

**SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA  
KATHAMRITA CENTENARY MEMORIAL**



# SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA CENTENARY MEMORIAL

Editors

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**Library & Meditation Hall:**

**SRI SRI KATHAMRITA PEETH**

**Sector 19-D, CHANDIGARH – 160019**

Published by

©The President

**SRI MA TRUST**

579, Sector 18-B, Chandigarh – 160018.

First Edition  
26 February 1982

Second Edition 2009  
XX XXXX 2004

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पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।  
तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥

*Om Thakur, our Beloved Father, on this 26<sup>th</sup> Day of February 1982, we, the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, dedicate this Volume – Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial – at Your lotus-feet in memory of the Great Day a hundred years ago, when for the first time, You and Your Divine Word touched Revered M.'s heart for the peace and joy of humanity.*

*Yourself, accompanied by Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, Sri M. and Your other beloved Disciples, do bless us, be always with us, guide us in the right direction!*

*May the entire universe be the abode of peace and happiness real!*

ॐ श्रीरामकृष्णार्पणमस्तु

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Peeth  
Sector 19-D, Chandigarh  
26 February 1982









# BLESSINGS AND MESSAGES

– Extracts from letters

\* ... I pray to Lord Sri Ramakrishna that by His grace your sincere endeavour for publishing a Centenary Volume on Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita may be fulfilled.

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita has brought a new light as well as a unique expression to seekers of God to realize truth. It showers eternal Bliss and Peace in the minds of an aspirant as well as a miserable soul. Although numerous public in general has yet to know about this *Gospel* and its blessed writer, I sincerely hope that this Centenary Volume of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita will help the public a lot to understand the message and ideals of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna ...

*Swami Saradeshananda*

4 December 1979

Ramakrishna Math, Vrindaban

\* ... In the religious history of India, during the last one hundred years two events are particularly remarkable. One is Sri Sri Swamiji's sojourn in the West for two couples of years representing Indian spirituality and his establishment of the Belur Math and the Order of monks after his return from the West. The second was the recording of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Master Mahashaya which has become the Bible for countless people devoted to our Great Master. The author of it though disguised behind the initial *M.* will be remembered as long as the book will be read. Only a person who denies the Sun in the sky will deny *M.* and his work ensouling the spirit of the Master. I feel much but I cannot write more... I am nearing 80... and rest here in complete retirement ... I pray for your success at the feet of our Lord.

*Swami Vimalananda*

18 May 1980

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nettayam, Trivandrum

\* It has been my privilege to see *M.* often when he was at Morton School on Amherst Street, Calcutta. Every evening he would meet a dozen or more devotees and talk to them. I often used to join this group of people because I was the youngest among them – I was only 16 when I first saw him – *M.* paid special attention to me, at least that is how I felt then. He specially wanted to know my background, the kind of family I came from, whether my mother practised meditation daily and whether I myself ever meditated. There was a time when I used to visit him at least twice a week but later I was not able to visit him often as I was away from Calcutta. I joined the Mission at Deoghar Vidyapith (where Swami Nityatmananda was among the monks there) and came down to Belur Math to spend a few days with Sri Sri Mahapurush Maharaj, then President of the Math and Mission. One morning I was cutting vegetables with others when word came that *M.* had passed away. It was like a bolt from the blue. The year was 1932. Tears came to my eyes and many memories rushed into my mind. How kind he had always been to me, not only to me but everybody else i.e., everybody who was a spiritual aspirant. I went to his house at Guruprasad Chowdhury Lane where he breathed his last. I joined a group of his admirers in carrying the dead body to the cremation ground at Cossipore where his own Master had been cremated. Soon we

discovered that there was quite a long procession of people, many of them strangers who had joined up. This was because by then *M.* was very well-known in Calcutta and the news that he had passed away drew his admirers from many parts of the city. As his body was laid on the funeral pyre, I noticed the same calm face with the broad forehead, large ears, the white beard which had always distinguished him. I felt sad as I had much contact with him in his closing years but I have the consolation that his blessings are always on me.

*Swami Lokeshwarananda*

23 October 1981                      Secretary, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of  
Culture, Calcutta

I wish all success to your Centenary Volume.

*Swami Ranganathananda*

2 December 1979                      President, The Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad

\* Your plan is very beautiful and auspicious... May Sri Thakur bless it with success.

*Swami Apurvananda*

21 December 1979                      The Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi

\* It is an honour to be asked to write on the *Kathamrita* – so unique in its contents and universal in its appeal. Sri Ma has immortalized himself by noting the words of God so vividly and directly. The world of seekers of truth and lovers of God will always feel grateful to him for this wonderful contribution/service. Sri Ma is and will be ever remembered with reverence for presenting Sri Ramakrishna so clearly and dearly...

*Swami Atmasthananda*

15 May 1980                      Asst. Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur

\* I am happy to know that Sri Ma Trust is planning to publish the Centenary Volume... I do pray that your noble effort may have blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma Sarada Devi and their illustrious disciple *M.* who was the Chosen One to be His Voice to the future generation.

*Parivrajika Mokshaprana*

30 April 1980                      President, Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar

\* I pray to the Master that the publication may be crowned with success bringing blessings to the readers, contributors and organizers...

29 May 1980  
Swami Prabudhhananda  
Vedanta Society of Northern California,  
San Francisco, USA

\* I note your noble venture to publish a Kathamrita Centenary Volume... Wishing you all good luck in your venture.

10 May 1980  
Swami Bhavyananda  
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End,  
Bucks, England

\* I, however, wish your project all success and may Sri Ramakrishna bless and protect you always!

24 March 1980  
Swami Bhaskarananda  
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Seattle, USA

\* ...laudable endeavour. I pray to God for the success of your endeavour...

13 May 1980  
Swami Dhyanananda  
Udbodhan Office, Calcutta

\* ... Indeed it is a great and grand attempt to publish the volume with suitable sublime articles on the *Kathamrita* for the good of the common people and the Ramakrishna Movement...

31 Dec 1979  
Swami Dharmeshananda  
Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi

\* ... We congratulate you for making such a noble plan and wish you all success.

Swami Shivamayananda  
Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir, Belur Math

\* ... This is a bold and noble venture no doubt... the task is equally difficult... with best wishes...

24 Feb 1980  
Swami Niramayananda  
Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay

\* ...I am glad to know that you are bringing out a Kathamrita Centenary Volume

in the near future. The volume will benefit many devotees who will like to learn new facts regarding the Kathamrita and/or see the same from a new angle. Sri Ma Trust is eminently the proper body to bring out such a volume...

7 Jan. 1980

Swami Krishnananda  
Ramakrishna Sarada Math, Varanasi  
Ramakrishna Math (Tulsi Math), Rishikesh

# **PREFACE TO 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION**



# PREFACE TO 1ST EDITION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 26<sup>th</sup> of February, 1882! On this day was created religious history, for from all available evidence, it was on this day that Sri *M.*, the apostle and the evangelist, met his Lord and Master, Sri Ramakrishna, for the first time and heard His divine word which was to bring the *Kathamrita*, the Nectar of His Word into being, for the peace and bliss of the strife torn restless world. On being asked which was the greatest event of this life, Sri *M.*, himself said without a moment's hesitation: "The day I had my first *darshana* of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) in February 1882."

Regarding this date, 26 February, 1882 there is some uncertainty in the minds of some devotees, because Sri *M.* himself did not record the dates of his first three meetings with the Master in so many words. However, he did say that his first meeting took place on a Sunday ... 'a few days after the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1882'. The only Sunday after 23 February 1882 till the end of the month fell on 26 February. This is our reason for taking this date as *the* day of Sri *M.*'s first meeting with Thakur, and therefore of the beginnings of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the Gospel, though only in seed form.

To celebrate this great day we promised ourselves a *yajna*, by collecting all available views on the *Kathamrita* and its Recorder and publish them in the form of a Centenary Memorial which we hoped would help remind our readers of the glory of the Great Master, his Word and his Evangelist. Sadhus and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were therefore invited to offer their *ahutis* (oblations) in the form of write-ups into this holy venture.

We are happy that quite a few of them agreed and even those who could not, sent us their blessings. When even two sadhus of Thakur sit together to talk of Him and His Lila, there surely, He is. In this Volume, so many sadhus and devotees have joined their hearts and heads that we feel, to our great joy that our *sankalpa*, our holy resolve, is amply fulfilled by His never-failing grace.

Whether literary or devotional, contributions to this Volume are all offerings to the feet of the Great Master made lovingly by fond hearts. This only we may claim for them in all humility.

While we thank Thakur for His unbounded grace, we would be failing in our duty if we did not express our sincere gratitude to Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and all those who accepted our invitation to write for this Volume. We had been forewarned that we were undertaking 'a most difficult project' but our generous contributors and friends have made it possible in the long run. We sincerely thank them.

We are also thankful to the authors, journals and institutions which have permitted us the use of copyright materials. We have tried to make all acknowledgements in the body of the book itself but if inadvertently any omission has been made we offer our sincere apologies.

The *Kathamrita* is sometimes criticized for repetitions of Thakur's teachings in different places. If this is a valid criticism in the case of the *Kathamrita*, it would be more so in the case of this Volume, for quite a few of our contributors repeat the same facts though in different contexts. However, we feel that repetition of truths in different contexts is an invaluable advantage in the domain of Reality for it is only by repetition that spiritual truths leave their impression on the mind which, alas, normally remains so full of worldly dross.

We regret that it has not been possible for us to use diacritical marks even where they were indicated by our writers. Our apologies to them. Our apologies also to those authors who find their write-up split in two parts or shortened or slightly edited. We were constrained to have recourse to these devices to make the matter received conform to the scheme of the book. May we point out, in this connection, that while inviting contributions we had left our authors full discretion to choose their subjects and the length of their write-ups. It was only when most of the contributions had been received that the book began to take some shape in the mind of our editors.

As the table of contents shows, the Volume has been divided into four parts: 1. Sri Ramakrishna, 2. The *Kathamrita*, 3. Sri *M.* and 4. Sri Ma Darshan. Needless to say that the editors were guided into this scheme by Thakur's great dictum: 'Bhakta – Bhagavata – Bhagavan', which if we may interpret means, that God, His Word and His (genuine) Devotee are one and the same. Thus the Volume achieves a unique unity in spite of its being so unplanned! Who dares plan Thakur's work!

We also express thanks to our friends who have helped us in this venture by making timely donations. Our thanks are specially due to 'Sri Marwari Charitable Society' Kanpur, from whom we received our first generous donation for this Volume.

In the end, may we add that the views expressed in this book are essentially of our devotee contributors individually – not necessarily of any organization. Those who read this Memorial Volume may attain bhakti at Sri Ramakrishna's feet – this is the sole prayer of Sri Ma Trust.

Ishwar Devi Gupta  
PUBLISHER



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*“... in Sri Ramakrishna’s service”*





# INTRODUCTION



# Mahendranath Gupta, The Recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Tapasyananda

The sixth Indian edition of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as translated by Swami Nikhilananda, was published in 1974 by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, with the addition of a life-sketch of Sri *M.* under the title, 'The Recorder of the *Gospel* Mahendranath Gupta', by Swami Tapasyananda.

Another shorter introduction, also by Swami Tapasyananda, appeared in '*The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*' (which, in fact, is Volume One of Sri *M.*'s English Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in its sixth impression of 1978). This Introduction comprises a 'History of *Gospel* Literature' and a short note on Sri *M.* and the *Gospel*, under the sub-title, 'About the Author Himself'.

Most of the admirers of the *Gospel* have found invaluable basic material on Sri *M.* and the *Gospel* in these two introductions. It was therefore felt that a combination of the two would serve admirably as introduction to 'Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial'. Sri Dipak Gupta, himself a scion of Sri *M.*'s family, presents this combined Introduction, with the kind permission of the author and publisher.

Passages incorporated from the Introduction to the 'Condensed Gospel' have been marked by an asterisk.

**"... and if there is in the world any one text that comes very near the original teaching of a God-man, it is the record of *M.* and *M.* alone."**

In the life of the great Saviours and Prophets of the world it is often found that they are accompanied by souls of high spiritual potency who play a conspicuous part in the furtherance of their Master's mission. They become so integral a part of the life and work of these great ones that posterity can think of them only in mutual association. Such is the case with Sri Ramakrishna and *M.*, whose diary has come to be known to this world as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English and as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in the original Bengali version.

Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta, ♦ familiarly known to the readers of the *Gospel* by his pen name *M.*, and to the devotees as Master Mahashaya, was born on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1854 as the son of Madhusudan Gupta, an officer of the Calcutta High Court, and his wife Swarnamayee Devi. He had a brilliant scholastic career at Hare School and the Presidency College at Calcutta. The range of studies included the best that both occidental and oriental learning had to offer. English literature, history, economics, western philosophy and law on the one hand, and Sanskrit literature and grammar, Darsanas, Puranas, Smritis, Jainism, Buddhism, astrology and Ayurveda on the other were the subjects in which he attained considerable proficiency.

He was an educationist all his life both in a spiritual and in a secular sense. After

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♦ In the body of the *Gospel*, he also appears under the assumed names of Mani, Mohini Mohan and Master (meaning school teacher). He is familiarly referred to in the circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees as Master Mahashaya. Readers who want to know in greater detail about *M.* and his teachings may read the book *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda. It is in 16 parts in Bengali (of which 10 parts have been published in English also) and records the conversations of *M.* in his later years with devotees, more or less on the lines of the *Gospel*.

he passed out of college he took up work as headmaster in a number of schools in succession – Narnail High School, City School, Ripon College School, Metropolitan School, Aryan School, Oriental School, Oriental Seminary and Model School. The causes of his migration from school to school were that he could not get on with some of the managements on grounds of principles and that often his spiritual mood drew him away to places of pilgrimage for long periods. He worked with some of the most noted public men of the time like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Surendranath Banerjee. The latter appointed him as a professor in the City and Ripon College where he taught subjects like English, Philosophy, History and Economics. In his later days he took over the Morton School, and he spent his time in the staircase room of the third floor of it, administering the school and preaching the message of the Master. He was much respected in educational circles where he was usually referred to as Rector Mahashaya. A teacher who had worked under him writes thus in warm appreciation of his teaching methods: “Only when I worked with him in school could I appreciate what a great educationist he was. He would come down to the level of his students when teaching, though he himself was so learned, so talented. Ordinarily teachers confine their instructions to what is given in books without much thought as to whether the student can accept it or not. But *M.* would first of all gauge how much the student could take in and by what means. He would employ aids to teaching like maps, pictures and diagrams, so that his students could learn by seeing. Thirty years ago (from 1959) when the question of imparting education through the medium of the mother tongue was being discussed, *M.* had already employed Bengali as the medium of instruction in the Morton School.”<sup>1</sup>

Imparting secular education was, however, only his profession; *M.*'s main concern was with the spiritual regeneration of man – a calling for which Destiny seems to have chosen him. From his childhood he was deeply pious, and he used to be moved very much by sadhus, temples and Durga Puja celebrations. The piety and eloquence of the great Brahmo leader of the times, Keshab Chandra Sen, elicited a powerful response from the impressionable mind of Mahendra Nath, as it did in the case of many an idealistic young man of Calcutta, and prepared him to receive the great Light that was to dawn on him with the coming of Sri Ramakrishna into his life.

This epoch-making event of his life came about in a very strange way. *M.* belonged to a joint family with several collateral members. Some ten years after he began his career as an educationist, bitter quarrels broke out among the members of the family, driving the sensitive *M.* to despair and utter despondency. He lost all interest in life and left home one night to go into the wide world with the idea of ending his life. At dead of night he took rest in his sister's house at Baranagore, and in the morning, accompanied by a nephew Siddheswar, he wandered from one garden to another in Calcutta until Siddheswar brought him to the Temple Garden of Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna was then living. After spending some time in the beautiful rose garden there, he was directed to the room of the Paramhansa, where the eventful meeting of the Master and the disciple took place on a blessed evening (the exact date is not on record)\* on a Sunday in March, 1882. As regards what followed during the succeeding few moments –\*\* ‘so momentous in the spiritual history of mankind – the reader is referred to the opening section of the first chapter of the *Gospel*. Literally, the man who went to die, remained to pass through a spiritual ascension without physical death. He found the real vocation of his life, the true purpose of his earthly sojourn.’

<sup>1</sup> *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda, Part I, p. 15

\* See our comments on the exact date in Article 20, pp. 164 entitled ‘A Submission’ by D.P. Gupta, in this Volume [Ed.]

\*\* Quoted from the *Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. xiii- xiv [Ed.]

The Master, who divined the mood of desperation in *M.*, his resolve to take leave of this 'play-field of deception', put new faith and hope into him by his gracious words of assurances: "God forbid! Why should you take leave of this world? Do you not feel blessed by discovering your Guru? By his grace, what is beyond all imagination or dreams can be easily achieved!" At these words the clouds of despair moved away from the horizon of *M.*'s mind, and the sunshine of a new hope revealed to him fresh vistas of meaning in life. Referring to this phase of life, *M.* used to say, "Behold! Where is the resolve to end life, and where the discovery of God! That is, sorrow should be looked upon as a friend of man. God is all good."<sup>2</sup>

After his re-settlement, *M.*'s life revolved around the Master though he continued his professional work as an educationist. During all holidays, including Sundays, he spent his time and Dakshineswar in the Master's company, and at times extended his stay to several days.

It did not take much time for *M.* to become very intimate with the Master or for the Master to recognise in this disciple a divinely commissioned partner in the fulfillment of his spiritual mission. When *M.* was reading out the Chaitanya Bhagavata, the Master discovered that he had been, in a previous birth, a disciple and companion of the great Vaishnava teacher, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the Master even saw him with his naked eye participating in the ecstatic mass-singing of the Lord's name under the leadership of that Divine personality. So the Master told *M.*, "You are my own, of the same substance – as the father and the son," indicating thereby that *M.* was one of the chosen few and a part and parcel of his Divine mission.

There was an urge in *M.* to abandon the household life and become a Sannyasi. When he communicated this idea to the Master he forbade him saying, "Mother has told me that you have to do a little of her work – you will have to teach Bhagavata, the word of God to humanity. The Mother keeps a Bhagavata Pandit with a bondage in the world!"<sup>3</sup>

An appropriate allusion indeed! Bhagavata, the great scripture that has given the word of Sri Krishna to mankind, was composed by the Sage Vyasa under similar circumstances. When caught up in a mood of depression like that of *M.*, Vyasa was advised by the sage Narada that he would gain peace of mind only on composing a work exclusively devoted to the depiction of the Lord's glorious attributes and his teachings on Knowledge and Devotion, and the result was that the world got from Vyasa the invaluable gift of the Bhagavata Purana depicting the life and teachings of Sri Krishna. From the mental depression of the modern Vyasa, the world has obtained the Kathamrita – *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Sri Ramakrishna was a teacher for both the orders of mankind, sannyasins and householders. His own life offered an ideal example for both, and he left behind disciples who followed the highest traditions he had set in respect of both these ways of life. *M.* was married to Nikunja Devi, a distant relative of Keshab Chandra Sen, even when he was reading at college, and he had four children, two sons and two daughters. The responsibility of the family, no doubt, made him dependent on his professional income, but the great devotee that he was, he never compromised with ideals, and principles for this reason. Once when he was working as the headmaster in a school managed by the great Vidyasagar, the results of the school, at the public examination happened to be

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<sup>2</sup> *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist*, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36

rather poor, and Vidyasagar attributed it to *M.*'s preoccupation with the Master and his consequent failure to attend adequately to the school work. *M.* at once resigned his post without any thought of the morrow. Within a fortnight the family was in poverty, and *M.* was one day pacing up and down the verandah of his house, musing how he would feed his children the next day. Just then a man came with a letter addressed to 'Mahendra Babu' and on opening it, *M.* found that it was a letter from his friend Sri Surendra Nath Banerjee, asking whether he would like to take up a professorship in the Ripon College. In this way, three or four times he gave up the job that gave him the wherewithal to support the family either for upholding principles or for practising spiritual *sadhanas* in holy places, without any consideration of the possible dire worldly consequences; but he was always able to get over these difficulties somehow, and the interests of his family never suffered. In spite of his disregard for worldly goods, he was, towards the later part of his life, in a fairly flourishing condition as the proprietor of the Morton School which he developed into a noted educational institution in the city. The Lord has said in the Bhagavad-Gita that in the case of those who think of nothing except Him, He himself would take up all their material and spiritual responsibilities. *M.* was an example of the truth of the Lord's promise.

Though his children received proper attention from him, his real family, both during the Master's lifetime and after consisted of saints, devotees, sannyasins and spiritual aspirants. His life exemplifies the Master's teaching that an ideal house-holder must be like a good maid-servant of a family, loving and caring properly for the children of the house, but knowing always that her real house and children are elsewhere. During the Master's lifetime he spent all his Sundays and other holidays with him and his devotees, and besides listening to the talks and devotional music, practised meditation both on the personal and the impersonal aspects of God under the direct guidance of the Master. In the pages of the *Gospel* the reader gets a picture of *M.*'s spiritual relationship with the Master – how from a hazy belief in the impersonal God of the Brahmos, he was step by step brought to accept both personality and impersonality as the two aspects of the same Non-dual Being, how he was convinced of the manifestation of that Being as Gods, Goddesses and as Incarnations, and how he was established in a life that was both of Jnani and of a Bhakta. This Jnani-Bhakta outlook and way of living became so dominant a feature of his life that Swami Raghavananda, who was very closely associated with him during his last six years, remarks, "Among those who lived with *M.* in later days, some felt that he always lived in this constant and conscious union with God even with open eyes (i.e., even in waking consciousness)".<sup>4</sup>

Besides undergoing spiritual disciplines at the feet of the Master *M.* used to go to holy places during the Master's lifetime itself and afterwards too as a part of his *sadhana*. He was one of the earliest of the disciples to visit Kamarpukur, the birth-place of the Master, in the latter's lifetime itself; for he wished to practise contemplation on the Master's early life in its true original setting. His experience there is described as follows by Swami Nityatmananda: "By the grace of the Master, he saw the entire Kamarpukur as a holy place bathed in an effulgent Light. Trees and creepers, beasts and birds and men – all were made of effulgence. So he prostrated to all on the road. He saw a tom-cat which appeared to him luminous with the Light of Consciousness. Immediately he fell to the ground and saluted it."<sup>5</sup> He had similar experience in Dakshineswar also. At the instance of the Master he also visited Puri, and in the words

<sup>4</sup> Swami Raghavananda's article on *M.* in *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 442.

<sup>5</sup> *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda, Vol. I. p. 40.

of Swami Nityatmananda, “with indomitable courage, *M.* embraced the image of Jagannath out of season.”<sup>6</sup>

The life of *sadhana* and holy association that he started on at the feet of the Master, he continued all through his life. He has for this reason been most appropriately described as a *grihastha-sannyasi* (householder-sannyasin). Though he was forbidden by the Master to become a sannyasin, his reverence for the sannyasin ideal was whole-hearted and was without any reservation. So after Sri Ramakrishna’s passing away, while several of the Master’s householder devotees considered the young sannyasin disciples of the Master as inexperienced and inconsequential, *M.* stood by them with the firm faith that the Master’s life and message were going to be perpetuated only through them. Swami Vivekananda wrote from America in a letter to the inmates of the Math: “When Sri Thakur (Master) left the body, everyone gave us up as few unripe urchins. But *M.* and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We cannot repay our debt to them.”<sup>7</sup>

*M.* spent his weekends and holidays with the monastic brethren who, after the Master’s demise, had formed themselves into an Order with a Math at Baranagore, and participated in the intense life of devotion and meditation that they followed. At other times he would retire to Dakshineswar or some garden in the city and spend several days in spiritual practice taking simple self-cooked food. In order to feel that he was one with all mankind he often used to go out of his home at dead of night, and like a wandering sannyasin, sleep with the waifs on some open verandah or footpath on the road.

After the Master’s demise, *M.* went on pilgrimage several times. He visited Banaras, Vrindaban, Ayodhya and other places. At Banaras he visited the famous Trailanga Swami and fed him with sweets, and he had long conversations with Swami Bhaskarananda, one of the noted saintly and scholarly sannyasins of the time. In 1912 he went with the Holy Mother to Banaras, and spent about a year in the company of Sannyasins at Banaras, Vrindaban, Hardwar, Rishikesh, and Swargashram. But he returned to Calcutta, as that city offered him the unique opportunity of associating himself with the places hallowed by the Master in his lifetime. Afterwards he does not seem to have gone to any far off place, but stayed in his room in the Morton School carrying on his spiritual ministry, speaking on the Master and his teachings to the large number of people who flocked to him after having read his famous *Kathamrita* known to English readers as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

This brings us to the circumstances that led to the writing and publication of this monumental work, which has made *M.* one of the immortals in hagiographic literature. While many educated people heard Sri Ramakrishna’s talks, it was given to this illustrious personage alone to leave a graphic and exact account of them for posterity with details like date, hour, place, names and particulars about participants. Humanity owes this great book to the ingrained habit of diary-keeping with which *M.* was endowed. Even as a boy of about thirteen, while he was a student in the 3<sup>rd</sup> class of the Hare School, he was in the habit of keeping a diary. “Today on rising”, he wrote in his diary, “I greeted my father and mother, prostrating on the ground before them.”<sup>8</sup> At

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<sup>6</sup> The idea is this: According to the rules of the temple, the worshippers could touch the image only in certain months of the year. *M.*, overpowered by devotion, broke these rules in the complete forgetfulness of spiritual absorption and touched the Deity during the forbidden time.

<sup>7</sup> Swami Raghavananda’s article on *M.* in *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. XXX, p. 442.

<sup>8</sup> Swami Nityatmananda’s *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist, Part I*, p. 29.

another place he wrote, "Today, while on my way to school, I visited, as usual, the temple of Kali, the Mother at Thanthania, and of Mother Sitala, and paid my obeisance to them". About twenty-five years after, when he met the great master in the spring of 1882, it was the same instinct of a born diary-writer that made him begin his book, 'unique in the literature of hagiography' with the memorable words: "When hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform devotions such as sandhya any more."

In addition to this instinct for diary keeping, *M.* had great endowments contributing to success in this line, writes Swami Nityatmananda who lived in close association with *M.*, in his book entitled '*M. the Apostle and the Evangelist*': "*M.*'s prodigious memory combined with his extraordinary power of imagination completely annihilated the distance of time and place for him. Even after the lapse of half a century he could always visualise vividly scenes from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Superb too was his power to portray pictures by words."

Besides the prompting of his inherent instinct, the main inducement for *M.* to keep this diary of his experiences at Dakshineswar was his desire to provide himself with a means of living in holy company at all times. Being a school teacher, he could be with the Master only on Sundays and other holidays, and it was on his diary that he depended for 'holy company' on other days. The devotional scriptures like the Bhagavata say that holy company is the first and most important means for the generation and growth of devotion. For, in such company man could hear talk on spiritual matters and listen to the glorification of divine attributes charged with the fervour and conviction emanating from the hearts of great lovers of God. Such company is, therefore, the one certain means through which *sraddha* (faith), *rati* (attachment to God) and *bhakti* (loving devotion) are generated. The diary of his visits to Dakshineswar provided *M.* with material for re-living, through reading and contemplation, the holy company he had had earlier, even on days when he was not able to visit Dakshineswar. The wealth of details and the vivid description of men and things in the midst of which the sublime conversations are set provide excellent material to re-live those experiences for any one with imaginative powers. It was observed by *M.*'s disciples and admirers that in later life also whenever he was free or alone, he would be pouring over his diary, transporting himself on the wings of imagination to the glorious days he spent at the feet of the Master.

During the Master's lifetime. *M.* does not seem to have revealed the contents of his diary to anyone. There is an unconfirmed tradition that when the Master saw him taking notes, he expressed apprehension at the possibility of his utilising these to publicise him like Keshab Sen; for the Great Master was so full of the spirit of renunciation and humility that he disliked being lionised. It must be for this reason that no one knew about this precious diary of *M.* for a decade until he brought out selections from it as a pamphlet in English in 1897 with the Holy Mother's blessings and permission. The Holy Mother, being very much pleased to hear parts of the diary read to her in Bengali, wrote to *M.*: "When I heard the *Kathamrita*, (Bengali name of the book) I felt as if it was He, the Master who was saying all that".<sup>9</sup>

The two pamphlets in English entitled the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* appeared in October and November 1897. They drew the spontaneous acclamation of Swami Vivekananda, who wrote on 24<sup>th</sup> November of that year from Dehradun to *M.*: "Many

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Part I, p. 37.



many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a Great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise – so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted His life before. It was been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.”<sup>10</sup>

And Swamiji added a post-script to the letter: “Socratic dialogues are Plato all over – you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it – here or in the West.” Indeed, in order to be unknown, Mahendra Nath had used the pen name *M.*, under which the book has been appearing till now. But so great a book cannot remain obscure for long, nor can its author remain unrecognised by the large public in these modern times. *M.* and his book came to be widely known very soon and to meet the growing demand, a full-sized book Vol. I of the *Gospel*, translated by the author himself, was published in 1907 by the Brahmavadin office, Madras. A second edition of it, revised by the author, was brought out by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in December 1911, and subsequently a second part containing new chapters from the original Bengali was published by the same Math in 1922. The full English translation of the *Gospel* by Swami Nikhilananda appeared first in 1942.

In Bengali, the book is published in five volumes, the first part having appeared in 1902 and the others in 1905, 1907, 1910 and 1932 respectively.

\*“Here we have to draw the reader's attention to the brief remark of Swami Vivekananda at the end of second of his letters: “You will have many blessings on you and many more curses – that is always the way of the world, Sir.” This remark of Swamiji has proved prophetic; for this great work has had hostile criticism from different sources from different points of view. Some with this fanatical slant to pure Advaitism and a supercilious contempt and patronising attitude towards the conception of a Personal God and practice of devotion to Him, have the habit of dubbing the *Gospel* as a mere Sunday report of *M.* and that the Great Master had many great and superior teachings which he did not reveal to *M.* But they, however, never reveal their authority for upholding this claim, a claim that falsifies the certification by Swami Vivekananda and the Holy Mother.’

\*“It is however reasonable to concede that the *Gospel* does not contain all that the Master taught during a decade of more of his ministry, or record all the instructions he gave to individuals specially for their practice. But this is far different from questioning the representative character of the *Gospel* as the Master's message to mankind, as certified by Swami Vivekananda and the Holy Mother.’

\*“There are some others, especially among Christian ministers who want to downgrade this book on the ground that its contents are all *M.*'s thoughts, foisted on Sri Ramakrishna who was quite an unlearned rustic. Such critics forget that if by such argument these conversations recorded by so learned and talented a contemporary, a close and keen observer, and a devoted disciple like *M.* could be set aside, the same logic

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<sup>10</sup> *Vedanta Kesari* Vol. XIX, p. 141. Also given in the first edition of the *Gospel* published from Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1911.

\* Extracts from *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Madras, pp. xiv-xv. (Ed.)

\* Extracts from *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Madras, pp. xiv-xv. (Ed.)

would utterly devastate the credibility of their own scriptures – the Bibles, the Kurans, the Tripitakas and all other scriptural texts supposed to be the utterances of great men, but neither recorded during their lifetime, nor authenticated by any one whose intellectual and spiritual competence to preserve them correctly can be proved. They are mostly traditions which have been handed down by later generations of disciples and have taken shape in some cases more than a century after the original teachers had passed away. Under the circumstances, they are most unreliable and if there is in the world any one text that comes very near the original teaching of a God-man, it is the record of *M.* and *M.* alone.’

It looks as if *M.* was brought to the world by the Great Master to record his words and transmit them to posterity. Swami Sivananda, a direct disciple of the Master and the second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, says on this topic: “Whenever there was an interesting talk, the Master would call Master Mahashaya if he was not in the room, and then draw his attention to the holy words spoken. We did not know then why the Master did so. Now we can realise that this action of the Master had an important significance, for it was reserved for Master Mahashaya to give to the world at large the sayings of the Master.”<sup>11</sup> Thanks to *M.* we get, unlike in the case of the great teachers of the past, a faithful record with date, time, exact report of conversations, description of concerned men and places, references to contemporary events and personalities and a hundred other details for the last four years of the Master’s life (1882-1886) so that no one can doubt the historicity of the Master and his teaching at any time in the future.

*M.* was in every respect a true missionary of Sri Ramakrishna right from his first acquaintance with him in 1882. As a school teacher, it was a practice with him to direct to the Master such of his students as had a true spiritual disposition. Though himself prohibited by the Master to take to monastic life, he encouraged all spiritually inclined young men he came across in his later life to join the monastic Order. Swami Vijnanananda, a direct Sannyasin disciple of the Master and a President of the Ramakrishna Order, once remarked to *M.*: “By enquiry I have come to the conclusion that eighty per cent and more of the Sannyasins have embraced the monastic life after reading the *Kathamrita* and coming in contact with you.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1905 he retired from the active life of professor and devoted his remaining twenty-seven years exclusively to the preaching of the life and message of the Great Master. He bought the Morton Institution from its original proprietors and shifted it to a commodious four-storeyed house at 50 Amherst Street, where it flourished under his management as one of the most efficient educational institutions in Calcutta. He generally occupied a staircase room at the top of it, cooking his own meal which consisted only of milk and rice without variation, and attended to all his personal needs himself. His dress also was the simplest possible. It was his conviction that limitation of personal wants to the minimum is an important aid to holy living. About one hour in the morning he would spend in inspecting the classes of the school, and then retire to his staircase room to pour over his diary and live in the divine atmosphere of earthly days of the Great Master, unless devotees and admirers had already gathered in his holy company.

In appearance, *M.* looked a Vedic Rishi. Tall and stately in bearing, he had a strong and well-built body, an unusually broad chest, high forehead and arms extending

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<sup>11</sup> *Vedanta Kesari*, Vol. XIX, p. 141

<sup>12</sup> *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda, Part I, p. 37.

to the knees. His complexion was fair and his prominent eyes were always tinged with the expression of the divine love that filled his heart. Adorned with a silvery beard that flowed luxuriantly down his chest, and a shining face radiating the serenity and gravity of holiness, *M.* was as imposing and majestic as he was handsome and engaging in appearance. Humorous, sweet-tongued and eloquent when situation required, this great Maharshi of our age lived only to sing the glory of Sri Ramakrishna day and night. Though a very well versed scholar in the Upanishads, Gita and the philosophies of the East and the West, all his discussions and teachings found their culmination in the life and the message of Sri Ramakrishna, in which he found the real explanation and illustration of all the scriptures. Both consciously and unconsciously, he was the teacher of the *Kathamrita* – the nectarine words of the Great Master.

Though a much sought after spiritual guide, an educationist of repute and a contemporary and close associate of illustrious personages like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Keshab Chandra Sen and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, he was always moved by the noble humanity of a lover of God, which consists in respecting the personalities of all as receptacles of the Divine Spirit. So he taught without consciousness of a teacher, and no bar of superiority stood in the way of his doing the humblest service to his students and devotees. “He was a commission of love,” writes his close devotee, Swami Raghavananda, “and yet his soft and sweet words would pierce the stoniest heart, make the worldly-minded weep and repent and turn God wards.”<sup>13</sup>

As time went on and the number of devotees increased, the staircase room and terrace of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Morton Institution became a veritable *Naimisaryanya* of modern times, resounding all hours of the day, and sometimes of night too, with the word of God coming from the Rishi-like face of *M.* addressed to the eager God-seekers sitting around. To the devotees who helped him in preparing the text of the *Gospel* he would dictate the conversations of the Master in a meditative mood referring now and then to his diary. At times in the stillness of midnight he would awaken a nearby devotee and tell him: “Let us listen to the words of the Master in the depths of the night as he explains the truth of the *Pranava*.<sup>14</sup> \* ‘And to such devotee-amanuenses he would dictate, stirring the depths of his stupendous memory with the help of his diary and deep meditation, and re-living those blessed days he spent with the Master, what he had then heard with vivid and detailed description of the scenic contexts in which they were delivered. Thus has mankind got for the first time in history something that is very near to what an Incarnation of God spoke.’

Swami Raghavananda, an intimate devotee of *M.* writes as follows about the aforesaid devotional sittings; In the sweet and warm months of April and May, sitting under the canopy of heaven on the roof-garden of 50, Amherst Street, surrounded by shrubs and plants, himself sitting in their midst like a Rishi of old, the stars and planets in their courses beckoning us to things infinite and sublime, he would speak to us of the mysteries of God and His love and of the yearning that would rise in the human heart to solve the Eternal Riddle, as exemplified in the life of his Master. The mind, melting under the influence of his soft sweet words of light, would almost transcend the frontiers of limited existence and dare to peep into the infinite. He himself would take the influence of the setting and say what a blessed privilege it is to sit in such a setting (pointing to the starry heavens), in the company of the devotees discoursing of God and

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<sup>13</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. XXXVII, p. 499

<sup>14</sup> *Vedanta Kesari*, Vol. XIX, p. 142.

\* Extract from The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. XIV, [Ed.]

His love. These unforgettable scenes will long remain imprinted on the minds of his hearers.<sup>15</sup>

About twenty seven years of his life he spent in this way in the heart of the great city of Calcutta, radiating the Master's thoughts and ideals to countless devotees who flocked to him, and to still larger numbers who read his *Kathamrita*, the last part of which he had completed before June 1932 and given to the press. And miraculously, as it were, his end also came immediately after he had completed his life's mission. About three months earlier he had come to stay at his house at 13/2 Guru Prasad Chaudhury Lane in Thakur Bari\*, where the Holy Mother had herself installed the Master and where His regular worship was being conducted for the previous forty years. The night of 3<sup>rd</sup> June being the Phalaharini Kali Puja day, *M.* had sent his devotees who used to keep company with him, to attend the special worship at Belur Math at night. After attending the service at the home shrine, he went through the proofs of the *Kathamrita* for an hour. Suddenly he got a severe attack of neuralgic pain, from which he had been suffering now and then of late. Before 6 a.m. in the early hours of the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1932, he passed away, fully conscious and chanting: '*Gurudeva-Ma, Kole toole na-o!*' – O Master! O Mother! Take me in your arms!

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<sup>15</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata* Vol. XXXVII, p. 497

\* Now known as the *Kathamrita Bhavan* (Ed.)

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA

ॐ स्थापकाय च धर्मस्य सर्व धर्म स्वरूपिणे ।  
अवतारवरिष्ठाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् ।

*M.* – I feel that Christ, Chaitanya and yourself – all three are one and the same. It's the same person that has become all these three.

Sri Ramakrishna – Yes, yes! One! It is indeed one. Don't you see that it is He who dwells here in this way.

– The Kathamrita

*“O Ramakrishna, Founder of religion universal and  
Embodiment of all world religions!  
To Thee, the noblest of Divine Incarnations  
I offer my salutations.”*

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“In Him the whole world  
has found one home,  
One place of rest,  
one nest.” – Yajur Veda, xxxii-8

**Sri Ramakrishna**





# 1. SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S CONTRIBUTION TO MODERN THOUGHT

Swami Bhashyananda

Says Swami Nityatmananda in *M., the Apostle and the Evangelist*: “M. was my guru... It was from him that I heard for the first time that it is That very undifferentiated Satchidananda, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, beyond thought and word who had come into the body of Sri Ramakrishna.”

In the following article Swami Bhashyananda, Head of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago gives the background of Sri Ramakrishna's advent with a short narration of some outstanding events in his life and quotations from the *Gospel* of some of his important teachings.’

**“If He were a normal man like us, He would not have been a messenger of God as He was, nay, God Himself!”**

Two major religions, viz. Hinduism and Christianity, accept the doctrine of incarnation – God or the Ultimate Reality, whatever the term, by which it is called by various religions, appearing in tangible human form on the human plane. While Christianity accepts this concept, it emphasizes that God came only in the form of Christ as “the Son of God”; and it was a unique phenomenon, never seen in the past nor to be seen in the future. Hinduism, on the other hand, takes it as a universal spiritual Law. God has always manifested in His world, which is His creation, in human form whenever it was necessary to do so. This Universal Law has been spelt out by Lord Krishna in the Bhagvadgita – यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ... जन्म कर्म च मे (Bhagvad Gita IV, 7-9). He is Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Almighty Spirit. Nothing is impossible for Him. But we are human beings; divine truths have to be brought to the human level. Transcendental truths must be tuned to human understanding to be grasped by us. Although all spiritual truths are given in scriptures, still, we need interpretation and demonstration by a teacher in human form in order to fully absorb these truths. As long as man identifies himself with body and mind, he needs a humanized God. People then refer to Him as an Incarnation, God-man, Prophet, Messenger, or Son of God; and thus establish an intimate relationship with Him as Father, Mother, Friend, Child, etc.

An Incarnation manifests at times of spiritual crisis – when secular values and ideals appear to be getting an upper hand, and seem about to disrupt and ultimately destroy the orderly universe. The Incarnation restores the balance between the secular and the spiritual. Moses restored justice and the belief in the reality of one God. Christ removed the abuse of religion by Pharisees and Sadducees, and established the “kingdom of God” with grace and love, through prayer and surrender. Buddha removed the abuse of Vedic rituals by trafficking priests, and taught the way of Enlightenment for all through desirelessness and a moral and ethical code of conduct. Shankaracharya revived and justified the essentials of Vedic rituals, eschewed meaningless philosophical speculations, and established with the help of scriptures, reason, and experience the reality of Brahman – one without a second. Ramakrishna, in our age, demonstrated through his life and character that God is the Truth and He can be seen and realised in this very life with the help of the conquest of lust and greed. He also practised the

disciplines of different faiths in order to taste the Bliss of God – *jato mat tato path.*

The problem in the modern age of secularism and its attendant evils is driving the human race to a great crisis and ultimately toward destruction. Science and technology unsupported by spiritual ideals have brought about the present situation. Man's goal in life has become pleasure and the power derived from the investigation of the universe through scientific method. What was begun in the seventeenth century with modest means has gradually spread to the common man through three centuries with the help of mass communication, ultimately giving rise to restlessness, discontent, and frustration.

In the pre-scientific age, Europe had a different climate. People had, by and large, faith in a fatherly God in heaven. Christ was the Representative of God on earth and his teachings were a source of moral law and strength. The existence of vice was recognised, but virtue was sought after through the life of faith. Virtue was expected ultimately to triumph through the life of faith. It was felt that pious people would be rewarded with peace and happiness in heaven. His teaching gave people courage, hope, and faith.

However, slowly and steadily, the Church increased its power. Reason was not given any importance and freethinking was discouraged. Dogmas and creeds gradually got the upper hand. The "kingdom of God" became the "kingdom of man". Secular values eclipsed spiritual values. God was found to be an unnecessary hypothesis and was replaced by a self-evolving, self-preserving and self-dissolving nature. Darwin brought about a great turning point in human thought with his concept of the evolution of human life from matter. In the course of three and a half billion years, it is thought, man has evolved from stars through plants and animals. Blind instinct evolved into reason; through reason, science and technology developed, and with their help a human being is capable of eliminating all that is evil. Thus, there is no necessity of postulating the existence of God. Science and technology are responsible for mass-production and mass-communication. They, in their turn, have fostered dry, routine mechanization in human life. Man is seeking new excitements every day and still remains unsatisfied.

On November 18th, 1964, in an attempt to discover the real cause of the present unrest in every fabric of human society and to devise means for establishing peace on earth, distinguished world-leaders met in New York. Yet, on the very day prior to their meeting, four men were arrested for plotting to blow up the Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument, and the Liberty Bell; forty Brooklyn youths were fighting in a railway station, a bomb blasted a gate of the Vatican in Rome, and a new warning came that the super-powers of the world were expanding their atomic arsenals. This is only one example of the general discontent that has been spreading everywhere. Abundance and poverty are seen side by side! Suspicion and fear poison relationships between nations and nations! Destructive weapons are preserving a precarious peace through the balance of terror! Man feels he has no free will but, rather, is a helpless gadget in the world-machine created by science and technology. Evolution emphasizes man's animal heritage, though he is an image of God. In materially prosperous countries, there is an abundance of worries, neurosis, industrial strikes, drunkenness, family break-downs, juvenile delinquency, etc. The whole world is haunted by some unknown fear!

Let us now try to ponder a little, with this background of the present unrest created by modern science and technology. Let us project Sri Ramakrishna's life against this backdrop of the modern situation and its problems – individual, social, national, and international. Sri Ramakrishna was not a social reformer or a political agitator. He was simply a genuine lover of God. He put his finger on the sore spots in society which he

diagnosed as “*kamini-kanchana*” – lust or sensuality, gross or refined, and greed, marked or subtle. The resultant world-malady is spiritual malaise. Man finds he is not at peace with God and therefore not with himself, his fellow creatures, or the universe. There are three escapes from this predicament: (1) downward through drinking, sensuality, gambling, and other such methods; (2) sideward through art, dance, music, philanthropy, or literature; and (3) upward, through communion with God. Sri Ramakrishna showed the upward way through His life and teachings.

It will be worthwhile to take a short pilgrimage through some events of His life. He was born in a small village untouched by modern civilization. Perhaps no western man ever visited His village during His lifetime. Now it is a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world. He had God-fearing parents, magnanimous in hospitality and utterly simple and truthful. They were poor but contented. Prophets are generally born and brought up in such family circumstances. Those of the world teachers who are born, in princely families embrace voluntary poverty. Perhaps poverty increases receptivity to spiritual teachings. His was an extraordinary childhood – He was full of joy and fun, and always inclined to religious activities. He loved singing devotional songs and had a melodious voice which enthralled his devotees later in life. Through these songs He created a very high spiritual atmosphere around him. He was indifferent to modern education. Professor Max Müller observes in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna that Sri Ramakrishna’s teaching was effective because it was unadulterated by modern education. He loved solitude and spent his time in intense worship and prayer. He was brought to Calcutta by his elder brother to further his education. But Sri Ramakrishna did not show interest in the education, which would bring him only bread and butter. He used to say that vultures soar very high in the sky, but their attraction is on a rotten piece of flesh on the ground. He had a wonderful power of assimilating what he heard from scholars about Vedanta and religion, and explained to devotees abstruse spiritual truths in simple language – a curious phenomenon in the lives of all prophets. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the embodiment of His teachings. In 1835, Macaulay, a representative of Western ideas and ideals, introduced in India through the English language, a system of education most aggressive, rational, and dynamic. In this way, Western ideas began to filter into educated Indian minds. In 1859, Darwin’s presentation of the origin of species proved a landmark in the development of western science. Its repercussions were felt by English-educated Indians. At that psychological hour, Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in spiritual practices in the temple-garden of Dakshineswar, unknown to human society at large, not subjected to the pressures of the modern news media. The mission of His life was to combat modern secularism and re-establish the eternal principles of the Vedas and Hinduism. A peculiarity of Hindu social reformers is that, though perhaps cognizant of non-Hindu thought, they are always inspired chiefly by the Indian sages as distinct from St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas whose ideas were evolved from Greek thought.

