reason why they suffer.’

From such sayings we learn that though the real presence of the Divine in nature and in the human soul was nowhere felt so strongly and so universally as in India, and though the fervent love of God, nay the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Ramakrishna, yet he perfectly knew the barriers that separate divine and human nature.

If we remember that these utterances of Ramakrishna reveal to us not only his own thoughts, but the faith and hope of millions of human beings, we may indeed feel hopeful about the future of that country. The consciousness of the Divine in man is there, and is shared by all, even by those who seem to worship idols. This constant sense of the presence of God is indeed the common ground on which we may hope that in time not too distant the great temple of the future will be erected, in which Hindus and non-Hindus may join hands and hearts in worshipping the same Supreme Spirit—who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>*Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1951), Preface, vii-ix.

## JIVA IS SIVA

Romain Rolland

It is related that when Sri Ramakrishna, in the first days following his great ecstasy in the bosom of identity—and this was after Totapuri's departure—allowed his consciousness to return to earth, he saw two boatmen quarrelling in hatred. And because of this hatred, as from a wound, his heart was bleeding; and he screamed; the sufferings of the universe were torturing him. For all the pains of the world were imprinting themselves into the tender flesh of his reawakening consciousness.

What would he have felt, what would he have suffered, in these days of the present world, when the whole humanity seems given up to hatred, when war rages or smoulders everywhere under the ashes, between nations, between races, between classes!

But the mighty Swan (Paramahansa) had wings that enabled him to hover above life. If he did not try to detach himself from life, as so many mystics do, to avoid its sufferings, it is because universal love, which was to him a second sight, revealed to him, in a flash, in the presence of human misery, that '*Jīva is Śiva*'—that the living being is God—that whoever loves God must unite himself with Him in sufferings, in misery, even in errors and excesses, in the terrible aspect of human nature.

We all know that he took away his great disciple Vivekananda from the fascination of the fathomless God in order to force him into the service of men. And that is what you, following his example, have been able to accomplish, you whose monastic Ramakrishna Mission, like your emblem, the swan, covers the unhappy with its wings and helps them as brothers. You have carried out the pregnant saying of your Master: '*If you want peace of mind, serve others!...If you wish to find God, serve man!...*'

The enfeeblement and the ruin of so many religions lies in the fact that they have forgotten this saying. They have forgotten man. And man, in his turn, forgets them. He has learned to help himself without God—(as one of our European artists, and one of the most religious too, Beethoven, proclaimed when he said to those who called upon god for help: 'O man, help thyself!...'). He has even learnt to help himself against God—whom he identifies with those Churches, which, too often, stand against the oppressed masses as the courtesans or the handmaids of power. Has not the Catholic Church, the most powerful of these Churches in Europe, laid down the cynical rule of ranging itself on the side of any power that has victory, provided only that it respects the Church privileges? Thus they associate themselves with the injustice set up by force. The Churches should not then wonder that oppressed peoples, in their revolt against unjust force, associate the former with the force from which they want to liberate themselves. Although not conscious of it, those seething peoples, even when they believe themselves to be without God or against God, are nevertheless, to be regarded as the living God, while in their fight for justice, in their ascent towards light, '*Jīva* is *Śiva*'....And we ought to recognize this truth.

We live in a world turned upside down. And, indeed, the masses have always been downtrodden. But they had not, up to this day, the knowledge and the consciousness of that universal oppression, which has been revealed to them by the increased means of communications and the progress of international solidarity. We may no longer remain indifferent to those peoples who are today making a desperate effort to break their chains and set up a more equitable and more human order. And this is no longer permissible especially to us, your friends in the Occident, who do not happen to possess like you the faith in survivals (lives after death). Time is pressing us. The wave of men's sufferings is drawing us like a tide. We must fly to their help. Even if we had before us the eternity of 'lives after

death', each one of these lives is a 'living thing' which has its own duties and its laws corresponding to the particular time of its birth and the human surroundings in which it has its course. Each single life is neither permitted to leave undone all the present good it is capable of doing, nor to decline to fight, with its total might of today, all the iniquities of the time being. The Ramakrishnite of the West that I am does not admit that for one's own salvation, one should withdraw from action, when it is urgent to act in order to help the oppressed. I remember the holy anger of the great disciple when he exclaimed to one of his brethren who was endeavouring to avoid the tragedy of the present world in order to betake himself to the sweetness of divine contemplation. *'Put off to the next life the reading of the Vedānta, the practice of meditation! Let this body of today be consecrated to the service of others!'*

And this immortal prayer:

*—'Would that I could be born and reborn again and suffer a thousand miseries, provided I might adore and serve the only God that exists, the sum total of all souls, and, above all, my God the evil-doers, my God the unfortunates, my God the poor of all races!'*

Oh, what an error, too common among religious God-lovers, to think that their love diminishes and that their soul is lowered in value on account of intercourse with men. On the contrary, it expands and is revived because of embracing the whole and entire Being, the innumerable Being; with its million forms ever in motion, ever advancing as they are, like a Ganges.

Doing thus, you will serve, by being wedded to it, each one of the forms of the living God;—but without ever losing the feeling and the very presence of the all-powerful Unity, wherein these conflicting million forms find harmony. It is not doing a wrong to the unchanging Divine Peace that hovers over the storms of Existence, if one holds out a hand to those who struggle in those storms. Vivekananda did not cease repeating to his sannyāsis that they had taken two

vows, and that, if the first was *'to realize the truth'*, the second was *'to help the world' ... 'To help men to stand erect, by themselves...'*—Let us help them, then, those people who, *'by themselves and alone,'* heroically try *'to stand erect!'* Let us co-operate in their efforts! Even in this manner it will be possible for us afterwards to co-operate in the harmony of warring forces.

You are the bearers, in this storm-tossed world, of the Supreme Harmony wherein must blend and melt away all combats and opposite efforts. It is your proper role, your privilege, and your sacred duty: to radiate peace, order, and unity in the chaos in which peoples are blindly at odds with one another. Be, like Sri Ramakrishna, the wide-spreading banyan tree in whose shade thousands of souls, weary and wounded in the fight, come for shelter and peace. Pour on them the balm of reconciliation, which is the fruit of reason, no less than of love! We know well that the most wicked are but misguided. They know not what they do. The greatest leader of the liberated peoples, Lenin of the U.S.S.R., victim of the dastardly outrage, calmed the vengeance of his friends by telling them with his intelligent smile: *'What's to be done! Everyone acts according to his knowledge.'*

The misfortune of the world comes from its want of knowledge. Let us then teach it to know. Let us enlighten it, by preventing it from doing harm—from harming itself! For he who harms his neighbour, does not know that it is himself whom he is harming. Another of our great men of Europe, the inspired poet Victor Hugo, speaking of those who wanted to harm him, uttered these beautiful words, so allied to the wisdom of India:

—'Oh! fool, who thinkest that thou art not I!...'

It is the Supreme miracle of Ramakrishna that in him 'thou' is 'I', that the whole world is not only reflected, but incarnate in a man's heart—that God is realized on earth, in his universality and his multiplicity... *'Jīva is Śīva.'*...

And Ramakrishna works in him—in us—this divine Identity.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
AND THE INDIAN CONTRIBUTION  
TO WORLD HARMONY

Arnold Toynbee

I have been asked to speak, as well as to take the chair. I am much touched and honoured. It is, I think, characteristic of the Indian spirit that an Indian religious order should have invited an Englishman to speak at this anniversary meeting that is a memorial to Sri Ramakrishna.

I speak with difference, because I am an outsider. In a few minutes you will be hearing Swami Ghanananda, who will be—speak from inside. An outsider cannot say anything of much value. Still, I have several things in my mind which I should like to put before you: firstly, whether one is an insider or an outsider, one is deeply concerned, because religion is the most important concern of every human being who passes through this world. Secondly, religion knows no barriers of nationality. It may speak through a Hindu mouth or through a Christian one or through a Muslim one; but, if the message does truly come from the source of truth, it speaks to each one of us direct. Thirdly, this [latter point] is the special insight of Hinduism, and the special gift that Indian religion has to give to the world.

Some of the religions that have arisen to the west of India are inclined to say, 'We have the truth.' Hinduism would not dispute this, but it would go on to say: 'Yes, you have the truth; we have it too, but neither of us has the *whole* truth or the same piece of it. No human being ever can have the *whole* truth, because truth has an infinite number of sides to it. One human being will get one glimpse of the truth, another will get a different glimpse. The two glimpses are different, but both are illuminating. Also, two glimpses are *more* than twice as illuminating as one glimpse. Truth is one, but there are many approaches

to it. These different views do not conflict; they supplement each other.'

This recognition of the many-sidedness of religious insight and experience was part of Sri Ramakrishna's message. It was also part of his life, because—if I am right—his life and his message cannot be distinguished from each other. He gave his message by living as he did.

The goal of Sri Ramakrishna's life was union with God. Having been born in India as a Hindu, he approached this goal first along the Hindu road. Later, he approached it along the Muslim road and then also the Christian road as well. But all the time he was also a Hindu.

A Muslim or a Christian might say: 'You can't do that. You can't take our road unless you give up all others, because ours is the *only* right one.' A Hindu will say: 'I *can* take all these roads and many more, because they are not mutually exclusive.'

On this point, I myself believe that Hinduism has seen further into the truth than the Western religions have. I also believe that this Indian understanding of the truth is of supreme significance and value for the human race today.

Of course, it always has been, and always will be right and good that we should appreciate and value other people's glimpses of truth as well as our own; but this is particularly important today, when the peoples of the world are facing each other at close quarters, armed with fearful weapons. In this situation, the exclusive-minded, intolerant temper is not *more wrong* than it has been in the past; it has always been as wrong as it could be, but today it is more *dangerous* than it has ever been. The Hindu attitude is the opposite of exclusive-mindedness; and this is India's contribution to world harmony.

Sri Ramakrishna was in the world for half a century: 1836–1886. Look up one of the conventional histories of India dealing with those years. You may not find the name Sri Ramakrishna in the index. You will find a lot about war and politics; the establishment of British rule over India; the Indian

Mutiny. You will find something about economics; the digging of irrigation canals; the building of roads and railways.

Now open a life of Sri Ramakrishna. Fortunately he had a disciple who did for him what Boswell did for Dr. Johnson. This book is a very full record of his conversations, with a great deal too about his religious experiences, recorded at first-hand by an eye-witness. You will find that this book—called *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—mentions none of the things that fill the conventional history books about India in those same fifty years.

Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up in a village in Bengal. He spent most of his life in a temple on the bank of the Ganges, only a few miles away from Calcutta. Outwardly, his life might seem uneventful. Yet in its own field—the field of religion—his life was more active, and more effective, than the lives of his contemporaries—Indian and English—who were building the framework of modern India in Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime. Perhaps Sri Ramakrishna's life was even more *modern* than theirs, in the sense that his work may have a still greater future than their work may be going to have.

Sri Ramakrishna's action was communion with God. It drew to him people of all ages, and a group of his younger disciples, headed by Swami Vivekananda, became the first members of the religious Order that is holding this meeting here tonight. If I am right, Sri Ramakrishna himself did not found his Order in any formal way. You might say that it founded itself after his death through the continuing effect of his life and disciples who had lived with him during his later years.

There can be few people alive today who are old enough to have known Sri Ramakrishna personally. Most of us today can know him only at second hand, in the way we know, say, Socrates or the Buddha or Christ or Mohammed. But we can measure his spiritual power, like theirs, indirectly by seeing the force and impetus of the religious movement which he set in motion.

In history books written fifty years or a hundred years from now, I do not think Sri Ramakrishna's name will be missing (not that it very much matters what does and what does not get a mention). Future histories of India and of the world will, I am sure, have much to say about the practical achievements of modern India. I am thinking particularly of the community development work. This is helping the peasants, in the hundreds of thousands of Indian villages, to realize that they can do something, by their own efforts, to make their lives better. Making them better means making them better materially as a means to making them better spiritually—and this brings us back to religion and to Sri Ramakrishna.

One last word: Indian ideals and Western ideals are not mutually exclusive. There is room for them both, and need for them both. Put them together, and they will be able, between them, to do great things for humanity.

## RAMAKRISHNA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ABSOLUTE AND THE FINITE GOD

Professor James B. Pratt

When I was a graduate student of philosophy in Harvard, some thirty-five years ago, my two great teachers, William James and Josiah Royce, were constantly at odds over the question of Pluralism and Monism. The divergence between them had its influence on their views concerning nearly everything in heaven and on earth, but it came to a climax over the problem of the nature of the Divine. Royce, as all the world knows, or used to know, was the prophet of the idealistic Absolute, while James was the champion of the finite God. In their views upon this question my two philosophers were, of course, only representative of an age-long controversy in which all the great philosophies and religions have been interested, and upon which no definitive conclusion has ever been reached. Both sides have found advocates among Christian thinkers, and even among Jews and Moslems. Mahāyāna Buddhism is divided between the Amadists, to whom Amida Buddha, a great but essentially finite conception, stands as God, and the thinkers who derive their teachings from the Tendai and related monistic philosophies. In no religion is the division of thought more fundamental or more to the front than in Hinduism. I need only mention the names Shankara and Rāmānuja, advaitism and bhakti, to bring home to the reader the contrast intended.