Sri Ramakrishna accepted a position as a worshipper in the temple-garden of Dakshineswar, where the principal deity is Kali, the Divine Mother. He used to look upon the deity as his own mother. The other two deities in the temple are Radha Kanta, a symbol of divine love, and Shiva, a symbol of asceticism and renunciation. All these deities represented the harmony of religions. He soon developed intense longing for the vision of the Divine Mother and gave up the rituals involved in formal worship. This intensity He later compared with the attraction of a chaste wife for her husband, the mother for her child, and the miser for his wealth. He almost completely forgot food and other physical needs, and did not sleep for a number of years. He sometimes spent the

whole day in meditation in the Panchavati, a grove of five types of trees. Through this intense longing He had the first vision of the Divine Mother and felt himself to be floating in an ocean of bliss. He desired to remain completely absorbed in this divine ecstasy and did not follow any traditional scriptural injunction. The sole content of his spiritual life at that time was spiritual prayer and longing. He later wanted to follow the traditional disciplines to find out whether or not those disciplines were valid. Teachers came one after another in search of Him who was a befitting disciple and initiated Him into different modes of worship. Due to one-pointed concentration, purity of mind, and utter non-attachment to the world, he quickly experienced different aspects of the Godhead described in the Hindu scriptures. He had a vision of Kali, the Divine Mother, Krishna, Rama, Shiva, and also experienced the higher non-dualistic state of oneness with the Ultimate Reality (Brahman). This is the culmination of man's spiritual endeavour. He also practised the principles of Christianity and Islam and arrived at the same conclusion. All His visions of the personal God finally led to the experience of the Impersonal Brahman. This Impersonal Spirit is the basis of harmony of religions, He taught. A worshipper of the personal God can show respect to other faiths. That all religions ultimately lead sincere aspirants to the same goal of Pure Spirit, he demonstrated through his personal life. A circle may have many points, but all radii ultimately end with the center. This is Sri Ramakrishna's contribution to the realm of religion.

While practising spiritual disciplines, He was considered by people who observed Him as abnormal. Of course, from their point of view He was abnormal. If He were a normal man like us, He would not have been a messenger of God, as He was – nay, God Himself! Yet, people thought that He was insane. In our society, to be considered sane we must share the insanity of the neighbourhood! Gossip of His insanity – God intoxicated state – disturbed His mother. She made a proposal for His marriage. He accepted the proposal, seeing in it the hand of the Divine Mother. It was indeed a unique marriage; Sarada Devi, the proposed wife, was His peer in every respect, utterly pure, guileless, and a simple village girl. Looking to a tube-rose, she would pray to God to keep her as pure as the rose. Looking to the moon, she would again pray to God to keep her spotless as the moon appeared. When she visited Sri Ramakrishna, her husband, in Dakshineswar, her age was sixteen. He asked her if she had come to drag Him down to worldliness. She replied that she had come to help Him in realising His chosen ideal. They were spiritual companions to each other, unaffected by worldliness. After Sri Ramakrishna gave up the body in 1886, His wife assumed the responsibility of a spiritual successor; for her name was Sarada, the giver and source of knowledge. Thereafter, she helped thousands of men and women on the spiritual path. Even after giving up her body in 1920, she continues to inspire millions on this path from all parts of the world.

The period of discipline being over and all doubts resolved, Sri Ramakrishna attained the highest peace. He came to know who He was and what His mission was. He knew that He was an Incarnation of God, as Rama and Krishna were in earlier ages; and that His mission was to restore the lost spiritual values. People flocked around Him from Calcutta and near-by places. All felt uplifted after listening to His words and having His holy company. He exhorted people to follow their religious faith with sincerity, and assured them that they would ultimately realise God. He became a source of refuge for all religious seekers. He would say, "To me all are to come, Hindus, Muslims, Christians – that is why you all are here". This is the meaning of Christ's saying, "Come unto me, all ye who are heavy-laden". Those who come to Him will either

accept the validity of the eternal religious principles demonstrated by Him, or will accept Him as their chosen ideal (*Ishta*). To them He brought assurance of grace and liberation.

These are His principle teachings: God exists. The goal of human life is God realisation. God dwells in us all covered by a veil of Maya or ignorance. It is the ego which, with the help of attachment, greed, lust, and other evils, creates and fosters this veil of Maya. When Maya is overcome, God becomes revealed. The most important discipline for the revelation of God is renunciation of lust and greed. He demonstrated the method of overcoming lust and greed in daily life. All women are manifestations of the Divine Mother – even a fallen woman. He never thought of them in any other way, even in a dream. He gave spiritual status to all women by viewing them as the embodiment of Shakti. He had no attachment to any material thing – could not even touch a coin without feeling as if He were stung by a scorpion. He would teach the house-holder to live in the world like a mud-fish lives in mud – without ever allowing himself to be soiled; or like a maid-servant lives in the family of her employer – taking all care of his property without becoming attached to it. He showed that renunciation is possible even in this secular age. Through God's grace and self-effort, all can control attachment. He never harped on the idea of sin. Sins are mistakes we make at lower stages of evolution. God is compassionate; He knows our limitations. If we ask His forgiveness and then resolve not to repeat our errors, we are forgiven – even the greatest sinners amongst us.

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।

साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥

[Gita, IX. 30]

People of the modern world are plagued with suspicion and fear because they see diversity alone, and not the unity of God in whom we live and move and have our being. Sri Ramakrishna taught that we should see Him in all and all in Him, and develop respect for all life at all levels. This is the remedy for violence and hatred. This may not be possible for all; but a few can realise it and be free; and the free can show others the way to freedom. If we sincerely aspire for freedom from bondage, we can have it here and now. That is the lesson we learn from the wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna and His Gospel.

On this auspicious occasion when we are celebrating the centenary of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we salute the Master from whose lips came these eternal words of the Gospel; the *Gospel* itself; it being identical with him; the devotees who have been illumined by these words, and all those who will be illumined in the future. We also salute Sri *M.* through whose instrumentality these words saw the light of day.

## 2. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Swami Ananyananda

Swami Ananyananda, President Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati and Editor, the *Prabuddha Bharata*, in the article reproduced here, reviews the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and the impact of his life and teachings on the modern world.

**“Sri Ramakrishna’s one endeavour in life was not merely to take man nearer to God, but bring God also nearer to man.”**

Referring to Sri Ramakrishna and the significance of his life and message, Swami Vivekananda, his chief disciple, says: ‘The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight, under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion... He showed by his life what the *rishis* and *avatars* 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.’

In his foreword to *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mahatma Gandhi writes. ‘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.’

The utterances of these two great personalities of renascent India focus our attention on the central theme of the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna, namely, that he was a man of God, a God-man, and the primary objective of his life was to awaken the religious spirit dormant in man, to bring God nearer to man, in other words, to raise man to the consciousness of God. In the following paragraphs, we shall discuss more elaborately his extraordinary life and his unique message, and try to show their direct relevance to our contemporary world.

Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings were essentially spiritual, if anything. He lived, and had his being in God. He himself used to say that what he spoke was not of his own volition, but that words were ‘pushed’ to his lips by the Divine Mother. He was a simple child of the Divine Mother, living in Her consciousness, and acted as She bid him.

It is a recurrent phenomenon in the religious history of nations that whenever they are caught up in the voyage of life by storms of materialistic forces, and are forced to drift aimlessly along, having lost their track, a path-finder appears on the scene, 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 unquestioningly believes in its recurrence whenever and wherever there is need for such a one. Through 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. This 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 would lift them out of the morass into which they have fallen. And such divine help has always come in the past, and will always come in the future as well.

India, in the mid-nineteenth century, stood in need of a thorough spiritual renaissance. It was a dire need. The nation was adrift, having lost sight of its spiritual moorings. The glare and the glamour of the Western materialistic way of life were becoming too strong to be resisted. The spiritual conscience of the nation became dormant and torpid; and agnosticism and skepticism began to spread their dreadful tentacles on the national mind like an octopus. The precious spiritual heritage of the nation was receding to the background, with no effective say in the conduct of the people. A blind imitation of the ways quite alien to Indian spirit and culture was noticeable all over the land. In such a context, there was an urgent necessity, a national desideratum, for one who would embody in himself the highest and the noblest in the spiritual traditions of the country and lead her along the path of divine life and spiritual awareness.

This 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 in himself the spiritual forces of the land accumulated for centuries in a vast sweep, and living an uncommon life in 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, may grow on this sacred land of ours.

About the advent of Sri Ramakrishna on the Indian scene and its appropriateness to the demands of the time, both in the national and the international context, Swami Vivekananda, who carried his message to the different parts of the world, says: '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 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 marvelous 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, as well as the spirit of confraternity among the various religious groups and sects that are growing among the different segments of humanity on the basis of their spiritual oneness.

During the last eight decades or so, 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 being literally worshipped by them today as a God-man, as the goal of their spiritual aspirations.

Christopher Isherwood, in his book *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, refers to Sri Ramakrishna as a 'phenomenon', and significantly 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, from beginning to end, throughout presents characteristics, moods, and attitudes quite out of the ordinary; and *mysterious* in the sense that his entire life was deeply spiritual and divinely inspired. Not merely in his day-to-day activities was he extraordinary, but even as a spiritual *sadhaka*, when he undertook diverse forms of spiritual disciplines; and later, as a teacher of men who sought his guidance, he was unique. There is the touch of the extraordinary character even in his message, as Swami Vivekananda points out: '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 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 episodes of his life both in infancy and in boyhood at his village home, as well as in his life at Dakshineswar, where he was God-intoxicated – into the details of which we refrain from entering – we notice an uncommon characteristic throughout. A mere mention can be made, however, in passing, of some of them: the antecedents of his birth, his birth itself, his proclivity to things connected with the daily worship in the household, his keen interest in the devotional stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; his spiritual ecstatic experience at the sight of a flight of a flock of milk-white cranes against the background of black cloud, at the age of six; a similar experience at the age of eight, when he was accompanying a group of women devotees from his village to the shrine of Vishalakshi; his getting identified with Shiva on the Shivaratri night, when he was persuaded to play the role of Shiva – these indicate the mental and spiritual make-up of Sri Ramakrishna, which flowered into full bloom at Dakshineswar. There, as the priest of Mother Kali, what an extraordinary life he lived! He had the vision of the Divine Mother, who was a living reality to him, not a mere image of black stone. He had established a personal relationship with Her as Her child. He would converse with Her and seek Her guidance whenever he was in doubt, or needed a practical solution for a problem that confronted him.

The vision of the Divine Mother was followed, in quick succession, with success in each and every mood or attitude that he adopted. A series of diverse *sadhanas* followed, and he reached the goal of each of these in extraordinarily short periods. Thus he



undertook the Shakta, Vaishnava, and other forms of *sadhanas*, under able teachers who came to him unsought; he also underwent the formal ritual of *sannyasa*, though married, under the tutelage of Totapuri. He also practised the religion of Christ and that of the Prophet Mohammed. At the end of it all, he proclaimed: *Yato mat, tato path* – ‘as many views, so many paths’.

Though he took formal *sannyasa* according to the scriptures, he did not wear the ochre clothes in later life; nor did he give up, his married wife – again, an extraordinary element in his life. As the culmination of his spiritual *sadhanas*, he literally worshipped his own wife, invoking the divine presence in her, and offered the fruit of his *sadhanas* at her feet, with his rosary, together with flowers, and prostrated himself before her, singing the glory of the Divine Mother – an event unheard of before in the life of any saint or God-man in the religious history of mankind. He saw God in everything. He perceived the divine presence in every being. His realization and proclamation of the fundamental unity of all religions is a message relevant to our contemporary world, torn by religious conflicts and dissensions and separated by high walls of sectarian dogmas. Its implications are far-reaching, inasmuch as it touches not only the religious realm, but other spheres as well. Humanity, in its essence, is one, as it has the same divine basis all over. As all religions are basically one, all men, through whom the divergent religions find expressions, are basically one, too. It is, therefore, foolish and unwise to fight in the name of one religion against another.

Unity in diversity is the plan of nature. Nature wants to enjoy manifoldness, and so she has done away with monotonous uniformity. This variety springs from unity, which is one and universal. While diversity is in a state of flux, unity remains unchanged, like the unchanging white screen on which an ever-changing motion picture depicts diverse emotions and characters in multi-coloured forms and several situations. This is the profound significance of Sri Ramakrishna’s message of the synthesis of all religions. This message is already finding its way into the hearts of men the world over, leading to a mutual understanding and appreciation of not only religious and spiritual values, but also social and cultural ideas and ideals among the different sections of humanity, and ushering in an era of respect, trust, fellowship, and co-operation in the common endeavour to uplift themselves.

Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘If you wish to find God, serve man, knowing him to be the veritable manifestation of God.’ This teaching of his has an immense spiritual force on the social plane. By his Advaitic realization of the unity of all existence, he came to feel the presence of the Divine in all things and beings, and so, to him, there was nothing that was not worship and adoration. One day, at Dakshineswar, when some people were talking of ‘compassion to creatures’, 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 – *jive shivajnane seva.*’

Significant words are these. Referring to these words of the Master, Swami Vivekananda (then Narendranath), who was present there on the occasion, said: ‘What a strange 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 upon 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 foolish, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the Pariah.’

Ever since these words were uttered, we know how the 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 up 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.

From the foregoing discussion, three features emerge prominently from the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna. They are: first, as Mahatma Gandhi points out – to, which reference has been made at the very outset – Sri Ramakrishna’s life was the complete antithesis of the modern materialistic attitude to life. To him, God alone was real. Only on that background, everything else had value or meaning. In his own characteristic way, he would say that any number of zeros put side by side have no value by themselves. 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. Which means that we should hold on to God in one hand and do our duties in the world with the other, in a spirit of devotion and dedication.

Secondly, his message of the unity and synthesis of all religions has an immediate relevance to our present-day world, where there is still a large measure of religious exclusiveness, bigotry, and intolerance. His message, if earnestly followed, will open up new avenues of religious fellowship and co-operation among the existing faiths, and bring about an atmosphere of peace and goodwill among their adherents, where the long-cherished ideal of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man will flourish.

Thirdly, his message of ‘service to man in the worship of God’ has immense possibilities. Not only the one served is raised to the position of the divine, but the one who serves is also elevated because of his subjective attitude. In that atmosphere, there will be no distinction between the sacred and the secular. Every deed done by man is transformed into an act of worship, a spiritual *sadhana*. Man’s life on earth becomes worth living; otherwise, it is wasted and worn out. If spirituality is the goal, perform each and every act as worship of the Divine.

Amidst the encircling gloom cast by the materialistic ideologies and forces, Sri Ramakrishna rises as a beacon to shed light on our path and lead us to our spiritual goal. That was the mission of his life. His one endeavour in life was not merely to take men nearer to God, but bring God also nearer to man. If the life of Ramakrishna has any message to our contemporary world, it is this that man should turn away from his material pursuits, by changing his attitude to his own life and work, and set out on the spiritual path and seek God who is the source of all happiness, joy, and peace.

### 3. THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE IN SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S TEACHINGS

Swami Nityabodhananda

God must be experienced; it is not enough that we read of Him in the scriptures. To the initial query by Swami Vivekananda (then Naren), 'Have you seen God?' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Yes, yes, I have seen God and talked to Him as I see and talk to you now. Not only that, I can make you see Him.' God, he said, must be seen, talked to and touched...

It is experience, not merely knowledge that matters. In the following lines, Swami Nityabodhananda, Founder of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Corsier, Geneva discusses the value of experience in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings and how the Master himself lived the summit of divine illumination.

Swami Nityabodhananda had the privilege of meeting and talking to Sri 'M', in the year 1931.

**“Experience transforms itself into life and life into Light...”**

All knowledge is based on experience. In the spiritual field experience is of major importance as it transforms speculation into life. What is possible actualizes itself in a tangible form. An idea may have great power but its power is lost when it is not lived. At the foot of a mountain I can have the idea of how I may feel at the summit. Only on the peak I live the summit-experience. It is an authentic experience and it can become contagious and communicable.

Sri Ramakrishna set great store by experience, by *anubhava*. Like a gardener, he insisted on the importance of 'harvest'. Of course, to have good harvest one should sow well and be attentive to what is sown. He was in the habit of saying: "It is announced in the almanac that in a certain year the rainfall will be such and such number of inches. You can squeeze the almanac full of predictions of rainfall, you will not get one drop of water. In the same way, you will find in the Sacred Books a lot of teaching. But a simple reading will not make your life spiritual. You should practise what has been prescribed in the Books to acquire love of God." (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 431)

Experience transforms itself into life and life into Light. Even from an ordinary experience, a blazing light, a high realization can spring forth. To gain that we should watch over its maturation, its ripening process (*paripaka*) and not evaluate it hastily and say that this and this experience is agreeable or disagreeable. This high truth Ramakrishna put in simple terms "So long as I live I learn". For a divine incarnation there is nothing to learn. It is evident that he was coming to our level.

On this earth everything is cut into two. In the heart of joy, a grain of sorrow subsists. We often say, life is beautiful. But life is also suffering. What can we learn from the contradictions of life? Before an experience transforms itself into light it has to measure its full dimension by touching its opposite pole and return to the Centre (Self). The transcendence and the ecstasy it involves is in the return process.

Three stages are discernible in the process of maturation:

1. As every experience, in the process of becoming life should pass through the

crucible of opposites, a suffering (or a joy) in and by itself is an incomplete situation. It is on the way of completing itself by going towards its opposite, pleasure in the case of suffering, pain in the case of joy.

2. Watchful awareness is called for. Hence an experience is an involvement, a responsibility. From awareness filters equilibrium and wisdom, *samatvabhavana*.

3. The spirit of involvement when practised creates in us a certain mastery over the unconscious levels. And from this can issue the necessary reflexes that can help us to get out of a spiritual impasse or spiritual anguish.

Says the Master, "The iron should be made hot many times before hammering it. Then only it becomes steel. Out of this steel one can forge as one likes and make a sharp sword. In the same way, a man should go through the furnace of troubles several times. He should be struck by the persecutions that life brings and become humble and pure to be able to enter the presence of God." (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, no. 399; 1971 edition)

### **The Experience of the Divine**

Ramakrishna lived the summit divine experience which the Hindu tradition names *samadhi*. Once a disciple asked the Master during *samadhi* whether he lost completely the sense of the ego.

The Master: "Yes, usually a little of the consciousness of the ego subsists. Imagine a gold leaf that is being rubbed against a lump of gold, The leaf does not wear itself off completely. All outward consciousness disappears. But the Lord keeps in me a small parcel of the ego so that I can enjoy the felicity, which is the Lord. Sometimes, it so happens that He takes away even this little bit. Then it is the highest *samadhi*. It is the total fusion-union of my self with God." (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, no. 988; 1971 edition)

Students of the *Gospel* and of the *Great Master* may remember that after having experienced the *nirvikalpa samadhi* for six months and *savikalpa samadhi* very often, Ramakrishna came to the state of *bhavamukha*. This was by the command of the Divine Mother. To quote his own words the command as he had it: 'Remain on the brink of relative consciousness to instruct humanity'. This was the state of continued divine consciousness.

Thanks to this state Ramakrishna 'saw' that God was in every human being. He had the habit of saying: "Men are like pillow-cases. The colour of one may be red, that of another blue and of a third black; but all contain the same cotton within. So it is with man; one is beautiful, another is black, a third holy, and a fourth wicked; but the same Divine Being dwells in them all." (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, no. 37, 1971 edition)

The experience of God with Ramakrishna was something that can be given, as a fruit in the hand, transferred to another. Such was the case with Swami Vivekananda. Placing the hand on the chest of Swamiji, Ramakrishna could give him the *samadhi* experience. He transformed many others, among whom was Girish Ghosh. Ramakrishna's mastery over divine experience was such that when the person who received it could not bear it he could take it away from him. That was so with Hriday, his nephew and caretaker. "Hriday begged the Master to bless him with that experience. The latter replied that he was not ready. As Hriday was insistent, Ramakrishna gave him *samadhi*. But Hriday could not bear the power and intensity of this experience and so begged him to take it away." (*Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, pp 274-275)

To this great reservoir of spirituality, to this vast and deep ocean, which was Ramakrishna, we are invited to drink according to our capacities, to fill up our 'jars' with the life-giving waters.

## 4. PERSONALITY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS IT EMERGES FROM THE GOSPEL

Swami Mukhyananda

Sri Ramakrishna's personality was as multifaceted as that of nature itself and it often transcended it. Otherwise how would we explain his constant divine inebriation, his mysterious conversations with the Divine Mother, his eating with Her, playing in Her lap and dancing in ecstasy? 'But to think of Sri Ramakrishna only as a *bhakta* of the Divine Mother, childlike, always soft and in-drawn and little aware of or unconcerned with the world and its affairs' is only to know a partial truth. In the following lines Swami Mukhyananda, Acharya, Probationers' Training Centre, Belur Math gives an account of the all-inclusive personality of Sri Ramakrishna as it emerges from his study of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

**“...the personification of all the yogas and the spiritual life of all mankind.”**

Sri Ramakrishna has been, as Christopher Isherwood has termed it in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, “a phenomenon”<sup>1</sup> in the religion-spiritual firmament of the world. He rose on the horizon like a spiritual sun whose morning glory enveloped the world within a few decades of his appearance. Those who had the poetic vision and sage insight to catch the beauty of that glorious dawn hailed it in wondrous words and announced it to mankind both in the East and the West.

Keshab Chandra Sen in the East and Max Müller in the West were among the earliest to scatter the brilliant rays of the life of Sri Ramakrishna over a wide circle by their writings and speeches. However, it was Swami Vivekananda, the illustrious disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who understood the full grandeur and vast scope of his seraphic Master's great and profound life and its immense meaning and lasting significance for the religious life of India and of humanity at large. Exclaimed Vivekananda:

“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 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 India, and bring a marvelous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence. Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years. There he lived, without any book learning whatsoever; this great intellect never learnt even to write his own name, but the most brilliant graduates of our university found in him an

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<sup>1</sup> It is Swami Vivekananda who first used the word, though in a slightly different way, regarding Sri Ramakrishna. Says he: “But here is a man in whose company we have been day and night and yet consider him to be a far greater personality than any of them (Krishna, Buddha, Christ, etc.), Can you understand this *phenomenon*?” (*Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, 8th Edn. 1972, p. 484).

intellectual giant. He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the great Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfillment of the Indian sages; the sage for the time, one whose teaching is just now, in the present time, most beneficial.”<sup>2</sup>

“Without studying Ramakrishna Paramhansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the Bhagavata and the other Puranas. His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India... This man had in fifty years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations... His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all nations. People will come to know him by degrees... He is the latest and the most perfect (of the *Avatars*) – the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity and the desire to serve mankind.”<sup>3</sup>

Romain Rolland, the eminent sage and savant of France, was the best interpreter to the West of the profound message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda through his immortal study on them in two volumes: ‘*Ramakrishna the Man-God and the Universal Gospel of Vivekananda*’ (1926). Writes he:

“I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past... The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people... He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti.”<sup>4</sup>

While the limited and scattered utterances of Vivekananda about Sri Ramakrishna are profound and reveal the Great Master at his best, and the biography of Romain Rolland interprets the Life and Message of the Master superbly in the world-wide religious context, equating Sri Ramakrishna with Jesus Christ, it is in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, originally recorded by M. (Mahendranath Gupta) in Bengali, that we get the minute details of his varied moods and movements, his acts and attitudes, and his teachings and trances. Here the Great Master comes alive before us in all vividness; scene after scene of his ecstatic life unfolds itself before our mental vision, and we feel as one of the participants in the great drama of his life, in his sportfull *lila*.

In his Foreword to the Gospel, the English translation of M.’s Bengali ‘*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*’ by Swami Nikhilananda, which we make use of for the purpose of this study,<sup>5</sup> Aldous Huxley writes:

“Never have the small events of a contemplative’s daily life been described with such wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity... what a scholastic philosopher would call the ‘accidents’ of Ramakrishna’s life were intensely Hindu and,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol, III, 11<sup>th</sup> Edn. 1973 pp. 267-8. ‘Sages of India.’

<sup>3</sup> Letters of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, IV Edn. 1948, pp. 187, 155, 254.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, ‘To My Western Readers’.

<sup>5</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras; 6th Edition 1974.

therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its 'essence', however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal. To read through these conversations in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oddest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance, and suspense of judgment."

Nikhilananda says in his preface to the translation:

"Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He never clothed his thoughts in formal language. His words sought to convey his direct realisation of Truth. His conversation was in a village *patois* (of Bengal). Therein lies its charm. In order to explain to his listeners an abstruse philosophy, he like Christ before him, used with telling effect homely parables and illustrations culled from his observation of the daily life around him... The words of Sri Ramakrishna have already exerted a tremendous influence in the land of his birth. Savants of Europe have found in his words the ring of universal truth. But these words were not the product of intellectual cognition; they were rooted in direct experience. Hence, to students of religion, psychology, and physical science, these experiences of the Master are of immense value for the understanding of religious phenomena in general. No doubt, Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu of the Hindus; yet his experiences transcended the limits of the dogmas and creeds of Hinduism. Mystics of religions other than Hinduism will find in Sri Ramakrishna's experiences a corroboration of the experiences of their own prophets and seers. And this is very important today for the resuscitation of religious values."

Many people know fairly Sri Ramakrishna as the Prophet of harmony of religions; some people comprehend his universal dimensions and his great role in the spiritual regeneration of mankind; maybe a few realize that he has opened up new vistas and horizons for spiritual attainments; but very few know the different aspects of his versatile, living, vibrant, divine personality. For Sri Ramakrishna *samadhi* (spiritual trance) was a constant and natural mode of divine knowledge and wisdom, (p. 175).<sup>6</sup> In the Gospel, he is often seen to go into indrawn moods, ecstasies, and trances.<sup>7</sup> An atmosphere of devotion, singing and dancing in divine emotion, and conversation centred on God and *bhakti*, pervades the Gospel, though other aspects are not lacking, as we shall see.<sup>8</sup> But most people, devoid of broad understanding and keen insight, form the idea of Sri Ramakrishna only as a great *bhakta* of the Divine Mother, childlike, always soft and indrawn, and little aware of, or unconcerned with, the world and its

<sup>6</sup> The page numbers in brackets refer to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

<sup>7</sup> While even great saints strive hard to attain *samadhi* and ecstasy, we find Sri Ramakrishna striving to bring down the mind to the normal plane. He said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious. I should like to talk to the *sadhu* about Satchidananda. Mother, I want to be merry talking about Satchidananda." (p. 320). "The Master's natural tendency of mind was to soar into the plane of God-consciousness. He would force his mind to be conscious of the body." (p. 828).

<sup>8</sup> The master was a *Vijnani*. He accepted both the Absolute and the Relative. He says: "A mere *jnani* trembles with fear. He is like the amateur *satranja* player. He is anxious to move his pieces somehow to the safety zone, where they won't be overtaken by his opponent. But a *Vijnani* is not afraid of anything. He has realized both aspects of God – Personal and Impersonal. He has talked with God. He has enjoyed the bliss of God... I don't press my arm to my side. Both my hands are free. I am not afraid of anything. I accept both the *Nitya* and the *Lila*, both the Absolute and the Relative." (p. 435) cf. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita* (XIII.2): 'क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञोद्भूतं यत्तज्ज्ञानं मतं मम. (The Knowledge of both the Inner Reality – Self or God – and the universe is considered by Me as full Knowledge).



affairs. While such a view is partly true, this estimate overlooks the rather important dimensions of Sri Ramakrishna's many-faceted great personality and it shows lack of understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's deep interest in the spiritual welfare of mankind.<sup>9</sup> We find in several speeches, write-ups and films on Sri Ramakrishna, that he is depicted as a goody-goody *bhakta* and we miss there the inner strength of his personality in his dealings with vastly varied types of people, and his leonine character. We get only the मृदूनि कुसुमादपि (softer than a flower) aspect of his great mind, but not the वज्रादपि कठोरणि (harder than diamond) aspect.

We may get some corrective to the above partial views of people from the presentation of the Master's personality in '*Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*'<sup>10</sup> (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna-lila-prasanga* in Bengali) by Swami Saradananda. Further, as Vivekananda has said:

“According to one's own capacity one has understood Sri Ramakrishna and so is discussing about him. It is not bad either to do so... But if any of his devotees has concluded that what he has understood of him is the only truth, then he is an object of pity... But do not listen to such one-sided estimates. What he was, the concentrated embodiment of how many previous *avatars* – we could not understand a bit even spending the whole life in religious austerity. Therefore one has to speak about him with caution and restraint. As are one's capacities, to that extent has he filled one with ideas. One spray from the full ocean of his spirituality, if realized, will make gods of men. Such a synthesis of universal ideas you will not find in the history of the world again. Understand from this who was born in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. When he used to instruct his sannyasin disciples, he would rise from his seat and look about if any householder was coming that way or not. If he found none, then in glowing words he would depict the glory of renunciation and *tapasya*. As a result of the rousing power of that fiery dispassion, we have renounced the world and become averse to worldliness.”<sup>11</sup>

What the *Bhagavata* (XI.8.5) says about the *Avadhuta* applies to Sri Ramakrishna very aptly in certain respects:

*Muniḥ prasannagambhīro durvigāhīyo duratyayaḥ,  
Anantapāro hyakṣobhyaḥ stimitoda ivārṇavaḥ.*

– The holy sage, his mind fixed in the Self, is placid and profound, difficult to fathom and cross over; he is illimitable and imperturbable, like the ocean with calm waters.

However, if we delve deep into the Gospel, scan it intelligently, and piece together the various incidents and events connected with Sri Ramakrishna and ponder on his words and attitudes, we can get a very vivid, colourful, and balanced picture of Sri Ramakrishna in life. Let us, therefore, address ourselves to this task and see how Sri Ramakrishna emerges before our vision. As the *Gospel* is a huge work of over a thousand

<sup>9</sup> The Master says, “it is being revealed to me that there is a greater manifestation of God in man than in other created beings.” God is telling me, as it were: ‘I dwell in men. Be merry with men’. (p. 356). “Man is Narayana Himself. If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also? God is born as man for the purpose of sporting as man.”(p. 356). “I have been feeling much inclined to the *Naralila* (sport of God as man). It is God Himself who plays about as human beings. If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through man?” (p. 358)

<sup>10</sup> Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

<sup>11</sup> The Holy Mother recognized the quality of supreme renunciation in Sri Ramakrishna as the highest and placed it above his achievement of the Harmony of all Religions.

pages, recording the events of over four years (1882-1886) we shall primarily survey in detail the first chapter which treats of the first meetings of *M.* with, and his impressions of, the Master<sup>12</sup> and refer to some other events and incidents in other chapters in a general way.

The First Chapter, entitled 'Master and Disciple', records four visits of *M.* to the Master at Dakshineswar (near Calcutta), between February 26th (probable date of his first visit) and March 6th, 1882 (probable date of his fourth visit), covering about eight days in which *M.* unfolds the picture of the Master as he appeared to him. When *M.* entered Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar with his companion Sidhu for the first time:

"They found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God.<sup>13</sup> The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence."

*M.* stood there speechless and looked on:

"It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup and other devotees."

"*M.* looked around him with wonder and said to himself: What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot."

*M.*, however, goes round the temple-garden and returns to the room and finds the doors shut. Seeing Brinde, the maid, outside, he enquires of her about the Master and learns that he had been living there for a long time. The Master has no need to go on lecture tours. He had a commission from God. He spreads his fragrance from where he is. "The lotus opens and the bees come by themselves,"<sup>14</sup> *M.* asked her, "Does he read many books?" "Books? Oh dear, no! They are all on his tongue."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Since this Memorial Volume is intended to commemorate the Centenary of *M.*'s first visit to the Master, from which date the record of the *Gospel* begins, it is apt that we should treat the First Chapter in detail. Further, it throws light on some of the salient aspects of the Master's personality.

<sup>13</sup> We find the Master in the *Gospel* always with his beatific smile, 'with his usual beaming countenance'. (p. 19). Even during the days of his fractured arm and his last prolonged fatal illness, the smile never left him. The Master had two desires: "First, that I should be the king of the devotees, and second, that I should not be a dry *sadhu*." (p. 797). He was always full of joy and filled others also with joy. He laughed and made others also laugh. (p. 335).

<sup>14</sup> The master said to Vijay Krishna Goswami: "The task of a religious teacher is indeed difficult. One cannot teach man without a direct command from God. People won't listen to you if you teach without such authority. Such teaching has no force behind it. One must first of all attain God through spiritual discipline or some other means. Thus armed with authority from God, one can be a teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives authority from God also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a teacher." (p. 100). Nobody can confound a preacher who teaches people after having received the command of God. Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning, a man becomes so powerful that before him big scholars seem mere earthworms... Such a preacher may not be a scholarly person, but don't conclude from it that he has any lack of wisdom. Does book-learning make one wise? He who has commission from God never runs short of wisdom... As he teaches people, the Divine Mother Herself supplies him with fresh knowledge from behind. That knowledge never comes to an end." (p. 420).

<sup>15</sup> The master did not read books. "But how many scriptures I have heard!" he said. (p. 899). "During my boyhood I could understand what the *sadhus* read at the Lahas' house at Kamarpukur, although I would miss a little here and there. If a Pandit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it

*M.* was amazed that Sri Ramakrishna read no books. Sri Ramakrishna was no scholar or pandit. But yet, spiritual wisdom flowed through his lips spontaneously from the depths of truth. *M.* thought it perhaps was time for evening devotions of the Master. He asked Brinde to seek permission from the Master for himself and Sidhu to meet him. But Brinde replied, "Go right in, children, go in and sit down." The Great Master had no pretensions. He was simple and easy of access to all; no formalities. He did not consider himself a guru.<sup>16</sup>

*M.* and Sidhu salute the Master on entering. The Master bids them to sit and asks *M.* about his whereabouts. But *M.* noticed that:

"Now and then the Master seemed to become absent-minded. Later he learnt that this mood is called *bhava*, ecstasy. It is like the state of the angler who has been sitting with his rod: the fish comes and swallows the bait, and the float begins to tremble; the angler is on the alert; he grips the rod and watches the float steadily and eagerly; he will not speak to anyone. Such was the state of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Later *M.* heard, and himself noticed, that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into this mood after dusk, sometimes becoming totally unconscious of the outer world."

After a little conversation *M.* saluted the Master and took his leave. But Sri Ramakrishna did not fail to ask, "Come again", even though his mind was absorbed in the divine mood. It was not to show mere courtesy. It was affection towards those who went to him and his interest in their welfare.<sup>17</sup> On his way home *M.* began to wonder:

"Who is this serene-looking man who is drawing me back to him? Is it possible for a man to be great without being a scholar? How wonderful it is! I should like to see him again. He himself said, 'Come again.'"

There *was* something ethereally attractive in the Master's personality. We find

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myself." (p. 358). The Master could also converse in Hindustani (pp. 605-6). He quotes a Hindi couplet from Tulsidas regarding sticking to truth (p. 238) (cf. also p. 252 regarding Tulsi). "I have heard a great deal about Buddha" (p. 382). The Divine Mother also revealed to him "everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, Puranas, Tantras, etc." (p. 542). He also knew something of Nyaya and Panini (p. 607). He tells Bankim: "Analogy is one-sided. You are a Pandit; haven't you read logic? Suppose you say that a man is as terrible as a tiger. That does not mean that he has a fearful tail or a tiger's pot-face!" (all laugh) – (p.639).

<sup>16</sup> The Master said: "There is no collection plate here; therefore all come." (p. 363). He did not touch money and was very open. He did not stand on the high pedestal of a teacher. He said, "As long as I live so long do I learn", and we see him in the *Gospel* going to meet many learned people and saintly persons to compare notes and to see if he can learn something from them. "Three words – 'Master', 'Teacher' and 'Father' – prick me like thorns. I am the son of God, His eternal child." (p. 600). "There is not a fellow under the sun who is my disciple. On the contrary, I am everybody's disciple. All are the children of God. All are His servants. I too am a child of God. I too am His servant. 'Uncle Moon' is every child's uncle!" (p. 855).

<sup>17</sup> We can see at many places in the *Gospel*, the Master's concern and consideration for the devotees. "The Master lay down on the small couch. He seemed worried about Tarak. Suddenly he said to *M.*, 'Why do I worry so much about these young boys?' (p. 698)." "The Master suddenly addressed Mohini's wife and said: 'By unnatural death one becomes an evil spirit. Beware... That will be all right (staying with the Holy Mother at the Nahabat). But you talk of dying. That frightens me. And the Ganges is so near!' (p. 698). Sri Ramakrishna said to *M.* tenderly, "Come early in the morning tomorrow. The hot sun of the rainy season is bad for health." (p. 824) "How strange! Tears also appeared in the Master's eyes. He wiped them away with his hands. Hriday had made him suffer endless agonies, yet the Master wept for him." (p. 612). See also pp. 495, 571, regarding Master's concern for Haripada and Narayana, and footnote 46.

record of it in the *Gospel* on several occasions. The Master himself reminisces:

“Can you tell me why all these youngsters, and you people too, visit me? There must be something in me; or why should you all feel such a pull, such an attraction? Once I visited Hriday’s house at Sihore. From there I was taken to Shyambazar. I had a vision of Gauranga before I entered the village, and I realised that I should meet Gauranga’s devotees there. For seven days and nights I was surrounded by a huge crowd of people. Such attraction! Nothing but *kirtan* and dancing day and night. People stood in rows on the walls and even were on the trees. I stayed at Natavar Goswami’s house. It was crowded day and night. In the morning I would run away to the house of a weaver for a little rest. There too I found that people would gather after a few minutes.” (p. 495).

On his second visit, one or two days later, *M.* found the Master just like an ordinary man. As it was still winter (end of February) the Master had put on a moleskin shawl bordered with red.<sup>18</sup> The barber had come and he was about to be shaved.<sup>19</sup> The Master welcomed *M.* smiling. He stammered a little when he spoke. The Master showed keen interest and enquired where *M.* was staying and so on. He even knew Ishan Kaviraj, who he learnt was *M.*’s brother-in-law. Suddenly the Master’s eager interest switched over from Kaviraj (Ayurvedic physician) to Keshab Chandra Sen, who was ill and made anxious enquiries about his health. With utter simplicity the Master revealed:

“I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab’s recovery. Sometimes, in the early hours of the morning, I would wake up and cry before Her: ‘Mother, please make Keshab well again. If Keshab doesn’t live, whom shall I talk with when I go to Calcutta?’ And so it was that I resolved to offer Her the green coconut and sugar.”

Then the Master’s interest moves on to a foreigner, and he asks *M.*

“Tell me, do you know of a certain Mr. Cook who has come to Calcutta? Is it true that he is giving lectures? Once Keshab took me on a steamer, and this Mr. Cook, too, was in the party.”

The Master notices everything and remembers it; he brings it out at the appropriate time.<sup>20</sup> Next the Master bestows his attention on one Pratap’s brother. The

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<sup>18</sup> When Vidyasagar asked *M.*, what kind of Paramahansa the Master was, saying, “Does he wear an ochre cloth?” *M.* replied: “No, Sir; he is an unusual person. He wears a red-bordered cloth and polished slippers. He lives in a room in Rani Rasmani’s temple garden. In his room there is a couch with a mattress and mosquito net. He has no outer indication of holiness. But he doesn’t know anything except God. Day and night he thinks of God alone.” *M.* also records that the Master went to see Vidyasagar in a hackney carriage, and he did so whenever he went out to meet devotees. Ashwini Kumar Datta writes to *M.* (p. 1020) that when he visited the Master in the autumn of 1881: “He was sitting reclining against a *bolster*. He wore *black-bordered* cloth... Going nearer, I found him half leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. Then I thought: ‘Evidently he is not used to pillows as gentlemen are’...” Ashwini wrote his reminiscences probably in 1910, nearly thirty years after his visit and he has said he may have forgotten many things and confused the events. So it is likely, he may have confused a pillow for a *bolster* and the red-border of the Master’s cloth for *black border*, for the Master has disapproved of both as *rajasic*. (Cf. pp. 145, 606 for bolster and pillow, and p. 101 for black border).

<sup>19</sup> The Master was not always with the beard as seen in the usual photograph is clear from this. In the photograph taken at the studio (given opp. to p. 700), he seems to have a smaller beard and is also fully dressed. We can also see the slippers and the border.

<sup>20</sup> Though the Master was mostly in a God-intoxicated state, he did not lack secular knowledge. “He sits in a tower, as it were, from which he gets all information and sees everything” (p. 958), He had been to the Registry Office (p. 327); he had witnessed a balloon going up (p. 507; he knew Golap had to be

Divine Master is not all sweet. He could be stern and critical too when the occasion needed it. He narrates:

“Pratap’s brother came here. He stayed a few days. He had nothing to do and said he wanted to live here. I came to know that he had left his wife and children with his father-in-law. He has a whole brood of them! So I took him to task. Just fancy! He is the father of so many children! Will people from the neighbourhood feed them and bring them up? He isn’t even ashamed that someone else is feeding his wife and children, and that they have been left at his father-in-law’s house. I scolded him very hard and asked him to look for a job. Then he was willing to leave here.”

The Master knew propriety well, and what course was appropriate for whom. “Man should possess dignity and alertness”, he said, (p. 830). Renunciation was not escapism from duties and responsibilities and one must have self-respect.<sup>21</sup>

Then comes *M.*’s own turn. Some searching questions follow to gauge the ins and outs of *M.* The Master’s keen eye examined all those who came to him, and he took

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approached for a job (p. 725); He had seen the human skeleton in the Asiatic Society Museum (p. 859); he knew how if one takes service, one has to suffer humiliation (p. 100); He says to Vijay Krishna Goswami:

“You yourself perceive how far you have gone down by being a servant of others. Again one finds that people with many university degrees, scholars with their vast English education accept service under their English masters and are daily trampled under their boots. The one cause of all this is woman. They have married and set up a gay fair with their wives and children. Now they cannot go back, much as they would like to. Hence all these insults and humiliations, all this suffering from slavery.”

He knows a cheque and that it has to be passed (p. 241), and about the Bengal Bank (p. 300). The Master uses all this knowledge to give spiritual instructions in the course of his conversations.

<sup>21</sup> We also find the other types of stern attitude of the Master: When *M.* who had a sense of duty and was worried about his wife, asked: “What shall one do if one’s wife says: ‘You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide?’”

Master: (in a serious tone): “Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life, let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband’s spiritual life is an ungodly wife.”

Immersed in deep thought, *M.* stood leaning against the wall... Then, suddenly going to *M.*, he whispered in his ear:

“But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control – the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband’s part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example.”

This had a most soothing effect on *M.*’s worried mind.” (p. 54)

The Master tells Mani Mullick: “Don’t hurry me please... I can’t rush.” (p. 411); he asks *M.* not to eat at the Kali temple guest house, but to cook his own food (p. 279); referring to Dr. Sarkar, the Master says, “He is a villain. He pressed my tongue as if I were a cow. (p. 831)”; When Dr. Sarkar was saying, “Listen to me –”, the Master retorted: “Listen to you? You are greedy, lustful, and egoistic.” (p. 900; see also p. 906); When the Pundit was arguing vehemently with Mani Mullick, the Master remarked smilingly, “This is the *tamasic* aspect of *sattva*, the attitude of a hero. This is necessary. One should not hold one’s tongue at the sight of injustice and untruth.” (p. 441). “In that state of God-intoxication I used to speak out my mind to all. I was no respecter of persons. Even to men of position I was not afraid to speak the truth.” (p. 46). “Surendra approached the Master with a garland and wanted to put it around his neck. But the Master took it in his hand and threw it aside. Surendra’s pride was wounded and his eyes filled with tears... ‘Now (Surendra) realized it was all his fault. God cannot be bought with money; He cannot be possessed by a vain person. He has really been vain.’” (p. 1011).

The Master also scolded the devotees when occasion called for it. We do not propose to give all the details in this short article. Please refer to pages 285, 321, 376, 387, 669 of the *Gospel*.

persons into his inner circle or as disciples only after thorough testing.<sup>22</sup>

Master: “Are you married?”

*M.*: “Yes, Sir.”

Master (with a shudder): “Oh, Ramlal! Ramlal! Alas, he is married.” The Master continued, “Have you children?”

*M.* whispered in a trembling voice: “Yes, Sir, I have children.” Master (very sadly): “Ah me! He even has children.”

But the Master, to soothe *M.*, explained his remarks affectionately, looking at *M.* kindly: “You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person’s forehead, his eyes and so on.”<sup>23</sup>

Master (continuing): “Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under power of *avidya*?”

*M.*: “She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.”

Master (with evident displeasure): “And you are a man of knowledge?”

The Master did not mince words where correction was necessary. But it was all for good; there was no malice in it. He did not like to unsettle people’s minds, but only make them liberal.

When, next, the question turned on God with form and without form, *M.* said, he would like to think of God as formless. The Master emphasized. “Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.”

*M.* ventured: “Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!”

Master (interrupting): “But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.”

*M.* argued: “But Sir, one should explain to those who worship the clay image that

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<sup>22</sup> The Master told Keshab: “You don’t look into people’s nature before you make them your disciples, and so they break away from you. All men look alike, to be sure, but they have different nature. Some have an excess of *sattva*, others an excess of *rajas*, and still others an excess of *tamas*. You must have noticed that the cakes known as *puli* all look alike. But their contents are very different. Some contain condensed milk, some coconut kernel, and others mere boiled *kalai* pulse.” (p. 71)

<sup>23</sup> We find other instances in the Gospel regarding the Master’s way of judging persons by bodily signs. He says: “When Narendra first came here he was dressed in dirty clothes, but his eyes and face betokened some inner stuff.” (p. 494). “Sri Ramakrishna took Tarak’s hand into his own and seemed to feel its weight. A few moments later he said: ‘There is a little crookedness in your mind; but that will go.’” (p. 698).

See also *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, pp. 768 for details of the Master’s power of testing people by the bodily signs and how he tested Narendra in many ways.

The Master had the gift of judging persons in other ways too. He said: “Yes, I can see inside him (Pundit Samadhayai) through his eyes, as one can see the objects in a room through the glass door.” (p. 20) Regarding the young boys, Purna and younger Naren, the Master said: “A great soul! Or how could he (Purna) make me do japa for his welfare? But Purna doesn’t know anything about it.” ... “Look at him! How naive he (Naren) looks when he laughs, as if he knew nothing. He never thinks of these three things: land, wife and money.” (p. 714). “Narendra belongs to a very high plane – the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. So many devotees come here, but there is not one like him. Every now and then I take stock of the devotees. I find that some are like lotuses with ten petals, some like lotuses with sixteen petals, some like lotuses with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petaled lotus.” (p. 793)

it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay.”

The Master did not spare. He said sharply: “That is the one hobby of you Calcutta people – giving lectures and bringing light to others! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?”<sup>24</sup>

However, the Master explained the significance of image worship satisfactorily and said; “God is our Inner Guide. He will be the teacher,” and admonished *M.*: “Why should you get a headache over it (image worship)? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself.”<sup>25</sup>

This time *M.* felt his ego completely crushed. He concludes: “What a shame! How foolish I am! This is not mathematics or history or literature, that one can teach it to others. No, this is the deep mystery of God. What he says appeals to me.”

Then with what simplicity and wealth of common illustrations does the Master elucidate, without ambiguity, the questions of spiritual seekers, which engenders conviction in their minds! And how practical they are!

*M.* asked: “How ought we to live in the world?”

Master: “Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all – with wife and children, father and mother – and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.”

The Master supplements the answer with four more apt illustrations:

1. A maid-servant serving in the house of a rich man doing all her work diligently, but with her mind on her own children in the village;
2. The tortoise moving about in the water but with her thoughts on her eggs;
3. Breaking opens the jackfruit after smearing the hands with oil;
4. Preparing first butter from milk and then putting it in water so that it will not mix with the water.