The two views of the divine are so opposed that it is plain in their extreme forms they cannot both be true. And much can be said in criticism of each. The Absolute of western Roycean idealism is regarded as the All-Knower, who, just in virtue of being an All-Knower must be conceived as experiencing identically all that each finite mind experiences, and thus including within one grasp and one eternal time-space the totality of Being. Such a conception

has obvious difficulties. How an omniscient Being can share the experience of ignorance it is hard to see. Shankara's advaitism and its attempted solution of the same problem by means of the conception of a *jñāni* is not more satisfactory. For those, moreover, who insist that the Divine shall be worthy of worship, the facts of evil make the conception of such an all-inclusive Absolute very unsatisfactory. And for many, the heart demands a more personal Divinity than either Shankara or Royce can provide.

The finite God of James and of the bhakti sects satisfies the longing for a personal relation between divine and human; and also is able, from the very fact of His being finite, to avoid many of the difficulties arising from the problem of evil which the concept of the inclusive Absolute has to face. There is no logical difficulty, moreover, in thinking of His relations to personal and finite minds. Yet the advance of science, and the increasing repugnance to the conception of interruptions and interference in natural laws is, for many, making the conception of the finite God less easy to maintain; and for another group of minds the conception, whether defensible or not, seems too little and too limited. To those who have heard the call of the Infinite Divine, the admirable moral God, struggling with us and for us and ever doing His best, makes no appeal.

Yet, just because neither of these conceptions is fully satisfactory, each of them is to some extent needed by the religious consciousness. The religious soul longs for an all-inclusive Divine, yet longs no less for a divine personification of Goodness which it cannot merely bow before but worship and love. The English philosopher Bradley, in one of his later essays, declared as his mature conclusion that these two demands of the religious consciousness were too deep-seated to be eradicated, yet too mutually contradictory to be reconciled. Here then we have the crux of religious philosophy and of the religious nature. What shall, what can, we do about it? What attitude should the religious thinker take toward this difficult problem?

The answer that many give is to surrender all thought of the Absolute and seek to satisfy oneself with the finite God—as James did. Another answer is to accept the Absolute and give up all hope of retaining the moralistic and personal aspects of the Divine. It is not surprising to find that so deeply religious a soul as Ramakrishna was not willing to take either of these courses, but insisted upon retaining religion in its wholeness, and seeking to satisfy both the demands of the religious nature.

In his attempt to do this, he sometimes used a purely practical method, sometimes he appealed to theory. 'One day in winter,' we are told, 'a certain householder disciple, who was a college professor, came to see the Bhagavān. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the southern veranda of His room, and He was smiling. After a short conversation He asked:

'Do you prefer to meditate on God with form or without form?' The disciple hesitated and answered: 'I prefer to meditate upon God as the formless Being rather than as a Being with form.' The Bhagavān replied: 'That is good. There is no harm in looking at Him from this or the other point of view. Yes, to think of Him as the formless Being is quite right. But do not go away with the idea that that alone is true and that all else is false. Meditating upon Him as a Being with form is equally right. You, however, must hold on to your particular conception of God until you have realized and seen God.'<sup>1</sup>

The advice thus given was psychologically wise. The religious man sooner or later is pretty sure to find in his heart both the demands we have considered. It is well, therefore, to satisfy both; and since they may well interfere,

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 80.

it is well (unless one has an intellectual interest in the matter) to let the two demands alternate with each other. But not everyone can be thus satisfied; and for these more intellectual natures Ramakrishna had a more intellectual answer. It consisted in the hypothesis that the Ultimate Reality, which is God, must necessarily appear differently to different finite minds, and will, in fact, have an infinite number of differing aspects. Some of these will be in sharp contrast to others, some may even seem to us mutually contradictory; yet all will be real, all will be, in their way, aspects and revelations of the One Divine. 'God is one, but many are His aspects. As one master of the house appears in various aspects: being father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to the particular worshipper.'<sup>2</sup> 'There is no distinction between Impersonal God (Brahman) on the one hand and Personal God (*shakti*) on the other. When the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive, He is styled God the Absolute (*shuddha Brahman*); and when He is thought of as active—creating, sustaining, and destroying—He is styled *shakti* or Personal God. God is absolute, eternal Brahman as well as the Father to the universe. The indivisible Brahman, pure Existence, Intelligence, and Bliss, is like a vast, shoreless ocean without bounds and limits in which I only struggle and sink; but when I approach the ever sportive personal Deity, Hari, I get peace like the sinking man who finds the shore.'<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>*Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA

(from *Diary Leaves*)

Professor Nicholas Roerich

We are in the deserts of Mongolia. It was hot and dusty yesterday. From far away thunder was approaching. Some of our friends become tired from climbing up the stony holy hills of Shiret Obo. While returning to the camp, we noticed in the distance a huge elm tree—'karagatch', lonely, towering, amidst the surrounding endless desert. The size of the tree, its somewhat familiar outlines, attracted us into its shadow. Botanical considerations led us to believe that in the wide shade of the giant there might be some interesting herbs for us. Soon all co-workers gathered around the two mighty stems of the *karagatch*. The deep, deep shadow of the tree covered over fifty feet across. The powerful tree-stems were covered with fantastic burr growths. In the rich foliage birds were singing and the beautiful branches were stretched out in all directions, as if wishing to give shelter to all pilgrims.

On the sands around the roots, innumerable trails made by animals were visible. Next to the broad imprints of a wolf were small hooves of the *dzeren*, the local antelope. A horse had also passed here and next to it was the heavy footstep of a bull. All sorts of birds had been here. Apparently the entire local population visited the welcoming shelter of the giant. The elm-*karagatch* especially reminded us of the huge banyan trees of India. Such trees were the meeting place of blessed gatherings. Many travellers found there both bodily and spiritual rest. Sacred narratives were chanted under the inviting branches of the banyan tree. And thus the lonely giant *karagatch* in the Mongolian desert vividly turned our memory to the shadow of the banyan. The mighty branches of the *karagatch* reminded us also of other great achievements of India. What a joy to think of India!

Thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India—Sri Ramakrishna. Around this glorious name there are so many respectful definitions. Sri, Bhagavan, Paramahansa—all the best offerings through which people wish to express their esteem and reverence. The consciousness of a nation knows how to bestow names of honour. And, after all, above all most venerable titles, there remains over the whole world the one great name—Ramakrishna. The personal name has already changed into a great universal concept. Who has not heard the Blessed Name! The conception of goodness and benevolence truly befits him. Except for petrified hearts, who would oppose the Good!

We recollect how in various countries has grown the understanding of the radiant Teaching of Ramakrishna, Beyond shameful words of hatred, beyond evil mutual destruction—the word of Bliss, which is close to every human heart, spreads widely like the mighty branches of the sacred banyan tree. On the paths of human searching, these calls of goodwill were shining like beacons. We ourselves witnessed and have often heard how books of Ramakrishna's Teaching were as if unexpectedly found by sincere seekers. We ourselves came across the book in a most unusual way.

Hundreds of thousands, even an entire million of pilgrims gather on the memorable day in the name of the Blessed Bhagavān. They gather, being called by an inner impulse of the heart, in goodwill and they become rejuvenated by blissful remembrances and strivings. Is this not a most remarkable expression of the voice of the people! This is the nation's judgement, the reverence of the people, which cannot be compelled nor forcefully commanded. As wonderful lights they spread from one to another forming an inexhaustible flame, hence such national reverence is not dimmed, but radiates throughout the times of contemporary world commotions.

Too many crises grip the people at present. It could happen that the spirit of the people could become confused

and distracted from spiritual fundamentals. The wail about the shattering of the foundations is so often heard nowadays. But are not these million of pilgrims, who assembled by their own free will, the best living proof that above the confusions of today, there lives in the hearts an inexhaustible spirituality and striving towards the Good? We are optimists and conquer all obstacles through goodwill.

Behold, on an unbearably hot day, not being frightened of distances, pilgrims are hastening, in order to venerate the memory of Ramakrishna. Is this not a remarkable event? For it is not an official duty which brings together all the multifarious travellers. A pure heart and a sincere striving imperatively leads them to the places consecrated by the name of Ramakrishna. Such a spiritual gathering is the most precious evidence in our days. It is wonderful that amidst the heavy labour, amidst doubts, amidst depression, people can yet be lit by the flame of gratitude and veneration. Their hearts call them together. They are gathering not for destruction, nor for quarrels, nor for insults, but in order to unite their thoughts upon the Good.

Great power is contained in a united benevolent thought. Humanity should value such sublime manifestations, which are the cause of all these unifying and constructive thoughts. Creative is the thought of the Good! The Good never destroys, it untiringly elevates and builds. By commands of the Good are affirmed those eternal foundations, which have been ordained to humanity on all the best tablets. The call of the Blessed Bhagavān for creative Good will for ever remain the great spiritual heritage of humanity.

Light is especially precious during the hours of darkness. May the Light be eternally preserved! In his parables about the Good, Ramakrishna never belittled anyone. And not only in the Teaching, in parables, but in his own deeds he never tolerated demeaning. Let us remember his reverent attitude towards all religions. Such broad understanding will move even a stony heart. In his broad outlook, the Blessed Bhagavān of course possessed a real straight-

knowledge. His power of healing he in turn gave out freely. He never hid anything useful. He exhausted his strength in innumerable blessed givings. And even his illness of course was due to such constant self-sacrificing, outpouring of his spiritual energy for the healing of others. And in these generous gifts Ramakrishna manifested his greatness.

In all parts of the world the name of Ramakrishna is venerated. Also is revered Swami Vivekananda, who symbolizes true discipleship. The names of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the glorious host of their followers remain on the most remarkable pages of the history of the spiritual culture of India. The astounding depth of thought, which is characteristic of India, the beautiful manifestation of Guru and Chelā—reminds the whole world of basic ideals. Ages pass, whole civilizations change, but the Guru and Chelā remain in the same wise relationship, which was since antiquity established in India. Many millenniums ago the words of Wisdom were already recorded in India. And how many more millenniums were they preserved even before, in verbal transmission. And in this sacred mouth-to-ear transmission they were kept perhaps even safer than on written records. The ability to keep up the correct meaning depends on a developed wise consciousness and in this is contained the applications of precious stones of the past for the radiant future.

Not only the everlasting value of the Teaching of Good affirmed by Ramakrishna, but precisely the necessity of these words especially for our times is unquestionable. When spirituality, as such, is being so often refuted through wrongly interpreted formulae, then the radiant constructive affirmation as a beacon becomes especially precious. One has but to know the colossal number of editions of the Ramakrishna Mission. One has but to remember the large number of cities in which this Mission has its branches. These figures require no exaggeration. There is no unnatural nervousness and no premeditatedness in these quiet thought-creating gatherings. Everything is deeply realized

not in tumult and rush, but grows in highest commensuration.

The thoughts about the Good, which Ramakrishna so generously taught, should awaken the best sides of human hearts. Ramakrishna always preached against denial and destruction. He was in all respects a builder for the Good, and his admirers should unfold on the examples of his Teaching the best hidden treasures of their hearts. Such beneficial creativeness is very active. And it naturally is transmuted also into best achievements on all paths of life. Gathering on the memorable day of Ramakrishna's anniversary, the pilgrims do not fear the dust of the road, they are not frightened by the fatiguing heat, but they are filled with a striving towards the Good, towards the great service to humanity. Service to Humanity—great is this ordainment of Ramakrishna!

Reverence to the Teacher!

I recall a small Hindu who found his Teacher. We asked him: 'Is it possible that the sun would glow to you, if you would see it without the Teacher?'

The boy smiled. 'The sun would remain as the sun, but in the presence of the Teacher twelve suns would shine to me!'

The sun of wisdom of India shall shine because upon the shores of a river there sits a boy who knows the Teacher.'

*Timur Khada (Mongolia).*

*Aug. 7th 1935.*

## RAMAKRISHNA AND WHAT HE STANDS FOR

Count Hermann Keyserling

A long time has elapsed since Hindu saintliness was a main object of my interest and studies. In the years of full maturity each and all who feel responsible for spiritual progress of mankind have to limit themselves exclusively to the creative task cut out for them by their inborn and acquired abilities. But when I think back now to the years 1911-14, when Indian wisdom was my daily food, I cannot help being overcome by a feeling of particular *warmth*, when concentrating on the saint of Dakshineswar. He does indeed stand for something eternal. For bhakti in its aspect of gentleness, of unworldly goodwill, for a kind of 'charity' which is probably the most truly Christian of all but which has almost disappeared in the West, owing to the ever increasing aggressiveness which is a specially Western variety of Truth-seeking. The age we are living in since the War is probably the least propitious to the culture of bhakti that the world has known for a thousand years. There will be ever more wars, ever more bloodshed, ever more violence. India itself will no doubt be carried away, sooner or later, by that same spirit of aggressiveness. All the more necessary do I think the permanence and influence of such centres of love as are able to survive in a chaotic world. Theirs will be the *role* of the monasteries in Europe during those invasions of the barbarians which initiated our Middle Ages. All my best thoughts and wishes will always accompany all work carried out, and on, in Ramakrishna's spirit.

## RAMAKRISHNA AND THE HARMONY OF RELIGIONS

Dr. Helmuth Von Glasenapp

From time immemorial, the existence of a large number of religions, which have been striving for recognition by mankind, has occupied the minds of religious thinkers. The deeper a man studies the teachings of a religion, the more will he be perturbed by the fact that the religion, with which he is closely connected and in which he sees the last and the highest truth embodied, unites only a small part of the dwellers of the earth, while the majority of the people of our planet follow other religions. He has, therefore, to seek for an explanation of the fact that all men do not recognize like him the absolute worth of the religion to which he has wedded himself.

The dogmatist solves the problem very simply and conveniently by considering as erroneous everything which differs from his own convictions. This standpoint is clearly seen in the great religions of the West, especially in Judaism and its two daughter religions, Christianity and Mohammedanism. For orthodox theologians the Bible, i.e. the old and the new testament, is the only holy scripture which authentically communicates the transcendental truths of religion, since the Bible alone is considered to be divine revelation. It is therefore the only source from which knowledge about God should be derived and it is the authoritative basis on which every theological system is built. It is immaterial, whether it is (as for the Protestants) the only formal principle of faith, or whether it is (as for the Catholics) the only holy means of instruction for the teachers authorized by God and as such is continuously explained and supplemented by authoritative ecclesiastical tradition and rules of faith in preaching the revelation. All teaching which is not based on the revelation is therefore for the orthodox Christians quite different from that based

on the revelation of the Bible. It is the work of man and therefore completely erroneous. What is correct in their eyes is that which arises from the general divine revelation communicated to mankind after the creation of the world. It was gradually lost to mankind weakened by the original sin, so that it gave rise to unbelief and idolatry. Since it is absolutely essential to follow the true faith as it is taught by the revelation in the Bible to attain salvation, eternal damnation awaits unbelievers, a prospect which, of course, stands in direct contradiction to the theory of justice and mercy of God.

Different non-Christian sects which consider a definite holy text as the basis of all truth assume a similar, sharp dogmatic standpoint in deciding what is true religion and what is man's correct work. Of course, many schools judge more leniently those who do not follow the true religion. According to the view of the followers of the theory of transmigration of souls, for heretics there is at least the possibility to understand the truth and attain salvation in a subsequent life. It is only those who boast of the possession of a divine revelation that criticize the views of the followers of other religions. The same intolerance is shown by those who have derived their 'World-philosophy' through rational considerations or by meditating upon the nature of things or by following masters who follow atheistic or rationalistic philosophy. There also prevails the naive conception, that the proper teaching of 'wisdom' is the highest goal and is the truth which is obligatory for all men and has the sole disposal of the means of grace.

Every dogmatic standpoint undeniably offers to the follower of a religion special advantages. It gives him an unshakable foundation for the consideration of the world and life and builds a solid embankment for him on which the waves of doubt rebound, as the standpoint offers him at once a sure rule of conduct.

The history of the world proves on all hands that all great men who have decidedly influenced human thought

were able to do so only because they were convinced of the general applicability of their own views and felt that the views of others were erroneous, which would therefore have to be corrected. Would Paul have had the power to spread the gospel of Christ in the countries round the Mediterranean Sea, had it not been for his unshakable belief that Christ rose from the dead and by his expiatory death saved all people who believed in him? Even so, the triumphal progress of Islam, which conquered a large part of the world in a very short time, would have been impossible, if its champions had not imagined that they had been commissioned by God to spread the faith. The philosopher also must firmly believe that his system is the best explanation of the world and the most suitable basis of action, if he wants to secure a place for his teachings in the history of human thought in spite of all obstacles.

Now there is the fact that different teachings which are indeed partly or diametrically opposed have been equally successful; on the other hand, none of them embodies the highest and decisive truth. Can anyone earnestly believe that any religious teaching about God would be accepted by the whole world as the only correct one, when one sees how in history certain countries have changed their religion? Although at one time Christianity was the prevailing religion in North Africa and the nearer East (Orient), today Islam dominates there, Southern Spain was for more than 700 years Mohammedan, until it was wrenched away from the clutches of that religion; Buddhism was extinguished in the land of its birth, in Afghanistan and Turkestan, Java and Sumatra.

Every religion has in course of time undergone such vast changes that, although it preserved its external form, it almost completely changed in its internal significance. Every religious teaching has been so differently interpreted that it appears as if a definite religion itself. And although uniformity is preserved, there is never seen a real and complete union amongst all its followers. If all these facts are taken

into consideration, the belief that a particular religion is the only one which has at its disposal the means of grace, and therefore at some future time will encompass the whole world, is completely unfounded. From the multiplicity of religions we may rather conclude that they all incorporate only a part of the eternal truth and that the difference in teaching is due to the nature and suited to the character of the different persons.

The fact that it will never be possible to convert all men to one of the historical religions has not been able to divest the minds of many thinkers of the idea that a universal religion is possible. Since such a universal religion is not one of the historical religions, it must lie after these and in fact beyond all these. It would have to comprise all the eternal truths contained in every one of them, but not what has been introduced by man. Attempts have been made to create such a universal religion in the East and in the West at different periods of time. Let us take for example the agnostic systems of modern times, the attempts of Akbar, Kabir and Nanak to form a higher religion by uniting Islam and Hinduism and the attempts of the Brahmo Samaj and other societies to combine all religions. However praiseworthy all these attempts may be, none of them has met with any permanent success. For every attempt to build a new temple by taking elective keystones from every religion must have a strong subjective stamp, since there is no criterion to decide whether a religion is true. It is only by giving quite new interpretations or weakly formulating their contradictory principles of faith that it is possible to bring about harmony between different manners of viewing, which by nature stand in distinct contrast to one another. The avenging God of the Old Testament can be brought into consonance with difficulty with the idea of the impersonal Brahman, which is by nature 'Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss,' and the teachings of Christianity and Mohammedanism about resurrection were contradictory to the Buddhistic theory of the non-existence of an 'I' and the eternal change

of all created things. All such artificial fusions of religions can count upon the support of only a particular class of people. They are like the artificially created languages, like Esperanto, which were used only by a definite circle, but could never replace the old languages. Religion can never by nature be a lifeless abstraction. It must offer to its followers something concrete, in order to be able to fulfil its functions, viz., rigidly sketched religious teachings which show a way to thinkers to solve the problems of the world and life, and adequate cult which excites religious feeling, and an ethics which can be the guiding principle for the will. The forces inherent in religion come into action when it has certain limitations and conditionalities to dogmatically fix and express infinite possibilities. However comprehensive and universal a religion may be, and although it may unite in itself various forms of belief and worship, it can be effective only when it impresses on every thing an individual stamp, so that all its phenomena are penetrated by a uniform spirit. This is possible only when it carries a personal note, which distinguishes it from all others; for it is only something comprehensible that can excite religious thought, feeling, and will. It is only something which is rigidly sketched and restricted that can form the man. Therefore, religions which wished to clearly unveil the truth in others, by freeing it from all limitations, have assumed other forms in the course of development. They defined their teachings and developed definite rituals (veneration of the founder and his relics) and laid down definite ethical commandments and prohibitions, which were binding on all their followers. They, thereby became separate religions, viz., the Sikh religion, in which *nava vidhāna* and other rituals are observed.

What has been mentioned above clearly shows that harmony cannot be established by a synthesis between religions. All endeavours in this direction have only been of a transitory nature and ceased with the founder and his circle of followers, or they have undergone a change with

time. They thus gradually became dogmatic religions, which differ from other by the specialty of their teachings and rituals, and not by their nature.

Should one therefore believe that there is no truth which underlies all religions and that even if such a truth exists, it cannot be understood? Certainly not! We must only see that we do not seek for the truth in a sphere where it cannot be found. Great credit is due to the Indians, who recognized even in early times that no religious or philosophical system is able to explain 'existence' (as it appears, not the 'existence' of God), or show a satisfactory path to salvation. Every teaching can be no more than a 'manner of view' (*darshana*). It is the attempt of a particular intellect to explain 'Existence', as it appears to it from its own particular point of view. No teaching can claim to be able to give a quite satisfactory explanation of the world or to be a path to salvation, which is within the reach of all. But every teaching is to a certain extent like a torch, which lights the way for an individual through darkness; but it is not a sun, which simultaneously gives light to all human beings. Let us take another example. One can see and describe only a part of a mountain from the point from which one views it. It is only the person who rises and sees it from above the earth that can give a complete description of the same mountain. Truth is not realized by one who combines individual views about the nature of God and the world, but by one who raises consciousness beyond all limitations and attains such a high state that all differences between different views vanish. The top of a mountain cannot be climbed by one who goes to it and tries every possible way of climbing and climbs at one time one part and at another time another part. The goal is reached only by one who has decided upon a definite path and follows it with energy and perseverance until the end. So the different religions give to their followers different advice about the path which they have to follow and fix for them a goal according to their manner of thinking, world of feeling, and the direction of

their will. He who has attained the goal will clearly see whether he has climbed to the highest point or he has to climb still further to reach it. He will then know whether he can himself find out the last part of the way or whether definite instructions have been given to him when starting, whose importance he realizes only when he has traversed a good bit of the way to the top of the mountain.

The holy personage of Sri Ramakrishna, whose centenary we are celebrating this year [1936], has done a great service to humanity by exhibiting in a new light the deep wisdom of the Vedic rishis and the great achāryas in his famous sayings for the benefit of religious men and by realizing them in his own life. Being deeply conscious of the fact that by living in a definite concrete religious world of imagination and following the discipline of rigidly sketched forms of belief it is possible to realize the truth, he succeeded in penetrating into a higher consciousness. By systematically testing the experiences realized by following the different paths of salvation, he realized that the various forms of belief have equal claim for recognition, and he overcame their limitations. He thus obtained a standpoint which lies 'on the other side' of all multiplicity and realized the harmony of religions, which can never be understood with our limited means of thought.

## RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

Professor Giuseppe Tucci

When speaking of time, Ramakrishna is near to us and yet he already belongs to the world of legend. It is thus often difficult to distinguish the historical fact from the imaginary one, the concrete reality of his daily life from the ideal reality which he now represents for his followers. This is the fate of all the founders of new religions. Their personality becomes the personality of thousands of others, prompts new energies, and transfers itself in new spiritual attitudes. He lives and spreads his spiritual superiority among the people who in turn will keep the initial impulse going, will feel his fascination and at the same time will identify with him their own inspirations, ideals, and hopes.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal at the time when the first contacts with the western world brought about a new orientation among the cultured classes and a new basis was laid for those religious and social movements which aimed at reforming the entire life of India. At the same time, traditional prejudices had to be overcome, chiefly because they had limited individual aspirations. It was therefore a social and religious renovation, inasmuch as in India the religious motive has been the lymph which permeates, spreads, and determines all thoughts and actions.

Around him gathered an anonymous and simple crowd, the slave of a thousand social and religious scruples, a political serf, economically disinherited, by nature longing for an ardent spiritual life.

Ramakrishna is, no doubt, one of the greatest religious characters of modern India. He certainly had many forerunners. From the dawn of centuries, from the banks of her rivers or at the feet of her towering mountains which reach the sky, she can count a large number of ascetics and saints who preceded him and followed the same principles.

But there is something new in him. Even after he has given up everything and his life is ebbing away, he still remains among the people who suffer and long for a word of sympathy. There is in him a spontaneous devotion for all divine manifestations, under whatever shape or symbol they may appear; an unlimited respect for every heart that is sincerely praying to God, with whatever name He may have. He distinguishes himself by his great desire to look for what the different religions have in common; he did not insist on the characteristics which distinguish one religion from the other.

He was the descendant of an orthodox brahminic family. He lost his father when still a child, and after joining his brother at Calcutta he followed, unwillingly, the traditional course of his school: grammar, rhetoric, theology.<sup>1</sup>

From the time he was a boy, he rebelled against two things: tradition and science<sup>2</sup>. Unconsciously he followed the way of the *siddha*, i.e. the perfect man, the man who is the supreme ideal of Indian mysticism. The *siddha* is not a saint, nor has he any particular ethical aims, but he is the person who has fully attained his true divine essence. The majority of humanity most certainly does not follow this way, nor does man obey the interior voice of his conscience, or allow the universal soul within him to act instinctively and with nearly unconscious strength: that Soul which brings all things to light and which reabsorbs them in Itself through the great drama of cosmic evolution.