Then he further elaborates it with instruction on the means of fixing the mind on God, by resorting to solitude occasionally and by the use of discrimination about the Real and the unreal etc.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Though the Master was from a village, he knew the nature of Calcutta people. He says, “Don’t you know how easily the people of Calcutta get excited? The milk in the kettle puffs up and boils as long as the fire burns underneath. Take away the fuel and all becomes quiet. The people of Calcutta love sensations.” (p. 71)

<sup>25</sup> “Do you know my attitude?”, the Master queried and said, “As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows... There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidananda. He alone is the Teacher. My attitude towards God is that of a child toward its mother. One can get human gurus by the million. All want to be teachers. But who cares to be a disciple? ... Anyone and everyone cannot be a guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him. Therefore in every age God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity. Satchidananda alone is the guru.” (p. 24. See also p. 71)

<sup>26</sup> At other places in the *Gospel*, we find several other illustrations as well, such as of mud-fish living untainted in the mud; a loose woman doing all her work but with her mind on her paramour; a man with a carbuncle doing all his work while always aware of the pain; a dancing girl dancing with jars on the head; women talking and laughing while going with water-pitchers on their heads; etc.

The next question of *M.* was: “Is it possible to see God?” The Master answers assuringly without the least ambiguity: “Yes, certainly,”<sup>27</sup> and then in his own inimitable way explains how one can obtain God vision through longing, comparing it with the intense longing of the worldly people for worldly things, and giving other apt illustrations, like that of the kitten mewling for its mother with complete dependence on her. He interspersed the reply with a soul stirring song (which is a general characteristic of the Master’s way of instruction, and very effective) in his charming voice, and pointed out:

“Longing is like the rosy dawn. Afar the dawn, out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.”

*M.* had been profoundly impressed by the first two visits to this wonderful man. He had been thinking of the Master constantly, and of the utterly simple way he explained the deep truths of spiritual life. Never before had he met such a man.

*M.* came on his third visit the next Sunday (5th March). The room was filled with devotees. The Master smiled as he talked and the conversation was about worldly men and how to deal with them. “They speak ill of the spiritually minded”, he said, and compared the latter’s attitude to that of an elephant which moves along the street without caring to look at the curs that bark at it.

The Master asked the spirited Narendra, about nineteen then (later Swami Vivekananda): “If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them?”

Narendra replied: “I shall think that dogs are barking at me.”

The Master smilingly corrected him, “Oh, no, you must not go that far, my child. (*laughter*). God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account.” (*laughter*).

Then, the Master elucidated its implications with the parables of the ‘Mahout-Narayana and Elephant-Narayana’ to keep away from the wicked, and with that of ‘the Brahmachari and the Snake’, to hiss at the wicked people to scare them away, but not to inject poison into, or to injure, them.

We see Sri Ramakrishna was an expert storyteller and used the parables with telling effect to the utmost advantage to drive home in simple way spiritual truths and their practical application in life. There is no dearth of parables, common telling illustrations and similes, and wit and wisdom to suit every occasion aptly.<sup>28</sup> They flow out spontaneously as he talks in a natural unaffected way. He does not pose as a teacher or a Guru standing on a high pedestal. He is the Great Master without being conscious of it.<sup>29</sup> All feel at ease in his company, whether rich or poor, high or low, young or old,

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<sup>27</sup> The master was kind to the householders and often encouraged them and assured them. When a person asked: “Sir, is it ever possible to realize God while leading the life of a householder?” The master assured: “Certainly. But as I said just now, one must live in holy company and pray unceasingly. One should weep for God. When the impurities of the mind are thus washed away, one realizes God.” (p. 23)

<sup>28</sup> There are more than 70 parables mentioned in the Index to the *Gospel*. These do not include all the illustrations and similes, sayings and proverbs, analogies and anecdotes, allegories and mythological stories, etc., which the Master uses profusely.

<sup>29</sup> “A hollow piece of drift-wood somehow manages to float; but it sinks if even a bird sits on it. But Narada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across to the other shore but can carry many animals and other creatures as well. A steamship itself crosses the ocean and also carries people across,” (p. 435). Sri Ramakrishna was a huge steamship.



and men or women. Wherever he is there is a mart of joy.

The Master is fully aware of the nature of the worldly persons,<sup>30</sup> and very graphically describes their mentality comparing them to the fish caught in the net, which burrow themselves into the mud with the net in their mouths thinking they are quite safe. But he assures, replying to a question, that there is certainly hope for even these if they keep holy company, etc. and pray to God saying, 'Give me faith and devotion.' The Master does not reject anyone. He finds a way for all. He declares, "Everybody will surely be liberated. But one should follow the instructions of the Guru." (p. 23). "Once a person has faith, he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith." Then he goes on to recount the miracles worked by faith in the name of God and makes all laugh saying that even God Rama had to build a bridge to cross the sea, but Hanuman with one bound cleared it with Rama's name on his lips. He then sings a song in his charming voice to the Divine Mother glorifying the power of Her name.

The Master was an expert connoisseur of persons.<sup>31</sup> He knows not only the nature of worldly-minded, but of great ones, and of spiritual geniuses too, and even of naughty boys. Pointing to Narendra, he said:

"You all see this boy. He behaves that way here. A naughty boy seems very gentle when with his father. But he is quite another when he plays in the *chandni*. Narendra and people of his type belong to the class of the ever-free. They are never entangled in the world. When they grow a little older they feel the awakening of inner consciousness and go directly towards God. They come to the world only to teach others. They never care for anything of the world. They are never attached to 'woman and gold.'" (p. 12)

Then he illustrated the ever-free nature of Narendra with the legend of the 'Homa Bird', which always flies high up in the sky and whose young ones, newly hatched, develop wings before they touch the ground and fly up to the mother-bird in the sky. What an apt illustration! Then the Master extolled Narendra's talents:

"You see, Narendra excels in singing, playing on instruments, study and everything. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar and tore his arguments to shreds." (*All laugh*).<sup>32</sup>

Here we come upon another aspect of the Master. He shows interest even in reasoning, though he is against vain argumentation. He asked *M.*: "Is there any book in English on reasoning? Tell me what it says."<sup>33</sup> *M.* explained; but while listening, the mood suddenly changed and the Master became absent-minded. *M.* sauntered in the garden and after a while returned to the Master's room. He describes the scene:

"There, on the small north verandah, he (*M.*) witnessed an amazing sight. Sri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees, and Narendra was singing. *M.* had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder; for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told *M.* that the Master was in *samadhi*. *M.* had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought: "Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a

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<sup>30</sup> See pages 71, 558, 581, 609, 692 etc.

<sup>31</sup> The Master freely bestows praise and appreciation wherever he sees laudable qualities. See pages 341, 365, 546, 571, 605-6, 610, 793, 799, 835, 907, 908, etc.

<sup>32</sup> Regarding appreciation of Narendra see also pages 219, 227, 705, 793, etc.

<sup>33</sup> See pages 33, 212, 437, 639, 840 for the Master's ideas on faith and reasoning.

state!’ “

Narendra was singing a song on Lord Hari which described His peerless beauty. The Master was reflecting the sentiments in his person like a delicate spiritual instrument. Narendra sang:

‘Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,

.....

Ever more beauteous in fresh-blossoming love  
That shames the splendour of a million moons,  
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,  
Raising erect the hair for very joy.’

“The Master shuddered when the last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, ‘that shames the splendour of a million moons’? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit?”

The song continued:

‘Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart;

With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.’

“Again that bewitching smile. The body motionless as before, the eyes half shut, as if beholding a strange inner vision.”

Next day when *M.* comes in the afternoon, quite a different scene opens. The Master (then about 46) is sitting on the small couch and with a smile is talking with Narendra, Bhavanath, and other young men, all about nineteen or twenty.

“The Master was having great fun with the boys, treating them as if they were his most intimate friends. Peals of side-splitting laughter filled the room as if it were a mart of joy. The whole thing was a revelation to *M.* He thought: “Didn’t I see him only yesterday intoxicated with God? Wasn’t he swimming then in the Ocean of Divine Love – a sight I had never seen before? And today the same person is behaving like an ordinary man! Wasn’t it he who scolded me on the first day of my coming here? Didn’t he admonish me, saying, ‘And you are a man of knowledge!’?”

Though Sri Ramakrishna was having great fun with the boys, no sooner *M.* entered the room, the Master laughed aloud and said to the boys: “There! He has come again.” They all joined in the laughter.<sup>34</sup> The Master explained the cause of the laughter:

“A man once fed a peacock with a pill of opium at four o’ clock in the afternoon. The next day, exactly at that time, the peacock came back. It had felt the intoxication of the drug and returned just in time to have another dose.” (*All laugh*).

*M.* thought this a very apt illustration. Even at home he had been unable to banish the thought of Sri Ramakrishna for a moment. His mind was constantly at Dakshineswar and he had counted the minutes until he should go again.

While the Master and the boys were having fun, his glance did not miss *M.* who was sitting in silence. The Master remarked to Ramlal: “You see, he is a little advanced in years (about 28), and therefore somewhat serious. He sits quiet while the youngsters are making merry.”

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<sup>34</sup> The master was full of wit and humour and often made the youngsters laugh heartily. See pages 70, 71, 146, 232, 408, 787, 788, 903 for witty remarks and page 692 for mimicry.

From the great fun, suddenly the Master's mood changed and he drew their attention to Hanuman's intense longing for Sri Rama:

"Just imagine Hanuman's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God."

The Master sang a song about Hanuman, and even as he was singing he went into samadhi.

"Again the half-closed eyes and motionless body that one sees in his photograph. Just a minute before, the devotees had been making merry in his company. After a long time the Master came back to ordinary consciousness. His face lighted up with a smile and his body relaxed; his senses began to function in a normal way. He shed tears of joy as he repeated the holy name of Rama. *M.* wondered whether this very saint was the person who a few minutes earlier had been behaving like a child of five!"

Note the quick and complete change in the moods and attitudes of the Master. Again the scene changes – The Master said to Narendra and *M.* "I should like to hear you speak and argue in English." "They both laughed... It was impossible for *M.* to argue any more before the Master." And yet *M.* was a learned man and Sri Ramakrishna an illiterate! Behold the power of the Master's personality!

In the afternoon *M.* suddenly came upon the Master talking to Narendra. He was saying:

"Look here. Come a little more often. You are a new-comer. On first acquaintance people visit each other quite often, as is the case with a lover and his sweetheart." (Narendra and *M.* laugh).

Nothing escapes the Master, though he was always intoxicated with God. He even knows the ways of the sweethearts and uses the illustration aptly.<sup>35</sup> Then he told *M.* about how the peasants select bullocks with mettle and spirit by touching their tails. Those, which meekly lie down, they reject, and those that frisk about and show their spirit they select. And he continued, "Narendra is like a bullock of this latter class. He is full of spirit within." The Master liked such spirit. He did not like namby-pamby fellows. He continued:

"There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk – soft and mushy. No inner strength."<sup>36</sup>

The Master had a scientific mind. He did not depend entirely on his own views. He always sought confirmation. He said to *M.* "Go and talk to Narendra. Then tell me

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<sup>35</sup> The Master said regarding Bhavanath: "Bhavanath is married; but he spends the whole night in spiritual conversation with his wife. The couple pass their time talking of God alone. I said to him, 'Have a little fun with your wife now and then.' (p. 690). cf. You see, he (Rakhal) has renounced his home and relatives and completely surrendered himself to me. It was I who sent him to his wife now and then. He still had a little desire for enjoyment." (p. 494).

<sup>36</sup> The Master sometimes exhibited his spirit. He said to the other devotees: "Captain forbids me to go to see Keshab." Captain: "But, Sir, you act as you will. What shall I do?" Master (*sharply*): "Why shouldn't I go to see Keshab? You feel at ease when you go to the Governor General's house, and for money at that. Keshab thinks of God and chants His name. Isn't it you who are always saying that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings? Doesn't God dwell in Keshab also?" (p. 218). The Master did not hesitate to scold the devotees when needed: Vijay (p. 100); *M.* (p. 285); Haladhari (p. 321); *M.* and Harish (p. 376); Adhar (p. 387); Niranjana (p. 402); Ishan (p. 577) etc.

what you think of him.”<sup>37</sup>

*M.* had been fascinated by Sri Ramakrishna’s personality<sup>38</sup> and had been enchanted by the Master’s sweet music. When the time for departure came, he felt reluctant to go and instead went in search of Sri Ramakrishna. *M.* saw him in the *Natmandir* (hall in front of the Kali temple), pacing up and down, and asked him with hesitation if there would be any more singing that evening. The Master replied, “No, not tonight.” But he added, “I am going to Balaram Bose’s house in Calcutta. Come there and you will hear me sing.” The Master was keenly interested in the welfare of the devotees. He was not content that they come to him at Dakshineswar. He himself graced their places and this also provided opportunities for the neighbouring people and those who could not go so far to Dakshineswar to meet him. When *M.* felt some hesitation whether he would be welcome at a stranger’s place, the Master assured him, “Oh no, why should you think that? Just mention my name. Say that you want to see me; then someone will take you to me.” The Lord is very easy of approach.

Again, like a scientist, he wanted to know what *M.* felt about himself, since he appeared to be so fascinated.

Master: “Let me ask you something. What do you think of me?” When *M.* remained silent the Master repeated, “What do you think of me? How many *annas* of knowledge of God have I?”

*M.* replied. “I do not understand what you mean by ‘*annas*’. But of this I am sure. I have never before seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in God, renunciation, and catholicity anywhere.”<sup>39</sup>

The Master laughed like a child. *M.* bowed low before him and took his leave.

He had gone up to the gate but remembering, he came back to Sri Ramakrishna

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<sup>37</sup> Sri Ramakrishna’s innate rational and scientific mind is evident in his going to several people to compare their realizations with his own. He had the scientist’s humility. If someone cast doubts on any of his realizations, he would try to verify it. He laid emphasis on practical *sadhana*. He used to say, by mere saying ‘*siddhi*, *siddhi*’ you won’t have intoxication; you must get some, make a paste of it and drink it mixed with water. (p. 547) He would also point out, though the almanac may forecast rain, if you squeeze it not a drop of water will come. Similar is the case with more theoretical knowledge of scriptures. He also declared that God can be seen and talked to by all if they undergo the necessary discipline and fulfill the conditions, and that he himself had seen God and talked to Him. (See pages 146, 175, 287, 357, 413, 600, 497, 780, 815, 818, 954, etc. for what the Master has said on himself and his experiences).

We also see the Master had knowledge how a photograph was taken (p. 182); about telegraph (p. 578), medicine (pp. 23, 174, 826 – cf. Sri Ramakrishna’s medical knowledge – a series of articles in Bhavan’s Journal by a Doctor in 1979-80). We can see the Master’s spirit of enquiry, when he enquires of *M.* about Pandit Shashadhar (p. 448); Narayana Shastri about Keshab (p. 835); and *M.* about Dr. Sarkar (p. 836) and the whole conversation with Dr. Sarkar (founder of the Science Association) is very illuminating (pp. 907-8). He also desired to visit the Science Association (p. 895). His remarks on science as incapable of revealing God is also interesting: “And what does your ‘science’ say? This combined with this produces that; that combined with that produces this. One is more likely to lose consciousness by contemplating those things – by handling material things too much.” (p. 907). He also recounts his experiences to Dr. Sarkar and others and allows himself to be tested (pp. 830-31).

<sup>38</sup> The Master not only was fascinating, he also attracted devotees: “I found that the Doctor (Dr. Sarkar) will have spiritual awakening. But it will take some time. I won’t have to tell him much. I saw another person while in that mood. My mind said to me, ‘Attract him too’.” (p. 902).

<sup>39</sup> At another place *M.* says: “You are as infinite as He of whom we have been talking. Truly, no one can fathom your depth.” (p. 56). (For the estimates of the Master’s personality see also page 19.) “If you want to see a grog-shop, then come with me. You will see a huge jar of wine (bliss) there.” (*M.* told Kali Krishna about the Master; 175; 254, 278, 306, 324, 387, 463, 836, 897, 958-9, etc.

who was still in the Natmandir, and saw:

“In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the Self as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.”

“In silent wonder *M.* surveyed that great soul.”

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We see from the foregoing that a wonderful many-faceted personality of the Master stands out before us even in the account of the first few days of *M.*'s visit to the Master. If we survey the whole *Gospel* on the lines of the First Chapter, we can see a good number of other important aspects of the Master's personality emerging, and those which we have already come across reinforced and enriched.<sup>40</sup> Swami Vivekananda used to say that the Master's moods were inexhaustible:

“Sri Ramakrishna had an infinite breadth of feeling. He had infinite moods and phases. Even if you might form an idea of the limits of Brahma-jnana, the knowledge of the Absolute, you could not do the same with the unfathomable depths of his mind. Thousands of Vivekanandas may spring forth through one gracious glance of his eyes! Sri Ramakrishna is not exactly what the ordinary followers have comprehended him to be... *He only knows what he himself really was; his frame was only a human one, but everything else about him was entirely different from that of others.* Truly, I tell you, I have understood him very little.”

Note what even the great Vivekananda says!

Consider the great spiritual power and inner strength of the person who could hold the sustained interest and devotion of so large a number of persons of high calibre and varied natures that we come across in the *Gospel*. There was the great and learned Keshab Chandra Sen, who was held in high esteem even in the West, an admired leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a great orator, and considered the idol of ‘Young Bengal’, and yet he came under the sway of the Master, and became the first instrument in spreading the Master's divine life and message. Then pursue his visit and the brilliant and profound conversation with so eminent a person and so great a Pandit as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The unlearned priest of Kali is in his natural elements. Wit, humour, and divine wisdom flow out of him spontaneously. Never for once is he in hesitation for words or ideas or quick repartee. He is in divine intoxication, and yet quite appreciative of the greatness of Vidyasagar.<sup>41</sup> Even the Pandit admitted openly that he learnt something new from Sri Ramakrishna, which he had not heard before: that of all entities Brahman alone is not made *ucchishta* (defiled).

Then see the variety of other eminent personalities that flit across the pages of the *Gospel* who were like little boys before the Master. To name only a few – Rani Rasmani, Mathur Nath Biswas, Pandit Narayana Shastri, Pandit Padmalochan, Pandits

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<sup>40</sup> This short pioneering article of its type cannot comprehend all the aspects of the Master's personality which a systematic and thorough analysis of the *Gospel* would yield. We have drawn attention to some salient aspects and tried to enrich some by way of footnotes. It has not been possible to give the details in all cases lest the article should become too long. We have contented ourselves by giving page references and seek the indulgence of interested readers to consult the *Gospel* for details as well as for further exploration.

<sup>41</sup> The Master in his talks often made acknowledgement to persons from whom he learnt or heard certain ideas and facts; and he often encouraged others to recount while he listened. One may refer to pages 230, 341, 405, 522, 605-6, 835, 836, 838-9, 899.

Shashadhara Tarkachudamani and Samadhyayi, Vijaya Krishna Goswami, Trailokya Nath Sanyal, Col. Viswanath, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Ashwini Kumar Datta, Hirananda of Sindh, Nitya Gopal, Dr. Rajendra Lal, Dr. Bhadhuri, Adhar, Jadulal Mullick, Shambhulal Mullick, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Williams, etc.<sup>42</sup> And how even a rationalist and a man of science like Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, who founded the Indian Association for the cultivation of science, was captivated by Sri Ramakrishna! The number of persons of all ages and classes who find place in the Gospel in association with Sri Ramakrishna is legion, and we find that a host of devotees from all sects and creeds and of all stations in life came to him for inspiration. There are also those who became his famous householder disciples such as Ramachandra Dutta, Manamohan Mitra, Suresh Kumar Mitra (Surendra), Durgacharan Nag, Akshaya Kumar Sen (who wrote the *Ramakrishna Punthi*), Devendra, Kalipada Ghosh, Balaram Bose, and *M.* himself, the author of the *Gospel*, and several others who spread the message of the Master and advanced his divine mission.

Above all, is it the work of any but a great spiritual dynamo to tame and hold together about a score of the intelligent and spirited youths of the University, well versed in modern sciences and rationalism, and inspire them with renunciation and dedication to the service of God and man? See the *Gospel*, how he gradually built up the cluster of his future great *sannyasin* disciples like Rakhal, Baburam, Shashi, Sarat, Tarak, and others and made a Vivekananda of Narendra and an Adbhutananda of an illiterate servant boy, Latu. And how he subdued that terrible *Bhairava*, the dramatist genius Girish Chandra Ghosh, the father of Bengali stage, but an inveterate drunkard who led a fast life, and transform him into one of the greatest devotees endowed with unflinching faith, so much so that he hailed openly Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God!

Sri Ramakrishna's moulding of persons into greatness was not confined to men only. His greatest gift to the world is the Holy Mother. He transformed the simple Saradamani, his wife, into his first *sannyasini* disciple and into the Holy Mother of the Ramakrishna-world, who guided his great disciples and the destinies of the Ramakrishna Order and ministered to a large number of devotees, for thirty-four long years after the passing away of the Master. Then there was Gopal-Ma, who had the living experience of Bala-Gopala (Child Krishna) playing with her, due to the Master's blessings. Many were the other women devotees whom the Master guided who find reference in the *Gospel*. Gauri-Ma later started an ashrama for women and schools for girls. Though Sri Ramakrishna emphasized on the '*kamini-kanchana tyaga*' and advocated that spiritual aspirants of either sex should not mix closely with each other, we find in the *Gospel* Sri Ramakrishna held all women as the embodiments of the Divine Mother and commended this attitude to all.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See the large number of names of persons who were associated with Sri Ramakrishna from the Index to the *Gospel* as also the list given on pages 7 and 8 of the *Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (original English version in part by *M.*), published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

<sup>43</sup> A devotee asked the Master: "Sir, shall we hate women then?" The Master replied: "He who has realized God does not look upon a woman with the eye of lust; so he is not afraid of her. He perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself." (p. 100). However, he held that spiritual seekers, especially sannyasins, must keep aloof from women (p. 558). Naturally the opposite advice was given to women spiritual seekers, for the attraction between the sexes is very strong and brings down the mind to the physical level. Regarding the Master's attitude to women: He considered even prostitutes as manifestations of the Divine Mother (p. 225); "I cannot bear to see women fast." (p. 384); "I look on women as my mother" (51); His love for his mother (pp. 535-6).; He scolds *M.* and Harish for neglecting their mothers (p. 376); etc.

Sri Ramakrishna's moods varied from that of a feminine one (p. 780) to that of a child. He would sometimes throw off his clothes and pace up and down like a five-year old child (p. 818). Then, he could perfectly mimic several types of male and female characters and send the young devotees into roars of laughter.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes, he would be in the heroic mood. When Adhar mentioned to him the cause of the grief of his friend who was bereaved (p. 143), the Master sang the song:

“To arms! to arms! O Man! Death storms your house in battle array!  
Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion;” . . .  
Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love, . . .  
Fight your foe from the Ganges' bank and he is easily slain.”

And then said, “What can you do? Be ready for Death. Death has entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name.”

Then what a variety of songs does the Master sing! From the light and frivolous song to entertain children (p. 477), with whom he was very happy:

Come; let me braid your hair,  
Lest your husband should scold you,  
When he beholds you!

to the most intoxicating devotional songs! Every sentiment is represented: there are those depicting the pangs of separation, and those inculcating intense renunciation, highest discrimination, and supreme knowledge; and those describing the union of *Shakti* in the *Muladhara* with *Shiva* in the *Sahasrara*, passing through the six *Chakras*. And there are songs for every occasion. Songs are there in the name of Shiva, Shakti, Kali, Durga, Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, Gauranga and Nityananda, etc. There are more than 200 songs of all types recorded in the *Gospel* sung by the Master and others composed by Ramaprasad, Kamalakanta, Premadasa, Trailokya, Madan, Nareshchandra, Meerabhai, Nanak and others. All this wide variety reveals the versatility and breadth of Master's mind and talents. The Master's singing was unusually melodious and charming, often interspersed with his improvisations and accompanied by his ecstatic trances and inspiring dances.

And what to speak of his tireless dancing, intoxicated with the divine mood, often going into rapturous *samadhi*! You meet these scenes often in the *Gospel*. At the festival of Panihati, *M.* records (p. 193):

“Sri Ramakrishna entered by turns into all the moods of ecstasy. In deep *samadhi* he stood still, his face radiating a divine glow. In the state of partial consciousness he

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<sup>44</sup> Sri Ramakrishna was in the happiest mood with his young and pure devotees. He was seated on the small couch and was doing funny imitations of a *kirtani*. The devotees laughed heartily. The *kirtani* is dressed lavishly and covered with ornaments. She sings, standing on the floor, a coloured kerchief in her hand. Now and then she coughs to draw people's attention and blows her nose, raising her nose-ring. When a respectable gentleman enters the room, she welcomes him with appropriate words, still continuing her song. Now and then she pulls her sari from her arms to show her jewels. The devotees were convulsed with laughter at this mimicry by Sri Ramakrishna. Paltu rolled on the ground. Pointing to him, “The Master said to *M.*: ‘Look at that child! He is rolling with laughter.’ He said to Paltu with a smile: ‘Don't report this to your father or he will lose the little respect he has for me. You see, he is an “Englishman”.’ (p. 692). See also pp. 793, 824.

Regarding the Master's habits, moods, simplicity, and humanness see pages 40, 146, 493, 608, 786, 788, 813, 841.

danced, sometimes gently and sometimes with the vigour of a lion.”

“Again, regaining consciousness of the world, he sang, himself leading the chorus:

‘Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari’s name,... See how all Nadia is shaking under the waves of Gauranga’s love!...’

“The crowd, with the Master in the centre, surged toward the temple of Radha-Krishna. Only a small number could enter. The rest stood outside the portal and jostled with one another to have a look at Sri Ramakrishna. In a mood of intoxication he began to dance in the courtyard of the shrine. Every now and then his body stood transfixed in deep samadhi. Hundreds of people around him shouted the name of God, and thousands outside caught the strain and raised the cry with full-throated voices.”<sup>45</sup>

Does this not remind one of the ‘*Rasa-dance*’ of Sri Krishna! We also find in the *Gospel* that Sri Ramakrishna’s knowledge of the various religious sects, of saints and seers, and the various *Yogas* and other religious disciplines was quite wide (see the Index). There are also references to *Ramayanas* of Valmiki and Tulsidas, *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Ashtavakra Samhita*, *Bhaktamala*, *Bhagavata*, *Gita*, *Chandi*, *Tantras*, *Manu Samhita*, *Narada Pancharatra*, *Panchadashi*, *Panini*, *Puranas*, *Smritis*, *Prabodhachandrodaya*, *Vivekachudamani*, *Yogavasishtha*, and other works, all of which go to show the wide interest and horizon of the Master.

Then we find that the Master witnesses the religious dramas at the Star Theatre (of Girish Ghosh), goes to see a circus, and is interested how a photograph is taken. He knows the Maidan, Museum, Zoo, Asiatic Society, Bengal Bank, Fort William, and is interested in visiting even the Science Association of Dr. Sarkar. And every one of his experiences provides him enough material to draw spiritual lessons to communicate in his brilliant conversations. The Master is ever active visiting the houses of devotees, participates in Brahma festivals, goes on a boat-trip on the Ganges with Keshab and his Brahma party, and attends Ratha-yatra at Balaram Bose’s house, etc. Everywhere he creates a surcharged divine atmosphere. No page of the *Gospel* is drab or dull. We have the whole gamut of human emotions of a higher type displayed there by Sri Ramakrishna. We see the high states of the Master, his intense detachment and his joyful moods in spite of his fractured arm or the intense pain in the throat. To the very end we see his interest in the spiritual development of all those who came to him and his deep sympathy and love for all<sup>46</sup>.” And he is particularly interested in pure youngsters.

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<sup>45</sup> See, ‘the description of the Master’s extraordinary dance’ (p. 697) and ‘the dance in bhava-samadhi’ (p. 824) by Swami Saradananda in his *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*.

<sup>46</sup> “On the morning of 23rd December (1885), Sri Ramakrishna gave unrestrained expression to his love for the devotees. He said to Niranjana, ‘You are my father: I shall sit on your lap.’ Touching Kalipada’s chest, he said, ‘May your inner spirit be awakened!’ He stroked Kalipada’s chin affectionately and said, ‘Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious devotions will certainly come here.’ In the morning two ladies received his special blessing. In a state of samadhi he touched their hearts with his feet. They shed tears of joy. One of them said to him, weeping, ‘You are so kind.’ His love this day really broke all bounds. He wanted to bless Gopal of Sinthi and said to a devotee: ‘Bring Gopal here.’” (p. 924)

For the Master’s concern and consideration for the devotees, see him doing japa for young Purna’s welfare (p. 714); depressed about Hriday’s illness (p. 214); worried about the grief of Mohini’s wife on the death of her son (p. 696); worry about young boys (pp. 494, 698); concern for Hriday (p. 612); his heart writhed in pain at the death of devotees (p. 731); concern for the younger Naren (p. 798) and Surendra (p. 411); for Girish Ghosh (p. 819); for the coachman (p. 828).

His compassion for all is also seen here: “In spite of his illness the Master keenly felt the sorrow and suffering of men. Day and night he thought about their welfare. The devotees wondered at his



Here he advises the householders how to live in the world, and there he expatiates on the glories of renunciation. He is at home with the young and the old, the learned and the ignorant, children and women, the poor and the rich, ordinary clerks and high officers, doctors and scientists, artists and philosophers, devotees and saints. Here he discusses with the Vedantists, there with the Vaishnavas or Shaktas or again about different sects and religions. He brings God face to face to us, exhorts us to consider Him as our very own and very near to us and to strive to realize Him in life. Nowhere anything is jarring, nowhere anything narrow, and nowhere the interest slackens. One is lifted up into an ethereal atmosphere of divine harmony. Verily he was the personification of all the *yogas* and the spiritual life of all mankind.<sup>47</sup> No wonder Vivekananda sang in a hymn composed by him on Sri Ramakrishna, who was the combined incarnation of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna:

Advayatattvasamāhitacittam  
 projjvalabhaktipaṭāvṛttam ,  
 Karmakalevaramadbhutaceṣṭam  
 yāmi gurum śaraṇam bhavavaidyam.  
 Naradeva deva jaya jaya naradeva!

– I surrender myself to the Guru, the Man-God, the physician for the malady of this *samsara* (relative existence), whose mind ever dwelt on the Non-dualistic Truth (*Advaita*), whose personality was covered by the cloth of supreme devotion, who was ever active (for the good of humanity) and whose actions were all super-human.

*Victory unto that God of all mankind!*

*Victory unto that Man-God!*

Om śrīrāmakṛṣṇārpaṇamastu!

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compassion. The assurance of Sri Ramakrishna that no sin can touch a man if he gives up his body while praying to God was deeply impressed on their minds.” (p. 904).

The Master does not reject drunkard Surendra (p. 527); Master’s illness is due to taking the sins of others (p. 897); “Don’t take more people than your horse can draw”, the Master says (p. 443); asks devotees to give alms to the beggar woman (p. 609).

47. For the Master’s realization of and equal regard for different religions see pages 18, 497, 800, etc. For his breadth of outlook and spirit of equality see pages 225, 435, 571, 604, 837, 854, etc. For his universal vision see page 290, etc.

## 5. SRI RAMAKRISHNA CAST HIS WHOLE SECRET TO THE WIND

Swami Prabhananda

Gautama, the Buddha passed away saying: 'Decay is inherent in all component things, but the truth will remain forever... ' The Gita also tells us that the body is not immortal; it can and does suffer and die but not the Atman, the Eternal Principle in the body.

Yes, a man may suffer in body and may die of it and yet he can be an *avatara*. Christ, the son of God was crucified; Rama – Vishnu himself come down to the earth to save righteousness – brought the end of his bodily existence by drowning himself into the Saryu river; Krishna, the God of the Gita quit his mortal frame when shot by the arrow of a hunter. Similarly Ramakrishna's body suffered from cancer and then *died* of it.

Though the laws of nature apply more or less equally to the common man and the *avatara*, the difference between the two lies in the latter's divine serenity of mind, his God consciousness in spite of terrible suffering when no remedy is in sight, and his power to transform others' lives – turning a fisherman into a world teacher or an abandoned street boy into a sage!

Swami Prabhananda, now of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, a noted writer has, in his following write-up, narrated the extraordinary, almost unbelievable acts of Sri Ramakrishna during his terminal illness, especially, on the 1st of January 1886 when he literally gave himself away to one and all granting, anything asked of him, notably the experience of ineffable bliss.

**“He looked at Girish and said, ‘What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined’ ... The devotees, one and all, became overwhelmed... Many were in a dazed mental state. Some shouted in joy... He (Akshay) experienced a profound divine bliss...”**

Sri Ramakrishna was seriously ill with cancer. In an effort to improve his condition by providing a healthier environment, his disciples shifted him on 11 December 1885 to a garden house at 99 Cossipore Road, in the northern suburbs of Calcutta. He realized that the end of his physical life was fast approaching and so he engaged himself with redoubled energy, as it were, in the task of completing his spiritual ministrations. He was like 'one of those fruit-sellers who bring their fruit to the market place, bargain at first about the prices, but then toward the sunset, when the market is about to close, give away the fruits indiscriminately'.<sup>1</sup> His body was under immense strain and was withering fast. 'It was the period of his great passion, a constant crucifixion of the body and the triumphant revelation of the soul. Here one sees the humanity and divinity of the Master passing and repassing across a thin borderline. Every minute of those eight months was suffused with touching tenderness of heart and breathtaking elevation of spirit. Every word he uttered was full of pathos and sublimity'.<sup>2</sup> Despite his critical illness, the Master would often pass into blessed states of

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<sup>1</sup> 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, tr. By Swami Nikhilananda, pub. By Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 6<sup>th</sup>. ed., p. 923.

<sup>2</sup> Swami Nikhilananda: *Ramakrishna – Prophet of New India*. pub. By Harper & Bros., Publishers, New York, 1948, p. 52.

communion with the Divine Mother or engage himself in looking after the spiritual welfare of those under his charge. His heart overflowed with compassion for all.

In his radiating spiritual presence the garden house became a veritable mart of divine love. The holy atmosphere was tangible to all. Everyone tasted the sweetness of that love. Those among the disciples who were more spiritually advanced and receptive could appreciate it all the more. Often Sri Ramakrishna would give unrestrained expression to his love and deep concern for the devotees. One such occasion occurred on 23 December 1885. Addressing Niranjan, one of his young disciples, he said, 'You are my father; I shall sit on your lap.' Next he touched Kalipada's chest and said, 'May your inner spirit be awakened!' Stroking Kalipada's chin affectionately, he went on, 'Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious devotions will certainly come here.' That morning two ladies were special recipients of his blessings. While in *samadhi* he touched them with his feet, whereupon they wept with joy. His love that day really broke all bounds. He wanted to bless Gopal of Sinthi and said to a devotee, 'Bring Gopal here.'<sup>3</sup> In the evening of the same day Sri Ramakrishna said, 'My teaching of others is coming to an end. I cannot give anymore instruction. I see that everything is Rama Himself.' Sometime thereafter, coming down from the state of *samadhi*, he said, 'I saw everything passing from form to formlessness... Well, this tendency of mine toward the formless is only a sign of my nearing dissolution.'<sup>4</sup>

The overflowing of divine love from his being was typical of the Master in those days. Eager to share this blessed treasure with others, the Master considered the imparting of spirituality as a liability he was obliged to honour. He used to hum a song that went:

Coming to this world – an obligation; whom to explain?  
He only knows who heeds the call, others hardly know of it.  
Like a woman, stranger be, I am shy to show my face,  
I cannot say, much less explain, what an obligation to be a woman.<sup>5</sup>

But it was an obligation he was ever eager to fulfill, in fact, longed with his whole heart to fulfill. For it was not so much a sacred duty as a sacred joy. His heart was overflowing with divine love. His greatest joy in life was to find a spiritual seeker eager to receive the treasure he had accumulated. Girishchandra Ghosh, the dramatist, once narrated one of his own experiences. He said, 'One day I went to the Cossipore garden house to find Sri Ramakrishna profusely shedding tears and lamenting, "Ah me! Nityananda went from door to door, walking on foot and gave divine love. Alas, I cannot move out except in a carriage." On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna said, "Well, I shall go on doing good to others even when I am on barley water."<sup>6</sup> This prophecy about himself Sri Ramakrishna literally fulfilled in the closing days of his life. And it reached its full glory, as it were, on 1 January 1886.

It was a Friday morning, the eleventh day of the dark fortnight of the moon. A few days earlier Sri Ramakrishna had taken a stroll along the garden path, appreciating the beautiful natural setting of the garden house. On this day the winter sky was clear, the wind chilly. Sri Ramakrishna was feeling much better. A happy child of the Divine Mother he radiated joy and peace. Since early morning a current of sublime spiritual love had gushed from his being. To most of the householder devotees he appeared as the

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<sup>3</sup> The Gospel, p. 924.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 925.

<sup>5</sup> Akshay Kumar Sen: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Bengali), pub. By Udbodhan, Calcutta, 9th ed. p. 321.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the 14th Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission Association held on 25 July 1897.

*kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree.<sup>7</sup>

The week before, a devotee had pleaded with him to bestow his benediction on Harish Mustafi,<sup>8</sup> but he had declined. As soon as Harish appeared on this morning, however, Sri Ramakrishna blessed him. At the touch of the Master, Harish experienced ineffable bliss. Overwhelmed with emotion, he rushed like a mad man to the said devotee and shedding tears of joy said, 'Well, Brother, I cannot contain my joy. What's the matter! Never before have I experienced this.' This brought tears to the devotee, who said joyously, 'Brother, this bespeaks the glory of Sri Ramakrishna.'<sup>9</sup>

Before the devotees who had assembled in the garden house could fully appreciate the good fortune that had befallen Harish, Sri Ramakrishna called Devendranath Mazumdar upstairs where he was lying ill. After sometime Devendranath returned to the hall on the ground floor, just below the Master's room, and said to Ramchandra Dutta and other devotees present, 'Paramahamsadev told me, "Ram (Ramchandra Dutta) calls me a Godman, you all discuss and decide on it." Keshab's followers too used to call him a Godman'. None present could fathom the motive of the Master, nor could they understand the hint given by the Master.<sup>10</sup>

The serenity of the Master's mind in spite of the terrible suffering of his body was constant example to all. He was a living illustration of how to think of the spirit and how to dwell in God-consciousness even when the body is suffering and with no remedy in sight. He had said, 'My Divine Mother has brought this illness upon this body to convince the skeptics of the present age that Atman is Divine, that God-consciousness is as true and practical today as it was in the Vedic period, that when one reaches perfection, freedom from all bondage is attained... All of my religious practices, Yoga practices, devotional exercises have been for the good of others and not for my own good. My Mother has set through this form a living example in this age.'<sup>11</sup>

The morning passed. After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna rested awhile. Silence pervaded the garden. Save for the gentle rustling of leaves, all nature was still. As it was New Year's Day and therefore a holiday, a number of disciples – more than thirty had come to the garden house. They were gathered in groups in the hall on the ground floor and in the garden under the trees and one or two sat on the branch of a mango tree. Some among those present were Girishchandra Ghosh, Atulchandra Ghosh, Ramchandra Dutta, Nabagopal Ghosh, Haramohan Mitra, Vaikunthanath Sanyal, Kishory Ray, Haranchandra Das, Ramlal Chattopadhyay, Akshay Kumar Sen, and Mahendranath Gupta.<sup>12</sup> The *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* mentions Upendranath Majumdar and Ganguly the cook as also being present. Besides, Swami Abhedananda has included Harish. *M.* has made mention of Kalipada as well. It is interesting to note that none of the world-renouncing disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were active participants in the drama that ensued, nor were there any women devotees. Again, all those present were well-known devotees of the Master.

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<sup>7</sup> Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, p. 613.

<sup>8</sup> Harish Mustafi was the maternal uncle of Devendranath Mazumdar. A physical instructor by profession, Harish had a strongly built body. However, he was well-known for his tender and devout nature.

<sup>9</sup> Ramchandra Dutta: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivanbrittanta*, (Bengali), pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Calcutta, 6th ed., p. 175.

<sup>10</sup> Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, p. 613.

<sup>11</sup> *M: The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, tr. by Swami Abhedananda, New York, 1907, p. 423.

<sup>12</sup> Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, tr. by Swami Jagadananda, pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 4th ed., p. 891.

At about three o' clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna called Ramlal and said, 'See Ramlal, I feel better today. Let us go for a little stroll in the garden.'<sup>13</sup> He came down to the garden in the company of Ramlal.<sup>14</sup> Sri Ramakrishna was wearing a red bordered *dhoti*, a green-coloured shirt, a thick wrapper set with a red border, a green coloured cap covering the ears, stockings, and slippers with carvings. He had a walking stick in his hand. Coming downstairs he noticed that Narendra and several of the others were asleep in the adjoining room, having attended on the Master or meditated the greater part of the preceding night. Sri Ramakrishna went out of the house through the western door and proceeded with slow steps along the garden path towards the southern gate. The trees and the green grass were aglow with the soft rays of the winter sun. Around the garden there smiled flowering plants whose blossoms made the air slightly fragrant.

Seeing that the Master had unexpectedly come down from his room to the garden, some of the devotees moved towards him. His attendant Latu, who had accompanied him thus far, returned to the house. Latu and Sarat seized this opportunity to sweep out the Master's room and air his bedding in the sunshine. The devotees were naturally much gladdened to find the Master well enough to come down from his room. Some of them took the dust of his feet, while others hastened to meet him. Girishchandra Ghosh, Ramchandra Dutta, Atulchandra Ghosh, and a few others had been having a chat under the shade of a mango tree. Now Ramchandra was already moving in the Master's direction with his companions following behind him. This group reached Sri Ramakrishna when the latter was half way between the house and the gate of the garden. He was close to a big tree.

As soon as the aristocratic-looking Girishchandra approached Sri Ramakrishna, the latter said, 'Well, Girish, what have you seen in me, that you proclaim me before all as an Incarnation of God?' Girish was not to be taken aback by this question. His warm sentiments, best guarded in his heart, now found expression. Falling to his knees on the ground, Girish said with folded hands and in a voice choked with emotion, 'What can an insignificant person like myself say about the One whose glory even sages like Vyasa and Valmiki could not adequately measure?' The words revealed Girish's deeply devout nature. The Master was profoundly moved. He went into deep ecstasy and stood motionless with his eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. His hair stood on end. His lips assumed a bewitching smile. Whoever looked at him was struck with wonder. All eyes were riveted on him. Exhilarated, Girish shouted, 'Glory to Ramakrishna! Glory to Ramakrishna!' and repeatedly took the dust of the Master's feet. Others followed suit. At this the Master's grace overstepped all bounds. Akshay Kumar Sen and a few others who had been sitting on the branch of a tree had by this time come up to the Master. Akshay offered two champak flowers at the Master's feet. Soon thereafter the Master regained half-consciousness. His face lighted up with a beautiful smile and he gazed at the devotees standing nearby. He looked at Girish and said, 'What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined.' With these words the Master again went into ecstasy.

The spiritual power which suddenly radiated from the Master moved swiftly,

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<sup>13</sup> Kamakrishna Mitra: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna O Antarangaprasanga* (Bengali), pub. by the author, Dakshineswar, 24-Parganas, 1st ed., p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Chandrasekhar Chattopadhyay: *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smritikatha* (Bengali) pub. by Udbodhan, Calcutta, 2nd ed., p. 252,

silently, and unseen. The devotees, one and all, became overwhelmed with emotion. Most of them began behaving unusually. Many were in a dazed mental state. Some shouted in joy, some plucked flowers from the trees and offered them at the Master's feet. They forgot their firm resolve of not touching the Master before he had fully recovered from his illness. Everyone looked at him with adoring eyes.

Still in an ecstatic mood, Sri Ramakrishna touched the chest of the closest person with his hand, moving it upwards, and said, 'Be illumined.' He then similarly blessed all present one after another. Those who had witnessed such moods of the Master earlier understood that it was his divine play 'he had enacted for his especial devotees at Dakshineswar in order to bestow grace on them, that was now being manifested and enacted for the good of all on that occasion, so that all might receive divine grace.'<sup>15</sup> All were in an inebriated mood, in a mart of joy, as it were. Haranchandra Das<sup>16</sup> took the dust of the Master's feet in great reverence. Scarcely had he bowed down to the Master than the latter placed his foot on Haran's head. This reminded many of a Pauranic scene. In olden days Narayana was pleased to place his foot on the head of Gayasur and thus inaugurate Gaya as a place of pilgrimage. Likewise, Sri Ramakrishna made Cossipore a place of pilgrimage by his actions on this day.

The Master's touch produced wonderful experiences in the devotees. Some saw light, some had visions of their Chosen Ideals, some saw an effulgence, and still others felt an onrush of spiritual power within themselves. The common experience of all, however, was an inexpressible bliss. In speaking of the experiences of the devotees, Sister Nivedita writes: 'In one there awoke an infinite sorrow. To another, everything about him became symbolic, and suggested ideas. With a third the benediction was realised as over-welling bliss. And one saw a great light, which never thereafter left him, but accompanied him always everywhere, so that never could he pass a temple, or a wayside shrine, without seeming to see there, seated in the midst of this effulgence smiling or sorrowful as he at the moment might deserve – a Form that he knew and talked of as "the Spirit that dwells in the images."<sup>17</sup>

The Master now began slowly walking towards his residence. On the way his eyes fell on Akshay Kumar Sen who was then standing a little away. At the Master's greeting, Akshay mustered his courage and came running and stood near him. The Master placed his right hand on Akshay's chest, saying, 'Be awakened!' And he muttered a holy *mantram* into Akshay's ear. An electrifying impulse rushed into his body. An indescribable force welled up within him from he knew not where, and he knew that he was blessed. But he could hardly stand his upsurge of feelings. A dynamic power took control of his flesh, turning him into a heap of twisted limbs. But all the while he experienced a profound divine bliss and shed profuse tears of joy.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sri Ramakrishna; the Great Master, p. 393.

<sup>16</sup> A resident of Beliaghata, Calcutta, Haranchandra Das was an employee of the Finlay Mure Co. About the benediction he received from Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda observed, 'It is on a few occasions only that we saw Sri Ramakrishna bestow his grace in this way.' Haranchandra used to celebrate this day in subsequent years.

<sup>17</sup> *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 1, pub. by Sister Nivedita Girls' School, Calcutta 1967, pp. 232-33. Sister Nivedita heard of this from a person blessed by the Master on that day.

<sup>18</sup> Akshay Kumar Sen wrote later on, 'I am fully convinced from what he has shown me or what he made me understand, that he is God; he is the Incarnation of God; he is the master of the universe, he is that all-powerful Rama, Krishna, Kali and *Akhanda Satchidananda* even – he is within the purview of mind and intellect, and also beyond them.' (Akshay Kumar Sen: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Mahima* (Bengali), pub. by Udbodhan; Calcutta, 2nd ed., p. 18).

In the meantime Ramchandra, who had already received the Master's blessings, went to Nabagopal Ghosh and told him, 'Well, what are you doing, Sir? The Master has turned into a *kalpataru*, this day. Go there, hurry up please! If you have a desire for something, ask for it right now.' An excited Nabagopal dashed to Sri Ramakrishna, bowed low on the ground, and said, 'What will happen to me, Sir?'

The Master remained silent for a moment, then replied, 'Will you be able to follow a little spiritual practice?'

'Being a worldly man,' Nabagopal said, 'I have to keep myself engaged for the maintenance of my big family. How can I find time for spiritual practice?'

After a short pause, the Master softly asked him, 'Can you tell beads a number of times daily?'

Nabagopal said, 'Where is the time for that even?'

'Well, can you take my name a little?'

'That I can do, no doubt.'

Pleased at this, the Master said, 'That will be enough – you will not have to do anything further.'

Then Upendranath Mazumdar received the Master's benediction. Next came Ramlal Chattopadhyay, a nephew of Sri Ramakrishna and a priest of the Dakshineswar temple. He recorded that event in his memoirs. While he was brooding if he would receive the favour of the Master, the latter called him, removed the wrapper from his body, slowly passed his hand across his chest, and said, 'Now have a good look.' Ramlal gloried in the illumination which grew within him like a flower. He later observed, 'Ah! What a beauty! What a splendour of light! How can I tell them?'<sup>19</sup> To Swami Saradananda he described his personal experience saying, 'I could formerly see a part only of the holy person of my Chosen Ideal with my mind's eye at the time of meditation – when I saw the lotus feet, I could not see the face; again perhaps I saw the person from the face to the waist, but could not see the holy feet and whatever I saw never seemed to be alive – but no sooner had the Master touched me that day than the form of my Chosen Ideal appeared suddenly from head to foot in the lotus of my heart and moved and looked benign and effulgent.'<sup>20</sup>

Next came the turn of Atulkrishna Ghosh, the High Court lawyer, and then Kishory Ray. They were blessed. Now, Bhai Bhupati prayed for *samadhi*. The Master readily granted this, saying, 'You will have *samadhi*.'<sup>21</sup> Next Upendranath Mukhopadhyay came and quietly prayed for material prosperity. The Master said, 'You will have wealth.'<sup>22</sup>

Vaikunthanath Sanyal now came to the Master and prayed, 'Kindly bless me, Sir.'

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<sup>19</sup> Sri Ramakrishna O Antarangaprasanga, pp. 35-36.

<sup>20</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, p.891.

<sup>21</sup> Swami Abhedananda: *Amar Jivankatha* (Bengali), pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta 1964, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Swami Akhandananda (formerly Gangadhar Ghosal) recalled that Sri Ramakrishna had one day said pointing to Upendranath, that he had visited him with the prayer for some fortune. (Swami Akhandanand: *Smritikatha* (Bengali), pub. by Udbodhan, Calcutta, 2nd ed., p. 182). His wish was fulfilled. He organised the now famous Basumati Sahitya Mandira, a publishing house in Calcutta, and earned a good fortune.

Earlier, Vaikuntha had prayed to the Master several times for illumination and every time the Master had assured him, saying, 'Wait till I recover from this illness. Then I shall do everything for you.' The same Master now said, 'You have already realised all that.' Vaikuntha submitted, 'Since you say this it must have happened. Please, however, favour me with something so that I can appreciate my realisation.' The Master touched his chest for a while and said, 'Well Mother, be awakened!' Immediately Vaikuntha had wonderful experience. Entering into an incomprehensible mental state, he saw the form of Sri Ramakrishna with his eyes wide open, both within his heart and outside, among the devotees, on the leaves of trees, in the sky – everywhere. Like a jaundiced person he saw the same everywhere. He experienced this not for only an hour or a day but for days together. In fact, three days later he felt that he was going mad.<sup>23</sup> But now on this blessed occasion ebullient Vaikuntha could not contain himself. As his eyes fell on Sarat and Latu who were busy on the roof adjoining the Master's room, he hysterically shouted 'You all please come! Hurry up, please!' But they kept to their posts to finish their work. The Master hinted at Vaikuntha to be quiet. A little earlier Girish and Ramchandra in the exuberance of their joy had been calling to the devotees to come. Girish in his excitement found Ganguli, the cook, in the kitchen. He practically dragged him out and placed him in front of the Master. And the Master kindly bestowed his grace on him.<sup>24</sup> Now Haramohan Mitra was brought before the Master. The Master touched him, saying 'Today let it be.'<sup>25</sup> Though disappointed that day, Haramohan was blessed later by the Master with a wonderful vision. He saw effulgent gods and goddesses at the point between his brows.

The devotees' effervescence of joy turned the scene into a veritable madhouse. Some became ecstatic, some laughed, some wept; some sat down to meditate, some began to pray. All confessed later that they felt Sri Ramakrishna had revealed himself as a Divine Incarnation and showered his grace upon them without distinction.

It so happened that none of the young disciples were recipients of Sri Ramakrishna's overflowing grace that day.<sup>26</sup> The ecstatic outburst of the devotees drew the attention of some of them, but before they could draw near, Sri Ramakrishna had returned to normal consciousness and was slowly retiring to his room. On returning to his room he told Ramlal, 'Accepting the sins of the rogues my limbs are burning. Bring some Ganges water.' Ramlal brought Ganges water and the Master spread it all over his body.

Among those who happened to be absent on this occasion, Pratap Hazra should be mentioned, for soon after his return to the garden he heard the generous gifting by the Master. He felt greatly disappointed. His friend Narendranath tried to cheer him up. He

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<sup>23</sup> Vaikunthanath Sanyal: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* (Bengali), 1st ed., B. S.1343, p.199. Unable to control himself, Vaikuntha approached the Master for help. By the magic touch of the Master this extraordinary vision of Vaikuntha vanished.

<sup>24</sup> Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, p. 615.

<sup>25</sup> Haramohan Mitra of Simla was a class-mate of Narendranath. Once earlier Sri Ramakrishna's reaction had been the same in response to a prayer for bestowing grace on him. (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivanbrittanta*, p. 176).

<sup>26</sup> Later Latu (Swami Adhutananda) in answer to queries said, 'He had already filled us with his blessings. What else could we have asked for that day?' (*Latu Maharajer Smritikatha*, p. 252) Saratchandra (Swami Saradananda) too said later, 'We did not think of begging for something. Besides, he was our own,' (Swami Gambhirananda: *Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika* (Bengali), Vol. 1, pub. by Udbodhan, Calcutta, 4th ed., p. 311)



took him to the Master in his sick bed and pleaded for his blessings. But Sri Ramakrishna said that nothing could be granted then. After repeated requests by Narendranath, he at last assured Hazra of a 'special grace' before his death. Consoled by the Master's wondrous promise, Hazra wended his way down the stairs. The Master's assurance was fulfilled.<sup>27</sup>

Before dusk set in, Chunilal Bose came to the garden house. On the advice of Narendranath he decided to see the Master and crave his benediction. He succeeded in evading the vigilance of Niranjan who was stationed at the bottom of stairs as usual to control the entrance of visitors, and went upstairs. As he made salutations to the Master, the latter asked, 'What do you want?' Baffled, Chunilal did not know what to ask for. Then the Master pointing to himself, said, 'Keep your faith and devotion to this; you too will be blessed.' On meeting Narendranath, he narrated the details of his meeting. Narendranath said, 'What is there to fear for you?'<sup>28</sup>

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna sat facing the north in the large room upstairs. The devotees were sitting quietly in the room. Among others, Mahimacharan Chakraborty, Atul Chandra Ghosh, Pratap Hazra, Mahendranath Gupta and Narendranath were present. The Master said, 'When the *Om* sound, rising from the naval, merges into the body itself, then *Turiya* will be attained. It is still left to be achieved.' After sometime the devotees bowed down before the Master, one after another. Observing this, Mahimacharan observed, 'Ah how nice it is! Even those who see this are blessed with devotion.'

The Master said, 'It occurred to my mind that many people will come the last seven years. There will be such a crowd that a watchman will have to be posted to control them.'

On his way home Mahimacharan talked with Mahendranath. He said, 'The science of *Om* will be clear if you read the chapter on *laya*.' Then Mahimacharan revealed a remark of the Master regarding Mahendranath. He said, 'The Master said, "Mahendra will soon attain the goal." ' Mahimacharan, who considered himself quite learned, gave his considered opinion about Sri Ramakrishna. He said, "Paramhansa does not have a trace of ego when he speaks. He always gives credit to others for his message. I have not seen Ramakrishna's peer in India."<sup>29</sup>

Every devotee blessed that day felt the thrill of the Master's magic touch. The blissful experience of the day reminded the devotees of legendary *kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree of the Puranas. While returning home many of the devotees wondered, 'Is it possible that the Master's frail frame, his ailing body, could contain the soul of a Godman with wondrous powers?' The more they thought about it, the more awe and respect arose within them. Sri Ramakrishna's was a strange nature, never to be known; a nature deep and mysterious, unfathomable to the outer world. It is evident, however, that the Master was 'a great instrument of the universal "I" or the Divine Mother in manifesting power',<sup>30</sup> and that he cast his whole secret to the wind on this day.

The Incarnation of God, as Sri Ramakrishna declared himself to be, is a friend, a

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<sup>27</sup> Prabuddha Bharata, May 1980, First meetings with Sri Ramakrishna: Pratap Chandra Hazra, p. 224.

<sup>28</sup> Swami Gambhirananda: *Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika Vol. 11* (Bengali), pub. by Udbodhan, Calcutta, 2nd ed., p. 401.

<sup>29</sup> M's Diary.

<sup>30</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, p. 394.

*suhrid*,<sup>31</sup> who does good to others without expectation of return. Unlike the *kalpataru*, however, he grants man the fulfillment of those wishes, which ultimately lead him to his complete self-realization. His objective is to help man manifest his innate divinity in every moment of life. His only mission is to make man awakened – awakened to his real nature. From this wider perspective Swami Saradananda was justified in describing the incident we have narrated as ‘the self-revelation of the Master’ or the ‘bestowal of freedom from fear on all devotees by revealing himself’.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Srimad Bhagavadgita, V. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, p. 891.

# SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA 'THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'

तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनं कविभिरीडितं कल्मषापहम् ।

श्रवणमंगलं श्रीमदाततं भुवि गृणन्ति ते भूरिदाजनाः ॥

“M. had started distributing the Nectar of the *Kathamrita* during the lifetime of Thakur. Its end will come only in eternity. Today, the whole world is drenched in the showers of the Nectar of the *Kathamrita*.”

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सत्यब्रह्म श्रीरामकृष्ण कथामृत निश्चयेन ।

– Undoubtedly Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita is the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Being.

*Swami Nityatmananda*

The Nectar of your story, Elixir to parched souls, Praise of the poet-seers, Cleanser of sins, Delight of listening ears, is grand and glorious. They who broadcast it are generous. –

– *Srimad Bhagavatam* (X : 31 – 9)

Sri Ramakrishna's Prophecy and Sketch in his own handwriting  
– 11 February 1886. [see pp. 163 for interpretation]

## 6. WHY THE GOSPEL IS SO POPULAR

Swami Swahananda

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has been accepted as a classic of spiritual literature in the entire world, at par with the older scriptures though so different from them in style and method of approach. It particularly appeals to the modern mind though like all scriptures it is timeless. Swami Swahananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of Hollywood (U.S.A.) briefly analyses the reasons why the *Gospel* is so popular with the modern man.

**“... the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna exhorts us to practise religious harmony, not merely for the avoidance of social and political dissension, but for the deepening of our spiritual lives.”**

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* or the *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, by which it is known in the original Bengali, is not only a classic in Bengali literature but also in the spiritual literature of the world. It has received recognition from official bodies in India, the United States and many other countries. It is my belief that there are three main reasons for its popularity.

A book becomes a classic when its themes are of perennial interest. Love, war, social and psychological analysis are some of the normal themes. Spiritual literature which centres on the life and teachings of a great soul is perennially appealing as its theme, spirituality, is of universal interest and concern. The Gospel presents spiritual ideas in such a universal language that its teachings can be applied by spiritual aspirants throughout all parts of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna stood for religious harmony. He repeatedly returns to the idea of the validity of all religions and decries dogmatism. By personally practising the spiritual disciplines of the different sects of Hinduism as well as those of Islam and Christianity, he found that all of them, if sincerely followed, lead to spiritual realization. So the different religious groups and sects have a continuing, valid existence. In an atmosphere of dissension, rivalry and violence, it is one of the great contributions of the *Gospel* to show the underlying unity of the various religions. This was not achieved by mere intellectualization but by Sri Ramakrishna's practical, spiritual experiences. The spiritual realization of a great teacher brings a quality of authenticity and injects tremendous mystical power into his words.

Although efforts had been made to bring about religious harmony by many people in earlier days it is now an essential need for contemporary mankind. The people of the world, because of easier communication and closer association with each other, have become more liberal. They are hungering for some type of religious universality that appeals to their reason and is supported by the spiritual realization of a great saint. Familiarity with different religions often creates doubts because they seem to represent incompatible ideas. But Sri Ramakrishna harmonized these ideas through his experiences and the philosophy of Vedanta enables one to see an underlying, cogent system behind the various teachings. Thus faith in the essence of religion is strengthened or restored.

Opposition by secularizing and anti-religious philosophies, especially modern political ideologies, has made it urgent for man to be free from conflicts regarding spiritual ideas. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* brings this need before us and exhorts us to practise religious harmony, not merely for the avoidance of social and political dissension, but for the deepening of our spiritual lives.

The second reason for the popularity of the *Gospel* is the superb technical artistry with which the theme is treated. The delightful, conversational method used reminded Swami Vivekananda of the Socratic dialogues of Plato. He praised *M.*, the writer of the *Gospel* for hiding himself and making his subject, Sri Ramakrishna, glow and sparkle. On any page of the *Gospel* a person can find some direction or suggestion for the solution of his problems. It contains the direct narration of the experiences of a great mystic, presented in simple, forthright language. Sri Ramakrishna advocated sincerity, that is making the heart, mind and speech, harmonious. In the *Gospel* he is frank, penetrating and sharing. His sympathy for the weak and the retarded in spiritual life is characteristic of great teachers. The *Gospel* shows Sri Ramakrishna's great love and sympathy for people whatever their walk of life. He taught that no matter at what level of spirituality a man may be, he would progress if he is sincere and prays open-heartedly to the Lord. Religion to Sri Ramakrishna was experience.

The English version of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has been re-arranged by Swami Nikhilananda according to chronology. Every great piece of literature, says Bertrand Russell, has areas of description and monotony. The five parts of the *Kathamrita* naturally have repetitions. But, as the Upanishads teach, spiritual truths have to be repeatedly heard, thought about and meditated upon. The *Gospel* is not a book to be read in one sitting. Reading a few pages of it every day helps us to absorb the ideas and make them our own.

*M.* has given detailed descriptions of the setting in which Sri Ramakrishna lived and talked. This enables us to form a graphic, living picture of him sitting or standing in his room and speaking to the assembled devotees. He was photographed, his features are known, how he lived, moved, talked, dressed – all these things have been meticulously recorded, making him seem very real and close to us.

Within fifty years of the author's death *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has become a world-wide spiritual classic. Its theme of universal, religious coexistence contains the germ, not only of individual, but global peace; its compassionate but uncompromising teachings on spiritual life give encouragement and inspiration; and the picture of the intimate daily life of Sri Ramakrishna gives a sense of contact with a living embodiment of the eternal truths of religion. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* speaks to the heart of the modern spiritual aspirant, renewing and strengthening his faith and emboldening him to strive for the highest ideals – of spiritual realization.

## 7. THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF ‘SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA’

Swami Bhuteshananda

Swami Bhuteshananda, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission wrote to us on 26th April 1980 –

“ ... You may be glad to know that I had the privilege of meeting Sri M., well known among us as Master Mahashaya, as early as in 1918 or so and my visits to him were repeated often even after my joining the Order. Moreover we lived with Swami Nityatmananda at the Belur Math when he was a brahmachari. His volumes on *Sri Ma Darshan* have been widely appreciated as a beautiful exposition of the life and works of Sri M. I am happy to know that you are going to publish the Kathamrita Centenary Volume by the end of January 1982. I am sorry... it will not be possible for me to contribute an article which will be worthy of the great volume you propose to bring out...”

We, however, take the liberty of reproducing below an old article of Swami Bhuteshananda translated by us into English with his kind permission.

**“...study scriptures in the light of the lives of those who have enlivened them by their lives.”**

It is the firm faith of Sri Ramakrishna’s circle of devotees that *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* contains the essence of all religious texts. We do not know if teachings of the deep and esoteric principles of Dharma have been enunciated anywhere in a way so simple and easy to understand as in the *Kathamrita*. That is why the reading of the *Kathamrita* and living according to it are the harbinger of the greatest good to all of us – of this there is no doubt.

It is often seen that in the *Kathamrita* the same teaching is repeated many a time. This is not a defect; on the other hand, it is for our great good. Our holy texts are called *sanatana*, perennial. For example, Bhagavan says in the Gita: स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः (IV:3) – O Arjuna, that same ancient yoga have I told you again today. What was said several times in ancient days was again told by Him to Arjuna in the Gita. Coming down to the earth, Bhagavan Himself repeated the fundamentals of Dharma from age to age. His coming down again and again and enunciating the same eternal principles – such repetitions involve no defect. शास्त्रेषु न जामिता अस्ति – religious texts never tire of repeating the same truth. Why? Our minds are such that it is doubtful if they can take the impress of what is heard even repeatedly. Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna’s nephew once said, “Uncle! Why do you repeat yourself so often?” Sri Ramakrishna replied, “Why shouldn’t I, man?” He meant that unless repeated, words will not make their impression on unconcentrated minds like ours. That is why everything has to be repeated and we have to hear it again and again. Repetition, therefore is no blemish in holy books.

For that reason, the nectar which saves us from the sea of death, that very nectar of the *Kathamrita*, we must try to taste. If by His grace we can imbibe some of its meaning, our life will not go in vain. Even if we can somehow take a drop of this nectar, we shall become immortal. That is why the words of Sri Ramakrishna have been termed,



as nectar – the Master Mahashaya could not have found a better word.

For the study of religious texts some special qualifications are necessary. It is only after acquiring some knowledge that man has the right to study them. But no such eligibility is necessary for studying the *Kathamrita*. Rather for one who knows little the *Kathamrita* is more easily comprehensible. Too much of knowledge only tends to confuse, adds to one's doubts. In fact, true knowledge is 'knowing One'. On his very first *darshan* of Sri Ramakrishna, the Master Mahashaya learnt from him that knowing God was knowledge and not knowing Him was ignorance.

This is something one has to learn. The Master Mahashaya felt this was something new even though when he went to him (Sri Ramakrishna) it was with a pure mind. In fact this purity of mind was the reason why Sri Ramakrishna accepted him as his own from the very first and gave him without his knowing the responsibility of spreading his gospel in the world. When this pure-hearted, so very learned schoolmaster had his first conversation with Sri Ramakrishna he came to know that to know God was knowledge and not to know Him ignorance. By reading books we sharpen our intellect but our minds are not purified thereby. In other words, sharpening of intellect does not lead to the attainment of *tattvajnana*. They say: *pothi parh tota bhaye, pandit bhaya na koye* – By reading books one becomes a parrot all right but not a pandit. Thakur also said, "The bird repeats Radha-Krishna, Radha-Krishna and what not. But when the cat catches it, it merely can utter *tain-tain*: it does not say Radha-Krishna any more." By learning, man's intellect gets sharpened, he can talk better, he can impress others by his talk but he cannot erase doubt from the mind. Sri Ramakrishna once asked a bhakta, Baikunthanath Sanyal, "Have you read the *Panchadashi* and books like that?" Sanyal Mahashaya said in reply, "No Sir, I don't know what it is." Hearing this Sri Ramakrishna said, "Saved! Those who talk much have generally read these things. They don't do anything; they just trouble me for nothing." Reading of books leads to 'indigestion' and the reader becomes a learned fool. He thinks, of himself as a *pandit* but in reality he is just ignorant. This he does not know. That is why scriptures say again and again, "Those who study scriptures much cannot know God." Does it mean that one should not read holy books? No, Sri Ramakrishna did not say so, nor has it been said in the *shastras*. We may read scriptures but may only do so after acquiring *vivek* (discrimination) and *sraddha* (faith and reverence) which are essential for their study. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Scriptures contain sugar mixed with sand." It is very difficult to sift sugar from sand. That is why we do not easily understand the scriptures. Then what is the way out? The way out is to study scriptures in the light of the lives of those who have enlivened them by their lives. Otherwise one cannot understand scriptures.

*The Kathamrita* is undoubtedly an unfailing help in this regard. One can reach the truth more easily through it than may be possible by other means. It is doubtful if one can find anywhere else such a beautiful and simple solution to the problems of life faced by man from the beginning of the creation to our times. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The rupee of the Nawabs is no longer a legal tender in the days of the kings," and he would say, "Formerly fevers were ordinary. They could be cured by ordinary Ayurvedic concoctions etc. But now one has malarial type of fevers. For it one has to take D. Gupta's mixture." What he meant was that the old remedies do not solve the modern problems. Times have changed giving rise to many new problems unheard of before. For new problems new light is needed to solve them.

In Sri Ramakrishna's life and his '*Kathamrita*' one can find unique solutions of these new problems. In so many ways has he given such simple solutions to the

problems of modern life that one is amazed. He said, “In the days of yore people used to take to *tapasya*, *yoga* and *yajna*. In the Kaliyuga, life is dependent on food and mind is weak. In this age by just repeating the name of Hari with a concentrated mind one gets rid of the malady of the world.” He also said, “Where is the time with you for performing hard austerities like the rishis of yore? You are short-lived; your life depends on food; you have no time. You do not need to perform *yajnas* and other great rituals.” What is needed, he has told us in so many ways, is the *Naradiya Bhakti*, which does not belong to any particular religious group. *Naradiya Bhakti* means pure devotion, a devotion with self-surrender, a devotion, which makes the devotee surrender himself to Bhagavan. How is it to be practised? This also Thakur has demonstrated: “Ma, I know nothing. Please tell me everything; let me know how I can attain You. I do not know *sadhan-bhajan* (spiritual discipline and repetition of the Name). Please make me do what I should.” This complete self-surrender is what is known as *Naradiya Bhakti*. It also means that I ask nothing of Him, I only want Him. God is not being accepted as a means but the end. The idea is that He is not being invoked so that He may rid us of physical ailments, give us more wealth, keep our people happy and add to our years of life – this is not the purpose. These are the natural desires of men. Thakur forbade praying for these boons, for who asks a king for ‘gourd and pumpkin’, that is trifles? Not that God cannot grant these but He can give much more. He is the *Kalpataru*, the Wish fulfilling Tree. He gives whatever we ask of Him. So why ask Him for trifles? Why not ask Him to give away Himself? If He is attained nothing remains un-received. यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः – And having gained which, he thinks that there is no greater gain than that! (Gita, VI: 22)

Dhruva’s story says: Dhruva was insulted by his step-mother. At the instance of his mother he left to practise *tapasya*, terribly upset in his mind. Why? Because he wanted a kingdom larger than his father’s – as is natural for a young boy who is hurt in his ego. So he began to pray to God with utmost concentration to grant him a kingdom greater than his father’s. This sincere prayer of his disturbed the peace of Bhagavan. He appeared before him and said that he could ask for any boon. Dhruva was in a great fix. Said he, “Boon! I have no boon to ask.” Bhagavan said, “What do you mean, Dhruva? Try to recall what was it for which you had taken to *tapasya*?” Dhruva then remembered. He said, “Having been refused a place in my father’s lap I desired a kingdom and took to *tapasya* for a big kingdom. But I have obtained something much greater than what I desired. I was looking for glass and I have found gold which is much more valuable. स्वामिन् कृतार्थोऽस्मि वरं न याचे – O Lord, I am gratified. I desire no boon. (*Hari Bhakti Sudhodaya* 7/28). This is the *ahaituki bhakti*, selfless devotion, *Naradiya Bhakti*. This *Naradiya Bhakti* comes to the Vaishnavas and the Shaktas; it comes to not only Hindus but to the followers of other religions too. Without gaining it, one is not eligible to enter the world of the Spirit. This simple anecdote is frequently met with in the *Kathamrita*.

Above all, let us see the life of Sri Ramakrishna. All his words are enlivened with his own life. They were not said for the sake of saying – they were in fact reflected in his life. His whole life is a bright example of his sayings. That is why by seeing his life we can understand the *Kathamrita*. There is nothing difficult in what he teaches – nothing difficult for us to understand. How easy he has made it all so that we may understand easily and not get confused! About loving God, he said, “What kind of love? The same as we have for our parents.” He also said, “Three attachments combined lead to attaining Him: the attachment of the mother for her son, of the faithful wife for her husband and of the man of the world for worldly riches.” We can understand these attachments as we

have ourselves felt them more or less in our lives. He said, “These three attachments combined, one can attain Him.” To understand this one does not need scriptures.

Sri Ramakrishna does not prescribe any great spiritual practice to attain Him. He only says: “Where will you meditate? *Mane, bane, kone* – in the mind, in the forest, in the corner.” Now, everybody cannot go to a forest, so by calling on Him in the corner, that is the corner of the house or the corner of your room you can attain Him. That will do. If you cannot find a corner where you can meditate on Him in solitude, meditate in the mind oblivious of the surroundings.

Somebody said, “Sir, I have no time for so such spiritual practice.” Thakur replied, “It will be enough if you just offer *pranams* twice, morning and evening. Please say after the pranam: I have no time to meditate on you. So O Lord, pardon me and bless me with Your grace.” How easy he made it – just *pranams* twice, morning and evening.

While instructing Girish Babu, Sri Ramakrishna said, “Look here. Meditate on His name morning and evening.” Girish Babu began to wonder how to find time for, meditation twice a day, busy as he remained with so much of his own work. On seeing, Girish Babu silent and penetrating his mind Sri Ramakrishna said, “Before you dine or go to bed think of Him once.” Girish Babu was still silent, unable to promise. He thought that even the time of his meal was uncertain – sometimes he would eat at 10, at other times at 5 in the evening, having remained busy with litigation – how he could promise Sri Ramakrishna. And when he was making it so easy for him how could he express his inability? In his helplessness he remained silent. Knowing his mind Sri Ramakrishna said, “Perhaps you want to say that even this you cannot do. All right give me the power of attorney.” In such a manner, in such an easy way has any one ever spoken religion for our benefit? Then someone may wonder if by making it so easy he brought religion too low. No, he didn’t. There is no compromise, no adulteration in it. Girish Babu himself understood it much later when Sri Ramakrishna was no more. He said, “What he meant by the power of attorney I am realizing only now.” After talking of the power of attorney, Sri Ramakrishna also imparted useful instruction to Girish Babu to help him build this attitude. It is narrated in the *Lila Prasanga*. One day when Girish Babu said in some context in Thakur’s presence: “I will do it.” Thakur said, “What do you mean? How do you say that you *will* do it? And suppose you couldn’t? That is why you should always say, I shall do it, *God willing*.” Girish Babu understood. True it is that if you have given Him the power of attorney the whole responsibility is His. Therefore, I shall do only if He permits. Girish Babu used to say later on, “I did not understand it then. I see it now.” He who has given the power of attorney has to see at every step, with every breath, that it is by God’s power that he has taken the step, that he has breathed a breath, not by the power of this wretched ‘I’.

That you have to renounce the world he never said. You have to renounce all and depart having given up your family and all – this also he did not say. Thakur instead said, “Why? I am not asking you to leave your hearth and home. I say only this much that you be in the world always keeping in mind that this world is His. Hold Him and live in family just as one breaks the jackfruit after smearing the hands with oil. Then the milk will not stick to your fingers. Live in the household; there is no objection to it. But if you live holding Him the sins of the world will not stain you.” This is Thakur’s teaching. Thakur said, “Hold the post, then go round it; you will not fall.” The Bhagavata says, “A poet – one of Navayogindras – says to Nimi Raja:

यानास्थाय नरो राजन् न प्रमाद्येत कर्हिचित् ।

धावन् निमील्य वा नेत्रे न स्वलेन्न पतोदिह ॥ (II:2:35)

– The man who follows the Bhagavata Dharma never falls into errors. Even if he runs blindfolded he does not fall.” Thakur said: “The boy who is held by hand by the father or is carried in his lap runs no risk. He can go carefree clapping his hands. And the boy who is holding his father’s hand runs the risk of failing when he is careless or clapping.” To follow Him, to offer oneself to Him and to put one’s whole burden on Him – this attitude is emphasized clearly in the *Kathamrita*.

Just as Thakur has spoken of *bhakti* he has also talked of *jnana*. And he has also talked of the highest *jnana*. How far a follower of the Vedanta can progress with the help of his own intellect can easily be known from Sri Ramakrishna’s words. He said, “Doesn’t the Vedanta say: ‘*Asti; Bhati and Priya*’? All you are discussing is around these three.” It means: *He is, He is radiant and He is our beloved*. By understanding this one understands a basketful of Vedanta. This is true. But by merely saying so we cannot make a show of our intellect. To show how learned we are we have to show the *purva paksha* (the earlier credo) and *siddhanta* (principle); then in the reverse process accepting *siddhanta* as *purva paksha*, *purva paksha* has to be established as the *siddhanta*. It only means that we have to transform *yes* into *no* and *no* into *yes*. Otherwise what is our learning! Thakur said, “You don’t need all this. All you need is somehow to destroy the ‘*I*.’” What else does the *jnani* do? When the ‘*I*’ dies the whole trouble is over. Therefore, destroy this ‘*I*’ by any means. You can do so *by jnana or bhakti or karma* or by combining all the three. Thakur gives an illustration: The goldsmith works so hard to melt his gold – in one hand he holds the bellows, in the other a fan and in his mouth the blowpipe. When the fire gets ablaze, the gold melts. Similarly when man begins to burn for God, his mind, his whole being advances till his gold has melted, that is till he has attained the Ideal: This is the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna in simple words.

Nowadays we talk of community welfare. The demand is for things, which are of benefit to everybody. It is difficult – to find elsewhere such teachings of universal application as Sri Ramakrishna’s. His teachings satisfy the learned and the ignorant alike; the *bhakta* (devotee), the *karmi* (man of work), the *jnani* (man of knowledge) all are inspired equally, not excluding the atheist. If someone is an atheist or an agnostic, even for him Thakur has a message. Sri Ramakrishna says to him, “Pray with a concentrated mind. He will tell you whether He is or not.” Even the atheist was not, rejected by Thakur.

His fear-dispelling words are contained in every line of the *Kathamrita*. How he has encouraged us all the time! He sees all our defects and inadequacies but does not give us up. On the other hand, he tells us a simple way of how to get rid of them.

An illustration: Swami Yogananda (then Jogindranath Roy Choudhury) asked Thakur how to get rid of lust. Thakur replied: “Repeat and repeat Hari’s Name, lust will fly out.” Jogen was not impressed. Thought he, “What a remedy! He does not know of any *kriya* (Tantric ritual) so he says that this will do. Can the repetition of Hari’s Name eradicate lust? Besides so many people repeat Hari’s Name. Why don’t they get rid of their lust?” Then he thought, “Since Thakur has said it why not see what is the result?” Thinking in this way he began repeating the Name with full concentration, and did in fact get clearly the results within a few days as Thakur had said. Because of differences in nature and variations in eligibility we find him in many places teaching differently to different persons – telling everyone what was needful for him. But nowhere did he

prescribe anything difficult – he never asked anybody to take up anything, which was hard to practise and distinguished him from others. On the other hand he said, “You have not to take up anything unusual; you have to lead a simple life.” He himself is an example of this simplicity: no long hair, no smearing the body with ashes, no iron tongs – none of the outward signs, which distinguish sadhus from the common man – nothing like it. For them who go to him, the nearer they go the farther they find him, the more vastness they see in him. This is his wonderful uniqueness.

Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings were as simple as he himself was. He attracted us through these very teachings: he made the path to the realization of God easy and possible. The *Kathamrita* contains thousands of proofs of this.

There is a need for knowing something about the book we wish to study. It is only natural. What is the subject of the *Kathamrita*? It is God and how to attain Him, how to snap worldly bondage, how to be freed from the troubles of the world, how to come out of the darkness in which we have been groping for so many past lives, how to get rid of our doubts, how to earn the right of infinite peace by turning Godwards amidst all our worldly activities. The *Kathamrita* tells us all this.

While introducing the *Kathamrita*, The Master Mahashaya, Sri Mahendranath Gupta, the writer of the *Kathamrita* has taken a *sloka* from the Bhagavata. This *sloka* is:

Tava kathāmṛtaṁ taptajīvanam kavibhirīditaṁ kalmaṣāpaham,  
śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmadātataṁ bhuvī gṛṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ.

(Srimadbhagavatam; X: 31, 9)

– What is this Nectar of Your Story? It is the elixir to the parched souls: it is delight to the listening ears. Then it is added: The poets, that is the *jnānis*, men who know the essence of the scriptures, praise it; they always worship this Kathamrita saying that this Nectar of Your Story saves man from the clutches of death, imparts to him the knowledge that man is not mortal. And what is the picture of this Kathamrita? *Kalmaṣāpaham*, that is to say that this Kathamrita wipes out all the dark stains of our sins – we have smeared ourselves all over by this soot of the world. Nobody can assert that he has been able to save himself from it. So what is the way to wipe this soot? Perhaps many of us think that there is no way of escape from it. So it is said. There is a way and it is this *kathāmṛtani kalmaṣāpaham*. Not only this, the Puranas say that by drinking *amṛta* one attains immortality. But one has no need to drink this *amṛta*; only hearing it leads to man’s salvation. It is *śravaṇamaṅgalani*. Now if someone thinks, ‘Well, the bearing of the Kathamrita may do me immense good but do I have the taste for it?’ The answer is *śrīmad*, that is, beautiful – there is so much of beauty in its words that it attracts man naturally, and without any effort. And this Kathamrita is not so small in quantity that it can over come to an end; that is why it is called *ātataṁ*, pervading – *pervading* also in the sense of limitless and easily attainable, for example the sky or the space is all pervasive; one does not have to make an effort to find it. The air, for example is also all around this earth. It has not to be looked for or discovered. Similarly this *amṛta* in the form of narration of God’s Life is limitless and easily available. Then why don’t we all partake of this *amṛta*? The answer to it is also given: *bhuvī gṛṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ* – those, who have freely given away a lot, those persons who have to their credit many righteous actions have natural taste for this *Kathamrita*. It is they who adore it,

sing it, study and discuss it. Why one person may have the taste and the other not, the reason of it is his actions of past lives. If he has to his credit a good many actions of the past lives, the man is born with this interest which manifests itself in his very childhood. If his good actions are not sufficient this interest develops later on when it receives a blow. Thus we find men on different levels but the *Kathamrita* benefits all. Besides, it is not so very difficult to live by it – every one of us can derive joy from it.

## 8. THE GOSPEL OF RAMAKRISHNA: WHAT IT STANDS FOR

Swami Ritajananda

It is not easy to recognise how much one gains by reading the *Gospel* over and over again and reflecting on what Sri Ramakrishna has said. Says Swami Ritajananda, Head of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna of Gretz (France), in the following article, that he has been helped enormously, during the last fifty years that he has been reading the *Gospel* and explaining it in his classes, to know a bit of the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna and also as to what spirituality is. Though he started reading the *Gospel* first in English, he later on learnt Bengali to read it in the original. He now uses only the five volumes in Bengali when he holds classes on the *Gospel*.

“Where do we see people who have been to such states even once in their lives and where do we hear the words of direct knowledge?” asks the Swami and answers himself: “*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* serves the purpose wonderfully.”

**“... a great volume of multiple dimensions just as Sri Ramakrishna himself was. Everybody can get from it what he seeks.”**

It is years ago, i.e. 1930, that I first happened to see the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. At that time I lived in a small town in Andhra State, on the banks of the Godavari river. The library from where I borrowed books, had just then received the two volumes in English. Always interested in new books, I asked the librarians what they could give and they showed me these two. I had no idea what was waiting for me. Though I had read “Words of the Master” by Swami Brahmananda, and Max Müller’s “Life of Sri Ramakrishna”, I did not know much of Sri Ramakrishna or his disciples. In other words, these books at that time were some of the many I used to read when I was a college student. Fifty years ago, Sri Ramakrishna or the Ramakrishna Mission, was practically unknown in that place. So, the bright red book, “*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*” by *M.* fell into my hands. Immediately I began to read a few lines, just to be sure that the book would be interesting so that I might not regret bringing home books which did not mean anything. Strangely, the first few lines of the conversation of *M.* with Sri Ramakrishna, the great saint about whom I had already read, were so thrilling that I checked out the books immediately and took them home. In the evening I took the first volume, which, while reading on, became more and more interesting, because the very questions which were bothering me at the time, were put to Sri Ramakrishna by *M.* At that time my age was in the early twenties and I was still a student. In daily life I had to face religion inevitably, being in a family where the religious life was observed with set rules: what one should do in the morning, at noon, and in the evening etc. These ceremonies were a “must” and nobody was allowed to ask any questions as regards them. Secondly, desiring a satisfactory and correct attitude towards religion, I had been to every form of religion practised around me: Brahmoism, the Catholic Church, the missionaries of the different Christian denominations, and other groups. I had one fundamental question: If there was only one God, why were there so many religions? I often remember even now the preachers of the various denominations telling me that what *they* believed in was the correct thing. Then why

didn't all people change their religion to follow the one true one – this was the first question which Sri Ramakrishna answered to my satisfaction. In the present article I shall try to present what I learnt by reading the *Gospel* a number of times during the last 50 years and by explaining the book for the western society. One does not easily recognise, how much one gains by reading it many times and reflecting on what Sri Ramakrishna says. To read the scriptures is one thing: to read the words of a person, who has passed through spiritual experiences is something else. The classes I hold on the Gospel have helped me enormously, not only to understand a bit of the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, but also as to what spirituality is.

The “Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna” (*Kathamrita* in Bengali) begins like a novel with a little bit of description of the surroundings in picturesque language, so that the reader can visualise everything around the Master (Sri Ramakrishna): the large property of the Dakshineswar temple with its gardens, tanks, temples, etc. If anyone desires to make a film, he will find all the directions necessary in the masterly descriptions one reads in the Gospel. The place and times, the people present, the positions they took in the room where they met, the songs, and finally every movement of Sri Ramakrishna are presented so vividly that it becomes a special attraction. We have no such presentation of anybody's life. Then, of course, the conversations, the laughter and the fun. *M.* did not try to make Ramakrishna as someone who followed the conventions rigidly. A man above the level of ordinary human beings is always above these. Those who attach too much value to these forms are sometimes shocked, because they are not aware at what level these God-men live. They live with us only at the surface, while the greater part of them is far away in a land where hardly any worldly man can set foot.

*M.* came to Sri Ramakrishna when he was 27 years old and Sri Ramakrishna was 45. *M.* had a family, a wife and children, like others, except that he had a spiritual bent and a nature, which appreciated spiritual qualities. So, he was immediately impressed by Sri Ramakrishna when he first met him, and he tells why it was so: *M.* felt that he was well-educated whereas Sri Ramakrishna did not have any such pretensions, being at that time only a simple temple-priest. So, in the beginning *M.* shows off all his ideas about God, image-worship, what is good and what is bad, etc. Then Sri Ramakrishna opens his eyes to his ignorance; to every reader of the *Gospel*, who is not very different from *M.*, it becomes very clear, that God and spiritual life can never be understood with one's worldly knowledge. As we go on reading the *Gospel*, it becomes very clear what spirituality is; Ramakrishna does not quote any authority – he shows it all in his own life. People called him an ignorant man and it is true that he did not go to any school, but he brings forth answers to abstruse points for which we never could have found a solution. For example, image worship is generally, even to this day, criticized; and Sri Ramakrishna answers this question for instance when *M.* says. “Sir, suppose one believes in God with form? Certainly He is not the clay-image...?” But Sri Ramakrishna stops him and says: “Why clay? The image is Consciousness!” *M.* was not satisfied by writing this answer in simple letters, he writes it in big capital letters. He still continues the discussion with Sri Ramakrishna and understands finally that one cannot teach religion without any, personal experience. With this all his questions come to an end and he submits himself to Sri Ramakrishna and lets himself be directed by him. This submission to him was total – the simple temple-priest immediately became to him the supreme teacher. Every word that came from his mouth, every gesture made by his body, was very important, because only a disciple who has full faith and admiration for his guru can really profit from all the instructions he receives. As *M.* visited Sri



Ramakrishna more and more, he found of course what a mine of spirituality was in front of him, in the form of his Master. That is how the Gospel begins. The short notes which *M.* took down, were not to be for his own personal use only, but they became really like a Gospel of the New Testament, for many people to read daily in order to quench their spiritual thirst.

Generally we all read the scriptures. They are our guides. They tell us of the Infinite and Indescribable Reality in many words often hard to grasp because we have nothing parallel to it in our world. Thus, bound as we are to the senses, the supersensory realm is never clear, leaving us to our imagination. Where do we see people who have been to such states even once in their lives and where do we hear the words of direct knowledge? The "*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*" serves this purpose wonderfully. Ramakrishna did not quote from the scriptures because it was not necessary for him. *M.* is told by the servant-maid Brinde, a rather ignorant woman: "You ask about the books he reads? Everything is on his tongue!" In the Bhagavad-Gita Sri Krishna often explains the features of a man of realisation, how he lives, how he acts, how he speaks, and what the state of his mind is. These questions are natural for all who want to know the supreme goal of life and what it does to a man. The description of such a person – that he is not affected by the ups and downs of life, that he has a perfect control of his body and mind – generally tends to be abstract unless there are people to demonstrate these extraordinary qualities in life. Our imagination of a man of realisation can never be true to life, because we take the human qualities away from him. So when people describe the divine incarnations, they present an idealised person rather than a human being. He is often a very serious person, rarely seen to laugh, make fun or enjoy some amusement. The tendency often is to present a saintly soul as an ascetic and then we wonder why the negative attributes are so important, which leads to the belief that life is a burden. In the *Gospel* we have plenty of information about Sri Ramakrishna and how he lived in the world. There was plenty of laughter with him and it was really a good fortune for many to be near him and feel that the world is really a mansion of mirth in spite of the many painful experiences. Sri Ramakrishna also talked of suffering, the suffering of others and even his own; his health was not perfect and finally he got cancer of the throat, which means a maximum of physical pain. Many who were dear to him left the world, and all those who lived with him were not always kind and respectful. Yet he was above all. The Divine Mother was constantly near Her beloved son, answering his questions. *M.* ignored nothing that took place in the small room of Sri Ramakrishna. He tells how Ramakrishna ate, how he spoke, how he imitated people and amused the youngsters. Never trying to idolise Sri Ramakrishna, never judging his action or his words, *M.* presents a picture of his Master in the most natural form possible. This makes us understand that a highly evolved spiritual person can also be a human being.

The biography of Sri Ramakrishna tells us how highly Ramakrishna was attuned to the Supreme and how he often entered into *bhava samadhi*. This state can only be understood by readers of the *Gospel*. We can never imagine the power of devotional music except by seeing a person actually under its influence. In the *Gospel* so many instances are given where Sri Ramakrishna can hardly stay seated on his small bed, but gets down to join the singing of the devotees, very soon to plunge into the ocean of Consciousness. *M.* and the others are wonder struck to find this man, who just a few minutes ago was quite normally talking, laughing, like everybody in the room, now suddenly leave all to be in the world of the Divine Mother and talk with Her. These extraordinary moods reveal to us how a person can live in this world yet have his real

world with the Supreme. It was during *M.*'s third visit to Sri Ramakrishna, on 5th March 1882, that he witnessed this for the first time. He says:

“*M.* walked in the temple garden for some time and came towards the room of Sri Ramakrishna; there he found that something extraordinary was taking place on the small veranda on the northern side. Sri Ramakrishna was standing still; Narendra was singing and two or three devotees were also standing. *M.* came further, attracted by the music. He had never heard before anyone sing so sweetly like Sri Ramakrishna. Suddenly, when he cast a glance at him, he was struck with wonder. The Master was standing, motionless, his eye-lids did not move. One could not tell whether he was even breathing. When he asked a devotee about it he was told that this was the state of *samadhi*. *M.* had never witnessed nor heard of such a state. Silent with wonder, he thought, ‘Is it possible for a man, while thinking of God, to lose all consciousness of the outer world? I don’t know how much devotion and faith one must have to attain this state.’”

*M.* wrote down the song and also noted how the body of the Master was showing different signs like the shudders, the hairs of the body standing on end, the tears dropping from his eyes, the laughter now and then, as if the Master saw some extraordinary sight; *M.* wondered, “Is this what is called the vision of the embodied consciousness? To have such a vision, how much of spiritual practice one has to do, through how many austerities one has to pass, and how strong must be the faith and devotion?” That day, *M.* witnessed Sri Ramakrishna going into this state thrice; he returned to his house, keeping these experiences in his heart. Undoubtedly it must have been an unusual sight. Books have spoken about this state, the biographies of Sri Krishna Chaitanya have mentioned it, but we get a first-hand description only from the Gospel. Ramakrishna made no effort to enter this state; it was so natural for him to forget the world, and sometimes it was difficult for him to return unless, with a strong will, he did so by expressing a simple desire, when, for example, he would ask for a smoke or some water. Not only the ecstatic states are presented by *M.*, but also the little details of Sri Ramakrishna’s mannerisms, the particular words and style of language of the native district of Ramakrishna, and even his strange use of grammar. This is an extraordinary work at a time, when there were no tape or cassette recorders. When we look at the diary of *M.*, we find only some jottings, some short sentences with which no one will be able to reconstruct the five volumes of “*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*” (“The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna”) except *M.*

But the Gospel, though so big a volume, shows really only a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna. *M.* did not try to *explain* Sri Ramakrishna. He just took things down as he had heard them. The words of the Master are simple, the examples are taken from everyday life, so that even an uneducated villager can understand them, yet they can take us to regions far beyond our reason. They remind us of the Upanishadic teachings and they make these very clear, because Ramakrishna had experienced them all himself. We read for example in the Scriptures, “sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma”, “Everything is Brahman”. Intellectually we can go no further and in our ordinary life it means nothing. Sri Ramakrishna experienced this state many a time directly and he told his devotees that it was the Divine Mother (*Brahmamayī*) Herself who had become everything; thus he expressed his veneration for everything accordingly. To him, the world was no more the world, but Brahman. Great pandits like Shashadhar and others had long conversations with Ramakrishna and they were astonished by his marvelous way of explaining the teachings of the Scriptures in such a simple form. Pandit Shashadhar was of a very intellectual type though also spiritually attracted. Sri

Ramakrishna makes him understand that devotion is equally necessary. Like many scholars, Shashadhar did not know anything about the state of *vijnana*, and Sri Ramakrishna explains to him that in the state of *vijnana* one sees God always, even with the eyes open. Sometimes such a man comes down to the *Lila* (the relative) from the *Nitya* (the Absolute), and sometimes he goes up to the *Nitya* coming from the *Lila*. Then the pandit says, “I do not understand that.”

*The Master:* “The jnani reasons about the world through the process of ‘*neti, neti*’, and at last he reaches the Eternal, the Indivisible Satchidananda. He reasons in this manner: Brahman is not the living beings; It is neither the universe nor the twenty-four cosmic principles. As a result of such reasoning he attains the Absolute. Then he realises that it is the Absolute that has become all this: the universe, the living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

“First turn the milk into curd and then take the butter. But when one takes out the butter, one finds that butter was of the buttermilk and the buttermilk was of the butter. The pith goes with the bark of a tree and the bark goes with the pith.”

*The Pandit*, (smiling to Bhudhar, his friend): “Have you understood? It is difficult to understand this.”

The explanation of *vijnana* is a special contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the study of Vedanta and the pandit, though he read literature, had never thought of this. Sri Ramakrishna shows beautifully how the Absolute (*nitya*) and the world (*lila*) are related to each other:

“If you have butter, you must have buttermilk; when you think of butter, you must think of buttermilk along with it. It is so, because you cannot get butter if the buttermilk is not there. So, if you want to accept the *Nitya*, you should also accept the *Lila*: *Anuloma* (descent) and *Viloma* (ascent). After realising *Sakara* (the Reality with form) and *Nirakara* (the Reality without form), this is the state one attains: the *Sakara* is the *Chinmaya* (embodied consciousness) and the *Nirakara* is the *Akhandam* (infinite consciousness or Satchidananda).