Humanity accepts, elaborates, and transmits to future generations a number of laws, principles, and precepts

<sup>1</sup>As a matter of fact, Sri Ramakrishna flatly refused to follow these courses. —*Publisher*

<sup>2</sup>Sri Ramakrishna was never against scientific knowledge and true scientific spirit. He was only against egoistic scientism which denies God and seeks to explain everything in terms of natural laws. —*Publisher*

which constitute a collective consciousness which alone dominates and inspires events, thus creating history. But the *siddha* is beyond this flux of conventions. All around him, uniformity and mediocrity are in turmoil; he is outside it all and to be outside means to estrange oneself or often to seal with a sacrifice this chosen life. Ramakrishna also feels this irreconcilable dualism. From the time he follows his brother as priest to the temple of Kāli, he does not respect the rules of liturgy. His life is already such that people accustomed to follow the same ancient traditions begin to whisper and criticize. The way is already marked: he will not be one among the others, he will obey no longer the laws of men, but God's voice. People believe he is mad and they act as people generally do when confronted with certain anomalies of the spirit, which they are unable to understand and to explain. Man is afraid of all that is different from himself. He does not like to come face to face with those few who disregard traditional values.

They send for doctors, they tell him to take a rest, they want him to marry. But all is of no avail. Ramakrishna leaves the temple and seeks refuge in a solitary wood, on the banks of the Ganges, and there he invokes the Great Mother so that She may reveal herself to him. He wants that the statue of the Goddess—to whom he addresses his daily prayers—should come to life and appear in all her glory before his worshipping eyes. They heard him calling out the name of the Goddess and weep and cry: 'Mother! Mother!' Many will be surprised to learn that the 'Mother', whom he called with all the bitterness of a forsaken child was that very same Kāli whom tradition represents under terrifying aspects: black as a cloud before a storm, her tongue stained with blood, and a wreath of skulls, marking the time of her terrible dance on the body of Shiva.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Traditionally, Kāli combines both the terrifying and benign aspects of the Godhead. —*Publisher*

But we must not forget that this Kāli is a symbol. A symbol of that divine will and cosmic energy whereby all that was in the supreme mind spreads out in the infinite variety of the world. She is the one who shapes all things and annuls all forms through that perennial rhythm of life and death which, besides making things appear and disappear, flows inexhaustible like the alternate breathing of God.

And at last the vision appeared. It appeared unexpectedly, like a sudden revelation of eternity which consecrated the palingenesis of the saint by a spiritual baptism. He never forgot the sublime and, at the same time, terrible moment of first vision he had. More than once he spoke about it to his followers but, as generally happens for the most intense moments of a mystical life, he was not capable of describing the details. At the contact of the divine, the human spirit is as if wrapped up in a mist and loses itself in a supreme Light which blinds and absorbs it. But let us see how he spoke of his vision:

I was suffering terribly because I had never been granted the privilege of seeking the Great Mother. I felt as if my heart were wrung like a wet cloth. I was restless, doubting that my fate might be never to see Her in this life.

But I could not reconcile myself to the idea of staying away from Her and I thought there was no reason for me to live. Suddenly my eyes caught sight of a sword that was in the temple; I ran like a madman to grasp it and thus end my life, when all at once the Mother appeared and I fell unconscious to the ground.

For a few days I did not know what was going on around me; I only knew that I was happy as I had never been before....Everything around me had disappeared. I was in the midst of a boundless ocean full of light and wherever I turned, my eyes saw only thundering waves advancing towards me with a terrific noise

to engulf me. All at once they were on me and I disappeared with them. I felt I was drowning. I was dragged into the storm and fainted away.

Those who know the life of mystics, whether they be of the West or of the East, know also that these facts, however they may be understood and explained, are such a vivid reality that once they have been experienced, they close one period of life to open another. The division is so complete between the first and the second that religious initiations compare these moments to death, i.e. death of contingent life and rebirth on the eternal plane.

Also Ramakrishna had become another man: the appearance of the Great Mother had given him a new vision of things. Besides the mirage of vain things, he had had glimpses of eternity, following which all human conventions dissolve like morning mists under the first rays of the rising sun. The brāhminic-cord which marked the privilege of caste does not exist any longer; he eats together with a dog and sweeps the house of an untouchable.

Visions repeat themselves with such frequency and violence that the body is exhausted: he can hardly sleep and his whole body burns as if with fever. His only relief is to bathe in cool waters. The ecstasy of mystic contemplation can only be attained through the martyrdom of the flesh, just as if the body could not stand the weight of this unknown strength which spiritual ascension arouses in him or which comes to him through mysterious ways.

Many think that without masters it is impossible to open the doors of Heaven. Without a sacrament or an initiation, man remains only with the weight of his own flesh, the sin of his birth and the darkness of his mistakes. They are wrong. Ramakrishna also had his masters, but merely to learn their particular system of meditation and prayer, and certainly not to enter in touch with God.

He had been initiated by the revelation which had inflamed his spirit. No master had ever taught him how

man can approach God. He had received a great blessing from the Great Mother who had not remained deaf to his invocations. Like Chaitanya, he believes that the Divine cannot remain insensible to the prayers of the person who addresses Him with all the devotion and enthusiasm of his faith.

Of an emotive temperament, he had followed the way of devotion, searching for something, without any guidance. It is useless to speak of God; theology is like a blind man talking of colours; no description in the world can ever give us the glory of an autumn sunset; Ramakrishna reached God through his heart and not through his brain.

'An almanac,' he once said to one of his disciples, 'foretells rain, but no matter how much you squeeze the book, not one drop of water will ever come out of it. The scriptures are full of beautiful words, but it is not enough to read them to be a religious person. The vulture soars high in the immense heights of space, but its eyes are always turned towards the ground looking for a putrid carcass. In the same way, the mind of the theologian clings to the things of this world.'

But Ramakrishna was not yet satisfied. He knew that the road to wisdom was long and difficult. He knew that once descended into the abyss of our spirit, a new world opens before us, perhaps wider than the sidereal spaces. One vision calls another one, a discovery also a second one, a conquest paves the way to a greater one.

Through the revelation of Kāli he had acquired the capability of attaining a state of ecstasy which Indian religious psychology calls *savikalpa samādhi*, i.e. contact with a symbolic manifestation of the being.

As compared with it, a still higher contact, absolute in its transparency, was the *nirvikalpa samādhi*, i.e. the experience of the indiscriminate. It is generally said that, with very few exceptions, whoever has reached such spiritual exaltation cannot live: the worn-out body dissolves itself.

Ramakrishna, who until then had experienced a life of devotion and religious ecstasy (or what Indian mysticism calls *madhura-rasa*<sup>4</sup>, i.e. loving submission), was not satisfied. It was necessary to tear away the veil of *māyā*, overcome the symbol, and have glimpses of the Absolute. The doors of the supreme mystery were opened for him by a *sādhu*, one of those ascetics who wander through India without any worldly attachments and with no desires, who are indifferent to all things. They live in the open, both when the sun is scorching and when monsoons overflow the earth with their angry cataracts. His name was Totāpuri. He arrived by chance at Dakshineswar and saw Ramakrishna. He immediately understood his great religious personality and began initiating him to the *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. It had taken Totāpuri forty years of hard exercise, macerations, and renunciations, to conquer his goal. It took Ramakrishna only one night and one day, but it was one of the hardest efforts he ever accomplished in his life.

It was practically impossible for him to overcome the psychological plane of the symbol. Everything faded away before his concentration: but the image and vision of the Great Mother remained there immovable. Totāpuri lost his patience. Looking around him, he found a small piece of broken glass and he pressed its point in Ramakrishna's forehead, between the eyes, and commanded him to concentrate his mind on that point.

'Then', Ramakrishna used to tell his pupils, when describing this unforgettable moment, 'using all my iron will I began to meditate again and as soon as the image of the Great Mother appeared, I used my discrimination like

---

<sup>4</sup>Strictly, *madhura-rasa* or *madhura-bhāva* represents only one of the various attitudes (that of the beloved to the lover) which devotees may bear to God. Sri Ramakrishna, while following the path of devotion, went through, at different times, this and many other attitudes. —*Publisher*

a sword and severed it in two. All obstacles disappeared and, overcoming the relative plane, I lost myself in samādhi.' And he remained unconscious for three days and three nights, watched over by the master.

Having reached this point, a follower of the pure Vedānta would think that there was nothing more to be done: after receiving the revelation of the supreme Ātman, the world disappears like a mirage or a vain image. One must only continue to concentrate in meditation and that is all. But Tāntric experience was very much alive in Rama-krishna. It taught him that māyā is not an inconsistent illusion, but the operating force of the supreme Being, the energy which prompts eternal ideas and creates the cosmic process and, at the same time, the infinite reflexes of the Absolute and the resonances which it awakens in the human soul.

And now we come to one of the most important points of Ramakrishna's mysticism. Religious experience is divided into two planes: the plane of the absolute and formless, to which one can arrive through the nirvikalpa-samādhi, and the other plane which concerns the different relative manifestations which are the consequence of this experience, though still remaining in a world of reality.

'We cannot', he said, 'know God fully. He is formless and at the same time has a form. To the devotee he appears as a personal God; for those who have experienced the unsubstantiality of the world, he is formless. He thinks of the Impersonal as if it were a vast ocean without shores, an infinite extension of water without land on any side; only here and there appear blocks of ice created by the intense cold of devotion. That is to say, it manifests itself like a person to the devotee, but when the sun of knowledge appears, the ice melts and one cannot say that God is a person; nobody can see His form. Words cannot express what He is. Who could do it? He who could, viz. the individual self, has then ceased to exist.'

The individuality of the believer is therefore not extraneous to the evocation. He does not contemplate passively the divine shape imposed on him, outside conscient co-operation, but, in a certain sense, he himself, through the contribution of his personality, fashions and forms the aspects of his divinity.

Therefore the latter is a true refraction of the Eternal existing in him, but at the same time a refraction which is a re-creation of the devotee, his special way of conceiving, feeling, and seeing it and—what is more important—of re-experiencing it.

But all these different refractions of the supreme Being have only one source and this is their unity:

A dyer used to dye clothing in a special manner. He used to ask his customers: 'How would you like me to dye your cloth?' If the customer answered, 'red', the dyer dipped the cloth in a vat and then took it out saying: 'Here is your cloth dyed red'; another one wanted it yellow. The dyer dipped it in the same vat and took it out and lo!, the cloth was yellow. And for other colours, he used the same vat, always obtaining the wished for result. A customer who had noticed all this, told the dyer: 'My friend, I have no preference for any particular colour. I would like to know what is your taste and have my clothes dyed as you like. I would like the colour you have used for your own.' The Lord shows Himself now in one shape, now with no shape, always according to the needs of the devotee. The manifest vision is true, relatively to the different creatures which are, firstly, limited and conditioned creatures and, secondly, placed in the midst of different things and situations. Only the divine Dyer knows in what colour he himself is dyed.

God as an absolute, and God as a personal God, are one and the same thing:

Faith in the one implies faith in the other. Thus one cannot think of fire apart from its capability to burn: neither can the latter be considered separate from fire. Thus one cannot conceive the rays of the sun without the sun, neither the sun without its rays. And so God, as an absolute, cannot be thought of as separate from the idea of God with attributes, and *vice versa*.

Therefore, like sparks of the Absolute, the symbols by means of which He attracts religious souls, the infinite shapes under which God has shown himself to man, are equally real, inasmuch as all that changes into spiritual values is real. No religion can claim to be above another one, because all of them are equally true inasmuch as they preach a symbolic shape, particular and personal, of the Eternal; whereas from the point of view of the Absolute, the experiences prepared by them, disappear in a supreme, indiscriminate blending with the germinal essence of all things.

This supreme 'cause' of all things, which we shall never know rationally, but in which we may flow and with which we may blend in the supreme instant of mystical ecstasy, is not universally perceptible by means of the same symbol or with the same intensity or in the identical shape. Men (and here Ramakrishna re-echoed a principle of Mahāyānic Buddhism) are different from one another in tendencies, aptitude, intelligence, moral inclinations, and *karmic* heredity, and therefore they cannot conceive reality in the same manner. Those religions which want to impose their own truths and proclaim as false all that is outside their own experiences, commit a great psychological mistake, inasmuch as they admit implicitly an identity of all creatures; and this is belied by facts.

There are no elects on the one side and the rejected on the other, but all religions, sincerely lived and deeply felt, are refractions and reflexes of the same light and are,

therefore, on the same plane. Any spot consecrated by the divine presence, under whatsoever shape it may appear, in all climates and under all skies, is worthy of our reverence. 'Kneel where others kneel,' was one of his precepts, 'because God is present where many have prayed.'

Instead, religions quarrel, insult, and offend each other like hucksters in a bazaar, who try to make an account of the goods sold by their neighbour, and pass their time speaking ill of him.

'Different religions,' he said one day to a disciple, 'are as many roads leading to God. The means to reach this temple of Kāli are different. Some come by boat, some on carts, and some on foot. In the same way, different people reach God through different faiths. A mother loves all her children in the same manner, but she prepares their food so that each one may receive what is good for him.

'Also, the Lord has inspired different forms of cult, according to the different capabilities and phases of spiritual development of man.' There may be different degrees in the manifestations of the eternal; they must not be spoken of by those who—as followers—would be at the same time part of them and judges of them, but only by those who, having overcome them, identify themselves with the inexhaustible source from which they all originate.