“He Himself has become everything. So what is for the Jnani a ‘Framework of Illusion’ is to the Vijnani a ‘Mansion of Mirth’. Ramprasad said, ‘This world is a framework of illusion’, so someone replied thus (Sri Ramakrishna sang) –

This world is a mansion of mirth.  
Here I eat and drink and make merry.  
O physician, you are a fool,  
You understand only a little on the surface.  
The King Janaka, as a man of might unsurpassed,  
What did he lack?  
Holding to this (the world) and to the other (the spiritual realm),  
He drank the milk from a cup filled to the brim.”

Everybody laughed with joy, because Sri Ramakrishna’s singing thrilled them. He continued:

“The Vijnani has enjoyed the bliss of the Lord in a special way. Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some have drunk it. The Vijnani has drunk it, enjoyed it and also has been nourished by it.”

The conversation between Pandit Shashadhar and the Master forms a very interesting chapter of the *Gospel*. We see how Sri Ramakrishna helps the pandit understand spiritual life. He hears ideas, which he never heard before, he listens to the *soul-stirring* music, which brings tears to his eyes, and he witnesses the state of *samadhi* in which the individual consciousness plunges into the Universal. With all this, Sri Ramakrishna was like a little boy, without pride or feeling of superiority. After regaining his normal condition he bows down to Shashadhar and says: "My child! Gain a little more strength. When I first heard your name, I asked whether this pandit was only a pandit or whether he had *viveka* (discrimination) and *vairagya* (detachment). That pandit who has no discrimination is no pandit at all." In this way Sri Ramakrishna explained how a man can preach religion – not by words, but by one's conduct. He showed that one has to do spiritual practices; then only one will be fit to be a teacher of religion, not otherwise. Many a scholar coming to Sri Ramakrishna changed and understood the right path one has to follow in order to help others; and if they were not good people, the Master unhesitatingly pointed out their bad ways.

Before concluding, we have to remember one very important point about the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It is a record of *M.* who describes what all happened when he was with Sri Ramakrishna; it is not like a record kept in a hermitage, where a sage talks to his young disciple, giving him instructions about spiritual life. The rare collection, which we have here, contains the talks of a spiritual teacher with all sorts of people living in the world, people living with their wife and children, who have to work to earn their means of livelihood. They cannot spend all their time in prayer and meditation like those who have renounced everything in search of God. There are many good souls who feel attracted to the Lord. They are often in moments of difficulty, when they need some consolation, some words of strength and encouragement. This is the role, which Sri Ramakrishna played so very well. All the devotees who came to him felt he was their own dear master, friend, father and all. The *Gospel* is a book where this relation between Sri Ramakrishna and his householder devotees is described; there is no other book, which throws so much light on this subject. So many different types of people came to Ramakrishna. People holding high positions, rich property holders, people who had retired from public life, people who were well-known for their scholarship, and equally people who were given to bad habits – even those who wanted to use the presence of Sri Ramakrishna for some material gain. Yet in his presence they all belonged as to one family. He spoke untiringly with them and inspired them; it was not only a pleasure for them to be with him, but he also liked their company. Very often we think that a man of God shuns human society; but Sri Ramakrishna felt very happy to be with people. He understood the nature of everyone and helped each his own way. His company and love was enough to change people and make them understand life's purpose. When a devotee would not come for a few days he sent word or, if possible, he would go himself and visit him. His presence in their house would turn into a festival. Everybody felt happy. There was music, talk on spiritual life, humour, dancing to devotional songs, and refreshments. No theatre or show could bring any joy to these people, but here a whole crowd would forget all their worries and sorrows and life was not a burden. While talking to them Sri Ramakrishna gave them a lot of advice. He convinced the devotees of the love of God, who was not partial to men of renunciation. In all his talks he showed them that God is our own, our most dear – all our prayers are heard by Him. To a person who has to work in an office for hours at a stretch, such words are of great value. Though he has to live in the world and is busy with the responsibilities of his family, the fact that the few moments of his worship will be accepted by the Lord is a great consolation to him.

As has already been pointed out, the *Gospel* is a great volume of multiple dimensions, just as Sri Ramakrishna himself was. Everyone can get from it what he seeks. Spiritual advice is there, decorated with a large number of side-lights as has already been shown above. A short article such as this cannot be exhaustive, since the contents of the book are simply too large. If there is any book, which presents Sri Ramakrishna alive, it is the *Gospel* that does so. That is why Swami Vivekananda wrote to *M.* when he had received a first copy, which was then only a pamphlet: (7th February 1889)<sup>1</sup>.

“ Thanks 100,000, Master! You have bit Ramakristo (Ramakrishna) in the right point. Few alas, few understand him!

Narendra Nath.”

“Antpore, 26 March 1889.<sup>2</sup>

My heart leaps in joy – and it is a wonder that I do not go mad when I find anybody thoroughly launched into the midst of the doctrine which is to shower peace on earth hereafter.”

Nearly ten years later, the Swami wrote again to *M.*, who was still publishing in pamphlet form:

Dehradun, 24th Nov. 1897.

My dear *M.*,

Many, many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer’s mind as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise – so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed it. I am really transported when I read it. Strange isn’t it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you, evidently. With love and namaskars,

Yours in the Lord,

Vivekananda.

P.S. Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it, here or in the West.

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<sup>1</sup> The two pamphlets which elicited unstinted praise of Swami Vivekananda (in his letters of Oct. 1897) and 24 Nov. 1897 from Rawalpindi and Dehradun) were perhaps published in 1897, (in any case we suppose not so early as Feb. 1889). So it should not be difficult to agree with the ‘*Opinions on Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*’ at the end of Vol. 5 of the Kathamrita wherein it is said that the above note was written on 7 February 1889 in Antpore, a village in Hoogly District of West Bengal, at the birth place of Swami Premananda, where Swami Vivekananda, Sri *M.* and other fellow disciples were staying as guests at this time. When Swamiji wrote this note he was observing a vow of silence. Presumably, Sri *M.* had shown or read out to him only a part of the manuscript of his future pamphlets. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> This text under 26 March 1889 is perhaps the concluding portion of his note of 7 February, 1889. It does not seem to be a separate note written later in March. However, we are open to correction. [Editor]

What greater appreciation can be expressed? Though the *Gospel* had not yet taken book form and was known to Bengali readers only, the great Swami expressed already how thrilled he was to read it. And that has been the impression of thousands of readers since. The Gospel has been published in the major languages of India; the people in the West can read it not only in English, but also in Spanish, French and German as far as my knowledge goes. Admirers in Japan started to translate it long ago. Many people keep the book near their bed and just before going to sleep they read a few lines or pages daily. What Swami Vivekananda wrote to *M.* is becoming more and more true. The book is appreciated by all, because it brings peace to its reader.

## 9. THE SCRIPTURE OF THE FUTURE

Swami Bhajanananda

Swami Bhajanananda, Joint Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* says that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* while accepting and harmonizing the fundamentals of the old religions, not only fulfils the needs of the present age but also promises to fulfil the aspirations and needs of the future man. With man's growing 'emphasis on the fullness and integrality of life' the *Karma Yoga* as instructed in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is likely to be the dominant ideal of mankind.

**“Kathamrita ... a Gospel of harmony ... a scripture to understand all other scriptures.”**

Every great religion has its own scripture, and there are several scriptures already existing in the world – Veda, Avesta, Tripitaka, Bible, Quran. Do we need one more? Yes, precisely because there are several scriptures we need just one more to show the validity of every one of them and to establish their overall harmony. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* compiled by Sri M. serves this purpose admirably well.

All the existing scriptures are at least more than a thousand years old. Each of them has shown the path of virtue, the doorway to peace and blessedness, to millions of people. Each scripture has laid the foundation of a great culture or tradition uniting millions of people in a common fellowship. Scriptures of world religions have become an inseparable part of mankind's heritage, and humanity owes a deep debt of gratitude to them. Each of these indestructible vehicles of divine wisdom has its own unique part to play in the wonderful economy of creation which none else can replace. It is the recognition of this important fact that gives *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* its uniqueness.

The world has now enough number of religions and a plethora of sects, and there is no need to add one more to these. What people urgently need is not one more sect or creed. The scripture of the future will not be one, which attempts to replace any of the existing scriptures, or which attempts to add one more religion to the existing stock. It will be the one which fulfils the aspirations and needs of the future man.

The title 'Gospel', chosen by Sri M. himself for his translation of the original *Kathamrita* in Bengali, is therefore an appropriate one. For the word comes from an earlier word 'godspell' meaning divine announcement or glad tidings or good news. In the Bible, Christ uses the word in the sense of a new message or dispensation, the promise of a new life. The earlier scriptures came into existence in order to meet the needs of different ages in the past. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* brings the promise of fulfillment to the people of the present age.

Every age is marked by its own particular cultural need or values. What are the needs of the present age? They are: higher experience, divinized humanism and harmony of religions. These are the goals engaging the attention of thinking people all over the world. The air is thick with these ideas.

All over the world there is now a search for higher experience. This began with the intellectual awakening of Europeans in the thirteenth century. Now with the

disillusionment produced by the two World Wars, the breakdown in traditional values and the widespread dissatisfaction with the pleasures of senses, large numbers of people are turning to Yoga, Zen, meditation and other oriental methods of attaining spiritual fulfillment. There is a growing urge for super-sensuous experience now. Science itself is basically a search for the ultimate truth, and modern developments in science are pointing to the transcendent nature of truth.

The re-establishment of the spiritual ideal by Sri Ramakrishna therefore assumes special relevance in modern times. The goal of life is not sense-enjoyment but realization of the Ultimate Reality, which can be directly experienced in a more intense way than sense objects. It is this assurance, which is the central message of the Gospel that the world now needs. Sri Ramakrishna has not only reinterpreted the ancient spiritual ideal in the idiom of the modern age but has given simple instructions regarding the means of its realization in a manner most suitable to the present age. Unlike the ancient teachers, he has not laid down rigorous and difficult conditions for spiritual practice. He does not even insist on a person's having faith in a particular religious dogma or creed, a condition which is against the spirit of science and freethinking characteristic of the modern age. The only condition he stresses is an intense yearning to know Truth whatever be the name given to it and whatever be the path to it.

The second dominant trend in the modern world is the apotheosis of man. Man is the main focus of all modern thinking and activities. Science has placed at his disposal almost limitless power, and he is manifesting his inherent capacities at a rapid rate. On the other hand, science has also enlarged man's awareness of the vastness of the universe and of an immanent reality which serves as a natural, self evolving cause within the universe.

Both these ideas find their true perspective and meaning in the *Gospel*. Sri Ramakrishna looked upon man as a special manifestation of divine consciousness. He saw the spark of divinity in all people – the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the saint and the sinner. It was this idea that Swami Vivekananda later on developed into a powerful instrument for social change. It alone can provide a true and lasting basis for the creation of an egalitarian society – democratic or communistic. The practical application of this doctrine of potential divinity of man alone can fulfill modern man's urge for freedom and solve his problems of alienation, anxiety, boredom and bondage to the senses.

Sri Ramakrishna's realization of the oneness of Brahman and Shakti and of the universe as filled with Brahman has changed man's outlook on the world. In the *Gospel* Sri Ramakrishna refers to this highest experience as *vijnana*. It removes the distinction between the sacred and the secular and converts every activity into a participation in divine Yoga. It is this experience that lies behind his teaching that the householders have no need to renounce the world but should do their duties in a spirit of detachment as a maid-servant works in a rich man's home. This makes Sri Ramakrishna a great teacher of Karma Yoga in the modern age. At a time when all over the world the older form of monastic withdrawal and seclusion is declining and an emphasis on the fullness and integrality of life is growing, the teaching of the *Gospel* on Karma Yoga assumes great importance. It is essentially a revival of the ancient Vedic ideal of the Rishi. The indications are that this is going to be the dominant ideal of mankind in the future.

The third major trend which is engaging attention of thoughtful people all over the world is harmony of religions. Modern modes of transport, communication and trade have brought the peoples of the world closer together than ever before, and there is now



a widespread awareness of the necessity of peaceful coexistence. For this, and also for containing the forces of atheism and materialism, harmony among world religions is the first step. It is not possible to make all religions agree on the same view of God or mode of salvation. All that is possible and important – and all that is necessary for harmony – is to recognize the validity of each concept of God and each path of salvation with direct mystic experience serving as a sort of common language for the promotion of inter-religious understanding. This is Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of *dharmā samanvaya*, and this is the only way to establish harmony among world religions.

Hinduism itself has for long remained split into different schools and sects. By practising the various disciplines of Hinduism Sri Ramakrishna showed that both *bhakti* and *jñāna* are efficacious means of realizing God and that God could be both personal and impersonal. This has paved the way for an all round unification and rejuvenation of Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna's teachings on the harmony of religions and the harmony of spiritual paths in Hinduism have been extensively recorded in the *Kathamrita*, which may indeed be regarded as a gospel of harmony.

The word 'gospel' has another meaning. It refers to the life and actions of the Incarnation. It is in this sense that the word is popularly understood, and Sri M. must have had it in view when he chose the title for his book. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a record of the day-to-day life of the Avatar of the age. The personality of a prophet is in no way less important than his teachings. For he authenticates and exemplifies his teachings and serves as the ideal for others.

The personality of Sri Ramakrishna has two unique characteristics. One is its universal dimension. Sri Ramakrishna stands before the world as the image of the Universal Person – a person who is in harmony with every dimension of religious consciousness, who can respond to the aspirations of all people in the East and the West, and whose compassion for humanity knows no barriers of caste, creed or race. Secondly, his personality stands as the symbol of superhuman spiritual dynamism and power. As Sri Aurobindo points out, 'In a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first driving straight to the divine realization, taking as it were the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter...'

Both these aspects of Sri Ramakrishna's personality have been fascinatingly portrayed in the *Gospel*. Here one sees how the Divine sported as the Avatar in the modern world. Here one meets the great Master of all paths, all yogas, all disciplines guiding, comforting, liberating suffering men and women. Here one finds the new Door to eternal life for millions of people of the present age.

Sri Ramakrishna is being recognized as the only authentic link between the spiritual traditions of the East and the West and of the ancient and the modern worlds. Religious contradictions get reconciled in him and timeworn ideals and ideas receive a new meaning and power through him. The *Gospel* as the most authentic and comprehensive record of his life and teachings thus acquires the status of a link scripture. Swami Vivekananda regarded it as the best modern commentary on the Upanishads. Followers of other religions will find in it a new light on the essentials of their religions. It may not contain the dry canons of hermeneutics to satisfy theologians. But it is certainly a summa of the eternal fundamentals of all religions and the universal principles of practical spiritual life. It may therefore be regarded as a meta-scripture, a scripture beyond all scriptures, a scripture to understand all other

scriptures.

Swami Vivekananda concludes his famous lecture on 'My Master' with the words: 'Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realised that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of the one eternal religion.' It is as the authentic scripture of this one eternal religion that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* will pass into the future.

## 10. LIFE-GIVING NECTAR FOR HUMANITY – ‘SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA’

Swami Sastrananda

Swami Sastrananda is the head of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Chandigarh. He has been holding regular weekly discourses and classes on *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Hindi, the Bhagavad Gita and some of the principal Upanishads. In the following write-up he talks on the *Kathamrita* and its ‘blessed recorder’ with deep devotion and great insight. Though no doubt the *Gospel* is a unique record of great spiritual significance and its recorder a unique personality among the recorders of scriptural texts, Swami Sastrananda also sees mysterious charm and power in this ‘Record’.

Swamiji narrates two incidents from his personal knowledge, hitherto unknown, which throw light on this mysterious aspect of the *Kathamrita*.

“... the power and charm of the Gospel.”

In the ‘Gopika-Gita’ of the Srimad Bhagavatam we find the Gopis singing the glory of Sri Krishna in the following words:

तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनं कविभिरीडितं कल्मषापहम् ।

श्रवणमंगलं श्रीमदाततं भुवि गृणन्ति ते भूरिदाजनाः ॥

(X:31,9)

“The nectar of your story, the praise of poet-seers, elixir to parched souls, delight to listening ears, cleanser of all sins, is great and glorious: They who spread it wide on earth are most generous”.

This verse is equally applicable to Sri Ramakrishna and his Gospel. Indeed the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (the English rendering of the Bengali original, ‘*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*’) is such a life-giving nectar, and *M.* or Mahendranath Gupta, the blessed recorder of the words of the Great Master, has proved to be a great benefactor to aspiring humanity.

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This recorder of the Gospel is as unique as the great work itself; he was uniquely qualified for the task. Apart from being very special as a devotional work, it has high artistic and literary merits. But, unlike many men of literary genius whose personal life, ideals and aspirations may have little to do with the contents of their celebrated literary products, *M.* was singularly well fitted for the role, in all the aspects mentioned.

In this context, certain factors are particularly worthy of notice.

Most important, from all facts available, it becomes clear that the Master himself commissioned this disciple for the task. While he discouraged the efforts of people to draw him into journalistic publicity, and even dissuaded some disciples from trying to keep a record of his conversations, so far as *M.* was concerned he adopted, strangely, a contrary course. It looks as if, he of all, was brought to the world by the Master to record his words and transmit them to posterity. This is confirmed by the words of

Mahapurusha Maharaj or Swami Sivananda, the direct monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the second president of the Ramakrishna Order: “Whenever there was an interesting talk, the Master would call *M.* if he was not in the room, and then draw his attention to the holy words spoken. We did not know then why the Master did so. Now we can realise that this action of the Master had an important significance, for it was reserved for *M.* to give to the world at large the sayings of the Master”.

More than that, the Master would frequently discuss with *M.* in detail what had been spoken, and what truths had been taught. If he was satisfied that *M.* had understood them rightly he would approve; otherwise he would minutely cross-examine and correct him wherever needed. This we find directly from the *Gospel* itself. It was thus that the way was being paved for a correct and authentic recording of his ideas, views and teachings to become available for posterity.

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And again there is *this* vital factor that the Gospel was not a project sponsored by a government agency, university or a literary foundation or some rich philanthropist, and undertaken by the writer – of whatever eminence – for monetary gains, or for name and fame; there was certainly no motivation of personal profit or ambition. In fact, it is the reverse. The work is the result of an utterly selfless and supremely self-effacing dedication and labour of love and reverence of the disciple for the Master. It is the product of the devoted efforts (*tapasya*) of one, who was a living witness of the Master’s, spiritual glory and a direct beneficiary of the Master’s grace and spiritual power.

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The Master looked upon *M.* as his own, as one come to earth to help in his mission – of bringing life, light and love to suffering humanity. He had his own plans for *M.* and when the latter was thinking of renouncing the world, he forbade him to take to formal *sannyasa* and told him, “Mother has told me that you have to do a little of Her work – you will have to teach ‘Bhagavata,’ the word of God, to humanity. The Mother keeps a Bhagavata Pandit with a bondage in the world!” *M.* had to live the ideal householder’s life, which would be a model and inspiration to a vast number of householder aspirants. And, in obedience to the Guru’s commands, *M.* lived outwardly as a householder, but inwardly all-absorbed in the Divine, specially manifest to him in and through the person and personality of his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna.

The responsibilities of a family and of the various educational institutions in which he served as a teacher or which were under his care and direction, however, did not either prevent him from fully attending to his devotional life and practices or make him compromise with demands or situations, which he considered unspiritual, unethical or against his principles of devotional life. On this score, he often resigned from lucrative jobs and even courted unemployment and privations for the family. But the unseen hand of Providence ever protected him and saved his family. His was one of the typical instances of the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise of protection to his real devotees: “योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्”<sup>\*</sup> – I take care of all the needs of the devotee who knows no other refuge than Me”.

Indeed *M.* knew no other refuge, and had no other interest or ambition in life except his Divine Master, and spreading his nectarine message. While the Master lived,

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\* Gita IX : 22

as much time as possible he spent in his blessed presence and company; and all his leisure or spare time he devoted to reflection and recording of what he saw of and heard from the Master. After the Master passed away, he dwelt upon him and recorded notes of his conversation in his mind, all the more intensely. In fact, living with the Master within, and sharing the message with fellow devotees became the main profession and passion of his life. During the later part of his life, for over a quarter of a century, while conducting a reputed and flourishing modern school in Calcutta he yet lived like a venerable sage of ancient times, absorbed in holy thought and spreading the *Gospel*.

And above all stands out his utter self-effacement and absence of any tendency to self-importance. Later in life when approached by aspirants for spiritual inspiration and guidance all that he would say was, "I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean and I keep with me a few pitchers of the water of the ocean. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak but his words."

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The Master's message was a veritable ocean of life-giving nectar and *M.*'s own life right from the start bore witness to it. In fact it was a desperate family situation which brought him, as if by chance, to the Master. Bitter quarrels among the members of his family had made this sensitive person utterly despondent and losing all interest in life, he actually walked out one night into the wide world, with the thought of putting an end to his life. But Providence had other plans. Not only was he not to lose his own life, but become instrumental in restoring 'life' to many lost souls through the nectar of the Master's Gospel. He was somehow propelled to the presence of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – and their first meeting proved to be not only an astounding turning point for himself but a most blessed moment for humanity, for that was when the recording of the Gospel started.

The would-be suicide was filled with a new hope and faith. His rudderless life found a new creative direction and mission and became consecrated to God-realisation and sharing his blessings with fellowmen. In *M.*'s own words, "Behold! where is the resolve to end life, and where the discovery of God! ... God is all-good."

While the actual words of the Master were indeed *Kathamrita*, nectarine words, which put back life and hope into *M.* and transformed him, even the recorded words of the Gospel have their own mysterious charm and power and instances are available from known contemporary life of ordinary devotees, which reveal this fact.

Once there came a professor to participate in a science congress and being a devotee stayed in one of our Ashramas. The next day he was to present his thesis; somehow he was in a disturbed state of mind and could not prepare his speech. Next morning I asked him if he had studied and prepared in the night. He said, "I have just taken the *Gospel* and studied some pages from it. That is my preparation." With this background he went to the meeting and later we learnt that his speech was one of the best and most appreciated!

And then, there was the young college student who developed a close association with the Ashrama and the *Swami* there. His elder brother – at the time residing in their native village some 50 miles away – a down-to-earth, hot headed person, did not take kindly to the 'unworldly' tendencies of this young man and decided to take steps to cure him of his infection. He knew the brother was reading some books, which contained the seeds of this *corruption* and sought secretly to find out what they were and to eliminate them. So one day, when the younger brother was safely out of station, he 'raided' his

room, opened up his box and conducted a security check. He decided to throw away or destroy any objectionable material. The search was not fruitless and he got hold of a book, which must apparently be the root of mischief. He began looking up a few of its pages in search of *sedition* material. He read ... he read ... and kept on reading, all the while standing near the box. Something strange happened ... The very book, which he sought to destroy, got him 'hooked'. He finished reading the book. One thing led to another and the next time he went to the city, he decided to get a copy for himself. And that book was no other than the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in translation! This, in turn, led him to visit the Ashrama, and meet the Swami. In due course he actually became one of the staunch devotees of the Ashrama and a favourite of the Swami, though yet retaining his rough boisterous ways.

That was – and continues to be – the power and charm of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)* – The Amrita of the Master's words rejuvenating human life and spirit.

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And *M.* was born, as it were, and lived solely for this purpose of giving the *Kathamrita* to the world. And no sooner had the proof of the last page of the last part, 5th and final volume of his records of the *Gospel* been received and corrected, his life-task seemed to be completed and he breathed his last, with the words "O Master – I come! Take me into your lap."

That is the '*Kathamrita*'; that is its immortal recorder *M.* Eternal glory to both!

# 11. THE BHAGAVAD-GITA AND THE KATHAMRITA

Swami Keshwananda

Swami Keshwananda is a well-known scholar of Srimad Bhagavad-Gita. His admiration and love of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, however, equals that of the older scripture. He selected for us 108 sayings from the *Kathamrita*, which he called 'anecdotes and parables', and quoted corresponding verses from the Gita which were either parallel or helped to complement and supplement each other. Because of the paucity of space, we are constrained to reproduce here only a quarter of these valuable sayings. Our apologies to Swamiji Maharaj. Says Swamiji: "May these *slokas* and parables serve as the daily *patha* (reading) of the aspirant ... If he meditates awhile the connection between the two will be clear."

**"The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna ... a vast commentary on the Holy Gita".**

The auspicious Centenary of the holy *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) will be celebrated on 26 February 1982, the day of Sri M.'s first visit to the Master. I have been asked to write an article on this occasion. To tell the truth, I am not a scholar, nor have I any special qualifications to write on this divine subject. Still I have agreed to do what I can, as I feel I shall myself be benefited by such an attempt.

When I read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I feel it is a vast commentary on the Holy Gita. In every sentence and in every parable and anecdote, the supreme secret of the holy teachings of the Gita is interwoven. I think Sri Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of the Gita and all his utterances are the nectar of the Gita. Therefore, to celebrate the Centenary of the Kathamrita I wish to give here 108\* anecdotes and parables selected from it which are full of significance and contain the essence of the doctrine of Sanatana Dharma. As these parables are specially related to the teachings of the Gita philosophy, I wish to correlate the verses from the Holy Gita with each one of them. The figure 108 symbolizes Brahman as does the syllable *OM*. With the name of every religious teacher also we add the figure 108. The Hindu rosary has also 108 beads. So I have preferred to select only this number of parables from among the thousands and have added appropriate verses from the Gita, which correspond to the idea behind these parables. May these *slokas* and parables serve as the daily *patha* (reading) of the aspirant. If he meditates awhile the connection between the two will be clear.

On being asked what were the main teachings of the Gita, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Read the word '*Gita*' in reverse and it becomes the word '*Tagi*' which means renunciation." The supreme secret of the Gita is renunciation. Throughout the Gita Lord Krishna talks about renunciation which means not the renunciation of action but the renunciation of egotism, I-ness and My-ness, lust, anger and greed. Similarly, Sri Ramakrishna teaches renunciation throughout his Gospel. 'Woman (lust) and gold (greed)' are the great impediments on the way to the realization of God. So he constantly talks of renunciation of these two in his daily *satsangas*. He declares that the root cause of all evils and sufferings are '*woman and gold*'. He had realized it in his own spiritual life and taught the same to the devotees and every seeker of the spiritual path. Gita's

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\* Only 27 are being reproduced for want of space. Our apologies. [Ed.]

teachings and the teachings of Sri Sri Ramakrishna are in substance the same.

It is however easier to understand the teachings of Sri Sri Ramakrishna than the philosophy of the Gita because the supreme truth has been told in the form of anecdotes and parables by Sri Sri Ramakrishna.

### **PARABLES FROM THE KATHAMRITA AND THE SLOKAS FROM THE GITA**

1. A maid-servant performs all her duties in the house of a big man but mentally she lives in her own house in some village. She serves her master and his children as if they all are her own but in her heart she knows fully well that none of them belongs to her ... (February, 1882)

*Therefore, constantly perform your obligatory duty without attachment, for, by doing duty without attachment man verily obtains the Supreme. (Gita, III:19)*

2. A tortoise moves about in water but her mind is fixed on her eggs on the bank where her eggs are lying. In the same way, do all your duties but keep your mind fixed on the Lord ... (February 1882)

*When he can withdraw the senses from sense objects like a tortoise drawing in its limbs, his wisdom is then set firm. (Gita II: 58)*

3. If you wish to break a jack-fruit and to enjoy its sweet juice, you have first to rub well your hands with oil; otherwise the milk of the fruit will stick to your hands. Similarly first acquire the oil of God's devotion and then set your hands to worldly duties ... (Feb. 1882)

*Mentally resigning all deeds to Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to Buddhi Yoga, do you ever fix your mind on Me. (Gita XVIII: 57)*

4. If you wish to get curd from milk you must keep the milk in a secluded spot. Do not disturb it, otherwise it would not turn into curd. When it is turned into curd, give up other duties and sit calmly in a corner and churn it. Only then you will get butter. In the same way, one must go to a solitary place and practise meditation to attain God's grace ... (February 1882)

*With unswerving love for Me in constant non-separation, resort to solitary places with a distaste for the company of (worldly) men ... Having firmly fixed, in a clean place, his seat, neither too high nor too low and having spread over it the kusa grass, a deer skin and a cloth, one over the other – sitting there on his seat, making the mind one-pointed and restraining the thinking faculty and the senses, he should practise Yoga for self-purification. Let him hold the body, head and neck erect and still, gazing at the tip of his nose, without looking around. Serene and fearless, in the firm vow of a Brahmachari, subdued in mind, he should sit in Yoga thinking on Me and intent on Me alone. Keeping himself ever steadfast in this manner, the Yogi of subdued mind attains the peace abiding in Me and culminating in Nirvana. (Gita XIII: 10; VI: 11 to 15)*

5. As the mother loves her children so very affectionately, the chaste wife serves her husband so very devotionally and the worldly-minded man loves his wealth so dearly; so also, when one wishes to attain the Lord's grace, one should apply all the above three forces of love ... (Feb. 1882)

*Therefore at all times think upon Me only and fight. With mind and understanding set on Me, you will surely come to Me. (Gita VIII: 7)*

6. A kitten knows only to call its mother, uttering 'mew mew'. It remains satisfied wherever its mother puts it. The mother cat also keeps the kitten at various safe places to save it from dogs and other animals. When the kitten feels hungry and thirsty, it calls its mother by crying 'mew mew'. The mother cat comes at the right time to quench its



thirst. God is the Universal Mother. When a devotee cries and weeps longingly uttering the word 'Ma Ma'; She must appear and take care of the child ... (February 1882)

*To those men who worship Me alone thinking of no other, who are ever devout, I provide gain and security. (Gita IX: 22)*

7. A mahatma asked his cobra disciple not to bite anyone. So the cobra did not bite anyone. The boys of the village beat the cobra so much that it was at the point of death. Regaining consciousness slowly it entered into its hole. When the Guru returned he saw the cobra and said, "You are a fool. I asked you not to bite but, I did not prohibit you from hissing to protect yourself." So also, one may threaten others but may not do them harm ... (Feb. 1882).

*Arise, therefore, and obtain fame. Conquer the enemy ... By Me have they been verily slain already. You be merely an outward cause, O ambidextrous one! (Gita II: 33)*

8. There are three kinds of devotees: the *baddha* (bounded by the fetters of the world), *mumukshu* (seeker after liberation) and *mukta* (liberated). Suppose a fisherman has cast his net in a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the nets – they are like the liberated (*mukta*). Most of the fish however get entangled in the net but some of them make efforts to free themselves from it. They are like those who seek liberation (*mumukshu*). The other fish entangled in the net cannot escape nor do they make any effort to get out. Similarly the bound souls never think of God. If they get time, they indulge in idle and foolish talk and engage themselves in useless work but the liberated souls, like King Janaka and Sukadeva, always remember God and detach themselves from the fetters of worldly bondage ... (February 1882)

*Four types of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna: the man in (worldly) distress, the man seeking knowledge, the man seeking wealth and the man imbued with wisdom, O the best of Bharatas (Gita 7:16) ... It was by works that Janaka and others attained to perfection. You should work also with a view to the maintenance of the world. (Gita III: 20)*

9. The Vedas speak of the *homa* bird. It lives in the sky and lays its eggs in the sky. The egg begins to fall down and continues to fall for many days. Then it hatches. Now it is no longer an egg but a chick. The chick begins to fall; its eyes open and it develops wings. When it realizes that it will face death if it falls down on the earth, then at once it shoots up towards the mother-bird who is very high in the sky ... Narendra is a man of this type. He realizes that the world and worldly affairs are the root cause of bondage. So from the very beginning detach yourselves from the world ... (February 1882)

*He, who acts, abandoning attachment, dedicating his deeds to Brahman, is untainted by sin as a lotus leaf by water. (Gita V: 10)*

10. The goal of human life is to love God. Bhakti is the one essential thing. To realize God through knowledge and reasoning is extremely difficult ... A devotee must cultivate love for God just like the cowherds of Vrindaban who felt such pangs of separation from Sri Krishna ... (March, 1882)

*Greater is their difficulty whose minds are set on the Unmanifested, for the goal of the Unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach ... I am easily attainable, O Partha, by that ever steadfast Yogi who constantly remembers Me daily and thinks of none else. (Gita XII: 5; VIII: 14)*

11. As a chronic patient cannot get rid of his disease without the help of a competent physician, so also is the case with the man who has been suffering from the chronic disease of worldly bondage. He cannot get relief without the help of a holy-man

(*guru*) who helps him to discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is Real and the world of five elements unreal ... (April 1882)

*Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the truth will instruct you in knowledge. (Gita IV: 34)*

12. Darkness is also needed. It reveals the glories of light. In the same way sufferings, cares and anxieties of the world also help man (the seeker) on the way to God-realization ... (April 1882)

*Out of compassion for them, remaining within My own true state, I destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the shining lamp of wisdom. (Gita X: 11)*

13. Live in the holy company of some realized soul. Pray to God for His mercy, weep for His grace and occasionally go into seclusion. As a plant on the road-side has to be protected at first by a fence from cattle, so also, a seeker should be protected by holy association. It takes a long time to realize God. A seeker has to face ups and downs in his life. One should perform one's duty, just like the royal sage Janaka, constantly thinking of God in one's mind. Dancing girls dance with jars on their heads but they keep their minds fixed on the jars. So should one do one's daily duties and obligatory tasks but keep the mind concentrated on the lotus feet of the Lord ... (April 1882)

*Cultivating dispassion towards the objects of the senses, absence of egotism perception of evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain ... un-attachment, non-identification of self with son, wife, home and the like, and constant equanimity amidst occurrences desirable and undesirable ... unswerving devotion to Me in the Yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places with a distaste for the society of men. (Gita XIII: 8 to 10)*

14. Potatoes and other vegetables when cooked become soft and tender; so also the realized soul becomes tender and compassionate ... (August 1882)

*He who has no ill-will toward any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from egoism and self-sense, even-minded in pain and pleasure and patient is My true devotee. (Gita XII: 13)*

15. Vultures fly very high in the sky but their eyes are fixed on rotten carrion on the ground; so also worldly people read books and perform many good things, but they remain attached to *woman and gold*. They are always in search of the carrion of worldly food but really learned persons are only attached to God ... (August 1882)

*Filled with insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, holding evil ideas through delusion they work with impure resolve. They are beset with immense cares, which end only with death. They regard gratification of lust as supreme, feeling sure that it is all ... (Gita XVI: 10-11)*

16. What Brahman is cannot be described. Everything in this world has been defiled for it has been touched by the tongue but Brahman has not been and cannot be defiled because none has been able to say what Brahman is. Only in complete *samadhi* can one attain the knowledge and feeling of Brahman. In that state, reasoning and worldly knowledge disappear. One has no power to describe the nature of Brahman ... (August 1882)

*He is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable and unchanging. Therefore, knowing Him as such, you should not grieve ... One looks upon Him as a marvel, another likewise speaks of Him as a marvel, yet another hears of Him as a marvel; yet even after hearing, no one whatsoever has known Him. (Gita II: 25 & 29)*

17. An empty vessel makes much noise; a bee buzzes as long as it is not sitting on

a flower. The vessel becomes silent when dipped in water and the bee becomes silent when it tastes the honey. So also a man becomes silent and speechless when he realizes the Supreme Self. Without realization, one should not say, 'I am He!' One should only say, 'I am His servant and He is my Master' ... (August 1882)

*Those deluded by ignorance say, "This foe is slain by me and others also I shall slay. I am the Lord, I am the enjoyer, I am successful, mighty and happy. I am rich and well born. Who is there like me? I shall sacrifice, I shall give, I shall rejoice" ... Of things secret I (the Lord) am silence and of knowers of wisdom I am wisdom. (Gita XVI: 14, 15; X: 38)*

18. All paths ultimately lead to the same Truth. But it is easier to follow the path of love. Once Rama asked Hanuman, "How do you look upon Me?" Hanuman replied, "As long as I have the feeling of 'I and my' I am a part of You and You are the whole. You are the Master and I am your servant but in time of realization I see Yourself and myself as one and the same" ... (August 1882)

*In whatever way men identify with Me, in the same way do I carry out their desires. Men pursue My path, O Partha, in all ways. (Gita IV:11)*

19. One should constantly remember death. Death is inevitable, it awakens discrimination (*viveka*) and detachment (*vairagya*). The physician says, "I must cure the patient. Do not be afraid." God laughs on two occasions when a physician thinks he can cure the patient forgetting God who does everything from behind the veil. Again God laughs when two brothers quarrel over a piece of land or other property. One says, "This side is mine and that is yours". They forget that the whole universe belongs to God. So they quarrel with each other ... (August 1882)

*One should cultivate dispassion towards the objects of the senses, absence of egoism, perception of evil in birth, death, old age sickness and pain; unattachment, non-identification of self with son, wife, home and the like, and constant equanimity amidst occurrences desirable and undesirable. (Gita XIII: 8-9)*

20. Brahman and Shakti are identical like fire and its power to burn ... (August 1882)

*Though I am unborn, imperishable and the Lord of beings yet I come into being by My own Maya (or Shakti) ... Under My guidance, nature gives birth to all things moving and unmoving and by this means, O son of Kunti, the world revolves. (Gita IV:6, 9:10)*

21. The lake of the nectar of Brahman is the lake of immortality. A man taking a dip in it does not die but becomes immortal ... (August 1882)

*I will describe that which is to be known and by knowing which life eternal is gained. It is the Supreme Brahman who is beginning-less and who is said to be neither existent nor non-existent. (Gita XIII: 12)*

22. When the daughter-in-law is pregnant her mother-in-law lightens her duties. When she is nearing her confinement the mother-in-law gives her still less work to do. When she has reached her full period she is not allowed to do any work; so also when a devotee loves God exclusively and comes nearer to God his mundane work subsides; he does not feel inclined to do any worldly duties ... (August 1882)

*The man who rejoices in the Self, who is satisfied with the Self and is centered in the Self, for him verily there is no obligatory duty ... As the fire which is kindled turns its fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, even so does the fire of wisdom turn to ashes all work. (Gita III: 17, IV: 37)*

23. A wood-cutter entered a forest to cut wood. There he met a brahmachari who asked him not to stop there but to go forward. He obeyed and went on. He then came across sandal-wood but he went further and found a silver mine. But he advanced still farther and discovered mines of gold and diamonds. So also when a seeker of truth goes forward and practices constantly he must attain the Supreme Goal of life, that is the realization of the Supreme Lord ... (August 1882)

*By whatever cause the restless and unsteady mind wanders away, it must be curbed by practice and non-attachment and subjugated solely to the (Supreme) Self. (Gita VI: 35)*

24. God can be seen, one can talk to Him as I am talking to you ... (Aug. 1882)

*By unswerving devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into. (Gita XI: 54)*

25. All religions are true. God can be realized from all paths. You are to reach the roof. You can do it by stone-stairs, wooden-stairs or bamboo-stairs ... (August 1882)

*Some behold the Self in the self by the self by meditation, others by the Yoga of knowledge and yet others by Karma Yoga. Still others, not knowing all this, worship as they hear from others. Even they go beyond death by their devotion to what they have heard ... As men approach Me so do I accept them. Men on all sides follow My path, O Partha. (Gita XIII: 24, 25; IV: 11)*

26. The mind of the Yogi is always fixed on God like the eyes of the mother-bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs and there is a vacant look in her eyes ... (August 1882)

*Supreme Bliss verily comes to that Yogi whose mind is calm, whose passions are pacified, who has become one with Brahman and is sinless. Constantly engaging the mind this way, the Yogi who has put away sin attains with ease the infinite bliss of contact with Brahman. (Gita VI: 27 & 28)*

27. Where Rama is, desire cannot be and where desire is Rama cannot be. Light and darkness cannot exist together ... (August 1882)

*There is no fixity of mind for them who cling to pleasures and power and whose discrimination is stolen away ... To the sense bound people the night is day and to the realized souls the day is night. (Gita II. 44 & 69)*

## 12. SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA – THE NEW BHAGAVATA

Swami Sevananda

Sri Ramakrishna said that the Divine Mother wanted to make a Bhagavata Pandit of Sri *M.* “Otherwise who would read it out to the world,” he asked. Swami Sevananda of Dumka in this study calls the *Kathamrita* ‘The New Bhagavata’ and explains what makes the Bhagavata. Appropriately, says he, did Sri *M.* preface the *Kathamrita* with the famous invocation verse from the Gopi-Gita of the Srimad-Bhagavata. Though a Bhagavata, ‘the *Kathamrita* is inimitable in style and unique’ in expression, almost scientific in precision’ and its recorder a veritable Vyasa.

Swami Sevananda’s article is in translation by Professor *S.M.* Chatterji.

**“A new Bhagavata ... to give new life to the old spiritual truths ... to carry the stream of individual soul towards the ocean of divinity.”**

The divine sayings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna as collected, compiled and presented by one of His chosen disciples Sri *M.* (Mahendra Nath Gupta) constitute the core of what is known as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The word *Kathamrita* can be traced back to one of the verses of Srimad Bhagavata Gopi Gita wherein the divine utterances of Lord Krishna have been adored as *tava kathāmr̥tam, taptajīvanam, śrvaṇamaṅgalam, śrīmadātataṁ etc.*

It was perhaps most proper for Sri *M.* to quote the aforesaid verse both as a preamble and as an invocation while making a present of presents to the world in the form of Ramakrishna *Kathamrita*. The sayings are intended to bring solace to the worried, take away the sins and miseries, and lift the mortals ever up to the level of divinity. A preamble was necessary to equate the present with the past, the current sayings with the age-old scriptures and to reveal the identity that exists between the two great saviours, Sri Ramakrishna of this age and Lord Krishna of the millennium. An invocation was essential to solicit the grace of God without which words used in any composition remain much too inadequate for expression of truth or reality.

To the core of the exact sayings has been added the pulp of narration, supremely beautiful, of the events that took place at the Dakshineswar temple or elsewhere in presence of Sri Ramakrishna. The occasional interpretations, the relevant questions posed, the soliloquy and the exact description of time, place and circumstances make the *Kathamrita* a complete fruit the flavour of which remains quite fresh even today in spite of the passage of years.

The entire work published in five volumes forms a set. Each volume contains so many chapters subdivided suitably to mark the important events recorded by Sri *M.* Though appearing to be discrete they give a sense of continuity. In fact, the scenes selected and depicted leave the impression of a divine drama, not divorced from reality, but most faithful in record and highly illuminating in character. Readers of the *Kathamrita* always get the feeling of enactment of this grand drama staged as though before their own eyes. The generation of such an impression is typical of all sacred books

termed as Bhagavata and the *Kathamrita* most certainly belongs to that category.

It is difficult to express in terms of formal definition what *Bhagavata* really is. There are so many things, which, though realizable concretely, cannot be defined. This is so because of the inherent limitation of words to convey the depth of emotion or the height of perception. One may however comprehend to some extent the characteristic features of *Bhagavata* and make a near-approach to its definition.

The sense of gladness or bliss one enjoys while going through the *Bhagavata* even casually marks the basic character of it. The generation of such a feeling may be ascribed to the influence of *Chidananda Rasa* with which *Bhagavata* is soaked, not superficially but quite intimately. This again may be traced to the fountainhead of joy, namely the divinity nearness to which justifies the name *Bhagavata*. This essential feature differentiates a sacred book from a book of ordinary description.

The trinity of *Bhagavata*, *Bhakta* and *Bhagavan* is a concept of deep significance. It gives rise to a set of three-fold equations in which each element tends to identify itself with the second one and the two combined approach the third to make the circuit complete. Consequently, the acid-test of a book belonging to the category of *Bhagavata* lies in its power to generate devotion or *bhakti*, cut across the ego of superficial knowledge and raise the reader's mind to a level of blissfulness as a step to divinity. The term divinity admits of various interpretations, no doubt. Philosophy cannot make any end of it indeed. But the most simple and effective meaning of the term would be what to derive out of the *Bhagavata* while going through the same, namely, the element of joy from within. The feeling grows with the details of narration, and induces the reader silently to meditate (*anudhyana*) upon the *Lila* described. A peculiar sense of identification, momentarily at least, does develop and elevates the reader to the fringe of divinity. Repetition of the reading of the *Bhagavata* accelerates the process and that is why, scriptures recommend regular *patha* or reading of the *Bhagavata* as a means to the attainment of Godhood.

What is true of the *Bhagavata* may be partially true of good books belonging to other domains where skillfulness of noble writers may take the readers to the track of enjoyment. A difference however exists between the *Bhagavata* and a good book of other description. While the former makes a unidirectional move towards divinity the latter tends to diffuse the pleasure of reading through multi-channel sense gates.

*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is *Bhagavata* by any standard. It fulfils all the criteria. The entire work centres round Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God. Bhaktas or devotees form the epicentres of vibration. Events, dialogues, discourses etc. are all in tune with the central note. The different characters depicted or mentioned are but symbols of the play and inter-play constituting what is called *Lila*. They constitute one and the same divinity though appearing to be different in form or name.

The apparent diversity in character of persons pictured in the *Kathamrita* was perhaps essential to the scheme of things. Sri Ramakrishna disliked uni-track attitudes towards religion and life. He wanted people to bear in mind that all roads lead to one and the same destination. Clash in religious thoughts, he wanted to avoid. He had no problem in tackling persons belonging to different sects or creeds. In fact He was synthesis incarnate, and anybody visiting Him could find contradictions met and difficulties resolved.

Sri Ramakrishna had a novel way of presenting religious thought to suit the needs of the time. Norms of life have changed enormously since the days of the Vedas

and the Puranas and a new outlook was certainly necessary to be developed. A new *Bhagavata* was required to be created 'to give new life to the old spiritual truths' and 'to carry the stream of individual soul towards the ocean of divinity'. (Memoirs of Ramakrishna, Introduction by Swami Abbedananda). The emergence of an avatara occurs, precisely for the said purpose, and the occurrence takes place whenever necessary to wipe out irreligion and to establish true religion. In this age of science and rationalism, it has been said, a universal religion free from dogmatism and sectarianism is the supreme need, and Lord Ramakrishna made His appearance to fulfil the mission.

It was therefore ordained that someone should come forward to outline the traits of His divine life, and make a systematic record of what He uttered or stood for. It was perhaps also ordained that the job be entrusted not to a distant writer or subsequent biographer, but to a person who could efface his own ego to present everything without distortion. Everybody could not do it, particularly when so novel was the mode or style of Sri Ramakrishna. He was absolutely free from the constraints of book learning with all that it connotes including the intellectual ego. Revolutionary were his ideas in the sense that He would not accept anything as true unless realized and would refuse to restrict the fruits of his *sadhana* to any privileged class. He wanted to keep the gate of Godhood wide open to the poorest of the poor, lowest of the low, without sticking to any social or religious prejudices whatsoever. It is no wonder that He had to encounter opposition and criticism of the orthodox class of the contemporary society. So radical were his views, so persuasive were his comments that traditionalism in religion had to yield to a new school of thought and the pandits had to regard Him as the latest incarnation of God.

To catch at the spirit was wanted an able writer, a sincere follower who could subordinate his own ego to the supreme will of Sri Ramakrishna and allow himself to be utilised as an instrument of transmission. And Sri *M.* was the right man to be commissioned for the purpose.

What an onerous job it was to follow Sri Ramakrishna, to keep pace with Him and grasp what fell from His lips. In the state of *samadhi* and *ardha-bahya* – He could hardly articulate and yet many a gem was to be picked at the time. In the normal state even, deeply suggestive were his words and it required exceptional alertness to catch his utterances. And yet no distortion was to be allowed since a *mantram* does not admit of any alteration or permutation. One can imagine what amount of attention Sri *M.* had to pay and energy he had to spend in collecting and recording the dialogues as also the events in which he too had to participate. Romain Rolland praised Sri *M.* for the exactitude (almost stenographic) of the discourses presented in the *Kathamrita*. Swami Vivekananda welcomed the publication of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (the first English pamphlet under this title) as something 'untarnished by the writer's mind'. And Sri *M.* richly deserved the compliments.

It will be incorrect to suppose that Sri *M.* was led casually to the temple garden at Dakshineswar and that it was chance alone that fructified his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna Deva. Those who believe in the theory of reappearance of God in human form for a set purpose should bear in mind that everything is preordained, and what appears to be casual or undesigned is really not so. A supreme Will operates from behind to put every element in tune and to space it to make the entire scheme coherent and in time with what is destined or desired to follow. By the grace of His Holy Mother, Sri Bhavatarini (Goddess Kali at the Dakshineswar temple) Sri Ramakrishna could foresee and did forecast many events including the nature and appearance of devotees who would be drawn near him to fulfil the mission. Sri *M.* was one of them, identified by

Him.

The twenty sixth of February, 1882 is consequently a memorable day when Sri M. led by frustration and wandering almost aimlessly, reached the garden at Dakshineswar and came across a surprising personality, quite unknown to him. He was not at all conscious of what was destined to follow. With a mixed feeling of reverence and astonishment he cut short his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna and left the place. What took place thereafter created history, unique in itself, and presumably without parallel in the annals of religious movements.

It will be childish to make any attempt to evaluate what Sri Ramakrishna did and bestowed. In fact, it will take a thousand years for intellectuals and scholars to grasp the full meaning and import of His sayings, let alone His *sadhana*. His divine sayings are so simple, so straight-cut and yet so deep in meaning and wide in coverage that topmost thinkers and writers are struck with wonder at the novelty of the style and expression to disseminate truth. Inimitable was his style and unique was his expression, almost scientific in precision. It was no exaggeration when Swami Vivekananda declared before the world that it would take thousand Vivekananda's to expose what Sri Ramakrishna wanted to deliver. Innumerable scholars and devotees have tried to explore Ramakrishna Darshan (not philosophy in its logical sense) and yet a full understanding of the same remains a distant goal. Swami Satyananda has described *Kathamrita* as the Pancham Veda of the age (extension of the four Vedas) in view of its comprehensiveness. *[Please see also 'M. and the New Bhagavata,' Article 31, in this Memorial Volume]*



## 13. THE UNIQUE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Maitrananda

Swami Ekatmananda, Head of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Ootacamund was approached for an article for this Centenary Memorial. In a weak moment, in spite of his extremely busy schedule, he promised to accede to our request. A Ramakrishna sadhu may delay but he never lets one down.

While sending the article says he: "At my instance, a brother monk of mine who is now a guest here has written this article which I have praised..."

Beyond this we cannot tell much about Swami Maitrananda, the writer of this article. The article itself, however, speaks of him abundantly. Need we know more?

**"The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is for all humanity for all times, a veritable eternal and universal Gospel (which has) redeemed and turned Godward many a distressed and desperate soul."**

The late Sri Sankaracharya of Puri, a Master of Arts in five or six subjects, who is also the famous author of *The Vedic Mathematics* and the first and only Sankaracharya to have visited the West, made an informal visit to the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, in the year 1945 or early in '46. After visiting the shrine, he sat in the hall down below, chatting with the Swamis and Brahmacharins of the Math. He spoke of the Ramakrishna Mission activities as the most relevant and truly effective forms of spiritual sadhana. Then he congratulated the Math for publishing the English translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which, he commented, was the best book of the century and the greatest blessing for the modern age. One Swami among his listeners became curious and asked him whether he had read it. Pat came the reply: "I keep a copy of the *Gospel* at my bedside and end the day only after going through a few pages of it". This was indeed revealing and highly gratifying.

True, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the *Bhagavata* for the modern age and, like *Srimad Bhagavata* by Vyasa, has redeemed and turned Godward many a distressed and desperate soul. Two instances of the redeeming and saving power of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, personally known to this writer, are briefly narrated below as it might be of interest and benefit to the readers.

A member of an aristocratic family of Kerala joined our Freedom Struggle in the early '40s during his college days. By the time he graduated, he was in the then Communist Party of India. He spent some years in the underground and also a short period in jail. Very sincere, enthusiastic and proud of his Party, he gave away all his wealth and property for the welfare and activities of the Party. He married a bit late. In due course he had three or four children and had to run a Tutorial Class in order to maintain them and himself. The income was meagre. He began to feel the pinch of poverty and, to add to his worries, cropped up the mother-in-law problem too. By that time he had already been deeply involved in political activities for about a decade and a half. The Communist Party came into power for a short time in Kerala. Somehow he got greatly disappointed in his friends. Add to it, the family problem worried him all the

more and he became desperate. He toyed with the idea of committing suicide. During that time he happened to visit Trivandrum. While there, he went to the local Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, where a cousin of his was a Swami whom he had not met for over a decade. He spent the night in the Ashrama. In the course of his talk with his cousin Swami, he laid bare his miserable plight and utter disappointment wrought by politics and family circumstances. Finally he blurted out his idea of suicide. The Swami coolly advised him just to read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Desperate as he was, he listened to the advice and took up the book. After six months or so, he wrote to the Swami in a cheerful and confident tone that the *Gospel* had saved him from the heinous sin of suicide and most miserable mental condition.

The Holy Book had turned him Godward. Since then he had become religious and nowadays reads no other book than *Srimad Bhagavata* and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

The second instance is that of an officer, a Major, who worked for the NCC in Tamil Nadu during the 60s. Perhaps his married life was unhappy. Often moody, he grumbled about life and felt inclined to shoot himself. His senior officer, a Colonel, felt pity on him. The Colonel was a great devotee of the Divine Mother and he was well acquainted with the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trivandrum, as he belonged to that place. At a weekend he went to the Ashrama and met the same Swami who had counseled the disillusioned and desperate Marxist referred to earlier to read the *Gospel* as a sure remedy for his malady. The Colonel narrated to the Swami the sad situation of his assistant whom he desired to take to the Ashrama, so that the Swami, after a talk with him, could bring about in him a welcome change. The Swami said: "Being strangers to each other, I am afraid that a personal talk may not prove effective. Look, give him a copy of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and ask him to read it through once, and thereafter let him do what he likes with his life. Tell him that the world will rotate round its axis whether he be or not on it, and that it would be cowardice and a sin to commit suicide." The Colonel did as was instructed. A few months later, he reported to the Swami: "Swamiji, the *Gospel* has saved my junior. After going through it he said to my pleasant surprise: 'For the whole world I am not going to commit the colossal sin of suicide.'"

There is nothing very surprising in these and similar incidents which may be many. The author of the *Gospel*, Sri M. himself happened earlier to leave his joint family at night, distressed, disgusted with the family quarrels and desperate, and with the idea of committing suicide. But on the next day, by God's grace, he had the good fortune to have *darshan* of Sri Ramakrishna and listen to a few words of his, which thoroughly transformed him. That was in February 1882. Now those who have perused the *Gospel* will certainly feel like praying for and blessing Sri M.'s joint family members who made his life distressed and sorrowful enough to leave home, and also Siddheswar, his nephew, who took him to Dakshineswar and to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Praised by Siddheswar and M.'s joint family members, the Lord's instruments which fetched His Vyasa to him!

It is undeniably the experience of utter wretchedness of the world and the calamities that occur in one's life which invariably turn out as real blessings. We hear Sri M. echoing Kunti Devi: 'Sorrow should be looked upon as a friend of man'. This Sri M. used to repeat later in his life. Mysterious indeed are the ways of the Lord!

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, it may be emphasized, is for all humanity for all

times, a veritable eternal and universal *Gospel*. The ego-screen separates us and hides our vision of God who is all-pervasive. When we put on our ego-glasses and see through them our vision of God, the One and the only Reality, gets distorted and appears as this ugly world.

Religions suggest effective methods which, when practised, would give us the means and the strength to destroy completely the ego-screen or the ego-glasses and truly see the Reality. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we find varied religious methods prescribed authentically, in simple language, without any touch of the so-called modernity. Moreover Sri Ramakrishna's personality which is the living embodiment of the *Gospel* touches the heart of all even of one who is uneducated in the modern sense of the term. Consequently the reader is led unmistakably God-ward.

I am tempted to add one more significant incident: A fair and healthy youth of about 18 or 20 years of age used to come every Sunday afternoon to the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Trichur and would go straight to the temple, wash his hands and feet, enter the prayer hall and sit for more than an hour in meditation and then depart. When the Swamis saw him for a few days thus they told him of the Spiritual Retreat held there on every second Sunday of each month from morning till evening, and suggested his attending it if he was interested. The young man attended the Retreat regularly. After a few months, he sought clarification from a Swami regarding *manasika japa*. Incidentally, one who has been doing *manasika japa* regularly, almost non-stop for quite some time, can only have such a doubt or difficulty. Astonished, the Swami asked him whether he was at it and for long. 'I am doing it for the last four years', came the reply.

*Swami*: "With what name or *mantra* do you perform japa?"

*Youth*: "I take Sri Ramakrishna's name".

*Swami*: "Are you initiated into it by anybody?"

*Youth*: "No. I happened to read *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* (Malayalam translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). I, was touched, thrilled and inspired and since then I continually repeat in my mind Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna's name."

*Swami*. "What is your name young friend? How far have you studied and where is your place of residence?"

*Youth*: "My name is ... (The Swami was astounded to know him to be a Muslim). I am educated up to the ninth class. I belong to a village fourteen miles away and make my living in a workshop. Sunday is off-day and so I come over here walking two miles and ten miles by bus."

The foregoing unequivocally shows the inestimable impression the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* creates invariably in its readers.

It may not be out of place to mention here that nearly three lakh copies of the English version of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* have been bought so far. And several lakhs of the precious book in different languages and in the original also have been purchased by many all over the world. Periodically more and more copies will be surely printed and made available.

In this age, when man is the greatest and most difficult problem to man, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the best and ever dependable guide for all humanity.

Glory to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Glory to Sri M., and Glory to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna!



## 14. GROWING WITH THE GOSPEL

### Swami Atmarupananda

In a recent talk: *They lived with God – M.*, Swami Chetanananda of St. Louis (U.S.A.) narrated an interesting story. Said he: “One of our President Swamis made an interesting remark. His secretary took a young boy to him and said, “Maharaj, please bless this young man. He is from college. He wants to be a monk. He is reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.” The President Swami said, “What! by reading the *Gospel*, you say, he will become a monk! You ask this young man to read the complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Then he will get inspiration and join the monastery. By reading the *Gospel* he will see God, he needn’t become a monk...”

Undoubtedly, one has to grow with the Gospel – and there is no end to this growth. Swami Atmarupananda of the Prabuddha Bharata, Mayavati, in this article traces candidly his growth with the *Gospel* – an experience many devotees of the *Gospel* would be able to confirm. And how right he is when he hints that it is one thing to read the *Gospel* in English and another to read the *Kathamrita* in Bengali.

**“... it would seem difficult to justify the claim that Swamiji is for monks and the Gospel for householders.”**

After being asked to contribute something for this souvenir, several possible subjects for an article passed through my mind. But as I began to think seriously about writing on a particular subject, the sketchiness of my knowledge of it would give me a forbidding stare in the face. In this way I considered, and finally rejected, several different subjects – all of them interesting, perhaps, but requiring more research than I had time for. After thus having learned how much I *didn't* know, I began thinking, well, what *do* I know? And the simple reply was: I know what the *Gospel* has meant to me personally, and how my perception of it has changed over the years. This idea quickly replaced all my previous plans, because it was the only subject I know better than anyone else, and one for which no further research would be required. And it is this that I intend to write about under the heading “Growing with the Gospel”.

Contrary to the usual pattern in the West, I first became acquainted (through books) with Sri Ramakrishna, not with Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna’s purity, renunciation, ecstatic love for God, liberality towards all religions, and the idea of God as Mother – all these made an immediate appeal. It was only after going to one of the Vedanta Societies to join the Ramakrishna Order as a Brahmachari, however, that I learned about Swami Vivekananda and also about *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I began to read both within a few days of entering the Vedanta Society’s Ashrama and was initially impressed with them both. But the more I read of Swamiji – biographies on him as well as his *Complete Works* – the less attracted I felt to the *Gospel*, so that after one reading of the latter it was years before I picked it up again!

Why? One reason was the unfamiliar cultural setting of the *Gospel*, so different from what I knew in the West; and the similes and parables drawn from Indian village life, with which I had no familiarity, whatsoever. This trouble didn’t exist with *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* by Swami Saradananda because, that being a study, everything was discussed and explained; in the *Gospel*, however, Sri Ramakrishna was presented simply and exactly as he had been, without commentary or apology. Later I

was to recognize in this the *Gospel's* greatness, but in the beginning it was a stumbling block to appreciation. Certainly not that I felt any aversion or repulsion! The greatness of Sri Ramakrishna and the beauty of Indian culture were too obvious for anyone to feel repulsed. But the problem was just lack of a feeling of closeness or familiarity, and also the fact that the Gospel didn't seem "relevant" to my life at the time: I couldn't find a connection between the Gospel's teachings and my own life-situation.

This brings me to the second reason why I put the *Gospel* down for years. The main reason for my inability to find personal relevance in the *Gospel* was my overwhelming attraction for Swami Vivekananda and the immediate relevance to my own life that I found in his teachings. Such was the powerful attraction I felt for Swamiji that what interest I might otherwise have had in the *Gospel* was swallowed up. This seems to be a very common experience among Western devotees of Ramakrishna Vivekananda. Though there are those who from the beginning feel much more attracted to Sri Ramakrishna and the *Gospel* than to Swamiji and his *Complete Works*, such are undeniably a minority. And the reason is not difficult to find. Swamiji interpreted for the world at large and especially for the West the principles, which Sri Ramakrishna had lived. Hence there is not the least strangeness, not a hair of distance between Swamiji and the Western mind, He seems like "one of us" in even a cultural sense. So coming back to my own case, I felt so close to Swamiji and found so much in him that I had no desire or need to seek inspiration in the *Gospel*.

Yet this powerful attraction for Swamiji and the slight feeling of foreignness about the *Gospel* were not the only two reasons why I put the Gospel down for so long. Another major reason was this: I came across several statements – some by highly respected monks of the Ramakrishna Order – which seemed to throw the *Gospel* into a bad light and prejudiced me against it. Later I found that my interpretation of these statements was faulty; most of them didn't really criticize the *Gospel* but only emphasized the fact that one can't truly understand Sri Ramakrishna without first understanding *Swamiji*. I will come back to these statements and discuss them in a moment.

For several years, as I have said, I set aside the *Gospel*, my main inspiration being Swamiji. Then I began to learn Bengali. For one year, children's books in Bengali (*Sisuder Ramakrishna*, etc.) provided sufficient linguistic challenge. But afterwards something more advanced was needed, so I turned (as most do) to the original Bengali Gospel – *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. This was a natural choice, for it has the advantage of being written partly in colloquial Bengali and partly in the formal literary style, thus giving the reader familiarity with both.

Now as I entered the *Kathamrita*, it aroused quite different feelings from what the *Gospel* had done several years earlier. Due to greater familiarity with India, her people and culture and religion, there was no longer the feeling of "foreignness". I felt at home in Dakshineswar. Moreover, I found a wonderful humour in the *Kathamrita*, which wasn't always evident in the English translations. And the interplay between the elegant literary Bengali used for the narrative and the homely colloquial Bengali of Sri Ramakrishna used for the conversation produced a charming effect, something which the English translations hadn't even attempted to capture because of the obvious, perhaps insurmountable, difficulty.

Most important, however, was the discovery that my long-nurtured prejudice against the *Gospel* was not at all justified. And here let me discuss the statements, which had caused this prejudice. One was something to the effect that Swamiji is for

monks, the Gospel for householders. This statement I cannot agree with now that I have studied the *Kathamrita*. There are small parts of the *Complete Works* which were addressed directly to monks, but by far the major portion was delivered through public speeches to all and sundry in the West and in India, showing the world the universal significance of Sri Ramakrishna's realizations and how to apply Sri Ramakrishna's harmonious, spiritual vision to every aspect of life. As such the *Complete Works* is essential to monks and householders equally. The Gospel, however, consists mainly of Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with a select group of very sincere and devout *sadhakas*, mostly householder *sadhakas*, no doubt, but as dedicated and sincere as most monks. As such, it contains a vast wealth of teaching on *sadhakas* and practical wisdom, valuable to both the monk and the householder devotee. So it would seem difficult to justify the claim that Swamiji is for monks and the *Gospel* for householders.

Another statement which had prejudiced me was made by Swami Premanandji, in which he told a monastic to study first Swamiji in order to understand Sri Ramakrishna. I had at first taken this as a disparagement of the *Gospel*, implying that one should study the *Complete Works* rather than the *Gospel* in order to understand Sri Ramakrishna (though the *Gospel* was nowhere mentioned in the Swami's statement). But now as I began reading the *Kathamrita* I understood the statement differently. For the more I read, the more I found seeds in Sri Ramakrishna which Swamiji had later developed into a vast tree in his *Complete Works*: that is, I found a greater harmony between the *Kathamrita* and the *Complete Works* than I could previously imagine might exist. And that gave me an understanding of another statement by another direct disciple of Master – that Sri Ramakrishna is the Veda and Swamiji his commentator. This statement is actually similar to the one made by Swami Premanandaji, for it is only by studying Swamiji that we can see the vastness of Sri Ramakrishna, that we can see the deep implications in the seemingly simple teachings and small incidents in his life.

If Swamiji is the commentator, then we have his "commentary" in the form of his *Complete Works* and the authentic biographical material on him. If Sri Ramakrishna is the Veda, then certainly the *Gospel* is a very important branch of it, others being Swami Saradanandaji's *The Great Master* and reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna by other direct disciples. So, if one wishes to understand the vastness, the universality of Sri Ramakrishna, one must study Swamiji. Otherwise, the profundity of the *Gospels* apparently simple statements and parables will pass unnoticed. Of course, the Gospel is such that it makes an appeal even to one who is totally unfamiliar with Swamiji or devoid of intellectual subtlety. But what such a person will find in it will certainly be more circumscribed than what one who has studied Swamiji will find; and in general, the subtler the mind is that reads the *Gospel*, the vaster the horizons will be that are opened up by its teachings.

A statement of Swamiji's was also clarified by reading the *Kathamrita*. As everyone knows, in his teachings Swamiji always stressed Vedanta, particularly in the West, while he rarely mentioned Sri Ramakrishna. He always warned that the principles, not personality, should be emphasized by those preaching Vedanta. This I had taken as a disparagement of the cult of Sri Ramakrishna, and it had contributed more to my prejudice against what I took to be "cultish" books like the *Gospel*. Yes, why not face truth directly instead of starting another weakening cult of worship and prayer! If I am the Atman, who cares for Avatars and Ramakrishna-lokas and all such weakening dualistic ideas!

My reasoning seemed quite safe, secure and absolute. I was ready to smash the

arguments of anyone who insisted on the cultic worship of *Sri Ramakrishna*. But then, there were a few statements of Swamiji's which just didn't fit into my otherwise logic-tight philosophy. One such statement was given in reply to a question by Ramchandra Datta as to why the Swami had not preached Sri Ramakrishna in the West: "Well, if I, talked to them about Sri Ramakrishna they would at once reply, 'We have our Jesus Christ, what more have you to say?' Now I have preached to them the religion and philosophy of Vedanta and the Vedantic ideal of God-realization. Naturally they would inquire, 'Who is the man who has realized this ideal in this age?' " Well, I consoled myself saying, Swamiji must have given this reply just to silence the objections of those who could never have understood the danger of personality worship anyway; so the statement didn't really reflect Swamiji's feelings but was a pacifier put into the mouths of spiritual children to keep them quiet and happy.

As I entered the *Kathamrita*, however, my anti-cultic philosophy began to crumble. After years of studying Swamiji, I had developed a deep love for the principles he taught. And what did I find in the *Kathamrita*? I found a man, a superman, who was the living embodiment of those principles. How could I help but adore and worship him? The value of personality was made clear. All the various spiritual principles I had held so dear were contained in perfection in the person of Sri Ramakrishna; to look at his image was to be reminded – not discursively but in a single flash – of all those principles. Not only that; the principles were also living, breathing in him and therefore more vivid and approachable. He, the embodiment of all spiritual truths, could respond to me and my needs with love and understanding. The principles themselves were beautiful in their austere purity and isolation, but they were passive, waiting for me to take the initiative of incorporating them into my life. But in Sri Ramakrishna they became living and active, responding to my every need and weakness; they *approached* me through him with love and compassion. Then I saw how wrong I had been: Swamiji was not merely pacifying a weak-minded bhakta. Having learned the grand principles of Vedanta, you will naturally look for a person who embodies them in his life; and if such a person is found, you cannot but fall down before him and worship. If you don't do so, then probably you don't really love the principles.

Did Swamiji then emphasize principles because he thought that was the only way to get people to worship Sri Ramakrishna? In other words, did he emphasize principles only in order to trick people into worshipping Sri Ramakrishna? No, that is, of course, preposterous. He emphasized principles because he was always afraid – as his Master had also been – of starting a narrow sect. If the personality is pushed forward, people forget the principles. Holding fanatically to the personality of their Teacher, they fight with sects that worship other Teachers, each claiming that their Teacher is greater and the only true Saviour of mankind, while the grand principles for which the Teachers had lived are kept safely locked within the books. This breeds dogmatism, bigotry, lifeless piety and "religious" violence. If, however, the principles are pushed forward and emphasized, people will naturally come to worship their Embodiment, but they will do so because the Person is their embodiment. That is, they won't worship the personality isolated from the principles but will worship the personality *because* of the Principles he embodies.

Thus, what I learned by entering the *Kathamrita* was basically this: (1) You cannot categorize the Gospel as being for householders. It contains a vast treasure of instruction on *sadhana* and practical wisdom and philosophy, profitable equally to householders and to monks. Moreover, it is the only place that a person – monk or householder – can see Sri Ramakrishna exactly as he was in his day-to-day life. (2)



There is a much greater harmony existing between the *Complete Works* of Swamiji and the *Gospel* than I ever imagined. The *Complete Works* forms a detailed development of Sri Ramakrishna's harmonious vision of reality which he used to call *vijnana* and which he gave such beautiful expression to in the *Gospel*. (3) Swamiji is therefore the "commentator" and Sri Ramakrishna the "Veda". Statements to the effect that Swamiji must be studied first if one wants to understand Sri Ramakrishna do not disparage the *Gospel* but actually show how deep and vast is the wisdom contained in it – so immense that it can't be grasped without much prior thought and *sadhana*. (4) Swamiji emphasized principles rather than personality not because the latter is insignificant or weakening but because attachment to personalities isolated from the principles is the cause of narrowness and bigotry. If the principles are pushed forward, people will naturally come to worship their Embodiment, yet without forgetting the principles. This will give a wonderful liberality of vision: people will bow down in adoration wherever they find the principles embodied rather than fight with the worshippers of other Teachers.

Is this the end of growing with the *Gospel*? Hardly. Every day's reading brings new understanding, new insight. In fact, no one can come to an end of growth with such a magnificent work. There have been Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order – great scholars – who in their old age would read nothing but the *Gospel*. Asked why, they would reply that, though in their youth they sought inspiration and stimulation from many sources, now they found everything in the *Gospel*. Such was the profundity, the inexhaustible vastness these great scholar-monks found in it! The four points mentioned above are merely the foundation for future growth with, growth through the *Gospel*. They have given me a vantage point from which to view the ocean of the *Gospel*'s greatness; now it is left for me to plunge in and explore.

# 15. THE KATHAMRITA AND ITS COMMENTARY

Swami Mumukshananda

Swami Mumukshananda agrees with our other learned contributors that the *Kathamrita* is the most accurate record of the facts of Sri Ramakrishna's life and that his actual words were truthfully noted with the exact setting in which they were spoken. He also talks of Sri *M.*, as a 'divinely ordained' recorder, who kept himself completely hidden throughout the narrative. These facts are now universally accepted. To these he adds another important dimension – 'that to grasp the full and real import of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings' the aspirant must join to a regular reverential study of the *Kathamrita*, a simultaneous study of the works of Swami Vivekananda, for the *Kathamrita* teaches not only *Bhakti* (Yoga of Devotion) but also the other three Yogas of knowledge, Meditation and Work.

Swami Mumukshananda is the Principal of the Probationers' Training Centre, Belur Math.

**“ ... If you study the Kathamrita along with its commentary given by Swamiji, you will grasp the import of this Veda.”**

Mr. Christopher Isherwood has described the life of Sri Ramakrishna as a phenomenon. He explains that a phenomenon is something “extraordinary and mysterious” yet it is “always a fact, an object of experience”. It is based on competent eyewitnesses' evidences that leave no room for doubt. “Ramakrishna's life, being comparatively recent history, is well documented ... 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 Sri Ramakrishna indubitably spoke and did.”<sup>1</sup>

“Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita” (literally, ambrosial words of Sri Sri Ramakrishna) in the Bengali original – for this is the name of the world-classic whose English rendering, ‘The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna’ has earned wide renown – is one of the indubitable evidences that justifies one's accepting the events of Sri Ramakrishna's life as facts. The author, Mahendranath Gupta, who humbly hides himself behind the pseudonym, *M.* had the habit of keeping diary from his boyhood. This habit prompted him to note down meticulously the events that he had witnessed and the utterances that he had heard. The result is this “big book which is probably close to totally accurate reporting.”<sup>2</sup>

This is remarkable in the religious history of mankind because “the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious leader” were never noted down “with so minute a fidelity”.<sup>3</sup> Aldous Huxley, therefore, has described the “Gospel” as “unique in the literature of hagiography.”<sup>4</sup>

This feature of the *Kathamrita* (the *Gospel*) – viz. its accuracy has been clearly authenticated by the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, who knew him most intimately. She said that while listening to these

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<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna and His Disciples – by Christopher Isherwood, Advaita Ashrama (1965) Page – 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Page – 2.

<sup>3</sup> Foreword to the “The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna”, Madras Math (1974).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

recordings made by *M.* she felt as if the words had been flowing from the lips of the Master himself and that the words recorded by *M.* were exact and true.<sup>5</sup> This observation of the Mother seems to be the greatest testimony to the reliability of the *Kathamrita*. The Holy Mother has not only vouched for the reliability of the *Kathamrita* but has also recommended its propagation for the benefit of mankind, when she said that for awakening the religious consciousness of man it was very necessary to bring these words to light.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that *M.* was divinely ordained for this task. Once when Swami Shivananda (at that time Tarak), following *M.*'s example, made an attempt to record Sri Ramakrishna's conversations and with that end in view was listening intently, Sri Ramakrishna noticed it and remarked, "Hallo, why are you listening in this fashion? You need not do any such thing. Your life (will be) different."<sup>7</sup> But in the case of *M.*, Sri Ramakrishna sometimes verified whether *M.* had listened attentively and understood him properly. He even corrected, if necessary, when *M.* repeated his words. Once Sri Ramakrishna made a statement which was both a prophecy and a directive to *M.* He revealingly pointed out that *M.* had to do in future the Divine Mother's work by providing the opportunity to the people to hear the words of the Divine. In bringing to light the Gospel or in talking about Sri Ramakrishna's teachings *M.* maintained a very devout attitude all through his life. His attitude was that he had the privilege of collecting a few pitchers of nectar – like water from the Infinite Ocean which was Sri Ramakrishna and that he was, therefore, serving the people with the saving, soothing and life-giving ambrosial waters of his *Gospel*. He considered himself a mere custodian, a trustee, of Sri Ramakrishna's words, and, as such, he was always keen and particular to present in his book the words of the Master in their purest and unadulterated form. He has successfully effaced himself, while expressing the words of his Master or of the other persons mentioned in the book. Swami Vivekananda has highly praised this role of the author. The Greek saint-philosopher Socrates did not leave behind him any book, any writing of his. But Plato, his greatest pupil is believed to have conveyed to humanity subsequently the ideas of his noble preceptor in the form of "Dialogues" published by him. Historians however say that "The Platonic dialogues represent a fusion of thought of the teacher and the disciple and the problem of distinguishing the doctrines actually advanced by the real historical Socrates from Platonic doctrines of which Socrates was the only mouthpiece is an insoluble one."<sup>8</sup> Some hold even an extreme view that the dialogues contain mainly the ideas of Plato, and only a minimum of Socratic teachings. This seems to be the reason why Swami Vivekananda wrote to *M.* on 24th October 1897: "Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden... The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind as you are doing."<sup>9</sup> Thus, in presenting to the public the teachings of Sri Sri Ramakrishna, *M.* has done just the reverse of what Plato is believed to have done with Socrates' teaching. About the "faithful account" of the discourses of the *Gospel*, Romain Rolland writes, "Their exactitude is about stenographic"<sup>10</sup>.

Another very notable feature of the *Kathamrita* is the vivid, living description of

<sup>5</sup> See Holy Mother's words of blessings quoted in the beginning of each volume of the *Kathamrita* in Bengali.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Bhakta Malika (Bengali) Vol. I (1959) Page – 255.

<sup>8</sup> A History of Philosophy by Frank Thilly, revised by Ledgerwood (1976), Pages, 63 – 64.

<sup>9</sup> Letters of Swami Vivekananda (1960), Page – 445.

<sup>10</sup> Vide opinions appended to "Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita", 1363 Bengali Era.

the setting and the atmosphere in which the words narrated were uttered. The picturesque description of the room, the furniture, the verandah, the temple, the river, the trees, the sky, the road and the carriage, together with the entrance and exit of persons of different temperaments and their conversations with the Master gives the *Kathamrita* a dramatic setting and overture and makes its reading highly interesting. Human mind in general finds it difficult to grasp and remember abstract teachings. But it becomes comparatively easy for the reader to retain in his mind the vivid dramatic scenes and the conversations permeated with the words of profound wisdom. *M.* has stated in his introduction to the *Kathamrita* (4<sup>th</sup> Volume) that he had depicted those scenes as an aid to the devotees, who, he hoped, would love to meditate on them.

Spiritual teachers, like the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, have strongly recommended a reverential and regular study of the *Kathamrita* as an aid to one's spiritual growth. But they have also advised that along with this study one should strive to put into practice these teachings according to one's capacity and simultaneously to study the works of Swami Vivekananda. Otherwise it will not be possible to grasp the full and real import of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Swami Saradanandaji has very clearly stated in his "Sri Ramakrishna – the Great Master" that, among all devotees and admirers, it was Narendranath who could understand, and reveal the deeper implications of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings and their relevance to modern man and his society.<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda himself said, "Now, all the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his ideas."<sup>12</sup> Readers of the Vivekananda literature know that service to God in man (otherwise described as Practical Vedanta) has been again and again emphasized by him. In fact this seems to be his chief message to mankind. A careful reading of the *Kathamrita* will reveal that this teaching – its philosophy and practice – permeates Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Sri Ramakrishna's several statements, scattered here and there in the *Kathamrita*, lend support to this. As for example, he said on December 14, 1884 at Dakshineswar: "If God can be worshipped through an image, why not also through a living man?"<sup>13</sup> But the deep significance and relevance of this and similar other sayings of Sri Ramakrishna may very well go unnoticed and unfathomed by the reader if he does not study Swami Vivekananda. When we read the *Kathamrita* without reading Vivekananda we feel that Sri Ramakrishna is prescribing only Bhakti (devotion) for the common householders. But according to Swami Vivekananda Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of *jnana* (knowledge and discrimination), *karma* (work), *bhakti* (devotion) and *yoga* (mediation, concentration), and his teachings aim at the application of all the four in our lives. When we read the *Kathamrita* with such clues provided by Swami Vivekananda, we discover that Sri Ramakrishna has actually prescribed a combination of all the four methods of *sadhana* for even common householders, without using such technical terms as the *synthesis of the Yogas*. For example, in answer to *M.*'s question, 'How, Sir, may we fix our mind on God?' Sri Ramakrishna replies: "Repeat God's name and sing His glories", which is clearly *Bhakti Yoga*. He emphasizes meditation (*dhyana*) at the same time, when he adds: "... it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult in the beginning unless one practices meditation in solitude". Continuing he further advises in the same sequence: "You should always discriminate between the real and the unreal. God alone is real, the

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<sup>11</sup> Sri Ramakrishna – the Great Master – Swami Saradananda, Vol. V.

<sup>12</sup> Lecture on "My Life and Mission" in "Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda" Vol. VII (1951), Page – 79

<sup>13</sup> "Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" (1974), Page – 660.

Eternal Substance and all else is unreal. By discriminating thus one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind.” The reader will notice that Sri Ramakrishna here asks the same devotee to combine in his *sadhana* knowledge (*jnana*) in the form of discrimination (*vichara*) with *bhakti* and *dhyana*. Again, to the same devotee, and in the course of the same conversation Sri Ramakrishna says, “Do all your duties but keep your mind in God”, which is *Karma Yoga* in a nutshell. This only shows how correct are Swami Vivekananda’s analysis and grasp of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>14</sup>

Swami Brahmananda, held in high esteem by all disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, has said, “Sri Ramakrishna was so great that it is difficult for a man with an ordinary mind to understand him. Swamiji has presented him before the public in a manner suitable to common man ... It is rather madness to try to understand the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) without understanding him (Swami Vivekananda)”<sup>15</sup> So, Swami Brahmananda has advised the reading of the teachings of both and also to live the spiritual life *simultaneously*. Swami Atmananda (one of the great monastic disciples of Swami Vivekananda) once came to know that a devotee had been reading some portions of the *Kathamrita* regularly, but not Swamiji’s speeches and writings. He then pointed out to the devotee: “The *Kathamrita* is the Veda of this age and Swami Vivekananda’s Works are the commentary to that very Veda ... Therefore if you study the *Kathamrita* along with its commentary given by Swamiji you will grasp the import of this Veda”.<sup>16</sup> Continuing further he advised the devotee to do some spiritual practices himself and also keep the company of the holy men along with it. Readers of the *Kathamrita* may also note that the writings and conversation of the other sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and those of *M.* and the great dramatist, Girish Chandra Ghosh, throw a good deal of light on the teachings of the *Kathamrita* and those of Swami Vivekananda as also on their unity of import and approach.

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<sup>14</sup> “The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna” (1974), pp. 5-7, and also a penetrative exposition of this portion of the dialogue by Swami Yatiswaranandaji in his “Meditation & Spiritual Life” (1979) pages, 278-79.

<sup>15</sup> “Dharma Prasange Swami Brahmananda” (Udbodhan); 1382 Bengali Era, Page – 78.

<sup>16</sup> “Swamijir Pada Prante” (1972), Page – 193-94

## 16. *M.*'s GOSPEL AND NARENDRA – THE MAKING OF A PROPHET

Swami Jitatmananda

While the *Kathamrita* primarily concerns itself with the divine personality of Sri Ramakrishna, in the process it throws invaluable light on the making of the future apostles of the Great Master, not the least of whom was Swami Vivekananda. By piecing together passages from the *Kathamrita*, Swami Jitatmananda, at present Deputy Director, School of Languages, Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, describes the greatest miracle of Sri Ramakrishna – that of transforming ‘a Calcutta boy’, ‘a doubting Thomas’, into a world prophet, the *alter ego* of his Master whose music was ‘the vibrations of the Logos, the WORD which was with God and which was God’. While narrating this, the learned Swami underlines what a pre-eminent place the *Kathamrita* occupies in the history of the world gospels and the divine relationship that existed between the writer of the *Kathamrita* and his own *guru-bhais*, the characters of his narrative.

The quotations from the *Kathamrita* are in translation into English by Swami Jitatmananda himself from the five volumes, 8th edition, of the original Bengali *Kathamrita*.

**“The musings on the Master brought only repentance and sadness in Narendra’s mind when *M.* sometimes soothed his disconsolate heart with warming words like an elder brother.”**

The making of a prophet is always a fascinating story. *M.* had it for us in his immortal *Gospel*. The world will never be able to sufficiently express its gratitude to *M.* for the treasure he has left behind for us. *M.*'s portrayal is irresistible, for it is faithful to the accent. Its dispassionate objectivity is phenomenal. He stands out in the *Gospel* as a quiet philosopher who belongs to the highest category of men born, as Pythagoras once said, ‘merely to look on’.

Plotinus once remarked that three kinds of men are fit for final illumination – the born artist, the born lover of men, and the born lover of truth or philosopher. Ramakrishna in *M.*'s *Gospel* is all these combined and so much more. Above all, Ramakrishna is a saviour-artist whose function, as the Russian artist Roerich wrote on him<sup>1</sup>, was to “create” and “elevate” whatever he sees, touches, or loves. Ramakrishna's creation of a world-prophet out of a Calcutta boy is one such phenomenon, a miracle that *M.* describes with great care in the pages of the *Gospel*. On the first day Narendra came, Ramakrishna instantly identified in him the sower of his seeds. Here was before the Master a Shiva Stone, a white alabaster with the immaculate purity of Christ, the meditative and loving heart of Buddha and the fire of a Shankara. The creative sculptor took up his chisel and with unfailing strokes of love and knowledge carved out the splendid image – Vivekananda, Paul the thunderer, Ramakrishna's *alter ego*.

*M.*'s *Gospel* depicts the milestones in the making of the prophet. In some forty-nine scenes, Narendra appears in the original Bengali *Gospel* (the *Kathamrita*), and in a dozen more episodes, Ramakrishna speaks of Narendra's greatness to others. *The Acts of the Apostles* (New Testament) describes the conversion of St. Paul in a single momentous

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<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna in the eyes of Brahma and Christian Admirers by Nanda Mukherji, p. 81.

theophany of Christ who suddenly appears before the fanatically anti-Christ Saul and speaks to him (*The Acts*, 22:7) with the passionate words – “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Except for Paul’s own confessions nothing more is known about this transfiguration in the entire New Testament. Paul is described only by the unknown author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, which begin after crucifixion. The author of the *Acts* has been compared by an ardent Christian<sup>2</sup> to Boswell of Johnson. *M.’s Gospel* is the only gospel on Ramakrishna, which combines the elements of the four Gospels of the New Testament, and also the initial *Acts* of the Apostles, all combined into a harmonious whole. The post-Ramakrishna world owes, in that respect, much more to *M.* than the Christians to the authors of the Gospels and the Acts, and a post-Johnson England to Boswell.

Although no exact parallelism can be found between Narendranath and St. Paul, yet Narendra’s first meeting with Ramakrishna was nothing less momentous than the Pauline theophany of Christ. It may be remembered that Paul despite his spiteful fanaticism was a well-bred man and himself a rabbi. His anti-Christ fanaticism was only a power gone astray. Likewise, Narendra, born in a well-to-do family of Calcutta began his life in the sunshine of optimism, but with the coming of youth, storms of doubt and reason threatened to shake the very foundations of his life and beliefs. Torn between despair and disillusionment Narendra began a desperate search for a way out of this predicament. His inborn faith and devotion to the providential gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon was severely eroded by the skeptical and agnostic thoughts of Hume, Spencer and Mill. His inborn and flaming purity of the soul stood poised for a dreadful war against the pull of senses, all powerful in an atheistic world. It was, as his intimate friend the celebrated philosopher B.N. Seal later wrote<sup>3</sup>, not in Narendra’s nature to search for life’s solutions in books or theories, but like Sophocles and Shakespeare in life itself and more particularly in his own personal and palpable experiences. This friend to whom Narendra at this period confided his heart, found in him a seething cauldron, a tormenting Prometheus, a devotional heart crying silently for a god, and more particularly for a guru, a man-god to lift him from the inferno of doubts and despairs. Like a madman he went from door to door knocking in vain for a response. None could and none did. The great leaders of Bengal failed to quench his fire. Finally he stumbled on the door of Ramakrishna – the last door. To his great surprise the illiterate Brahmin priest of Dakshineswar Kali temple told him with an unbelievably calm assurance and nonchalance that God is and that one can see and talk to God. Ramakrishna expounded no philosophy, but his disarming simplicity, his immaculate purity and fidelity to truth struck Narendra with awe. Ramakrishna’s innate love showered on the tired soul a peace and a benediction. The unassuming but tremendously powerful personality of Ramakrishna drove home a conviction and a new assurance in Narendra’s arid soul. The days ahead hummed with promise.

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*M.’s* episode of Ramakrishna-Narendra opens in this stormy background. *M.* records how the Master led the boy slowly to the path of devotion. In Ramakrishna’s presence the long lost devotion to Gods welled up again in Narendra’s heart. Ramakrishna’s love drew him more and more and without his knowing it Narendra fell in love with the strange personality. But intellectually he was still at war and refused to believe in the evidence of others that Ramakrishna did really talk to the image in the

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. J.R. Dummelow (Oxon) – A Commentary on Holy Bible, p. 813.

<sup>3</sup> Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharat Barsha – Vol. 4, p. 171.

temple as something living. Nevertheless he saw for the first time that “He was a triumphant example of the complete conquest of lust and of desire for money.”<sup>4</sup> The tremendous personality carried weight in every word that came out of Ramakrishna’s lips, no matter how unpolished or rustic the language was.

The doubting Thomas died hard. It lingered in Narendra’s intellect even to the moment when Ramakrishna left the world. In some of the scenes in the *Gospel M.* gives us a glimpse of Narendra’s continuing confrontation with the Master. Once in 1886 when Narendra’s family was gripped by acute poverty, he declared. “God etc. are just nonexistent (Kathamrita, Vol. IV, p. 293).”

*Narendra (to M.):* I want truth. The other day I had a serious debate with the Master himself.

*M. (smiling):* What happened?

*Narendra:* He told me, “There are some persons who call me God.” I said, “Even if thousands speak of you as God I am not going to admit it unless I myself find it to be true.” He said, “What many people admit as truth that is truth, and that is religion.” I answered, “I won’t listen to anyone unless I realize it myself.”

On another occasion Narendra, Sasi and *M.* were discussing Buddha in front of Ramakrishna. (Kathamrita, Vol. IV, p. 290).

*M.:* What is Buddha’s realization?

*Narendra:* I will speak what I myself have realized.

*M.:* God is: What is Buddha’s opinion?

*Narendra:* How do you say there is a God? You yourself have created the world. Do you know what Berkley says on this subject? ...

*Ramakrishna:* The naked one (Totapuri) used to say: “The world is in the mind only, and it dissolves in the mind itself.”

Again when Ramakrishna spoke of his own visions of Gods, Narendra coruscated them away with such words as, “They are hallucinations of the mind.” (Kathamrita Vol. 11, p. 268). Once Ramakrishna assured Narendra that he could have a vision of Krishna if only he once wished it. Naren sarcastically rejected his suggestion saying, “I do not believe in any Krishna or such other Gods.”

Although Naren could not intellectually accept Ramakrishna’s divine visions, he slowly got more and more drawn towards the Master primarily for his deep and loving concern for himself and his family. In a touching moment in the Gospel (Kathamrita, Vol. IV, p. 272) a worried Ramakrishna asks *M.* why Naren suffers so much despite his purity and devotion. *M.* consoles a disconsolate master.

*Ramakrishna (to M.):* He who is the son of a landlord gets his monthly allowance. Narendra belongs to so high a level, yet why does he suffer? Is it not said that God will arrange everything for the devotee who surrenders to him?

Ramakrishna’s love for Narendra never flagged for a moment. It grew intense on the contrary. Narendra’s hard answers, stern rejections only brought deeper affection from the Master. Ramakrishna’s love for Narendra was increasingly turning into a

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<sup>4</sup> Teachings of S. Vivekananda, 6th Edition, Advaita Ashrama, p. 230.



passion – a passionate cry of a father for a son at a crisis of the soul, the night-long worry of the shepherd for the one sheep that had not yet returned to the fold. When the worry grew too intense to bear, *M.* or others comforted the mother's heart. Later, with a heart lacerated by his earlier treatment, Narendra confided these unforgettable moments to *M.* (Kathamrita, Vol. III, pp. 267 – 268).

*Narendra (to M.):* One day he said to Annada Guha (a rich friend of Narendra), "Narendra has just lost his father. His family has fallen into poor days. It would be good if his friends get some help for the family in distress." After Annada Guha had left I began to scold the Master. I said, "Why did you speak these words to him?" Rebuked by me he began to weep and said with tears, "My boy, for you I can even beg from door to door. Don't you know it?"

The moment was poignant beyond words. Ramakrishna who never even accepted a piece of cotton either for himself or his wife from the richest men, begged for Narendra of someone whom he scarcely knew. It took a whole life for Narendra to pay the debt of this single day.

And finally the illumination came. It was at Cossipore where Ramakrishna lay dying of incurable cancer, his angelic body emaciated to bones. Curious visitors stopped coming to this skeleton of a man. Serious doubts about Ramakrishna's divinity had arisen in the minds of even his nearest disciples. Narendra strangely held fast to the Master like a one-master dog. He was in love with Ramakrishna. And then one day the hidden doubt reared its hood. It suddenly struck Narendra that if Ramakrishna could declare his divinity at this penultimate moment without any hesitation then only he would believe. Instantly Ramakrishna answered the unspoken thought of Narendra with the unforgettable words: "He who came as Rama and as Krishna has verily come this time as Ramakrishna." *M.* narrates it (Kathamrita, Vol. V, p. 183) although he was not present on the occasion. But he knew this to be true as much as Narendra himself.

Despite Ramakrishna's childlike behaviour and unusual humility during the moments of teaching he could and did speak with a strange tone of authority, a mysterious divine power fortifying his simple words. When he spoke to Bankim Chatterji, the eminent writer of those days, he thundered like Christ on the Pharisees. His talks with Keshab, Shivanath, Pratap, Ishan and Vidyasagar are full of sparkling wisdom, striking the listeners with wonder. His words to Kedar are awfully irrevocable. His words in the presence of Michael Madhusudan Dutta are tragically poignant. But when he speaks to Narendra who was only a boy compared to these social stalwarts already mentioned, Ramakrishna's voice is unusually soft with affection and even with an unmistakable respect of great expectation. *M.* describes a scene (Kathamrita, Vol. 11, p. 202) when Ramakrishna affectionately looks at Narendra and speaks of renunciation in a tone of importunate request.

– "My child, nothing will be achieved until one renounces lust and gold." Speaking these words, Ramakrishna was again absorbed in a divine mood. With the same compassionate look he began to sing in an inspired way:

*"I am afraid to speak;  
I am afraid not to speak;  
I only fear lest I should lose my darling.  
The mantra that I have learnt,  
The same I give unto you,  
Now it belongs to you.*

“Sri Ramakrishna is afraid lest Narendra should belong to somebody else.” (Kathamrita, Vol. II, p. 202).

Later, after the Master’s passing away Narendra confided to *M.* (Kathamrita, Vol. II, p. 237).

– “In Dakshineswar he began to chant prayers before me saying ‘Narayana, You have come in this body for my work.’ In Cossipore he gave me Power.”

The musings on the Master brought only repentance and sadness in Narendra’s mind, when *M.* sometimes soothed his disconsolate heart with warming words like an elder brother. On one such occasion the conversation ran thus – (Kathamrita, Vol. III, p. 268).