Faithful to this principle, he experimented with three religions: the one in which he was born, the Muslim, and the Christian. By following all three, he had visions, ecstasies, and spiritual raptures. After having divested religions of their doctrinal and dogmatic structures, and cleared them of schemes which were a fatal adaptation to those historical and social events in which they had developed, he discovered a common element that permeates them all: man's irrational abandonment to the hope that death may not be the irrevocable end of all things, his anxiety to flow towards the eternal, that vague sense of mystery which, under all skies, makes us bend our knees and bow our heads.

He insists on this state of irrational foreboding which seems to be part of man's nature, and not on the systematic formulas of religions. Starting from the diversity of material shapes, he went back to the unity of inspiration which underlies them, and found in it the fundamental identity of souls. While religious beliefs have had the unhappy privilege of dividing man, Ramakrishna, going back to their principle, welcomed them all as a means of understanding and fraternization.

But, contrary to what some of his contemporaries have done in India, Ramakrishna has not sponsored a sort of syncretism in which the different experiences are destroyed, losing their individuality, strength, and character in a bleak synthesis.

He wants that each religion may develop its possibilities to the utmost, inasmuch as each one represents—as I have already pointed out—one side of the eternal and satisfies the spiritual exigencies of certain classes of human beings. The sincerity with which one lives in one's faith is important. The truth of every religion is equal, in a certain sense, to the intensity with which it is felt in the follower's heart.

And so Ramakrishna, through these principal phases of his interior life, had also become a *siddha*, a perfect man, on account of the natural development of his personality and of an intrinsic and nearly inevitable necessity that had brought him, step by step, to the highest peaks of contemplative life. But having once had the revelation of Truth, having once been beatified by supreme Grace, should he not come out from Kāli's temple and from his cell, in order to preach his doctrine of salvation to the world?

Ramakrishna was not a preacher; he never ascended the pulpit to dictate the law on spiritual conquests. To those who came to him to be comforted or to reason of the things of God, he answered with the simplicity of a man who knew by experience and not through doctrine, and with that crystal clearness which filled with astonishment men of letters, thinkers, and reformers.

He did not build up systems on his experiences. Dialectics could not express the depth and sweetness of ecstasy, but he gave glimpses of it, by means of innumerable examples, nearly all new and original even for a country like India where allegory has always been the favourite expression, when hinting at the inexpressible.

After all, preaching is, in a sense, dangerous: the danger of falling into the snares of the assertion of 'self', which is part of our nature and is ever in ambush. If the ascetic begins to preach, he runs the risk of being misled by the mania of becoming a master, of considering himself a divine messenger and delighting in praise and glory: two things which the sage must avoid as two terrible temptations which ensnare purity so hard won.

It is difficult to preach; often it causes great harm to the preacher. As soon as he perceives that people honour him he gives himself airs and says: 'Men, listen to what I tell you.' This way of reasoning is dangerous. All his progress stops here—a little glory, that is all the reward he gets. At the most, people may say: 'How well and fluently so-and-so speaks! He must be truly a cultured man.' Never think that it's you who speak. I tell my Mother: 'Mother! I am an instrument, you are the hand. I do what you wish, I say what you inspire me with.'

Indians have no faith in apostolates. Other people—including the unwilling—must not be compelled to listen to the things of the spirit. The road to illumination is the road of choice and, in a certain sense, of grace. The Indian master has never gone in search of disciples, but waits for them to come to him. When one is inflamed with a sincere vocation and has strong faith, let him act, question, ask, and he will end by finding his master and his guide.

‘When fire burns,’ said Ramakrishna, ‘moths come, from where nobody knows, fall into it, and die: the teaching of the Perfect One is the same. He does not move about, inviting others; on the contrary, hundreds of people go to him, coming from unknown places, of their own initiative, in order to be taught by him.’

At the foot of the sacred mountain in Tibet, a sādhu once said to me:

In the same way as a scientific truth is useful to humanity, so the perfection reached by us does not remain circumscribed and limited within ourselves, but flows invisibly and spreads and maintains, unsuspected, the equilibrium of the world.

From the temple of Dakshineswar, where he spent his life at the feet of Kāli’s image, Ramakrishna spread his silent teaching, like the Himālaya which, from its adamantine peaks, feeds the rivers, perennial rivers of the parched lands in the distant and sunny plains. Nothing extraordinary, nothing tragic or pathetic in his life so soon ended; just as there was nearly always nothing new or unusual in the lives of Indian sādhus. They do not attempt to reconcile good and evil, rational and irrational, matter and spirit—the source of tragedy and martyrdom when these elements fight one another. Indian sādhus follows what is called by them the quick way. It is necessary to jump with one pull from the world of opposite things to the world of the one thing, from becoming to Being, from māyā to God. This transformation is difficult, but once accomplished, man rises again to another plane which transcends all dualism.

A century after his birth, Ramakrishna is still—nay, today more than when he was alive—a living and operating force in the moral conscience of India. He has taught the great value of the strength of character and, with the example of his own life, has shown that coherence between thinking and acting is worth much more than any preaching.

While India, after her first contacts with the West, began to fashion for herself a political consciousness and foresaw, though vaguely, the struggle of the morrow, he repeats in a loud voice that no compromises or arrangements exist for the strong; man must be, above all, his true self and fully accept the responsibility of his actions, both in religious life and in the social one. There is nothing worse than allowing oneself to be guided by traditional schemes, by those pseudo-morals which are pure convention and may be employed in order not to take up any position whatever and avoid all bother with the excuse of respecting a rule.

A gentleman who had received a modern education, was once discussing with the Master the character of those heads of families who do not want to be soiled by the things of this world. 'I know very well', the Master told him, 'what these pure heads of the present day families are. If a poor brahmin knocks at his door to beg for alms, he—being the pure head of the family—not caring about money matters which are looked after by his wife, will ask the brahmin beggar: "My dear man, I never touch money. Why do you waste your time asking me?" Not being able to withstand his insistence, your head of the family thinks that he must give a rupee and tells the beggar: "All right, come tomorrow and I'll see what I can do for you." Re-entering the house, this typical head of the family says to his wife: "Look here, my dear, a poor brahmin is in great need, let us give him a rupee." As soon as she hears the world rupee, the wife loses her patience and exclaims sarcastically: "Oh, how generous you have become! Do you think that rupees are like leaves and stones to be thrown carelessly away?" "All right, my dear," answers the husband apologetically, "the brahmin is very poor and we cannot give him less." "No," the wife answers back, "I can't afford it. Here are two annas, give them to him if you wish." As this gentleman is a family man, unsullied by the things of the next day the poor brahmin receives only two

annas. So, you see, your unsullied heads of families aren't their own masters. For the very reason that they don't worry about family affairs they believe that they are saintly men, while they are, in fact, weak husbands, entirely under their wives' thumb and therefore very poor specimens of ordinary humanity.'

In a country where people had thought too much and loved discussions too much, he brings the spirit back to an independence of judgement, to a simplicity and immediateness of feeling, in which there is only the strength of man. And while the number of systems and theories grows, he points out that dogmas separate us and only the sincerity of life draws us together.

It makes no difference if our ideas are not the same—and how could it be so if each one of us is an element which cannot be reduced to another? What truly matters and can draw us together and make us love each other and feel like brothers, is an interior coherence, a total devotion to our ideas and to our faith, whatever it may be; the same anxiety, lived, felt, and suffered, to draw near to what we believe, is the Eternal, or a reflex of it.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE

Rev. James B. Muckle

We come here tonight to delve a little deeper into the religion and philosophy of the world. We come here to honour that great Hindu saint and mystic, Ramakrishna.

As I read once again that great book *Prophet of New India*, I could not help but feel akin to the thinking of that great teacher Ramakrishna and his devoted disciple Vivekananda. India has long been the mother country of many great and famous religions, so it is not unusual that in the nineteenth century another great awakening took place—this time under Ramakrishna. I think it is natural and logical to look over the field of action in religion.

There seem to be three principle types of techniques that man uses to place himself directly into relation with a divine being whom we shall call God. These three are: ritual, supplication and contemplation; and each has played a part in the major religions which have sought to find this closeness and understanding of God.

Many religions depend on ritual to bring the individual follower into harmony with God. They will build a magnificent, ornate building dedicated to their Deity. They will make effective use of subdued lighting, soft carpeting, and the burning of incense and candles to bring disciples into a closeness with God. This ritual really means the doing of the right thing at the right time in the right place in order to achieve a goal. The goal may be seeking help from God in some daily problem. It may be the need of assistance and assurance from a source that is unending and unending. It may be for comfort, or guidance, or any one of the things that you and I seek from our God. By living according to the laws of God one hopes and knows that ultimately he will receive this divine relief. There is an automatic relation, as it were, between doing right and receiving the help of

the supernatural order. Ritual may be classed as religious because in it many people receive a definite religious experience which causes them to do something about it.

The second approach in religion may be called supplication. This can be supplication through prayer, wherein we bow our heads, or kneel and humble ourselves to God; or sacrifice. We place our God here as a personal God, a Father, or a great saint to whom we can come for help and forgiveness. This is the Christian point of view. Sacrifice, as a type of supplication, is bringing material gifts to be given to God or to the uses of the religious orders. More dramatic is the use of animals, or even people, as actual sacrificial gifts to beg audience with the Father. It is like a small child who wishes to go to a circus and has been told by his father that he cannot go. By cajoling and begging, perhaps threatening or promising, he hopes to change the father's mind.

Whereas in ritual we approach God by laws and order, in supplication we approach Him as an actual person who is capable of making decisions and changing his mind, as it were, by the appeals of his children. The third type of action that is used to approach God is that which we call contemplation. Those of the East have used this mechanism to the greater degree than the usual religions of the West. Here, the individual worshipper prepares his mind (by contemplation) to receive the will of the Deity. He readies himself by various devices so that he may be acceptable to this reception. The God who is worshipped in this manner is a much less personal God—one who is everywhere and yet not touchable, one who is immanent as well as transcendent. We have termed these religions 'mystical religions' and they are those such as we find in your beloved India.

Whichever the way in which man reaches his God, reach Him he must; for there is a wide river between what man imagines the world should be and what it actually is. The religious beliefs of individuals are systems of orientation which give definition to the situation—to the meaning of nature, of man, or society, the vicissitudes of human

life—and man tries to reduce the tension and strain that just plain living brings. However, there is adjustment and defence needed in explaining things that happen to us—premature death, in fact the morality of men in general, ‘meaningless’ suffering, ‘the problems of evil’, and unearned rewards. Man’s knowledge of the physical world and his expectations of what should happen cannot alone constitute adequate adjustment to life. He must add a higher, evaluative element so that these ‘irrational’ discrepancies, which seems so inevitable, will not break down his way of living.

Man needs a ‘light unto his pathway’, for he must walk into the light—with vision of his steps. Man can never walk long away from the light, for then he must falter and fall. God has sent His prophets to earth to tell man that there is but one God and that we, His people, are but one people. He has meant His light to shine for all humanity, not to be turned to just one corner of His world or to one section. Where there is light, fear and ignorance melt away.

God has not restricted His teachings to one race, or to one country. Within this room—for each individual there is perhaps a different concept of God because each one has a different need and each a different way to express his union with God. The Word of God is open to all mankind—to withhold it from any man is to withhold life itself.

Many Christians claim the New Testament, but would disclaim the Old. The Old Testament is a root from which two great branches have sprung—the Jewish Faith and the Christian Faith. One needs the background and the teachings and the individual lives and faith of each man in the chain. Out of trials and errors and eventual successes man struggled closer towards the Truth.

Jesus Christ lived and walked with mankind, and when he left, his influence was to remain so that man could reach the peak of ultimate understanding. His teachings are still above most of our achievements, but they remain as a magnet to hold us from going backward.

Mohammed announced that his followers must acknowledge Moses and Jesus the Christ. He taught that there was but one omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, relentless, merciful, everlasting, and eternal God—'no distinction do we make between any of His messengers; follow ye, O people, the messengers of God! All mankind is but one people.'

Ramakrishna lives very near to the heart of many western people because they see him as a man and not as an Incarnation as he appears to his disciples. Ramakrishna's very human approach to the daily problems of life is what endears him to many people. Ramakrishna said to his disciples: 'Are you seeking God? Very well, look for Him in man; the divinity has manifest itself in man more than in any other object. In truth God is everything; but His power is more or less manifest in other objects. God incarnate in man is the most manifest power of God in the flesh—man is the greatest manifestation of God.' And then he goes on to say, 'the attainment of perfect knowledge is to see God in every man.' When a person like Ramakrishna speaks words like these surely he is very close to God.

Centuries ago, Plato was denounced as irreligious because he no longer believed in the existence of Homeric gods in a literal sense, and certainly not in all the tales that were told about them in the mythological tradition. He felt that religion, to survive in an enlightened society, must attain its answer in One Mind and Will, not in many.