*Naren:* ... Well, – is so humble and so very egoless. Can you kindly tell me if I can become egoless?

*M.:* He (Ramakrishna) used to say about your ego: ‘Do you know whose ego is this?’

*Naren:* What does that mean?

*M.:* What the Master meant to say was that God himself had given this “Ego” to you so that with it many good things would be accomplished.”

\* \* \*

Throughout the *Gospel* Ramakrishna sings the glory of Narendra in most unambiguous words even in front of the so-called social dignitaries. Repeatedly does Ramakrishna assert that Narendra is the paragon among men – with all his rustic similes of bamboos, sweet-water-fish, earthen pitcher, and so on. Ramakrishna compares him with whatever is the best and the noblest in any species in life. And one day he tells an intellectually eminent Girish: “... I consider Narendra as the manifested embodiment of the Atman; and I am obedient to him.” Girish tries to interpret it as Ramakrishna’s characteristic humility but Ramakrishna holds fast to his spoken words. *M.’s Gospel* bears ample evidence that Ramakrishna’s thoughts on Narendra were not unfounded.

Narendra, however, was not conscious of his own radiant divinity and purity that sent his Master again and again into an ecstasy of divine bliss. Sometimes at the very sight of Narendra, Ramakrishna lost himself in a trance and could hardly utter a word. *M.* describes one of such extremely moving moments (Kathamrita, Vol. I, p. 198) when Ramakrishna went into ecstasy in an open Calcutta street at the approach of Narendra. After a long while he could only mutter a few words charged with the tenderest affection. “Are you well my son?” softly enquired an apologetic Ramakrishna; “I could not speak to you then.” Each word, *M.* records, was fraught with compassion. Suddenly looking at Narendra he said, “*This* is one, *that* is one.” *M.* tried to interpret these mystical sounds: ‘*This*’ meaning Narendra is the manifested Atman, who stands above the evanescence of ‘*that*’, phenomenal world. Again and again, *M.* writes: Ramakrishna would at once see the ‘Real Man’ in Narendra behind his body-mind, the ‘Apparent Man.’ A spontaneous veneration for Narendra wells up in *M.’s* heart who writes: Blessed you are, Narendra! Such a world of love for you in the heart of this God-man! Such an instant conflagration of divinity at your very sight! (Kathamrita, Vol. 1, p. 207)

\* \* \*

*M.’s Gospel* makes here a significant departure from the lives of Christ or

Buddha. Paul and Ananda were only foremost disciples, while Narendra was identified with the Master. It is only in the Ramakrishna Incarnation that the disciple is worshipped with the Master on the same altar.

In the Gospel, Ramakrishna points out more than once to a very significant aspect of Narendra's personality – his blazing music. Narendra's songs were no music in the common sense, but they were the vibrations of the Logos, 'the Word which was with God and which was God', the pulsation of the primeval *Nada*, the cosmic sound that instantly kindles the spark of dormant divinity in man. It is this great music that Rolland found in his words that sent 'a thrill' through Rolland's body like an electric shock. It is this power of the Logos that revolutionised the Chicago Parliament of Religions and changed the thought current of half the globe within the span of nine years.

*M.* describes a scene (Kathamrita, Vol. 1, pp. 98-99).

"Narendra began to sing:

*In the Shrine of heart radiates  
The Divine form of truth, beauty and good."*

Sri Ramakrishna goes into deep *samadhi* ... He is merged in the sea of the divine beauty of the Blissful Mother ... He sits like a picture absolutely motionless with unblinking eyes.

The *samadhi* is over. Seeing the quiet *samadhi* of Ramakrishna Narendra in the meanwhile has left the room ... The room is full of devotees. *Samadhi* over. Ramakrishna looks askance at the devotees. He finds Narendra is not there; only the *tanpura* (the stringed musical instrument) lies there. All the devotees look at him with curiosity.

*Sri Ramakrishna:* He (Narendra) has lit the fire. Now it matters little if he stays or goes.

Pages after pages in the *Gospel* are radiant with these scenes: when Narendra sings and brings instant conflagration of divinity and bliss in his master. Others present enjoy the divine fire. Long afterwards in Detroit one night, Vivekananda spoke on the divinity of man. Sister Christine who was present on the occasion wrote that there was an instant radiation of divinity that drifted the listeners into a sea of bliss. The lecture over, she wrote that it was a pain to emerge into the world of sorrow. One never knew what music was unless one heard Vivekananda, she recorded.

Again on another evening at Belur-on-Ganges Vivekananda was speaking on the love of God. The listeners forgot the lapse of time and were hardly conscious that a great storm was lashing on the swelling river while the great drama of divine love was being enacted in front of them. Nivedita, an eyewitness, wrote, "The voice that encompassed all the players and the play that was acted before us was the love of soul for God! Till we too caught the kindling, and lived for the moment with a fire that the rushing river could not put out, nor the hurricane disturb ... And before Prometheus left us, we knelt before him together and he blest us all."

Narendra was conscious of this Power within and spoke to *M.* after the Master's passing away. (Kathamrita, Vol. III, p. 275)

*Narendra (to M.):* Probably you remember that he (the Master) used to say, by pointing his finger towards his own heart: 'He who resides in this body responds to your

song just as the hooded serpent stands erect and still at the music of the charmer.’

Ramakrishna’s testimony brought deeper convictions in the prophet Vivekananda who declared later on ... “I am a voice without a form.”

\* \* \*

Ramakrishna passed away. He left no rules, made no organisation, but he kindled the fire of renunciation in the hearts of all who came near to his heart. And a new brotherhood started crystallizing in his unseen presence. Its basis was love. One remembers the parting message of Christ to his apostles:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; ... By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another.” (*St. John* 13: 34-35)”

In eight unforgettable chapters *M.* records with classic fidelity and reverence the birth of a nascent Order of Ramakrishna Brotherhood. These eight chapters imitate what we may call the ‘Acts of Ramakrishna Apostles’. *M.* was the most authentic eyewitness of this humble birth of a world brotherhood in a forlorn, ghost-ridden, dilapidated house at Baranagore, in a world of incredible poverty and all the more incredible austerity and penance by the poor Brothers. Yet these disciples were not alone. The spirit of Ramakrishna hovered over them like an eagle protecting the kids with extended wings.

Here is *M.*’s record of its beginnings. (*Kathamrita*, Vol. II, p. 244).

“A few months ago Sri Ramakrishna left this world plunging his devotees in the endless sea of grief. The bond of love and affection that tied together the unmarried and the householder disciples of the Master was not to be broken any more. At the sudden departure of the leader they have all been frightened a little, but they are looking at one another with hope, for all of them have their hearts in Sri Ramakrishna. Now they just cannot live without seeing one another ... Nothing but talks on the Master delight them now. Everyone wonders: Shall we not see him any more?”

We remember Christ’s consolation to his devotees: ‘I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you.’ (*St. John* 14: 18). Ramakrishna did not leave his dear ones comfortless. He returned in the body of his anointed one – Narendra. *M.* tells us how everyone felt a second coming of the Master in his beloved boy. Everyone found in Narendra the shadow of the Master, heard in his voice the old rhythm of the departed Lord. Narendra was the leader of the Brotherhood. He went and called back from home the other brother disciples and inspired them with a burning desire for God-realization in the midst of awful poverty and barrenness of the Baranagore monastery. He now spent sleepless nights for his brother disciples, for their food and shelter, and above all looked after them like the old father. In his absence darkness would descend in the ghost-ridden building. In his presence it was a perpetual festivity with God. Ramakrishna’s love engulfed him and permeated him through and through. The doubts now gave way to a fiery devotion to the Guru, and intellectual scorn ended in a total self-surrender. Narendra underwent a great change.

*Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament tells us of the Pauline transfiguration:

“So also is the resurrection of the dead ... It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” (*I Corinthian*: 42-44).

The Love that was Ramakrishna imperceptibly enters into his son: the brother disciples feel the fire, but feel sometimes at a loss to understand the reason behind.

*M.* records a conversation between Narendra and one of his brother disciples. (Kathamrita, Vol. 1, p. 258)

*A Brother:* I say no one can give Divine Love to anyone.

*Narendra:* Paramahansa Deva gave *me* the Divine Love.

*Brother:* Really, have you got it?

*Narendra:* How can you understand that?

The process of transfiguration through Love is silent and unspeakable because of its sheer profundity. It cannot be communicated either. It can only be felt like the descension of heavenly Dove on Jesus on the banks of Jordan. One remembers Christ's words: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love." (St. John 15:9).

*M.* describes in the Kathamrita (Vol. III, p. 268), a transfigured Narendra, a Paul who would carry Christ beyond the regions of the Jews to the world of the gentiles. It was on a memorable dawn after a whole night of vigil, prayer and meditation on Shiva on the occasion of Shivaratri, the annual Shiva festival. Only two days after they would celebrate the birthday of their Master for the first time after his passing away. Every line of *M.* is glowing with a great expectation, and every word charged with reverence on the birth of a prophet:

"The morning dawned ... Narendra wore a new saffron cloth. The beauty of his cloth matched the unprecedented spiritual radiance and purity born of austerity that marked his face. The face glowed with a divine power and love. It was as if a spark from the Infinite Sea of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute had taken a human form to teach knowledge and devotion to mankind, to assist the mission of the Incarnation of God."

The unknown Calcutta boy had been transfigured into a world-prophet.

# 17. SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA: SRI M.'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO BENGALI LITERATURE

Pranab Ranjan Ghosh

Professor Pranab Ranjan Ghosh of the Calcutta University is a well-known scholar of Ramakrishna Vivekananda literature. He has contributed many studies for the better understanding of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and his foremost apostle. In the following thoughtful study Professor Ghosh has stressed the importance of *Sri M.'s Kathamrita* not only as a scripture but also as a great contribution to Bengali literature like the Bible of the Anglican Church is to English literature.

**“... in the original Bengali, the real Ramakrishna was established once for all ... M.'s expression is absorbing, lucid, picturesque with a melody of its own ... poems in prose ... a mood of constant worship.”**

Great literature is always the creation of a great mind. To understand the greatness of that mind, his life and reminiscences may be of much help, but the depth of his soul must be ascertained from the writing itself. In world literature the *Kathamrita* stands unparalleled in its unfathomable spiritual quality. From the life force of rural Bengal came a serene and sublime form of expression, in the spoken words of Sri Ramakrishna. Following Srimad-Bhagavata, Sri M. named them ‘Nectar of Words’ (*Kathamrita*); in English he named them ‘*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*’. Both in Vaishnava and Christian sense these words signify eternal truth and love. Rarely human words have acquired such spiritual height; also it is rare to find a more competent recorder of such sayings. Sri Ramakrishna found in Mahendranath Gupta (Sri M.), the best ever scribe the world has ever found.

That his talks were being recorded by Sri M., Sri Ramakrishna was aware of. But that awareness did not make him self-conscious as is evident from the records. Sometimes well aware of the surrounding and his listeners, sometimes fully ignoring them and being immersed in his trance (*samadhi*); sometimes talking with the Mother Kali Herself, or to himself, he spoke in various moods which was impossible for a novice to note down. It was Sri M.'s deep and rich religious training, which made him a fit carrier of Sri Ramakrishna's words and ideas.

Sri M. could publish only a part of his immense treasures of Sri Ramakrishna's words. But in his private conversations he distributed this holy water of his language, (*Gangajali* i.e. water of the Ganges) to all who yearned for it. In later years, some of his associates published their memories of Sri M.<sup>1</sup> Those are actually reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna, for Sri M. after coming in touch with Sri Ramakrishna, lost himself in that embodiment of blessedness. He was the incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings – as a Hindu would like to describe him.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Sri Ma Darshan’ by Swami Nityatmananda, in 16 volumes, is the most exhaustive record in this respect.

One must be prepared to accept the world of Ramakrishna, before one can really appreciate the mastery of Sri *M.*'s art of writing. It was in the seventies of the nineteenth century Bengal, in India, where the East and the West met and struggled with their wide difference and inner unity. Of the difference we can talk a lot, but over the unity we rarely ponder. Man, everywhere is distinguished from the level of other animals, because he can think of the Eternal. There is no country in this world, where someone or other is not struggling to realize the Truth – truth in divine sense. Outward patterns of this search may be different, but the inner urge is everywhere the same.

Through Sri Ramakrishna India spoke to the world about this unity in the diverse ways of man's search for Truth. Much before Vivekananda started preaching, an English newspaper of Calcutta announced on 28 March 1875 –

“A Hindu Saint: – We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful.”<sup>2</sup> In these few lines we find the essence of literary appreciation of Sri Ramakrishna, as a litterateur of spoken words. More appreciations were to follow.

But the art of Sri *M.* was properly appreciated by Swami Vivekananda, perhaps for the first time in literary history, in a note dated 7 February 1889 – after reading the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English: “Thanks! 100000 times Master. You have hit Ramkristo in the right point.”

Later in a letter dated 24 November 1897, he wrote:

“My dear ‘M.’, Many many, many, many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original and never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise – so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy, I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? ... I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you – this great work. He is with you, evidently ...

“(P.S.) Socratic dialogues are Plato all over – you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it, here or in the West.”<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that Swami Vivekananda saw the first volume of Bengali ‘Kathamrita’, which was published in March 1902. We can easily surmise that his opinion on the Bengali version was equally full of praise.

Mr. N. Ghosh wrote in “The Indian Nation” on 19 May 1902 – “*Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by *M.* (part I) is a work of singular value and interest. He has done a kind of work, which no Bengalee had ever done before, which so far as we are aware no native of India had ever done. It has been done only once in history namely by Boswell. But then the immortal biography is only the life of a scholar and a kind-hearted man. This *Kathamrita* on the other hand, is the record of the sayings of a saint. What is the wit or even the worldly wisdom of the great Doctor by the side of the divine teaching of a genuine devotee? Its value is immense. We say nothing of the sayings themselves for the

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<sup>2</sup> *The Indian Mirror*, 28 March 1875: This paper was run by the renowned preacher Keshab Chandra Sen of Brahma Samaj (Nava Vidhan Group). Incidentally Keshab Sen may be reckoned as the first preacher to write about Sri Ramakrishna in newspapers. (Quoted from ‘*Samasamayik Dristite Sri Ramakrishna*’: Bengali: Edited by Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajani Kanta Das, Publisher: General Printers).

<sup>3</sup> Kathamrita: Part V. Bengali edition.

character of the Teacher and teaching is well-known.”<sup>4</sup>

Compared to Swami Vivekananda’s comments, Sri Ghosh’s remarks are more on Sri Ramakrishna’s sayings than on *Sri M.*’s literary skill. Still in the latter’s comparison of *Sri M.* with Boswell there is a real insight of literary understanding. In recent times, Aldous Huxley referred to Eckerman also in this context.

In his foreword to the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Huxley wrote – “The world has had many hundreds of admirable poets and philosophers; but of these hundreds, only a few have had the fortune to attract a Boswell or an Eckerman ...

“*M.*, as the author modestly styles himself, was peculiarly qualified for his task. To a reverent love of his Master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that Master’s teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, *M.* produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and so indefatigable a Boswell.”<sup>5</sup>

From Plato to Boswell we have the world’s best recorders of the sayings of great men in different periods of history. Along with this we may remember the Bible (King James’ Version) by which *Sri M.* and all his contemporaries were more or less influenced. The sayings of Sri Ramakrishna are comparable to Christ’s sayings in their utter simplicity, art in artlessness and direct spiritual quality. Naturally an English educated Brahmo-minded thinker like *Sri M.* took the sayings of Ramakrishna, as the *Gospel* of the modern age and tried to render them in somewhat Biblical language in his English leaflets of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Even in the English version, these sayings had a tremendous effect. But by publishing the sayings in the original Bengali, the real Ramakrishna was established once for all before the contemporary and future readers. We shall humbly make an attempt in this article to evaluate, as far as it is given to us, the merit of the *Kathamrita* as a piece of literature.

As a reader of Bengali literature, one is first struck by the creation of atmosphere in *Kathamrita* – the contemporary world of Sri Ramakrishna comes out in its minutest details in and around Calcutta. It would have been more interesting if we could find Ramakrishna in his native village among the common people. But as we have it, the first and foremost attraction is in the Dakshineswar temple. In this temple and within its vicinity at the Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna realized the Supreme Truth in its various phases. Mother Kali and various other deities of Hindu conception were revealed to him within the arena of Dakshineswar temple. Later he referred to his visions time and again while discussing his religious experiences. Some of these narrations are full of poetry.

But when *Sri M.* first met Sri Ramakrishna in the month of February 1882, he did not believe in gods and goddesses with forms. His description of the second meeting (very soon after his first brief meeting) is so sincere, so revealing and full of humanity that the reader is at once taken in the fold of spiritual brotherhood of Sri Ramakrishna’s apostles. The victory of Ramakrishna over this highly educated young man of his contemporary learned society reveals equally the greatness of these two minds – of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Kathamrita*. Part V: Bengali edition.

<sup>5</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* published by Ramakrishna Math, Madras.



Master, as well as of the disciple:

*Master:* Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?

*M.* (rather surprised said to himself): How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with Form? ...

*M.:* Sir, I like to think of God as formless.

*Master:* Very good. It is very good to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form. That is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just, as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction...

*M.:* Sir, suppose one believes in God with form, certainly He is not the clay image!

*Master* (interrupting): But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.

*M.* could not quite understand the significance of this 'image of Spirit'. "But, sir," he said to the Master, "One should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay."

*Master* (sharply): That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people – giving lectures and bringing light to others! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself! Who are you to teach others?

He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone... If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide...

This was *M.*'s first argument with the Master, and happily his last.<sup>6</sup>

Thus from the very beginning the *Kathamrita* brings out a great drama of the inner soul. On the one hand there is a man (or God), whose every inch of being is nothing but spirituality, on the other there is a devotee who would not drink anything but divine nectar. May be, he is not a monk, a *sannyasi*. To us it is a divine grace that he remained in the so-called worldly life, and made this our worldly life full of his reminiscences of the Master. Thus he connected our limited world with the eternal divine world. His whole life became a constant worship through remembrance and meditation.

A product of the then modern English education, Sri *M.* was fondly referred to as an 'Englishman' by Sri Ramakrishna. In his characteristic coinage, Sri Ramakrishna meant by the word 'Englishman', both a man with knowledge of English and a man westernised by that knowledge. Of course, Sri *M.* was not like those young Bengalis who became drunk with western ideals. In reality, his western education made him a seeker of Truth. So when the real occasion came he shunned all complex of superiority, and offered himself at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, as a true disciple in search of Truth. But this metamorphosis of Sri *M.*'s personality has been recorded by himself with such humility and devotion that he wins the hearts of his readers from the very beginning of the *Kathamrita*.

Regarding the dramatic quality of the *Kathamrita*, we may remember that Sri *M.* has recorded Sri Ramakrishna's many meetings with different personalities. These meetings are full of intellectual and spiritual action-reactions, always dissolving in the great ocean of godliness. Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bankim Chandra

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Chattopadhyay, Mahendranath Sarkar, young Narendranath (Vivekananda) – the great luminaries of the 19th century intellectual world are represented in the *Kathamrita* in various moments, and Sri Ramakrishna always comes out in these meetings as the hero of a great drama of *bhakti* and *jnana* (devotion and knowledge). For a future biographical dramatist of Sri Ramakrishna there are scores of scenes in the *Kathamrita* which can be compared with the scenes of any great drama of the world.

We are presenting here one such scene. Vidyasagar and Sri Ramakrishna met in the former's house on 5 August 1892. Sri *M.*, at that time, a teacher in Vidyasagar's school, was instrumental in arranging this meeting. As a true dramatist, Sri *M.* put these two unique characters the world has ever produced in their own light and although he himself was present all the time, rarely came in front:

“*Master*: Ah! Today, at last, I have come to the ocean. Up till now I have seen only canals, marshes, or a river at the most. But today I am face to face with the *sagar* (the ocean). (All laugh).

*Vidyasagar* (smiling): Then please take home some salt water. (Laughter).

*Master*: Oh, no! Why salt water? You aren't the ocean of ignorance. You are the ocean of Vidya, knowledge. You are the ocean of *Khsira* (*condensed milk*). (All laugh)

*Vidyasagar*: Well, you may put it that way.

Vidyasagar became silent. Sri Ramakrishna said, “Your activities are inspired by *sattva*. Though they are *rajasik*, they are influenced by *sattva*. Compassion springs from *sattva*. Though work for the good of others belongs to *rajas*, yet this *rajas* has *sattva* for its basis and is not harmful. Suka and other sages cherished compassion in their minds to give people religious instruction, to teach them about God. You are distributing food and learning. That is good too. If these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God. But most people work for fame or to acquire merit (*punya*). Their activities are not selfless. Besides, you are already a *siddha* (one perfected by religious practice or who is mellowed by devotion just as rice becomes soft after boiling.)

*Vidyasagar*: How is that, Sir?

*Master* (laughing): When potatoes and other vegetables are well cooked, they become soft and tender. And you possess such a tender nature! You are so compassionate! (Laughter)

*Vidyasagar* (laughing): But when the paste of *Kalai* pulse is boiled, it becomes all the harder.

*Master*: But you don't belong to this class. Mere pandits are like a diseased fruit that becomes hard and will not ripen at all. Such a fruit has neither the freshness of a green fruit nor the flavour of a ripe one ... Compassion, love of God, and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge.

Vidyasagar listened to these words in silence.<sup>7</sup>

Both in humour and wit these two masters of conversation gave ample evidence of their wealth of language. Through the pen of Sri *M.*, the world has found this wealth forever recorded. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna's literary genius has found its widest

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from the translation of Swami Nikhilananda in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*; p. 27; Fifth Madras R.K. Math edition. [Vide the original Bengali version of *Kathamrita*; Part III.]

expression in Sri *M.*'s records. But there was no such Boswell for Vidyasagar.

We can give another example of Sri *M.*'s capacity of capturing dramatic moments from Sri Ramakrishna's life. This is one of the earliest meetings of Narendranath (at that time a young man of nineteen) and Sri Ramakrishna. Time: 5 March, 1882. It was the day of Sri *M.*'s third visit. Place: small north verandah of Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar.

"Sri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees, and Narendranath was singing. *M.* had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told *M.* that the Master was in *samadhi*. *M.* had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought: "Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state!"

Narendranath was singing –

*Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari ...  
Ever more beautiful in fresh blossoming love  
That shames the splendour of a million moons,  
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,  
Raising erect the hair for very joy.'*

The Master shuddered when this last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, "that shames the splendour of a million moons"? Was this the vision of God, true Essence of Spirit? How much austerity and discipline, how much faith and devotion, must be necessary for such a vision!

The song went on –

*Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart;  
With mind serene and eyes made radiant  
With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.*

Again that bewitching smile. The body motionless as before, the eyes half shut, as if beholding a strange inner vision."<sup>8</sup>

Thus by a few strokes, Sri *M.* brought out the inner sublimity of Sri Ramakrishna. The picture is so vivid, almost photographic. The readers of this book will find so many instances of this kind and realize that the disciple *M.* had a rare gift of creating the atmosphere from his prodigious memory. In the above mentioned first quotation we saw Sri Ramakrishna in conversation, in the second quotation we find him all in trance and Sri *M.* recording the various finer shades of feelings on his face. With minimum words Sri *M.* brought out maximum expression. Here is one of his best pen-pictures.

*The Kathamrita* is a great drama in which Sri *M.*'s conversations are more in soliloquy. On the one side he described the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings, with minutest details, on the other he has recorded his own reactions to those occasions. In world literature there are other biographies where talks of the central figures are recorded, but rarely do we find such accuracy of atmospheric details. With such atmospheric details the words or moods of Sri Ramakrishna had a total dimension which

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<sup>8</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras: 5th ed.: pp. 13-14.

is essential for a real biography.

We are quoting here one such example in English translation from the original *Kathamrita* (second part) – “Brother, let us visit Sri Ramakrishna in the Dakshineswar temple. How he is playing with his disciples, how deeply he is in divine ecstasy! Sometimes in trance, sometimes merged in the joy of singing *kirtana*, again sometimes conversing with the devotees just like an ordinary man. There is nothing but God’s name in his holy mouth; he is always drawn into his inner self; his behaviour is like a child of five. With every breath he is uttering the name of the Divine Mother. A child of five has no ego, always full of joy, simple and large-hearted.

Sri Ramakrishna says only this – ‘God alone is permanent, all else is temporary. Let us visit that God-intoxicated young boy! A great yogi! Moving alone beside the endless Sea of Satchidananda!...’<sup>9</sup>

To a modern reader of Bengali literature the language of Sri Ramakrishna is as fresh as ever. Even today his conversations as recorded in the *Kathamrita* put us in an immediate rapport with him. Sri *M.*’s language in the *Kathamrita* has a touch of embellishment, which reminds the reader, more or less of the 19th century prose-style. Still Sri *M.*’s expression is absorbing, lucid, and picturesque, with a melody of its own. Throughout the *Kathamrita*, in Sri *M.*’s observation and presentation of Sri Ramakrishna’s personality and sayings there is something like a mood of constant worship. We can feel the man, with his deep meditation, devotion and submission to God. To Sri *M.* nothing is more important than Sri Ramakrishna. So his personality and his pen both are steeped in that great ocean of spirituality, and thus the *Kathamrita* came out in five volumes.

The *Kathamrita* no doubt is a hagiography, instead of a modern biography in scientific sense. But how can one distinguish between biography and hagiography when one wants to write on a divine personality? One who seeks and realizes God, lives in a world of his own where visions are more true than ordinary seeing. But these visions became the foundation of Truth, Love and Sacrifice on the lines of Buddha, Christ or Ramakrishna. While reading the *Kathamrita* the reader feels that supreme sense of direct spiritual realization, for which both the Master and the disciple can deserve almost equal credit.

Sri *M.* was a poet who wrote poems in prose in the *Kathamrita*. Throughout the *Kathamrita* we find him as a lover of nature, preferring the quiet of Dakshineswar more than the din and bustle of city life. His short descriptions of nature’s beauty have enriched the *Kathamrita* time and again and these descriptions became a grand background for the words of the highest realisation uttered by his Master.

We are presenting before our readers one such example, where Sri *M.*’s love of nature’s beauty became a wonderful background for the meditation of his dearest Master Sri Ramakrishna –

“It was night. The moon rose, flooding all the quarters with its silvery light. *M.* was walking alone in the garden of the temple. On one side of the path stood the Panchavati, the bakul-grove, the nahabat, and the Master’s room; and on the other side flowed the Ganges, reflecting millions of broken moons on its rippling surface.

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from the *Kathamrita*.: Part II. Place: Dakshineswar. Date: 8 April 1883. This portion has been omitted in the English *Gospel*.

*M.* said to himself: Can one really see God? The Master says it is possible. He says that if one makes a little effort, then someone comes forward and shows the way. Well, I am married. I have children. Can one realize God in spite of all that?

*M.* reflected awhile and continued his soliloquy. Surely one can. Otherwise why should the Master say so?"<sup>10</sup>

This intermingling of nature's beauty and Sri *M.*'s soliloquy has enriched the *Kathamrita* time and again. But although a bhakta (devotee), Sri *M.* showed a fine balance between *bhakti* and *jnana*. Whenever he tried, in a few words, to explain the impact of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings, we find him a genuine teacher, always ready to help his followers with sympathetic understanding. But such occasions are rare. Sri *M.*'s greatest style is in effacing himself as much as possible, and focusing all attention on Sri Ramakrishna. Still he is always present with his Master, like the refrain of a song announcing the advent of God.

Little did the world know that a silent revolution was going on in and around the Dakshineswar Temple – a revolution both in the field of religion and in the field of literature. Since Sri Ramakrishna's time, Bengali language has become the medium of the highest realisation, the language of the common man, and the ideal form of expression in literature. Vivekananda became the forerunner of modern Bengali prose, Girish Chandra gave a new impetus to Bengali drama, Saradananda wrote one of the best biographies of Ramakrishna;<sup>11</sup> in modern times Achintya Kumar Sengupta wrote two very popular books on Ramakrishna.<sup>12</sup> Swami Nityatmananda continued with the tradition of Sri *M.*'s *Kathamrita* with his sixteen-volume '*Sri Ma Darshan*' which is based on his association with Sri *M.*

With Sri Ramakrishna's growing influence on Bengali literature, Sri *M.*'s impact is also being felt day by day. He is the modern Garuda, carrying the message of Sri Ramakrishna for all those who are weary and thirsty at present or in future.

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<sup>10</sup> Vide *Kathamrita (Part II)*: dt. 14-12-1883. Place: Dakshineswar. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> '*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*' (in 5 volumes).

<sup>12</sup> '*Parampurusha Sri Ramakrishna*' and '*Kavi Sri Ramakrishna*'

## 18. THE STORY OF THE KATHAMRITA

B. Dey

No book so far has brought to light the life and work of Sri *M.* so well as *Sri Ma Darshan* – a 16 volume work in Bengali. Sri B. Dey is an avid reader of this work as of the *Kathamrita* and likes to be known only as the *sevak-santan* of Swami Nityatmananda. In the following write-up this devotee-writer gives an account of the *Kathamrita* based mostly on his gleanings from *Sri Ma Darshan*. Except for the first three volumes of this work under the title '*M., the Apostle and the Evangelist*,' none of the remaining volumes have so far been translated into English. This study, therefore, would be of special interest to our readers outside Bengal.

**“... re-live the divine play of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna as recorded by his Evangelist.”**

It was Sunday, the 26th of February in the year 1882 A.D. Sri *M.* was at Dakshineswar in the temple of the Goddess Kali where the God-man Sri Ramakrishna was then living. After the *arati* (evening worship) Sri *M.* went into Sri Ramakrishna's presence and saw him entering *bhava-samadhi*. After exchanging a word or two Sri *M.* saluted the Master to depart but his mind was being pulled to His feet. Bidding him good-bye, Thakur said, “Come again.” This was the first meeting of Sri *M.* with the Master, the seed that grew and blossomed into the thousand-petalled lotus that is *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. A hundred years have rolled by since this seemingly insignificant incident took place. It was, however, verily the foundation-stone of the great scripture, the *Kathamrita*. It is to celebrate this Day, so significant in the history of religion that *Sri Ma Trust* is bringing out *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial* so that the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna may be inspired to re-live the divine play of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna as recorded by His evangelist Sri *M.* in the *Kathamrita* or the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Sri *M.* was born endowed with many a divine quality – faith in God, devotion to gods and the twice-born, reverence to superiors, sweet speech, sweet disposition, a wonderful power to penetrate into the inner import of the *shastras*, a prodigious memory, profoundly serene demeanour and so on. Among his other qualities were his lifelong love of knowledge and study, an uncommon moral courage, identification with the sorrows of others, sympathy, kindness and charity, service and self-control. We may add that while studying in Class VIII (then called class III) in the Hare School in Calcutta, in 1867, he was inspired by an Unseen Hand to keep his daily diary. Some of his early notings significantly were: “Today, on rising, I greeted my father and mother by lying prostrate on the ground before them;” or “Today, while on my way to school, I visited, as usual, the temples of Kali, the Mother, at Thanthania and Mother Shitala and paid obeisance to them.” Fifteen years later when Sri *M.* met Sri Ramakrishna, it was this practice combined with his extraordinary qualities of head and heart that gave birth to *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*.

Since his first meeting with the Master on the 26th February, 1882 Sri *M.* would always remain absorbed in the thought of the Master day and night and await the next opportunity of having his *darshan*. He used to say, “Thakur made my condition such that I would listen to his words for seven or eight hours, and watch him. After I returned

home, I would note down everything. I remembered it all – while in the process of noting down, whole conversations would emerge one after the other. All the notings could not be done in one day; they would gradually come to the mind. Such deep impression did He (Thakur) make! I had been writing for five years but none knew of it. This period of five years was the time when Thakur’s Divine Play was manifesting itself.”<sup>1</sup>

### **The Diary that blossomed into the Immortal Kathamrita**

Expanding some of the notes in his diary Sri *M.* first brought out two pamphlets in English. Later on the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali came to be produced containing the immortal words of Thakur with details like place, date, *tithi*, hour, the name of the participants. Sri *M.* used to keep notes in his diary in a sort of Bengali shorthand, which was his own discovery. In order to have an idea as to how he would develop his notes into a narration; let us go through a scene described in Volume XV of *Sri Ma Darshan* by Swami Nityatmananda (page 399) –

“It was the month of May, in the year 1932 A.D. A sadhu (Swami Nityatmananda) came to Sri *M.* from the Belur Math. That day Sri *M.* would be writing the ‘*Kathamrita*’. The sadhu saw the following words noted in Sri *M.*’s note-book in his own style of keeping notes: *Kamar Shaler Noya*. From this Sri *M.* built up the scene thus – ‘Why is it not possible in the household? Because the mind is attached to woman and gold. The mind is just like *Kamar Shaler Noya* (the thin bangle made of iron in an iron-smith’s shop). It is red so long as it is in the fire but pull it out and you will find it to be the same as it was before. Either live alone or be in the company of sadhus. When you are companionless the mind dries up considerably. It is somewhat like the water that dries up when kept in a small earthen pot. But if the small earthen pot itself is kept in a bigger vessel containing the water of the Ganga, the water in the small earthen pot will not dry up.’

“Seeing this the sadhu thought it was simply amazing: It occurred to him that while writing the *Kathamrita*, Sri *M.* had become one with Thakur on the mental plane. Whatever arose in that pure concentrated mind was written down by Sri *M.* as he meditated on the notes preserved with him.” (Swami Vivekananda) has rightly said this very thing ‘... It has been reserved for you – this great work ... He is with you evidently’. Once in 1925, Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj asked Sri *M.* how he could write the wonderful *Kathamrita* from such a meagre sketch? Modestly Sri *M.* said, “By His Grace alone. People take these incidents to have occurred over forty years ago. But I see them before my very eyes, at this very moment. In meditation the distance of time vanishes. To be in love and devotion is to be in the presence of ‘*the eternal now*’ – no relation to past or future.”<sup>2</sup>

Sri *M.* never took notes of the holy words of Thakur while sitting with him. He made notes after he returned home. We find Sri *M.* himself mentioning this in Volume XI of *Sri Ma Darshan*, page 104. The text runs as follows:–

“Swami Madhavananda, president of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the Himalayas, came to Sri *M.* one day (March 20,1924) from the Belur Math. He said to Sri *M.*, ‘Well Sir, didn’t you note down the words of Thakur just when you heard them?’

Sri *M.* – No. I didn’t note them down on the spot. I wrote everything from memory after I returned home. Sometimes I had to keep awake the whole night. What I have

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<sup>1</sup> *Sri Ma Darshan*: Vol. 5, page 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Sri Ma Darshan*, Vol. 13, page 97.

presented here is not collected from others. Only what I have seen of the divine play of Thakur with my own eyes and heard with my own ears from His holy mouth has been narrated. I have not collected as the antiquarians do – only what I myself heard from Thakur’s holy mouth or saw with my own eyes....

*Swami Madhavananda* – Within this short time so much change is to be seen (in respect of the narration of the life and words of Thakur).

*Sri M.* – What is surprising in this? It does happen. Why, look at the Bible. The four Gospels (of the Bible) are not similar. It is not surprising at all... Sometimes I would keep on writing the events of one sitting for seven days, recollect the songs that were sung, and the order in which they were sung, and the *samadhi* and so on.”

Another evidence. Swami Deshikananda had gone to Puri towards the end of November 1925. There, he met *Sri M.* On the fourth day of his stay at Puri, this Swamiji asked *Sri M.* as to how he wrote *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. *Sri M.* gave the following reply to Swamiji:<sup>3</sup>

“I would carry the nectarine words of Thakur in my memory and on returning home would briefly record them in the diary. Many times it took me a whole week to take down from memory all the words of a single day’s conversation, eager like a lark as I was for every little word of Thakur. The book “*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*” appeared in book form much later from these notes. On every scene I have meditated a thousand times throughout my life. Therefore, the story of Thakur Lila (divine play) which took place forty years ago was again enacted before my eyes by Thakur’s grace, as if I had just been witnessing it, the distance of time having been annihilated. In this sense, it can be said that the story of Thakur was recorded in the living presence of Thakur Himself. Many a time I did not feel satisfied with my description of the events; I would then immediately plunge myself in deep meditation on Thakur. Then the correct image would arise before my mind’s eye in a bright, real and living form. That is why in spite of the big gap in time in the physical sense, this story remains so fresh and lifelike in my mind as if it happened just now.

“Swami Brahmananda, Swami Shivananda, Swami Abhedananda and other bhaktas sometimes tried to keep notes of Thakur’s words secretly. On coming to know of it Thakur dissuaded them saying, “There is already a man for it...”

“During conversations, sometimes Sri Ramakrishna would ask *Sri M.* to repeat what had previously been said to the bhaktas. In case of any inaccuracy in *Sri M.*’s narration, Thakur would correct him. On returning home, *Sri M.* would correct his previous notes in his diary.”

At the time of his conversation with bhaktas when *Sri M.* did not happen to be present, Thakur would send for him and call him to his side. The reason was this. Thakur knew that for this great work *Sri M.* had already been appointed by the Mother of the Universe. *Sri M.* was born to be the evangelist of Sri Ramakrishna.

During a conversation with Swami Nityatmananda on 8 September 1924, *Sri M.* talked of three classes of evidence:<sup>4</sup> When a writer records on the same day what he has seen of or heard from Thakur, it is a first class evidence; when he records his first hand

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<sup>3</sup> *M.*-The Apostle and the Evangelist, Vol. I, 2nd Edition. Pages 442-443.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Ma Darshan, Vol. IX, p. 147



information days later, it is a second class evidence; and when he records what he has heard other people say it is an evidence of the third class. Besides, there can be another class of evidence; let us call it the evidence of the fourth class. When a writer records at a later date the events and conversations of which he himself was a witness mixing them with hearsay his evidence fails into this 4th class.

Then ensued the following conversation between Sri *M.* and *Antevasi* (Swami Nityatmananda) regarding the *Kathamrita* itself.

“Sri *M.* – The *Kathamrita* is a first class evidence. The acts of Thakur I have seen with my own eyes and the holy words I have heard with my own ears, did I record the same day in my diary on reaching home. Sometimes I had continuously to write for days because on some days Thakur spoke for long. I have narrated all those divine scenes and words in the *Kathamrita*. I was present in all the scenes, which have been narrated in the main text of the *Gospel*.

*Antevasi* – But Sir, the memoirs of Ashwini Dutta, about Baranagore Math, etc. have also found a place in the *Kathamrita*.

Sri *M.* – Not in the main part of the book – it is only in an appendix. The main book contains only the direct evidence that which I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears.

“Such evidence is of great value for lawyers; you see, they are cultured men. Have you not seen what Ashwini Dutta has written? He says, ‘Am I so fortunate as *M.* to have kept notes of the holy words of Thakur with the day of the week, the *tithi* and *nakshatra*?’ In these words he has apologised before setting out to pen the words of Thakur. Ashwini Kumar Dutta also admitted that it was possible that he had ascribed the words of one day to some other day and might have forgotten much. Will you please bring the *Kathamrita*? ...

“There has been no such record of any *avatar* in world history,”<sup>5</sup> continued Sri *M.* during the course of the above conversation. “Only Swami Vivekananda was seized of it. He wrote to me, ‘The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public, untarnished by the writer’s mind as you are doing.’

“Because the books which are now coming out are based on evidences of the second and third class, they are rather confused. This book (the *Kathamrita*) is the first record of the life and word of an *avatara* of its kind in the world.

“The *Kathamrita* has done yet another good. The future writers of diaries or books would be greatly benefited if these three classes of evidence were in their knowledge. They would be on their guard against pushing in their own opinions while recording what others have said or done.”

Last but not least we have the testimony of Thakur himself. Swami Subodhananda was only 15 or 16 when he saw Sri Ramakrishna. On seeing him Thakur at once recognized him as his own and suggested that he might visit Sri *M.* – both of them were living in the same locality of Calcutta. But Swami Subodhananda (then known as Khoka) did not do so. This caused anxiety to Thakur. When he came next, Thakur inquired why he did not go to Sri *M.* After some hesitation Khoka replied, “Because he is a householder,” “No, no, none of those who come here is a *sansari* (worldly). They are all chosen persons of the (Divine) Mother; they have taken birth for

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<sup>5</sup> Romain Rolland

Her work. Go to him and you will know. Mahendra does not talk anything of his own. He will talk to you only of this place.”

Sri *M.* was always surrounded by sadhus and bhaktas. He considered the sadhus and bhaktas as his own near and dear ones and looked upon his kith and kin as strangers. In his opinion a householder and a monk both could be highly advanced in spiritual life, yet there would be difference between the two as between two ripe mangoes (or apples) of different grades.<sup>6</sup> The terrace of the third storey of Morton School and the staircase room always resounded with the holy words of God. Sri *M.* would sing the glory of Sri Ramakrishna with a thousand tongues. Broach any topic you like and Sri *M.* would drown it without your knowledge into the ocean of Nectar of Sri Ramakrishna’s words. The best use of eyes is to see Him, of the tongue to talk of Him and of the ear to hear of His glories.

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The nectarine words of Thakur were in the custody of Sri *M.* in the form of his diary. It was; however, not with the idea of publishing them that Sri *M.* had kept his diary. They were meant only for his own study and meditation when he was away from the Master. In the *Kathamrita*<sup>7</sup> itself we find Sri *M.* telling Girish Ghosh: ‘... I am writing it for myself, not for others ... you may get it when I die’. That was in April 1886. Later on his monk brother disciples kept on urging Sri *M.* to publish his diary. In his introductory submission dated the 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1910 to the Holy Mother, in Volume IV of the *Kathamrita*, Sri *M.* has stated that he took the difficult vow of writing *Sri Sri Kathamrita* thirteen years ago (that is in 1897) with the blessings of the Holy Mother, and that he got encouragement in various ways from Swami Vivekananda and other brother disciples. Sri *M.* has also stated in his submission that Sriyut Baburam, Shashi, Girish and other brothers continued always to encourage him. We have seen that Swami Vivekananda, while preparing Sri *M.*’s mind for the consequences which might follow the publication of the *Kathamrita*, on the basis of his own experiences inspired Sri *M.* to publish the words of Thakur in book form, saying, ‘It will not pay its way in pamphlet form’. With the blessings of the Holy Mother, Sri *M.* worked on some of his diary-notes to bring out the *Gospel* and the *Kathamrita*. Thus the words of Sri Ramakrishna saw the light of the day for the first time in print in English eleven years after He attained mahasamadhi. In overflowing praise, Swami Vivekananda said in a letter to Sri *M.*, “... It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.” Swami Vivekananda seems to have seen only these two pamphlets and not perhaps the *Kathamrita* in Bengali, the first part of which was published some time in 1902. Says Swami Tapasyananda in his introduction to the ‘Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna’, pages, XI & XII: “... the first installment of the English version, which elicited Swamiji’s unstinted praise and approval, assumes tremendous importance from the historical perspective of the *Gospel* literature.” Unfortunately, no copy of either of the two pamphlets seems to be available at present.

Shankari Prasad Basu in *Swami Vivekananda in Indian Press, 1893-1902*, (page 611) however indicates that some leaves of the Gospel appeared in the Prabuddha Bharata in the year 1898, possibly some time between January and June. It would be filling a gap in the *Gospel* literature if the contents of these two precious pamphlets could be republished from the old files of this great magazine.

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<sup>6</sup> Reminiscences of Master Mahashaya by Swami Satprakashananda (Vedanta Kesari, April, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> Part II page 242.

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We have seen that at first Sri *M.* took a small portion of his material, worked on it and published it in the form of two pamphlets in English under the title, “*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*”, in October and November 1897. When the *Gospel* started appearing before the public in English, Ramchandra Dutta wrote in a letter to Sri *M.* in ‘*Tattvamanjari*’ published from Yogodyan to advocate publication of the words of Thakur in an enlarged volume instead of fragmentary form, and secondly to request him not to give up the Bengali language.

Whatever may be the promptings, we find that after the publication of the two pamphlets in English, Sri *M.* started writing the *Kathamrita* in Bengali, the first volume of which was first published in 1902. It was not before 1907 (by then two volumes of Sri Sri Ramakrishna *Kathamrita* in Bengali had come out) that the “*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*”, Volume I in English came to be published.

We may continue here with the English version of the *Gospel* and touch upon the other versions passingly before getting on to the Bengali version.

### **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in Sri *M.*’s own English**

Sri *M.* was anxious that the *Gospel* should spread far and wide and its influence reach every corner of the land.<sup>8</sup> For this reason he wrote, “*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*” in English. In his introductory letter of *Phalgun*, 1910, published in Volume I of the ‘*Kathamrita*’ (in its 5th edition) Sri *M.* wrote, “Mother, once again has arrived the holy birthday of Sri Sri Thakur. *Sri Sri Kathamrita* enters its fifth edition today. Its English translation has also been done. With your blessings the nectarine words of Thakur are now spreading in the whole of India and Europe and America...”

The first volume in English (1907) bore on its title page the following words: ‘*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* [According to *M.* (Mahendra), a son of the Lord and disciple].’ A sub-title was also given as below: ‘or *The Ideal Man for India and for the World.*’ It was published from the Brahmavadin Office, Madras. In its second edition the word ‘Mahendra’ and the entire sub-title were deleted. Sri *M.* himself said of his first book: ‘It is no sentence by sentence translation but *M.*’s own rendering of his thoughts rather than language, directly into English with many elaboration’s and elucidating repetitions’. The language of the first edition was archaic, a kind of evangelical language. We give below a page or so from Section II of the book.

*The Master on Jnana Yoga: The Vedanta or Advaita Philosophy, or Philosophy of the Unconditioned.*

(a) *Brahman of the Vedanta – The Absolute and the Unconditioned:*

Master: Well, I was talking of Vidya. But Brahman is above and beyond *Vidya* (the relative knowledge which leadeth God ward) as well as *Avidya* (the world which keepeth all beings away from the knowledge of God).

The knowledge leading God ward is the last, topmost step of the stairs leading up to the roof. The Absolute is the roof.

The phenomenal world<sup>9</sup> is made up of that<sup>10</sup> which leadeth God ward and that<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Swami Vivekananda in Indian press, page 611.

<sup>9</sup> Maya.

<sup>10</sup> Vidya

<sup>11</sup> Avidya

which doth not. Thus God the Absolute<sup>12</sup> is above and beyond the phenomenal world.

(b) *The Absolute is perfectly unattached. The Problem of Good & Evil Solved.*

The Absolute is unattached to good or evil. It is like the light of a lamp. You may read the Holy Scriptures<sup>13</sup> with the help of that light. It is equally open to you to forge a document with criminal intent in the same light. Again, the Absolute is like a snake. The snake hath poison in its fangs. But it is none the worse for it. The poison doth not affect it or cause its death. It is poison in relation to other creatures whom it may come to bite.

Whatever misery, whatever sin, whatever evil we find in this world is misery, sin and evil relatively to us. God the Absolute is not affected thereby. He is above and beyond all these things.

People talk glibly of the Infinite, the Absolute, the Unconditioned, as if they had a conception of it all!

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The second edition of the *Gospel* was revised by Sri *M.* himself 'freed from its Biblical turns of expression'. It was published by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in 1911. Subsequently, several editions of it were published by the Madras Math, and it was in circulation till 1942, when the full English translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Swami Nikhilananda came out. Thus we find that till 1942 the only available book in English, which carried the authentic words of Sri Ramakrishna to the English reading public was Sri *M.*'s own English edition of the *Gospel*. It seems that Sri *M.* did not find time to translate his Bengali work into English except volume I. It may, however, be added that Volume II of the *Gospel* was also published from Madras in 1922, but perhaps it did not meet with the approval of Sri *M.* So it did not appear any more after its second edition of 1928, which had its language 'edited and improved mostly by a Western friend.'