In achieving also a new conscience, it was gradually expressed that God need not be simply All-powerful but that He shall be supremely good. He can neither commit nor approve any evil thing, so that in being true to conscience one is loyal also to God. Indeed, one may say that in being and doing good one does not become happy and tireless until it is regarded as achieving in time some eternal purpose of the Ultimate Divinity. All of us cannot help but feel that if religion is to last and be of value, it must have the aroma of saintly men and women, the assurance of

immortality, and some present experience of the supernatural. God does respond to him who faithfully observes, supplicates, and contemplates and submits himself to the good. As Wordsworth said,

I have felt a presence that disturbs me  
With the joy of elevated thoughts.

The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind. Now is the time for unity. Now is the time to lay aside all self-purposes and know for a certainty that all men are the servants of one God who will bind them together in love and agreement. Mature man is no longer his brother's keeper; he is his brother's brother.

[Address delivered on the occasion of the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary celebration in 1953, organized by the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, U.S.A.]

## A SOCIOLOGIST IS INTRODUCED TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA<sup>1</sup>

Melvin J. Vincent

'The ordinary leaders and members of the Western social order are widely proclaiming the superiority of Western civilization. They fail to study, either at all, or with unprejudiced minds, the worthy points of Eastern development; they see chiefly its defects.'—Emory S. Bogardus in *Fundamentals of Social Psychology*.

'Whereas occidental nations have used every effort to improve their material position, India has done differently. There live the only men in the world who, in the whole history of humanity, never went beyond their frontiers to conquer anyone, who never coveted that which belonged to anyone else, whose only fault was that their lands were so fertile...and so tempted other nations to come and despoil them. They are contented to be despoiled, and to be called barbarians; and in return they want to send to this world, visions of the supreme, to lay bare for the world the secrets of human nature, to rend the veil that conceals the real man....'—Swami Vivekananda in 'My Master,'

(from: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.4)

Doctor Charles A. Cooley, in his admirable treatise entitled *Social Process*, writes significantly: 'I look with

---

<sup>1</sup>For this introduction, I am indebted to Swami Prabhavananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California at Hollywood, CA; to Romain Rolland's enlightening book, *Prophets of the New India, The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, published by the Advaita Ashrama, 1925; and to an article, 'Ramakrishna', by Swami Shivananda, published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930. I have also read with much profit, the brilliant article, 'My Master', by Swami Vivekananda.

wonder and reverence upon the expression of human nature in countless forms of art and aspiration. It seems to me that back of all this must be a greater life, high and glorious beyond my imagination, which is trying to work itself out through us.'— And it is with this attitude that I have come away from the life of the golden saint of India, Sri Ramakrishna; for, one who leaves the study of this most remarkable career must indeed be made of granite if he does not carry away with him the holy idea that back of this eventful life there has been that effulgence of that greater Life, high and glorious beyond the scope of the ordinary western imagination.

In the minds of the most advanced socialized thinkers of the present day, there exists the fundamental notion that world unity is a necessity of the immediate future. To the sociologist, this need has been apparent for a very long time. He, like his brother, the physical scientist, is ever on the alert for that which shall harmonize, for that which shall bring order out of chaos. And he realizes full well that there must be a more full and complete understanding of the people of the world before any attempts at unification can be undertaken. He is mindful of the great dynamic force inherent in religion, and he is cognizant of the fact that in order to comprehend the culture of a people, it is essential that their religious thought and beliefs be subjected to study and research. In their religious thought may be found the utilitarian key that will open the door to friendship and unity. The sociologist is further impressed by a religion which encompasses a social outlook; that is, a religion which is based first, on service to others, and not on individual salvation.

What wonder, then, that the sociologist should become attracted to the teachings of a man who could say: 'What! First accumulation of money and then God! And how great is their charity and kindness! They will spend thousands of rupees in the marriage of their daughters, but the next-door neighbour may be starving with his family, and they feel

constraint in giving him a handful of rice—they have to think a lot before doing so! When people are starving, they think, 'Never mind, whether they live or die, it is of little consequence to me! Let me and my family live well.' And they talk of kindness to all beings!<sup>2</sup>

It is, then, with an intensified interest that I have studied the religious life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna whose 'soul animates modern India'<sup>3</sup>, and without an understanding of whose life, the spirit of modern India will remain an enigma forever in the western mind. For I believe that Romain Rolland is right when he divines that a knowledge of this radiant soul with his message of a practical love will afford a key to 'human unity with God.'<sup>4</sup> And it may not be amiss to insert at this point a message of thanks to Mr. Rolland for the presentation to Western readers of his inspirational treatise on the life of Sri Ramakrishna; it is to be devoutly wished that his pregnant hope, 'to bring the beating of that artery to the ears of fever-stricken Europe ...to wet its lips with the blood of immortality'<sup>5</sup>, will be realized in the not distant future. A new understanding of India and its leaders is vital and full of meaning for the cause of world unity, and when the message of Sri Ramakrishna is understood in the West, a new evaluation will have been necessitated.

Has Indian thought, as moulded by the influence of this honoured saint, anything to contribute to the friendship of the world? What is the sociological evaluation of his life and work? These are the major points of interest in this discussion. The sociologist will be the first to acknowledge that a leader, whoever he may be, and whenever and

---

<sup>2</sup>*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, (a compilation from authentic sources) (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama) p. 377.

<sup>3</sup>Romain Rolland, *Prophets of the New India*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

wherever he may appear, will prove to be a force which the world must reckon with sooner or later, especially when that leader is filled with the essence of a universal and dynamically operating and functioning spirit of love.

Sri Ramakrishna's great strength as a powerful spiritual leader lies in his continuous emphasis on *service*. Like the Christ, of whom he was so fond, this service meant an uncontaminated one, a service not profaned with the desire for returns. And he could do this because in his God-intoxicated state, he saw his fellowmen as only the many expressions of the Divine Mother. He was, first of all, the humanitarian. What would it mean to the world of today if all men were capable of catching this rare vision of the divine spark resident in every one? What a noble message from India; India, the misunderstood! We glimpse the whole spirit of social service, the nobility of a divinely gifted soul in the beautiful tale of his visit with the rich Mathur Babu, when that worthy man led him to his tenanted estate. Mathur, typical feudal lord, overseer, and employer, possessed the age-long attitude of those who own, 'It's mine, therefore I can do whatever I like with it and those who belong to it.' But how firmly and sharply rebuked Mathur was by the gentle but firm words: 'These are Mother's tenants. You must help them. You are but the Mother's steward.' This is a basic attitude for the foundation of the ideal society. Once again is the rich truth pointed out that material wealth when misapplied, debases; selfishness bars the door to the Kingdom of Eternal Bliss. Sharing with others was his only road to complete ecstasy; witness his visit with the suffering and miserable Santhals. He refused to move from amongst them until he had been promised that they would be given oil, bathed, clothed and fed. Of him, the sociologist would report: an ideal and practical social worker!

Another supreme instance of Sri Ramakrishna's social thought is revealed in his treatment of his favourite disciple, Narendranath Dutta (later Vivekananda). His beloved

disciple had just emerged from a state of the highest superconsciousness. Long had this ecstasy been sought, it had been found sweetly satisfying. To Naren the summit had been reached: 'I had forgotten the world,' he said. 'Shame!' cries Sri Ramakrishna. 'I thought you were a vast receptacle, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man.' Service, service, first, last and always. The Mother's work must be done. And here is the essence, the divine oil of that social religion which the Christ taught, being brought again to the world. Little wonder that the two are identifiable. His significant statement, 'O Mother, let me remain in contact with man'<sup>6</sup>, marks the identity still more closely. How many times had he noted that personal salvation was an utter selfishness based on the desire for escape.

The universality of all religions was realized by his demonstration that the Truth is one; it is his message of religious harmony that carves his name on the table of the immortals. And what a message to present-day so-called Christianity! Mother India, reveal thy true Self! 'And he will share the food of immortality in a Lord's supper, not with the twelve apostles, but with all starving souls—with the universe'.<sup>7</sup> Truly, he had seen and heard the superb orchestration of the vast symphony of religions playing the Song Divine—'I and my brother are One; I and My Father are one.' World friendship rests on this revelation. India knows for she has had the precious jewel concealed in her breast; she awaits the call for its display: Ramakrishna citizen of the world!

Man is Divinely created. Small wonder that, knowing this and practising it, Sri Ramakrishna could see the oneness pervading all things. The social principle of love is put to the acid test, and does not fail. The rich and the poor, the

---

<sup>6</sup>*Prophets of the New India*, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

unlearned and the learned, the impure and the pure—all are embraced. He could catch the glimpse of the Mother in the adulteress, the prostitute, and the murderer. His was, like the Christ's a truly cosmopolitan love. Swami Shivananda reports: 'I have seen him showering his love equally on men and women, on the learned and the ignorant, and on saints and sinners, and evincing interest and unceasing solicitude for the relief of their misery and for their attainment to infinite peace by realizing the Divine. And I dare say the world has not seen another man of his type in modern times, so devoted to the welfare of mankind.'<sup>8</sup>

There is another sociological test to be applied. And that is the regard for the family unit which a great leader may possess. Here again Sri Ramakrishna fulfils the necessary requirement. He would not allow any of his close followers to renounce their families in order to follow him, until they had declared that those families stood not in need of their services. He steadfastly proclaimed that 'not even a depraved mother ought to be deserted.'<sup>9</sup> He, himself had been ready to renounce his spiritual enterprises if his wife had demanded her physical rights. For him the family was sacred, and he ever was the first to render homage and honour to parents and to wives.

The message of Sri Ramakrishna to India and to the world is therefore fraught with much sociological significance and importance. Love is a dynamic concept, a supreme motivation which leads ever onward to that unity which is designed to make of all men, brothers. It was this message that he entrusted to his successor, Swami Vivekananda, in order that it might be borne to the West on his broad and sturdy shoulders.

---

<sup>8</sup>Swami Shivananda, 'Sri Ramakrishna', *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930, p. 107. (See also p. 50 of this volume.)

<sup>9</sup>*Prophets of the New India*, p. 175.

How vastly important is the idea of service, unselfish service, to man! It is a manifestation of the universal Fatherhood and Motherhood of the great 'I Am'. It signifies the realization of social justice, and blooming of love, humility and self-sacrifice in man, the welding of the nations of the world into an organic unity based on a recognition of a like Divine inheritance. Sri Ramakrishna's life amplifies the claim that the great soul concentrates within itself the urgent longings of many men for a noble and edifying explanation of the unity of Life—and that this soul awakens these seekers to the consciousness of the one permanent Reality.

## A MODERN HINDU SAINT

Charles H. Tawney

Like a true mystic Ramakrishna attached the highest importance to intense meditation. In this he was not above taking lessons from the fowler or the angler. A story is told of a devotee meeting a marriage procession crossing a plain and seeing a fowler, undisturbed gazing intently at his quarry, the saint bowed his head and hailed the fowler as his guru or spiritual guide.

So too with the angler. 'An angler was catching fish. A devotee passing by came to him and said, 'My friend, which is the road to such and such place?' At that moment a fish was seen pulling at the angler's float, so the angler was concentrating all his attention on the fish. When that business was over, he turned round and asked, "What did you say?" The devotee bowed his head and said, "You are my spiritual guide. When I meditate on the Supreme Being, I will imitate you and not turn my attention to anything else until I have finished the business in hand."

Ramakrishna's sayings abound in homely illustrations of this kind. Paddy birds, cranes, kites, crows, mango trees and other everyday objects of life in Bengal are employed by him to point out a moral. He compares the religious hero, struggling against the harassing temptations of worldly existence, to a locomotive dragging at rapid rate a long line of carriages. Even the pernicious habit of hemp (*ganja*) smoking is made to yield an edifying lesson: A true devotee seeks the company of other devotees for, like a hemp-smoker, he derives no pleasure from smoking alone.

In one case the saint borrows an illustration from an article of European luxury: 'When one sits upon a spring couch it gives away, and when one rises up it resumes its previous position. So when a worldly man hears a religious discourse, religious feeling gains power over his mind, and when he enters the world again, the feeling no longer

continues.' The following illustrations will interest the folklorist: 'As a magnetic rock hidden in the depths of the sea suddenly draws from a ship its nails and other iron fittings and causes it to go to pieces and sink, so when the true spiritual knowledge arises in the soul, all the knots of selfishness and self-conceit are loosened and, it sinks like the ship in the sea of God's love.' It is well known that *The Imitation of Christ* is very generally read by the Bengalis educated in our schools and colleges, and it is perhaps possible to trace the influence of this book upon the mind of the latter day Hindu Sage.<sup>1</sup> He urges his disciples to avoid contention and subtle disputations, not to place too much reliance on books, and to avoid too much familiarity with the female sex. He does not run directly counter to the prejudices of his countrymen, but rather rises above them. He holds that for a perfect man caste distinctions are absolutely non-existent, but for an ordinary man they are necessary. In the same way he does not consider the orange garb of the sannyāsin to be an indispensable requisite, but the wearing of it produces a feeling conducive to religion, as canvas shoes and torn garments are connected with the idea of humility, and boots and pantaloons with that of pride and self-conceit. The following extracts are especially characteristic: 'As many men in this world have heard of the object ice; but have never seen it with their eyes, so there are many preachers of religion who have only read treatises on the nature of God, but have never experienced him in their lives. Again, as there are many who have seen ice but never tasted it, so there are many preachers who have caught a glimpse of God from a distance, but have never penetrated into the real essence of God. Only those

---

<sup>1</sup>There is no record that *The Imitation of Christ* was ever read or its contents discussed before Sri Ramakrishna. However, Hinduism is replete with teachings as to renunciation of gold and lust.—*Publisher*

who have tasted ice can describe its real properties. So only those who have communed with God in such ways as self sacrifice and service can describe his attributes.'

'To teach people about God on the strength of having read about him in books is much the same as to teach people about Benares on the strength of having found that city on a map.'

The following parable shows the necessity of perseverance in the religious life. 'A certain person went to dig a tank<sup>2</sup>. After he had dug two cubits deep, a person came to him and said: 'My friend why do you spend your labour in vain? You will find no underground water here; you will get nothing but sand.' He immediately left the place and began to turn up earth in another place. Then another person came to him and said: 'My friend, formerly there was a tank here. Why do you fruitlessly worry yourself? If you go a little further south and dig, it is probable that you will find excellent water.' The man immediately followed the advice. But in the next place too a person came and discouraged him. Wherever he fancied a spot, someone came and dissuaded him from going on with his work and induced him to leave it. The consequence was that his tank was never dug. In the same way many have become bankrupt in the way of religion. The man who has gained faith one day and loses it the next when he faces trials and temptations, at the end may become a total atheist, or at any rate, becomes convinced that it is impossible to become religious in this life.'

It is interesting to observe that his teachings contain some positively appalling etymologies used for the purpose of edification. Such phenomenon is not altogether unknown in Europe. Whatever may be thought of the culture of the Saint Ramakrishna it is impossible to read his sayings without conceiving genuine respect for him. But the

---

<sup>2</sup>Pond or reservoir.

paramount importance of the work seems to us to consist in the fact that it contains the idea of a teacher who has profoundly influenced his educated fellow countrymen. It must be remembered that it is written by an Indian for Indians and is not an article prepared for European consumption. Such books should be literally translated into English. Probably more could be learnt from them with regard to the real feeling of seriously-minded Hindus than from volumes of travels written by gentlemen who rush through India at railway speed and associate only with European officials or Europeanized natives 'of the boot and pantaloons' type reprobated by this Bengali saint.

[From: *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review and Oriental and Colonial Record*, January 1896, 2nd Edition 1903].

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S MESSAGE  
TO THE WEST  
Joseph Campbell**

'*Mahābhāva* is God-consciousness,' Sri Ramakrishna once said, 'My joy after the experience of *mahābhāva* was equal to the pain I suffered before it. *Mahābhāva* shakes the body and the mind to their foundation. It is like a huge elephant's entrance into a little hut. The hut is shaken to its foundation. Perhaps it falls apart.

'The fire of the pain of this experience is not an ordinary feeling. It is said that the fire of this anguish, in Rūpa and Sanātana, scorched the leaves of the tree under which they sat. I was three days unconscious in that state of God-consciousness. I could not move. I lay in one place.

'When I regained consciousness, I was taken out for a bath. But my skin could not bear the touch of a hand; so my body had to be covered with a heavy sheet. Only then could I be led to the bathing place. The earth that had stuck to my body while I was lying on the ground had become baked.

'When I was being overpowered by that state, I felt as if a ploughshare were passing through my backbone. I cried out, "Oh, I am dying! I am dying!" But afterwards I was filled with a great joy.'

This experience of *mahābhāva* represented the culmination of Sri Ramakrishna's long agony of yearning for union with the Absolute. During the earlier years of his devotion he had experienced many visions. He occasionally described them to his devotees:

'When I meditated,' said he, 'I would see vividly a person sitting near me with a trident in his hand. He would threaten to strike me with the weapon unless I fixed my mind on the Lotus Feet of God. He would warn me that his trident would pierce my breast if my attention strayed from God.

'Once I was meditating under the *bel* tree when "Sin" appeared before me and tempted me in various ways. He came to me in the form of an English soldier. He wanted to give me wealth, honour, sex-pleasure, various occult powers, and such things. I began to pray to the Divine Mother. (And now I am telling you something very secret.) The Mother appeared. I said to Her, "Kill him, Mother!" I remember still that form of the Mother, Her world-bewitching beauty. She came in the form of a young girl; but it seemed as if the world were moved by her glance.'

Keshab Chandra Sen once asked Sri Ramakrishna to describe to him the various ways in which the Divine Mother sports in the world. Sri Ramakrishna replied with the following glorious picture of Kālī:

'Oh,' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'She plays in many ways. She is known according to Her various moods, as *Mahā-Kālī*, *Nitya-Kālī*, *Smashāna-Kālī*, *Rakshā-Kālī*, and *Shyāmā-Kālī*. *Mahā-Kālī* and *Nitya-Kālī* are mentioned in the Tantra philosophy. Before creation, when the sun, moon, and planets were not, and darkness was enveloped in darkness, then the Mother, the Formless One, *Mahā-Kālī*, the Great Power, was one with *Mahā-Kāla*, the Absolute.

As *Shyāmā-Kālī* She has a tender aspect. Under this aspect She is worshipped in Hindu households. She is represented as dispensing boons with one hand and dispelling the fear of Her devotees with another.

'As *Rakshā-Kālī*, the Protectress, She is worshipped at the time of plague, famine, earthquake, drought, and flood.

'But as *Smashāna-Kālī* She is the embodiment of the power of destruction. She resides in the cremation ground surrounded by corpses, jackals, and terrible spirits—Her companions. From Her mouth issues a river of blood, on Her neck hangs a garland of human skulls, and the girdle around her waist is made of human hands.

After the destruction of the universe, at the end of each great cycle, the Divine Mother gathers together the seeds of next creation. She behaves like the mistress of the house,

who has a hotch-potch pot, in which She keeps an assortment of little household articles....After the destruction of the universe, my Divine Mother, the Power of Brahman, gathers together the seeds. And then, after the re-creation, She pervades the universe. She brings this phenomenal world out of Her womb, and then pervades it....'

'Is Kāli, the Divine Mother, of a black complexion? When viewed from a distance, She appears black; but when intimately known, She is not so....'

'The Divine Mother is always at play and is full of sportiveness. The universe is her play. She is self-willed and must always have her own way. She is full of bliss. She gives freedom to one out of millions.'

From the standpoint of the modern, enlightened Christian, Sri Ramakrishna was an idolater and worshipper of hideous images. During his century, the western world was devoting untold energy, love, and money, to the sending out of apostles into the darkness of Africa and Asia, to preach the good tidings of the Redemption of the children of Eve, and to transport, along with these tidings, the great philosophies and conveniences of civilization. This was the White Man's Burden: enlighten and redeem the world.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in 1836, and in 1886 he died. In 1836, the year of his birth, a young English biologist, Charles Darwin, aboard the schooner 'Beagle,' was cruising the coasts of South America and the Isles of the Pacific, collecting data for his epoch making books. And in 1886, the year of Sri Ramakrishna's death, a young English poet, Rudyard Kipling, born like Sri Ramakrishna, in India, was publishing his first volume of patriotic verse. In 1859, the year of Sri Ramakrishna's marriage, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. In this work the mystery of evolution is mechanistically explained. The book became immediately the Rig-Veda of nineteenth century materialism. That very year, John Stuart Mill, the utilitarian, published his important essay, *On Liberty*. And precisely at this

time, Darwin's, Mill's, and Kipling's queen, Victoria, took into her own hands the supervision of the people of India. The bayonet of Tommy Atkins had established, east of Suez, where 'there ain't no ten commandments and a man can raise a thirst', the empire of sweetness and light; the empire of Darwinism, Utilitarianism, Victorianism, Birmingham tinware, Kipling's verse, and sterilized Christianity.

Meanwhile, Sri Ramakrishna was teaching at Dakshineswar, and he was speaking to his devotees, as follows:

'To know many things is ignorance—*ajñāna*; to know only one thing is knowledge—*jñāna*: knowledge that God alone is real and that it is He who dwells in all. And to talk with God is still fuller knowledge—*vijñāna*. *Vijñāna* is the loving of God in various ways, after His realization.

'God is beyond one and two. God is beyond speech and mind. To ascend from God's play-in-the-world to His eternity, and to descend again from the Eternal to the Play, is called mature devotion.

'Suppose a man has a thorn in the sole of his foot. He procures another thorn and takes it out. That is to say, he removes the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge. But when he attains to fuller knowledge—*vijñāna*—then he discards the two thorns, ignorance and knowledge. Then he talks with God intimately, day and night.

'He who has merely heard of milk is ignorant. He who has seen milk has knowledge. But he who has drunk milk and been strengthened by it has attained *vijñāna*.

'There is a difference between a sage endowed with knowledge and one endowed with this fuller knowledge. The knowing type of sage has a certain way of sitting. He twirls his moustache and asks the visitor, "Well, Sir! Have you any question to ask?" But the man who always sees God and talks to Him intimately has an altogether different nature. He is sometimes like an inert object, sometimes like a ghou, sometimes like a child, and sometimes like a madman.

'When he is in *samādhi*, he becomes unconscious of the outer world and remains like an inert object. He sees everything as full of Brahman-consciousness: Therefore he behaves like a ghoul. He is not conscious of any distinction between the holy and the unholy. He is not aware of filth and dirt. To him everything is Brahman.

'Again, he is like a madman. People notice his ways and actions and think of him as insane. Or again, he is sometimes like a child—without restraint, shame, hatred, or hesitation.

'One acquires this state of mind after the vision of God. When a boat passes a magnetic hill, its screws and nails are loosened and drop out. Lust, anger, and the other passions cannot exist after the vision of God.'

Throughout the entire course of the nineteenth century there is to be noted in Europe a revolt against the degradation of man in mechanization, utilization, sentimental hypocrisy, and militarization. In England itself, where the problems of the industrial revolution first presented themselves, we hear the cry of William Blake; perhaps the first to state the cause of man against the cause of standardized mediocrity. Consider, for instance, his poem, *London*:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls;  
And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But the most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlot's curse  
Blasts the new born Infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage Hearse.

In France, the revolt against the banal complacencies and pious cliches of the age of progress plunged a generation of tortured souls into every conceivable form of reaction. Consider Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine, for instance. Since the so-called 'Good Man' of the day was such a disheartening fiasco, perhaps divinity was to be discovered in the realm of the so-called 'Evil'.

And from Germany rings out the voice of Nietzsche:

'Verily, a polluted stream is man, One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream without becoming impure.

'Lo, I teach you the Superman: he is that sea; in him can your great contempt be submerged.

'What is the greatest thing ye can experience? It is the hour of great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness becometh loathsome unto you, and so also your reason and virtue.

'The hour when ye say: "What good is my happiness! It is poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency. But my happiness should be the justification of existence itself!"

'The hour when ye say: "What good is my reason! Doth it long for knowledge as the lion for his food? It is mere poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency!"

'The hour when ye say: "What good is my virtue! As yet it hath not made me passionate. How weary I am of my good and my bad! It is all poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency!"

'The hour when ye say: "What good is my pity! Is not pity the cross on which he is nailed who loveth man? But my pity is not a crucifixion."

'Have ye ever spoken thus? Have ye ever cried out thus? Ah! would that I had heard you crying out thus!

It is not your sin—it is your self-satisfaction that crieth unto heaven!

‘Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the frenzy with which ye should be inoculated?’

‘Lo, I teach you the Superman: he is that lightning, he is that frenzy!’

Nietzsche was shaken to his foundation, like a hut being entered by an elephant. He was shaken to his foundation, and he fell apart. He never survived to know the joy after the experience which would have been equal to the pain he suffered before it. So his words never rise to the glorious gentleness of the words of Sri Ramakrishna, who, even while Nietzsche was vigorously prophesying the Superman, quietly was teaching his devotees in Dakshineswar, and was speaking to them, as follows:

‘Do I look down on worldly people? Of course not. When I see them, I apply the knowledge of Brahman, the Oneness of Existence. Brahman Itself has become all. All are Nārāyana Himself. Regarding all women as mother, I see no difference between a chaste woman and a harlot.’

‘One should attain to Brahman by negating the universe and all living beings; but after the attainment of Brahman, one discovers that it is Brahman Itself which has become all these—the universe and the living beings.’

‘Consider the parable of the *vilwa* fruit. If a man separates the flesh from the shell and the seeds and then wishes to know the weight of the fruit, can he ascertain its weight by weighing only the flesh? He must weigh, together with the flesh, the shell and the seeds. At first the essential thing appears to be the flesh of the fruit, and not the seeds or shell. But then, by reasoning, one discovers that the shell, the seeds, and the flesh all together constitute the fruit. Shell and seeds belong to the thing to which the flesh belongs. Similarly, in spiritual discrimination, you must first reason according to the method of ‘Not this, not this’—God is not the universe; God is not the living beings. Brahman alone is real and everything else is unreal. But finally you

will realize, as you realized in the case of the *vilwa* fruit, that the Reality from which we derive the notion of Brahman is the very Reality which creates the idea of universe and living beings. That is to say, the Eternal and the Play-of-the-world are two aspects of the one Reality.'

The Europeans who protested against the empire of mediocrity, themselves failed to attain to the springs of power. So their world of ideals went down before the steamroller. But in Dakshineswar, only a few miles outside the Victorian metropolis of Calcutta, practising his *sādhana*, not according to enlightened, modern methods, but after the most ancient, most superstitious, most idolatrous traditions of timeless India: now hanging to a tree, like a monkey; now posturing and dressing as a girl; now weeping before an image; now sitting, night and day, like a stump; six years unable to close his eyes, himself terrified at what was happening to him; swooning in the ocean of the Mother's love; stunned by the experience of Brahman—Sri Rama-krishna cut the hinges of the heavens and released the fountains of divine bliss.

This bliss, this joy of Absolute Man, is the power that now goes out against the empires of the historical ego. It will never down them—for the play of ignorance is eternal; but neither will it ever go down beneath them.

'Dogmatism is not good,' declared the Master to his devotees at Dakshineswar.

'Do you know where lies the mistake of those who speak of the formless God? It lies where they say that God is formless only, and the those who differ with them are wrong. But I know that God is both with form and without. And God may have still further aspects. It is possible for Him to be everything.

'I have practised all religions—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. I have followed the paths of the different Hindu sects....I have found that it is the one God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths....Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name

of religion—the Hindus, Mohammedans, Brāhmos, Vaishnavas, and the rest; but they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Shiva, and bears the names of Shakti, Jesus, and Allah as well: the one Rāma with a thousand names.

‘The tank has several ghats. At one, Hindus draw water in pitchers and call it *jal*; at another, Mussalmans draw water in leathern bottles and call it *pāni*; at a third, Christians do the same and call it *water*. Can we imagine that the water is not *jal* but *pāni* or *water*? How ridiculous! The substance is one under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; nothing but climate, temperament, and names vary. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will realize Him surely.’

## RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Ronaldshay,  
P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., etc.

The temple of Dakshineswar, a few miles above Calcutta, is easily noticed by any one steaming up the river (Hooghly), by means of a group of tall casuarina trees, which can be seen from afar, standing in the temple grounds. It was build by a pious Bengali lady, Rani Rasmani, in the year A.D. 1855, and it was here that the famous saint of Dakshineswar spent the greater part of his life. Few men have made a deeper impress upon the mind of Bengal in recent years than Gadadhar Chatterji, known to history as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and his chief disciple Narendra Nath Dutt, better known under the title of Swami Vivekananda. At a time when the craze for the ideas and ways of the West was at its height, these men stood for the ancient ideal of the East, for renunciation in an age of megalomania, for simplicity at a time when discoveries in mechanical science were making life elaborately complex.

Born of brāhmin parents on 18 February 1836, Gadadhar Chatterji found himself drawn to a religious life from his boyhood, and he became an assistant priest at the temple of Dakshineswar from the date of its construction in 1855. He was no scholar, yet he possessed the power of attracting to himself men of light and leading of the day—Keshub Chandra Sen, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chatterji and Pratap Chandra Mazumdar amongst others. The latter, one of the most devoted followers of Keshub Chandra Sen, seems to have been forcibly struck, and a good deal puzzled, by the influence which Ramakrishna exercised over educated men. 'What is there in common between him and me?' he asked. 'I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate,

unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Müller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines?...And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same.' And after due deliberation he comes to the conclusion that it is Ramakrishna's religion that is his only recommendation. But his religion itself is a puzzle. 'He worships Shiva, he worships Kāli, he worships Rāma, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedāntic doctrines.... He is an idolator, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator on the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity....His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling.'<sup>1</sup>

He studied the doctrine of the Vedānta at the feet of one Totāpuri, a holy man who took up his abode at the temple for the space of nearly a year. But it was along the path of worship (*bhakti*) rather than by way of knowledge (*Jñāna*) that he sought for the solution of the mystery of the universe. By temperament he was a mystic rather than a philosopher. The narrative of his life and teachings recalls inevitably the emotional figure of Chaitanya. Like the great Vaishnava saint of Nadia he gave vent to his pent-up feelings in song and dance. Hymns to the deity sung by his favourite disciples reduced him to tears, and frequently induced in him a state of trance. He was subject to such trances from his boyhood, his first experience taking place at the age of seven, when, according to his own account, he suddenly saw a vision of glory, and lost all sense-consciousness while walking through the fields. His knowledge of God was intuitive, and he never felt the need of systematic study. A discussion on the subject of the study of the

---

<sup>1</sup>From a monograph entitled 'Paramahansa Ramakrishna', republished from the *Theistic Quarterly Review*.

scriptures was once in progress among his disciples when he exclaimed, 'Do you know what I think of it? books—sacred scriptures—all point the way to God. Once you know the way, what is the use of books?' A young man, typical of the educated middle classes of the day, obviously proud of his scholarship and knowledge of books and men, proceeded one day to the temple, attracted by the growing fame of the saint.<sup>2</sup> On learning that he was no scholar and had no use for books, he expressed extreme surprise, and at his first meeting embarked upon an argument with him on the subject of image worship. Ramakrishna swept aside his scholarly arguments. 'Why must you worry yourself about things above you and beyond your reach?' he asked. 'Does not the Lord of the universe abide in the temple of the human body and know the innermost thoughts of men? Seek then to know and revere God. Love God. That is the duty nearest you.'

Apparent contradictions were nothing to him. God is the Absolute, the One, the All, the Brahman of the philosopher. But that does not prevent Him from manifesting Himself in different aspects in His relations with the phenomenal world—as Krishna in His aspect of divine love, as Kāli in His aspect of creator of the universe and saviour of mankind. And when you realize God, such things cease to puzzle. 'Sir, is it possible to see God?' asked the scholar. 'Certainly,' came the reply. 'Cry unto the Lord with a yearning heart, and you shall see Him.' It is clear from the testimony of his disciples that Ramakrishna himself constantly attained that pitch of spiritual exaltation which is

---

<sup>2</sup>Professor M.N. Gupta, a teacher in Calcutta who subsequently became a devoted disciple of Ramakrishna, and under the *nom-de-plume* of 'M' wrote an account of his life and teaching entitled *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*....The sketch of the saint and his teaching which I have drawn in this chapter is based upon Professor Gupta's narrative.

called by the Hindus *samādhi*, a state of trance induced by God-consciousness—that communion with the Infinite enjoyed by the rishis of old and spoken of by Professor B.N. Seal as the bliss of Brahman, which is beyond all words and above all reason.

With even scantier consideration, he brushed aside the question of the apparent partiality of God. 'Am I then, Sir,' asked Pandit Vidyasagar on one occasion, 'to believe that we come into the world with unequal endowments? Is the Lord partial to a select few?' To which the Master replied, 'Well, I am afraid you will have to take the facts of the universe as they stand. It is not given to man to see clearly into the ways of the Lord.'

The value which he attached to ratiocination and inspiration respectively, is well illustrated by a scene which took place one afternoon in the presence of a number of his disciples in the grounds of the temple. 'Is there any book in English on the art of reasoning?' he asked one of his Western-educated followers. He was informed that there were such treatises and, as an example, was told of that part of logic which dealt with reasoning from general propositions to particulars. He appeared to pay little attention to these explanations, which evidently fell flat upon his ear. And looking at him a little while after, his would-be instructor marvelled and became speechless. I give the description of the scene in his own words. 'The Master stands motionless. His eyes are fixed. It is hard to say whether he is breathing or not...The smile on his lips shows ecstatic delight that he feels at the sight of the blessed vision. Yes, he must be enjoying a vision of unequalled beauty which puts into the shade the refulgence of a million moons! Is this God vision? If so, what must be the intensity of faith and devotion, of discipline and austerity which has brought such a vision within reach of mortal man?' The writer goes on to tell us that he wended his way home with this unique picture of *samādhi* and the ecstasy of divine love vividly reflected in his mind, and that there

echoed within him as he went these words, 'Be incessantly merged, O my mind, in the sweetness of his love and bliss! Yes, be thou drunken with the joy of the Lord!'

Ramakrishna did not dissent from the monistic explanation of the universe. It was only that he was driven by temperament to attach far greater importance to the Personal aspect of God. The Absolute of Sankara could be realized, but only in perfect samādhi. On one occasion, half returning to consciousness from a state of trance, he was heard exclaiming, 'Yes, my Holy Mother (Kāli) is none other than the Absolute. She it is to whom the six systems of philosophy with all their learned disquisitions furnish no clue.' But when a man returned from samādhi he became a differentiated ego once more, and was thrown back upon the world of relativity so that he perceived the world-system (māyā) as real. Why? Because with the return of his egoity he was convinced that he as an individual was real; and 'so long as his ego is real to him (real relatively) the world is real too, and the Absolute is unreal (unreal relatively).' he laid constant stress upon this.

The saint returning from samādhi could say nothing about the Absolute. 'Once differentiated, he is mute as to the undifferentiated. Once in the relative world his mouth is shut as to the Absolute and Unconditioned.' And since samādhi was not achieved by the average man, he must meditate upon and commune with the Personal God, for 'so long as you are a person you cannot conceive of, think or perceive God otherwise than as a person.'

In Ramakrishna's own case this latter difficulty was undoubtedly a predilection as much as a necessity, for by temperament he was emotional rather than critical. 'As a rule,' he declared, 'the devotee does not long for the realization of the Impersonal. He is anxious that the whole of his ego should not be effaced in samādhi.' And the reason which he gives is the one to be expected from a man of his temperament. 'He would fain have sufficient individuality left to him to enjoy the vision divine as a person. He

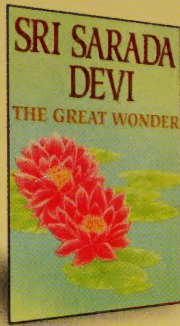
would fain taste the sugar in place of being one with the sugar itself.'

His creed was summed up by him during a visit to Pandit Shashadhar in Calcutta one afternoon in 1884. 'Many paths lead to God, the path of knowledge, that of works and that of self-surrender and devotion. The way of knowledge is for the philosopher. His object is to realize Brahman the Absolute. He says "Neti, neti" (not this, not this), and so eliminates one unreal thing after another until he arrives at a point at which all discrimination between the Real and the unreal ceases. The way of works is that laid down in the *Gītā*, to live in the world but not to be of the world; to practise at all times an exalted altruism. Neither of these paths is easy to travel in the present age. It is almost impossible in these materialistic days to get rid of the conviction that the self is identical with the body. How, then, can a man understand that he is one with the universal soul, the Being absolute and unconditioned? Similarly with the way of works. A man may form a resolution to work without expectation of any reward or fear of punishment in this world or the next; but the chances are that consciously or unconsciously he will get attached to the fruit of his work. Let a man then choose the way of worship and seek communion with the Personal God, for the path of love, adoration and self-surrender to God is the easiest of all paths. It teaches the necessity of prayer without ceasing, it is in this age 'the shortest cut leading to God.'

[*The Heart of Aryavarta*, published by Constable and Company Ltd., London, Second Printing.]







**Sri Sarada Devi — The Great Wonder!** Yes. But how many people could, even remotely, discover it? How many people could even concede it? Only the apostles of Sri Ramakrishna could know her greatness and Swami Vivekananda has openly declared it in one of his letters. Needless to mention, this anthology is only a humble attempt to help the readers to have a distant glimpse of Sri Sarada Devi — The Great Wonder as she was.

**Vivekananda — The Great Spiritual Teacher**

This book, an anthology of forty articles collected from various sources, describes how Swamiji worked to awaken the spiritual consciousness of human beings all over the world, and how he brought about a new movement in human life and society.





Sri Ramakrishna Temple, Belur Math sprawling over several acres of land on the western bank of the Hooghly (Ganga), is a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world professing different religious faiths. Even people not interested in religion come here for the peace it exudes.

**T**HIS BOOK consists of articles by the Master's direct disciples as well as by his contemporaries; several articles by his Eastern and Western admirers — monks of the Order, leading men of letters, national leaders, philosophers, statesmen, and other eminent men, each well known in his respective field. All the contributors have the same aim in view — studying the unique life and message of the Master and paying their humble homage to this child of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna, who is acclaimed as the Prophet of Renascent India.

*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 claims for himself.*

*Sri Ramakrishna was a wonderful gardener. Therefore, he has made a bouquet of different flowers and formed his Order. All different types and ideas have come into it and many more will come.*

— Swami Vivekananda



Distributed by

**Vedanta Press**

1946 Vedanta Pl. · Hollywood CA 90068

e-mail: [info@vedanta.org](mailto:info@vedanta.org)

[www.advaitaonline.com](http://www.advaitaonline.com)