After about thirty-six years, in 1978, the *Gospel* written by Sri *M.* himself has once again become available to the public under the title *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. In his Introduction to this edition Swami Tapasyananda says, '... even now many devotees of the Great Master, who by chance happen to go through the pages of this old publication are thrilled by this – *M.*'s own English version; a persistent demand for its republication has been coming from the English reading public both in India and abroad ... this *M.*'s English version is too precious and authentic a book to be thrown into the limbo and forgotten by humanity and so we are republishing it as a condensed edition of the *Gospel*. . . if there is in the world any one text that comes very near the original teaching of a Godman it is the record of *M.* and *M.* alone.'

The following extracts would be of interest to our readers:

'One day in 1931 A.D. a sadhu from Belur Math was having a talk with Sri *M.* During their conversation the topic turned to 'Ramu Maharaj' of Madras. The sadhu said, "Sir, I saw Ramu also doing the same in Madras; he himself said that he had gone knocking from door to door with a begging bowl ... people thought as if a dog was knocking about around the street ... after so much labour that big 'Students' Home' has

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<sup>12</sup> Brahman

<sup>13</sup> Bhagavat

come into being; even now he keeps on working lying in bed, an invalid though he is.”

‘Sri M. then said, “Aha, it was the initiative and drive of Ramu and others which brought out the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Volume I). They had formed the Brahmavadin Club.” He went on, “The *Kathamrita* and the Gospel have not been written with my strength; the Mother gave me the strength and capacity; then only these have come out. You can see God, you can talk to Him, and the path is the love that passeth all understanding.” Sri M. continued, “This is the undercurrent of His words throughout and it is this that has to be brought out. Only then will the reading generate inspiration. ... In case that current of thought is maintained in the translation, then only there will be inspiration, and good will ensue to the people ... So many people know English, ... but where is that idea, that thought? Have they had the company of holy men, sadhus? Have they practised meditation on God? Those who have seen Thakur, they have that thought, that idea.”<sup>14</sup>

‘On another occasion Sri M. said, “... while talking Thakur would give expression to one feeling, a living feeling. I have tried my best to convey the same by preserving the same words as far as possible. The feeling was given primary importance; words or the language only secondary. And I have tried to express it in a simple language. If you ignore the aim with which He spoke the meaning becomes quite different.”<sup>15</sup>

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### **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Nikhilananda –**

The translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* was done by Swami Nikhilananda and published by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center New York, in 1942. It was brought out in its first Indian reprint by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras in 1944.

Readers would be interested to know that in September 1949, ‘The New York Herald Tribune,’ one of the most important dailies in the United States completed the twenty-fifth year of its Weekly Book Review Section. To commemorate the occasion several outstanding literary men of the country were invited to name three memorable books of the past twenty-five years. Thomas Sugrue, a distinguished literary figure and critic said in this connection that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York was the foremost philosophical publication of the last quarter century and added, ‘... The English version is a triumph of creative translation ... If we may venture an honest conviction of ours, firmly planted in us by whatever little understanding we have of the spiritual situation of modern humanity, the *Gospel* will become in time the authoritative basis of a broad conception of religion demanded by the present age.’<sup>16</sup>

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as translated by Swami Nikhilananda has claimed to be a ‘literal, regular and complete’ translation of the original in Bengali. In this translation, however, the material of the five volumes of the *Kathamrita* has been rearranged in a chronological order and *edited* at several places.<sup>17</sup>

Swami Nikhilananda also published an abridged edition of the longer and

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<sup>14</sup> Sri Ma Darshan. Vol. 16, page 119-122.

<sup>15</sup> *M. The Apostle and the Evangelist*, Vol. III, page 241.

<sup>16</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata*. December. 1949, page 495.

<sup>17</sup> Dharm Pal Gupta: *A Short Life of M.*, page 64.

complete *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In 1948, the Religious Books Round Table of the American Library Association judged it to be one of the, ‘fifty outstanding religious books for the year’ (May 1947-May 1948).<sup>18</sup>

### **Translation in Hindi Language**

*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* has been translated into Hindi by Pandit Surya Kant Tripathi ‘Nirala’ under the title, *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamrita* and published from Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nagpur. In it, the five volumes of Bengali have been reduced to three volumes. Though translated into a major Indian language by such an eminent writer, the translation is not as close to the original as might be expected in the case of *Gospel*.

### **Translations in other languages**

The *Kathamrita* has also been translated into Sanskrit and in many Indian languages<sup>19</sup> also in some foreign languages. The report of 1979 of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, 77220 – Gretz, France, gives us information about publication of the *Gospel* in French and German. It says, “... Beginning in January 1980, the ‘Vedanta’ is publishing in three volumes a French translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* according to *M.*’s own English version. The German branch which is called Vedanta-Zentrum Wiesbaden, has published in German a condensed *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* translated by Swami Nikhilananda.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (in Bengali)**

As mentioned earlier, Sri *M.* had taken the vow of writing the *Kathamrita* around 1897. ‘Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita according to *M.*’ – with this name the immortal words of Sri Ramakrishna started being published in Bengali in *Tattwamanjari*, *Banga Darshan*, *Udbodhan* and *Hindu* – the then periodicals. Later in 1902, all these published writings were compiled in a volume and published by Swami Trigunatitananda from the *Udbodhan Press*, under the title “Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, Part I.” This volume was followed by four more volumes at different intervals – the second in 1904-5; the third in 1908; the fourth in 1910; the fifth and the last of which appeared posthumously in 1932, the year of *M.*’s. passing away.<sup>21</sup>

The *Kathamrita* covers the period of Sri Ramakrishna’s life from the day Sri *M.* met the great Master for the first time, a hundred years ago, on Sunday, February 26, 1882 A.D., to Saturday, April 24, 1886 A.D., a little over three and a half months before his passing away. The probable reason for this omission has been given in these words by Christopher Isherwood: “... *M.* has left us no record of the last 3½ months of his life. . . It is said that *M.* left this gap in his narrative because he could not bear to write about the final stages of the cancer which caused his Master’s death.”

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‘All the words of Thakur are the words of Infinite Bliss. Is it given to all to enjoy that Supreme Bliss? It happens only when the time is ripe. After passing through many births enjoying the things of the material world, when one finds that the fleeting pleasures of the world are salt-less and insipid, then alone does one understand the

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<sup>18</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata*. April, 1949. Page 171.

<sup>19</sup> Dharm Pal Gupta: *A Short Life of M.*, page 64.

<sup>20</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata*, May, 1980, page 239.

<sup>21</sup> Dharm Pal Gupta: *A Short Life of M.*, page 62.

words of the *Kathamrita*. That is why Thakur used to say, “It is good to have acquaintance by hearing. When the time comes one will realize. Oh! That’s it.”<sup>22</sup>

‘ “He who wants to enter into the realm of Brahman will have to listen to the words of the Avatara, the words of the Veda. Avatara means God in human form,” said Sri M.<sup>23</sup>

‘Sri M. would tell the bhaktas, “Thakur used to speak from the summit. His realm was beyond the earth, in the domain where the world of God and the world of man meet ... Thakur saw the inside and outside, both: that Narayana (the Primal Person) dwells equally in all beings and the whole universe is absorbed in Narayana. Thakur’s insight was always rooted at that depth. That is the reason why the speech of Thakur, the words of Thakur are so attractive. That is where the charm of the *Kathamrita* lies.’

‘The Upanishad is nothing but divine talk which leads to God-realization and destroys worldliness. The Gita, the Srimad-Bhagavata are all Upanishads in this sense. So is the *Kathamrita* – all that Sri Ramakrishna said is Veda, Upanishad. The *Kathamrita* has proved to be veritable nectar for the spiritually thirsty of our age.’<sup>24</sup>

Jnana Maharaj said to a bhakta at the Belur Math, “In what terms did Swamiji (Vivekananda) speak of the *Kathamrita*! Such a praise he gave to no other book. It is through the *Kathamrita* that we first came to know about Thakur ... “

We may also recall what on the sacred occasion of the birthday of the Holy Mother at the Belur Math on the 18th December, 1924 did Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj say to Sri M. He said, “Master Mahashaya.... (the *Kathamrita*) appears to be new and fresh every time that I read it ... Aha, what a wonderful book you have composed! ... By enquiry I have come to the conclusion that 85 per cent (*14 annas*) of sadhus have embraced the monastic life after reading the *Kathamrita* and coming in contact with you.”

On June 4, 1932, Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj said, “Extraordinary indeed was his (Sri M.’s) memory. The notes, which he kept, were so brief; yet later on he would meditate and meditate on them and remember everything. Thus did he write down the *Vachanamrita*! He was Thakur’s very own. It was, as it were, Thakur had brought him along with Him for getting this work done.”<sup>25</sup> Jai Sri Ramakrishna!

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<sup>22</sup> *Sri Ma Darshan*, Volume 7, pages 79 & 80.

<sup>23</sup> *Sri Ma Darshan*, Volume 6, page 199.

<sup>24</sup> Dharm Pal Gupta: *A Short Life of M.*, page 63.

<sup>25</sup> Dharma prasanga mein Swami Shivananda, p. 357

## 19. TWO PAGES FROM SRI M.'S DIARY

[Frontispiece Part II of this volume]

Below, the reader will find the text of two pages, 12 and 13, of *M.*'s original diary, deciphered and transliterated into Roman script and interpreted by Sri D. K. Sengupta. The full narrative written from these notes' by Sri *M.* may be seen in the chapter of the *Gospel* entitled 'Visit to Vidyasagar'.

### Transliteration

[Page 12]

Visit to Vidyasagar 1882  
5th Aug 82 Sat: Shra. 26

Sc P Myself, Hazra, Bhavanath –

Sc I. Rasta-Gadite-before Ram Mohon  
Rayer Bati

*M.* – Reminding of Ram Mohon  
Sri – “Dur Karo Ami Ekhan Anya  
Kichhu shunbona.”

Sc II

(Gadi hoti namar par shindi othar  
age)

Sri – (to me) “Jamar Botam Ki Debo?”  
I – Tar Darkar nai – Apnar Kichhu  
Darkar nai

Sc III, upstairs

(Table Dhore Paschimasya – Sahasya)  
Sri – Looks at Vidya S who stands up  
to receive

Sc. IV

Sri (Abishta) Ami Jal (Khabar) Khabo

Vidya – Goes in & brings Mithai (from  
Bardhaman)

(Mithai being offered to me)

Vidya – O Gharer Chhele

Myself – ‘ ‘

Sri (to Vidya) – “Sat o Antahsar  
Jemon Falgu Nadi”

2. Est. of Vidyasagar

Sri – ‘Aaj Sagare Ese Militam’ – Eto  
Din Khal Bil Nadi Hadda Dekhechhi

### Interpretation

[Page 12]

*Visit to Vidyasagar 1882*  
*5th August 1882, Saturday Shraavan*  
*26*

*Present in the scene: Myself, Hazra,*  
*Bhavanath*

*Scene I. – Road, in the carriage,*  
*before Ram Mohan Roy's House*

*M. – Reminding of Ram Mohan*  
*Sri Ramakrishna – “Leave it. I am*  
*not going to listen to anything else*  
*now.”*

*Scene II*

*(After alighting from the carriage,*  
*before climbing the stairs)*

*Sri R.K. (to me) – “Shall I button my*  
*shirt?”*

*I – “No need. You don't need (do)*  
*anything.”*

*Scene III, Upstairs*

*(Holding to the table – face to the west*  
*– smiling)*

*Sri R.K. looks at Vidyasagar who*  
*stands up*  
*to receive*

*Scene IV*

*Sri R.K. (in an ecstatic mood) – “I*  
*shall have a drink of water.”*

*Vidyasagar goes in and brings sweets*  
*(from Burdwan)*

*(Sweets being offered to me)*

*Vidyasagar – “He is. one of the*  
*family”*

*Myself – ‘ ‘*

*Sri R.K. (to Vidyasagar) – “Honest*  
*and sound to the core, like the river*  
*Phalgu.”*

*2. Est.? of Vidyasagar*

*Sri – “Today I have come to the ocean.*  
*Up till now I have seen only canals,*



Vi – ‘Nona Jal Niye Jan’

Sri – ‘Na go Tumi to Avidyar Sagar  
Nao, Tumi Kshir Samudra Vidyar  
Sagar

Vi – Ta Bolte Paren (a)

.....  
Sri – Tomar Satwer Rajo – Danadi  
Dosh Nai – Daya (b)

[Page 13]

Sri Sri Gurudeva  
Sri Charan Bharasha  
Sri – Ar Tumi Siddha – Kenona Alu  
Patol Siddha Hole Narom Hai – Tate  
Tomar Ato Daya – Naram (c)

Vi – Kalai Bata Shakta Hay

Sri – Tumi Ta Nao – Shudhu Pandit  
Darkacha pada, Na Edik Na Odik

3. Brahma (Vidya Avidyar Par)

- (a) Nirlipta e. pradip  
(b) Sarpa & Vish Mystery of Good  
and Evil  
(c) Surya (equally kind to Dushta  
and Shishta)  
(d) Uccishte Han Nai  
  
(Avyapadeshyam)

Ba, Aj Ekti Nutan Katha Shikhlam

(e) e.g. Chinir Pahad – Shuk  
Devadi Deo Pimpde – Na hai 8/10  
Ta Dana Mukha Korechhilo

(f) e.g. Sagar – Predicable Hiloll  
Kallol so Brahma ‘Anandam’  
– Shuk Devadi Darshan Sparshan  
Korechhilo

*marshes or a river at the most.”*  
*Vidyasagar – “Please take home some  
salt water.”*

*Sri. R.K. – “Oh no! You are not the  
ocean of ignorance; You are  
Vidyasagar, the ocean of knowledge.”*

*Vidyasagar – “You may say that.” (a)*

.....  
*Sri R.K. – “Your rajas is of sattva –  
compassion – not harmful. (b)*

[Page 13]

*The Lotus feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva,  
my only Refuge!*

*Sri R.K. – Besides you are already a  
Siddha\*. When potatoes and other  
vegetables are boiled they become  
tender. And you possess so much of  
compassion, such a tender nature. (c)*  
*Vidyasagar – But the paste of Kalai  
pulse when boiled becomes hard.*  
*Sri R.K. – You are not like that. Mere  
Pandits are like diseased fruits  
neither here nor there.*

3. Brahma (Beyond Knowledge  
and Ignorance)

- (a) Unaffected e.g. light of lamp  
(b) e.g. Snake and poison. Mystery  
of Good and Evil.  
(c) e.g. The Sun (equally kind to  
the virtuous and the wicked)  
(d) Has not been defiled by the  
touch of tongue.

(Avyapadeshyam)

*Oh! I’ve learnt something new today.*

(e) e.g. a hill of sugar –  
*Sukadeva and sages like him may  
have been only big ants – at the  
most eight or ten grams of sugar  
could be carried by them.*

*e.g. Ocean – Predicable waves and  
sound, so Brahman ‘Bliss’  
– Sukadeva and other sages only  
saw and touched the water of the  
Ocean*

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\* Literally refers to a perfected soul or boiled things.

Duble Ar Phirtona

Dui Putra O Bap

g) Ni (Sa, Re, Ga, Ma ...) Kintu Ni-te Thaka Jayna

4. Purna Jnani  
Khapar Deyna – Laban Puttalika & Sagar

Bichar Karena e. Paka Ghrita

(Exception, Jnan Upadesh – Paka Ghiye Kachha Nuchi i.e. Shishya)  
Purna Kalasi e.g. Phule Bosechhe

5. Agamya Apar  
Gan – Ke Jane Kali Kemon, Shada Darshane Darshan Melena)  
Kali Udar Brahmanda Bhandra  
Prakanda

6. Vedanta O Soham  
(a) Ami Narayana – E Jnan Thik Noi

(b) Tine Atal Nishkriya, Tar Tin Gune Samsar, Tante Vidya Avidya Duni-i achhe

(c) Ni-te Thaka Jayna  
(d) Jnan Jog & Bhakti Jog  
“Tini Aishwarja purna (Bhagaban)

(e) Je Babu Ghar Dor Bikolo se Babu Ki?

*– If they had plunged into it, they would not have come back.  
Two sons and their father*

*(g) Ni (Sa, Re, Ga, Ma ...) But the voice cannot stand for long on Ni.  
4. One who has attained direct knowledge of Brahman cannot report on its nature – e.g. Salt-doll and Ocean.*

*Does not reason e.g. clarified butter when fully hot.  
Exception: For teaching others – an uncooked cake of flour (i.e. disciple) (in that hot clarified butter). e.g. filled-up pitcher, e.g. sitting on the flower.*

*5. The Unknowable and the Unfathomable: Song: Who can understand what Mother Kali is? Even the six branches of philosophy are powerless to reveal Her ...*

*The Macrocosm and microcosm rest in the womb of Kali  
6. Vedanta and ‘I am He’  
(a) I am Brahman – This knowledge is not correct.*

*(b) He is immovable and actionless. The world is made of his three gunas. Both knowledge and ignorance reside in Him.*

*(c) One cannot stay long on ‘Ni’.  
(d) The paths of Knowledge and Devotion, “He has many supernatural powers (Bhagawan).”*

*(e) If an aristocrat has been forced to sell his house and property, what sort of an aristocrat is he?*

# SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S PROPHECY AND SKETCH

[2. Frontispiece, Part Two of this Volume]

Sri Ramakrishna made a prophecy about Naren (Swami Vivekananda) which he wrote in his own handwriting on a piece of paper. Under the text he drew a sketch of a Brahmin (Sri Ramakrishna himself with his throat trouble?) and a peacock running after him (Does it symbolize Swami Vivekananda?)<sup>1</sup> Sri M. took away this pictorial document 'without leave as something too valuable to be lost.'

The reader will find the following text regarding the *Prophecy* in the English Gospel (pp. 980 and 982) –

“... Narendra and M. sat under a tree in the garden to the west of the monastery. It was a solitary place and no one else was present ...

M.: “There is a special purpose in his transmission of power to you. He will accomplish much work through you. One day the Master wrote on a piece of paper, ‘Naren will teach people’.”

*Narendra*: “But I said to him, ‘I won’t do any such thing...’”

Sri D.K. Sengupta has given the transliteration of the text (where necessary) and translated it in the opposite column.

Transliteration	Interpretation
7½ p.m. Ma. Shu. Navami	7.30 p.m. Magh-Shukla Navami (9th Day of the Bright Fortnight)
Saturday (Corrpod) 13th Feb. 1886 Pa's Hater Lekha o Chhabi (Kagaje)	Saturday (Corresponding) 13 Feb. 1886. Paramahansa Deva's hand-writing and drawing (on paper)
I take without leave as something too valuable to be lost	I take without leave as something too valuable to be lost.
(True Copy)	(True Copy)
Jay Radhe Premomoi Naren K Shikshe Dibe Jakhan Ghure Baire Hank Dibe	Victory to Radha, full of love! Naren will teach K <sup>2</sup> when he will speak with a raised voice at home and outside.
Jay Radha	Victory to Radha!

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<sup>1</sup> For the image of a peacock symbolizing a religious leader, the following observation by Christopher Isherwood in his 'Sri Ramakrishna and Disciples' may be of interest to our reader: “Now, in *samadhi* he (Sri Ramakrishna) has a vision of Keshab in the form of a peacock with its tail outspread and a ruby adorning its head. The peacock's tail he later explained, symbolized Keshab's followers and the ruby Keshab's own nature; his qualities of leadership and proselytizing zeal. (page 159).

<sup>2</sup> The letter 'K' in original may have stood for 'Lok' in which case it would read as ... 'Naren will teach people...'

## 20. A SUBMISSION

D. P. Gupta

*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is a scripture like the Gita, the Bible and the Koran. A number of versions of this holy book have already appeared and are still appearing in various world languages. The *Kathamrita* has also been 'translated' into some of the Indian languages and may be translated into many more. These versions are naturally being taken as the *Kathamrita*.

In the following lines emphasis has been laid on the need to take the Bengali *Kathamrita* as the original for all translations, for only this book contains the original words of the Great Master and of the Master Mahashaya in their purest form. A plea has further been made that the translation should be literal first, and literary only if possible so that the non-Bengali devotees of Sri Ramakrishna get the flavour of the original words of the Master, their emotional import and the feel of the atmosphere of his native land as far as possible.

It may be added that the excellence of '*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*', by Swami Nikhilananda written in America or of the Hindi version made by the great Hindi poet and litterateur Pandit Surya Kanta Tripathi Nirala, brought out from Nagpur is not intended to be denied. They are great in their own right as pieces of 'creative translation'. The point that is sought to be made is that in the case of a translation of a scripture readability though very desirable should not be allowed to dilute the purity of the original expression whether of words or mores of the country of its origin. Our scriptures in translation must give to the devotees the feel of the original as far as possible and the exact words of the avatara.

**“The great Ramakrishna Order must give paramount importance to bringing out really complete literal renderings of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita in English and Hindi ...”**

It is a universal phenomenon that written texts, whether religious or temporal, undergo changes with the passage of time when handled by different hands. There is probably no old book of which there is only one 'reading'. Though the various readings give a lot of scope for research to scholars, they are a great hurdle in the way, of arriving at the truths of the original text. Our own old scriptures, the Vedas, the Gita and others are too old to allow detection of interpolations or even to fix a date when they assumed the shape in which they are extant now. Even the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have grown with time. Texts of other religions also have a history.\* What, therefore, Krishna, Buddha, Christ said originally can only be a surmise at best.

What is the position with regard to the *Kathamrita*?

It would be of interest to our readers to know that the *Kathamrita* though hardly a hundred year old text, has already a number of versions not exactly alike.

### History of the Gospel Literature

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\* Modern research has shown that the Bible has had a number of versions – to cite only the most important ones the Septuagint in Greek, Targum in Hebrew, the Vulgate in Latin (the Bible of the Roman Church), the English version of Wycliff, later of Tyndale, then the first full translation of the English Bible by Coverdale, the first English Bible printed in England of Thomas Matthew (John Rogers), still later the Great Bible, then the Genevan Bible which was a thorough revision of the Great Bible and then the Authorized Version of 1604. The Bible was further revised and presented to the Convocation in 1881, as the Revised Version. Now the Bible is appearing in a number of modern versions which are translations at some places and paraphrases at others.

We give below a list of various Indian versions of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as recorded by Sri *M.* to this date. For most of this information, we are indebted to Mr. Isherwood and Swami Tapasyananda.

1. In 1897, Sri *M.* published two pamphlets in 'a sort of evangelical language' in English. These pamphlets were enthusiastically praised by Swami Vivekananda. The Holy Mother also testified to Sri *M.*'s recordings as the very words of Thakur. No copy of these pamphlets is available at present to our knowledge.

2. Between 1898 and 1902, Sri *M.* expanded his notes in Bengali which, appeared in three or four magazines in serial form.

3. In 1902, everything already printed was collected by Swami Trigunatitananda and published in one volume from the Udbodhan Office. This is '*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*' volume one, of the present day. Swami Vivekananda very probably did not see this volume as he passed away in 1902.

4. Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Part II appeared in Bengali in 1904 or 1905.

5. Swami Abhedananda edited Sri *M.*'s English version and added sections directly translated from Bengali. The first edition of this book in India was published by the Brahmavadin Office, Madras, in 1907.

6. In 1908 appeared *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* Part III in Bengali.

7. In 1910 came *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* Part IV in Bengali.

8. The task of publishing a second edition of the English *Gospel* completely revised by the author himself and freed from its Biblical turns of expression was entrusted to Ramakrishna Mission, Madras and brought out in 1911.

9. The Vedanta Society of San Francisco brought out 'a reprint from the Madras Edition' of the *Gospel* in 1912. It, however, contains Biblical verb endings.

10. In 1922, Volume II of the *Gospel* in English was brought out from the Madras R. K. Mission. There is no indication who translated it. The writer very probably was not Sri *M.*

11. In 1928, appeared the second edition of Volume II of the *Gospel* in English. It announced itself as 'an improved edition in which the language had been edited by a Western friend and the index enlarged.' It was probably withdrawn, as it did not meet the author's approval. It has not been printed since.

12. In 1932, appeared the last (5th) Volume of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali, published posthumously.

13. In 1942, Swami Nikhilananda published his 'regular', 'complete' and 'literal' translation of the *Kathamrita* from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York. It appeared in the first Indian edition in 1944.

14. In 1947, Swami Nikhilananda abridged the *Gospel*, gave it the title 'Ramakrishna: Prophet of New India', included a long valuable introduction and published it from New York.

15. In 1978, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras reprinted the 1911 edition\* of *M.*'s own *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* 'because of its literary worth and *M.*'s own full

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\* Since the 1978 edition does not contain Biblical verb endings we presume this edition is a reprint of the 1911 edition, not of 1907.

authorship’.

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There can perhaps be no doubt that the *Kathamrita* in Bengali is the only original of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna spoke in Bengali, for that matter in his regional rustic patois; he used simile and metaphors peculiarly of rustic Bengal – his atmosphere and conversational style were both typically Bengali. In no other language could all this be caught so faithfully as in Bengali. Besides, Sri *M.* though educated in the western lore had also a typical Bengali mind – of course, he was Bengali by birth.

Now the question arises whether the various publications of the Gospel which have appeared so far are faithful translations of the *Kathamrita* or not. We append at the end of the write-up four narrations of the first visit of Sri *M.* to the Master and leave the reader to arrive at his own conclusion. We may only say that compared to the text of the *Kathamrita*, the narration in the Hindi *Vachanamrita* looks like a *resume* of the former, and even the English complete Gospel only an edited version. The short English Gospel by Sri *M.* himself is also not a line by line translation of any book. It is as Sri *M.* himself said ‘*M.*’s own rendering of thoughts rather than language, directly into English with many elaborations and elucidating repetitions’. Moreover, this English version though admirable in many ways is only a small portion of the Gospel and therefore, cannot take the place of the *Kathamrita*.

If we carefully compare the text of the complete English *Gospel* and the Hindi *Vachanamrita* with the Bengali *Kathamrita* we shall find that many lines of the *Kathamrita* have been omitted especially Sri *M.*’s soliloquies which being Sri *M.*’s own reactions to different situations would seem precious to many. An example of it has been mentioned, though in a different context, by Professor Pranab Ranjan Ghosh (see Article 17 in this volume). The deleted passage begins with “Brother, let’s visit Sri Ramakrishna in the Dakshineswar temple ...”

For the sake of better readability and for other reasons\*, the uninhibited words of Sri Ramakrishna have also been changed which naturally results in shifting the emphasis to some extent. At places the argument of the Master also suffers because of this change. We give below a few examples from the *Kathamrita* and the English *Gospel* and underline the portions we think suffer most by the change of words. The *Hindi Vachanamrita* does not make any significant change here though in other places it does.

*The Kathamrita, Part IV. pp. 68: Date, February 2, 1884*

‘Thakur says again: ‘I am Mahima Chakravarty, a learned man’ – this kind of ‘I’ has to be renounced. But the ‘I of Knowledge is not harmful. Shankaracharya retained the ‘I of Knowledge in order to teach mankind ...’

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna – p. 336*

‘One must renounce the ‘*T*’ that makes one feel ‘I am Mahima Chakravarty’, ‘I am a learned man’, and so on. But the ‘ego of Knowledge’ does not injure one.

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\* Mr. Isherwood’s explanation of the Master’s occasional use of ‘obscene’ words should be of interest to our readers. Says he: Words which normally carry sensual associations suggested higher meanings to Ramakrishna in his exalted state. For example, the word *yoni* which normally means the female sex organ, would mean for him the divine source of all creation. Indeed, the most unconditionally obscene words were now as sacred to him as the vocabulary of the scriptures since all were composed of the letters of the same alphabet. [*Ramakrishna and his Disciples, P. 102*]

Shankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach mankind ...'

*The Kathamrita, Part IV, pp. 68-69*

'But for a jnani (here, a man following the path of Knowledge) it is not harmful to unite sexually with his own wife once in a while. Just as one expels faeces and urine in the same way one discharges semen – one defecates and forgets it.'

'A bit of *chhane-ka-munda* (a delicious milk sweetmeat) you may take once in a while. (Mahimacharan laughs.) It is not so harmful for the householders.'

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pp. 336*

'But it is not so harmful for a householder who follows the path of knowledge to enjoy conjugal happiness with his own wife now and then. He may satisfy his sexual impulse like any other natural impulse. Yes, you may enjoy a sweetmeat once in a while. (Mahimacharan laughs). It is not so harmful for a householder.'

*The Kathamrita, Part IV pp. 68-69*

'That's why when the Marwari wanted to deposit money with Hriday, I said: "No, that too will not be" – its proximity will raise clouds.'

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pp. 337*

'That's why I didn't agree to the Marwari's depositing money for me with Hriday, I said: 'No, I won't allow even that. If I keep money near me, it will certainly raise clouds.'

A literal translation of the *Kathamrita* in English and Hindi without omissions; additions or paraphrase would have been a boon to devotees who naturally like to hear the original words of the Master – and those of *M*.\*

Shouldn't the text of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* be fixed before it is too late? Translations of the *Gospel* in European languages are presumably being done from its English version and in Indian languages not only from Bengali but perhaps also from Hindi.

### **Dates of M.'s first four visits to Sri Ramakrishna**

It will be seen from Sri *M*'s short English *Gospel* of 1907 that he dates his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna in March 1882. Pandit Surya Kant 'Nirala' following Sri *M*'s English *Gospel* does the same though his Hindi *Vachanamrita* has the Bengali *Kathamrita* as its source book. Fortunately the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* translated by Swami Nikhilananda follows the *Kathamrita* in this respect and indicates February 1882 as the month of Sri *M*'s first visit. However, on pages 37-38 of the *Vachanamrita*, Nirala almost reproduces the text of the Bengali *Kathamrita* (p. 10, Vol. V) in the following words (translation ours) –

"January 1882, in collection with *Maghotsava*, Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab had

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\* Readers' attention is drawn to the views of Swami Atmarupananda on this subject in 'Growing with the Gospel' pp: 126 & 128 in this volume. Some other Swamis who read the *Kathamrita* regularly are also of the opinion that it is one thing to read to Gospel in English and another to read to *Kathamrita* in Bengali.

been invited to the Shimulia Tala Brahma Samaj celebrations at the house of Jnana Choudhury. The *kirtana* was held in the courtyard. It was here that Sri Ramakrishna heard Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) sing for the first time and asked him to visit Dakshineswar on *Thursday, 23 February 1882*. Keshab again had Sri Ramakrishna's darshana in the company of bhaktas in Dakshineswar. With him were an American padre Mr. Joseph Cook and Miss Pigget. Keshab took Sri Ramakrishna with him on a steamer along with Brahma devotees. Mr. Cook had seen Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi. *Three days after this incident the school master (Sri M.) saw Sri Ramakrishna for the first time.*" [Sri M. on the authority of Narendra].

Regarding February 26 as the date of Sri M.'s first visit and his subsequent three visits, Vol. V of the *Kathamrita* gives the following further indications –

The first visit took place on *Sunday*, a few days after February 23; the third visit also, on a *Sunday*. The fourth visit came *one day after the third*, that is on Monday. On the fourth visit, Sri Ramakrishna had asked Sri M. to meet him at Balaram Babu's house and Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram Babu's house on *Saturday 11 March* (Vol. V., 1st Section, 1st Chapter). Between the 23rd of February and 11th of March there were two Sundays – on 26th February and 5th March. Thus the dates of Sri M.'s visits transpire as below –

1st visit on 26th February 1882

2nd visit on a day between 26th February and 5th March 1882

3rd visit on 5th March 1882

4th visit on 6th March 1882

Says Mr. Christopher Isherwood in his admirable study of 'Ramakrishna and His Disciples' (Indian Edition, p. 257).

"Throughout the Gospel, M. is nearly always precise about dates, and it seems odd that he does not tell us in so many words exactly when his first meeting took place. He does give us two clues, however, which fix the date; it was a few days, after February 23rd and it was a Sunday in February. In the year 1882, the only Sunday between February 23rd and end of the month fell on the 26th."

Besides, if we do not accept 26 February 1882 as the date of Sri M.'s first visit to Sri Ramakrishna, there is no other date we can reasonably put our faith in. Sri M.'s first four visits took place before 11 March and it is also indicated that his visit was on a Sunday.

The reasons why Sri M. did not record the exact date of his first three meetings with the Master may be that during those visits he perhaps did not realize their importance to the extent he did later on, even though the vision of the God-man had simply fascinated him. But perhaps a more weighty reason is that he did not sit down to write his diary during these days being in a terribly depressed state of mind and also perhaps because he was away from home at least for some time.

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### **Kathamrita – the most truthful and exact record of the God-man**

The text of the *Kathamrita* is based on first class evidence, that is the evidence of a competent person like M., 'a close and keen observer and a devoted disciple' who was himself present at every sitting with the Master which he narrated and who invariably



took his notes before he could possibly forget the exact words of the ‘actors’ of his ‘scenes’ and their moods etc. What a blessing it would have been if the other scriptures of the world had also been as authentic as is the *Kathamrita*. Most of them, unfortunately are only records of traditions current at the time of their composition.

We also append a short history of *The New Testament* and the Holy Quran at the end of the Annexures to this write up for those who may be interested in the subject as it has some bearing on our thesis. Suffice it to reproduce here the opinion of Mr. Christopher Isherwood about the authenticity of the *Gospel* and the candour and objectivity of its recorder.

Says Mr. Isherwood in his ‘Ramakrishna and His Disciples’ –

‘The *Gospel* opens with an artless abruptness and incoherence, which give an immediate impression of its authenticity. It is as if *M.* has been so moved by his experiences that he has not even paused to rehearse the sequence of events in his mind before starting to write.’

Taking not merely the opening lines but the book as a whole Mr. Christopher Isherwood’s evaluation of Sri *M.* gives a true picture of the blessed recorder and his record. Says he:

‘One of *M.*’s great virtues as a biographer is his candour. We have seen how he describes his humiliation during his second visit to Ramakrishna. Elsewhere in the *Gospel*, he tells how Ramakrishna praised him and treated him with affection. A self-consciously humble man might have omitted the praise. But there is a more genuine lack of egotism in *M.*’s simple relation of fact.

‘*M.* is equally candid about Ramakrishna himself. His firm belief in the divinity of Ramakrishna’s nature was just what stopped him from presenting his Master as the glorified figure of a holy man. Anything that Ramakrishna says or does is sacred to him; therefore he omits nothing, alters nothing. In his pages, we encounter Ramakrishna as an authentic spiritual phenomenon; by turns godlike and childlike, sublime and absurd...’

And finally, summing up his appreciation of the *Gospel* says Mr. Isherwood:

‘If I had to use one single word to describe the atmosphere of the Gospel narrative, it would be the word *Now*. The majority of us spend the greater part of our lives in the future or the past – fearing or desiring what is to come, regretting what is over. *M.* shows us a being who lives in continuous contact with that which is eternally present ...’

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We presume that for purposes of his study Mr. Isherwood has relied entirely on the English Gospel as most Westerners and many of us do. Yet, if we think of the Record of Sri *M.* in which, to use Aldous Huxley’s words, “... the small events of a contemplative’s daily life been described with such wealth of intimate detail ... the almost stenographic casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity ...” we must ourselves be absolutely precise in our translations omitting nothing, adding nothing and not letting our personality (and knowledge of the English idiom!) as far as possible intrude upon the original text. Otherwise the whole point of the uniqueness of Sri *M.*’s record in the literature of hagiography is lost.

Let us concede however that the task of the translator is indeed very difficult. It is

no child's play to reconcile the readability of a text in translation with the flavour of the original words and their emotional content in a foreign language.

Even so we cannot agree with Mr. J. B. Phillips, the author of 'The New Testament in Modern English' when he says that the essential, the fundamental principle of translation is 'that it must not sound like a translation' and that 'the translator must be flexible.' This, in our opinion, may be a desirable quality of a translation of a work of fiction or of history but it cannot be that of a work of deep truths, philosophy or spirituality, least of all of revelations.

No doubt language changes with time; words change their meaning and take up different nuances. Yet it seems to us imperative that the earliest record of the words of a Great Master must be preserved jealously in their original form, context and idiom in which they were uttered with the mention of persons to whom they were addressed and the reaction of the latter to them, irrespective of considerations like literary graces or the type of readers likely to read the version. And one must also guard against the bias and imaginative flights of the translators, the biographers and the general miracle loving tendencies of the followers. The words of a Divine Teacher are direct inspiration from God by which religion is portrayed anew to suit the times as a practical solution of the problems which trouble the men of the day. Commentaries and studies will, of course, be many but the Gospel can only be one. No paraphrase should replace the original however more readable it may be.

Thus in the case of the 'Gospel' specially, it is imperative to preserve as far as possible the purity of the actual words of the great masters in translations, not bringing in our own interpretations to intrude upon the original text. A paraphrase only takes up the thought content *as understood by the writer*, whereas a translation tries to preserve the original words and the idiom so as to transmit as much feel of the original as possible. Records of the words of self-realised souls are not meant for rapid reading but for meditation.

We now conclude by summing up our facts and making a submission—

1. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the only original 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' is so far not available to the non-Bengali devotees of Sri Ramakrishna of whom there are millions.

2. The nearest to the *Kathamrita* in English is '*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*', translated by Swami Nikhilananda.

3. The edition of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Part I, completely revised by M. himself, printed from Madras in 1911 and now reprinted under the title 'The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna', though a great book in its own right is only a condensed version of the *Gospel* as its latest title indicates. Therefore, it also cannot take the place of the *Kathamrita*.

4. Since the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna have always taken Sri Ramakrishna's words as recorded by Sri M. in the *Kathamrita* as the Gospel, the great Ramakrishna Order must give paramount importance to bringing out really complete literal renderings of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in English and Hindi so that the original Gospel is available to the entire humanity.

This is our respectful submission to the learned sadhus and scholarly householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

[For different versions of Sri M's first visit to Sri Ramakrishna please read further]



## 1. ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST VISIT OF SRI M. TO THE MASTER

– Four Versions

The following are the first few lines of the four narrations of Sri *M.*'s first visit to the Master in 1. The Bengali Kathamrita, 2. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in Sri *M.*'s own English, 3. The complete Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna translated by Swami Nikhilananda and 4. Our literal (not literary) translation into English of the Hindi Vachanamrita by Nirala. If the reader takes the Kathamrita as the original text he will see that the other three versions are only translations of the thought content, not exact translations in the strict sense of the word.

### 1. Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (Bengali, Part I) – Second Chapter

THE FIRST DARSHANA – February 1882

*Tava kathāmṛtāni ...*

– *Srimadbhagavat, Gopi Gita Rasa Panchadhaya*

The Kali Bari at Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganga. Mother Kali's temple. Spring season, the month of February 1882 by the Christian calendar; a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. Thakur had made a steam-boat trip on Thursday, 23 February, with Sri Keshab Sen and Mr. Joseph Cook – a few days after it. The evening was setting in. The school master (*M.*) arrived at Thakur Sri Ramakrishna's room. This was his first *darshana* (view of him). He saw the room full of people drinking the Nectar of His Words in deep silence. Seated on a wooden bed and facing the east, Thakur was talking of God with a smiling face. The devotees were seated on the floor.

*Renunciation of Karma: When?*

*M.* stood speechless and looked on. He felt that Sukadeva himself was talking of God and all the holy places met there. Or as if Sri Chaitanya was seated with Ramananda, Swarup and the other devotees in the holy land of Puri singing the name and glories of the Lord.

Thakur said, "When by taking the name of Hari or Rama but once, the hair stands on end and tears flow from the eyes, you should know for certain that there is no need to perform *karma* (devotions) like *sandhya* any more. Then one has acquired the right to renounce *karma*. The *karmas* then get renounced of themselves. Then it is enough to repeat the name of Rama or Hari or simply Om." And he continued, "The *sandhya* merges into the Gayatri and the Gayatri in turn merges into Om."

The school master had reached this garden having walked from one garden to the other with Sidhu. It is Sunday, 26 February – 15 Phalgun. As he is at leisure he has come for a walk; some time ago he was walking in Prasanna Banerji's garden. Sidhu had said then, "There is a charming garden on the bank of the Ganga. Would you like to go there? A paramahansa is living there." Entering the main gate of the garden the school master and Sidhu went directly to Sri Ramakrishna's room. The teacher looked on and said, wonder-struck to himself, "Oh! What a beautiful spot! What a charming man! What a beautiful talk! I do not feel like moving away from here." After a few minutes he thought, "Let me see the place where I have come; then I will come back and sit down."

As he left the room with Sidhu, the sweet music of *arati* (devotions comprising

waving of lights and chanting of a hymn) arose – the gong, the bell, the *khol* (drum) and *kartals* (cymbals) began sounding all at once. The sweet music from the *nahabat* could also be heard from the south end of the garden. These sounds traveling over the surface of the Ganga lost themselves far into the distance. A soft spring breeze was blowing with the fragrance of flowers. The moon was just coming out. It was as if preparations were afoot all around for the *arati* of the Gods. *M.* witnessed the *arati* in the twelve Siva temples, the Radhakanta temple and the temple of Bhavatarini and felt blessed. Sidhu said, “This is the temple [built by] Rasmani. Many holy guests and beggars are fed here daily.”

Both (*M.* and Sidhu) returned to Sri Ramakrishna’s room talking on the way as they walked through the big brick courtyard from the temple of Bhavatarini. They now found the door of the room shut. Incense had just been burnt in the room. *M.* had English education; he wouldn’t enter the room without permission. Brinde, the maid was standing at the door.

*M.* asked her, “Is the sadhu in?”

Brinde: “Yes, he is in the room.”

*M.*: “How long has he been here?”

Brinde: “Well, he has been here for a long time.”

*M.*: “I say, does he read many books?”

Brinde: “Books! Oh no. They are all on his tongue.”

*M.* had just finished his studies. He was all the more amazed to hear that Sri Ramakrishna read no books.

*M.*: “Perhaps he is to perform his *sandhya* now. May we enter the room? Could you tell him (announce us)?”

Brinde: “Why don’t you go in, children? Go in and sit down.” Then they entered the room and saw...

## 2. *M.*’s own English Version – 1907

### SRI RAMAKRISHNA AT DAKSHINESHWAR

1882

#### The First Meeting with the Master

It is the spring of 1882, the season of flowers and of the sweet southern breeze. The sun is about to set on the temple of the Mother of the Universe one pleasant day in the month of March. All nature smiles and rejoices. At such a time came about *M.*’s first vision of the God-man.

The Temple of the Mother where Sri Ramakrishna has made his abode for years is on the eastern bank of the Ganges in the village of Dakshineshwar, about four miles north of Calcutta.

He is sitting on the lounge (the smaller of the two bedsteads), in his own chamber which looks out on the sacred water of the Holy Stream (the Ganges) as it flows past. The disciples and other devotees are seated on the floor. They look on his benign and smiling face and drink the nectar of the living words that fall from his hallowed lips.

Facing the east and smiling, the Master talks of the Lord.

*M.* looks in and stands speechless. *M.* wonders if it is Sukadeva before him that talks of the Lord? *M.* feels as if he were standing on a spot to which have come together the various holy places of pilgrimage to hear the Divine Preacher that is seated before him. It might have been the Lord Gauranga Deva (Chaitanya) seated before him with Ramananda, Swarup and other beloved disciples in the Holy Land of Puri, singing forth the sacred name of the Beloved Lord and His glorious works.

[Renunciation of work for the Lord]

Sri Ramakrishna speaks, saying: “Suppose at the Name of the Lord your hair stands on end or tears of joy start from your eyes; verily I say unto you the term is over of your ‘work for the Lord’; for instance, the daily service (*sandhya*), morning, noon and evening, laid down for the twice-born. Then and not till then have you the right to give up work (*karma*); then indeed work will drop off of itself. When this state of the soul is reached, the devotee need only repeat the name of the Lord (Rama, Hari or simply the symbol Om). That will suffice, no other work need be done.”

Again says the Master: *Sandhya* ends in Gayatri (the Vedic Mantra...); Gayatri in the simple symbol Om; (Vedic symbol for Supreme Being...).

*M.* is staying in Baranagore (near Dakshineswar). He has come with Sidhu, a friend, to the Temple-garden in the course of an evening walk. It is Sunday and *M.* is free from work.

In the course of his walk *M.* had first visited the garden-house of P. Banerjee. There Sidhu had said to him, “There is a beautiful garden on the bank of the Ganges. Let us go there. A holy man dwells there called the Paramahansa.”

*M.* stands speechless! He thinks within himself: How charming is this place! What a man! How sweet and charming are his words! The very idea of leaving this place troubles the soul. But let me first look about and form a clear idea of the Temple. I will then come back and sit at his feet.

*M.* comes out of the room into the quadrangle. He begins to visit the temples of God the Father (Siva), of God Incarnate as Love (Radhakanta) and lastly, that of God the Mother (Kali – God in His relation to the conditioned and the finite, as distinguished from Brahman or God the Absolute).

It is evening – the time of Divine Service. The priests are waving the lights before the sacred images to the accompaniment of bells, cymbals and drums. From the southern end of the Temple-garden is wafted upon the soft southern breeze, sweet music, melody played by the temple orchestra upon flagesletes and other instruments. That music is carried far over the bosom of the Ganges until it is lost in the distant Immensity! The breeze that blows from the south, how gentle and fragrant with the sweet fragrance that comes from many a flower! The moon is just up and the temple and the garden are soon bathed in the soft silvery light. It seems as if Nature and Man both rejoice and hold themselves in readiness for the evening service.

*M.*’s joy is full at the blessed sight. Sidhu speaks to *M.*, saying: This is Rasmani’s temple. Here the Gods are ministered unto from day to day – from morning till night. Here too holy men and the poor are daily fed out of the offerings made to the Deity.

The two friends wend their way through the grand quadrangle back towards Sri Ramakrishna’s chamber. Coming up to the door of the room they notice that it is closed. *M.* has learnt English etiquette and thinks it will be rude to try to enter without leave.

The incense has burnt a little while before.

At the door stands Brinda, the maidservant. *M.* talks to her.

*M.*: Well, my good woman is he in – the holy man?

Brinda: Yes, he is inside this room.

*M.*: How long has he made his abode here?

Brinda: O, many many years.

*M.*: I suppose he has many books to read and study.\

Brinda: O dear, no; not a single one. His tongue talks everything – even the highest truth! His words come from above.

*M.* is fresh from college. He is told the Master is not a scholar! At this he stands aghast – speechless with surprise!

*M.*: Very well. Is he now going on with his evening worship (*sandhya*)? May we come in? Will you be so kind as to tell him that we are anxious to see him?

Brinda: Why, you may go in, my children; do go, and take your seats before him.

Thereupon they enter the room.

### 3. Swami Nikhilananda's 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'

MASTER AND DISCIPLE – February, 1882

It was on a Sunday in spring, a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, that *M.* met him the first time. Sri Ramakrishna lived at the Kalibari, the temple garden of Mother Kali, on the bank of the Ganges at Dakshineswar.

*M.*, being at leisure on Sundays, had gone with his friend Sidhu to visit several gardens at Baranagore. As they were walking in Prasanna Bannerji's garden, Sidhu said: "There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges where a paramahansa lives. Should you like to go there?" *M.* assented and they started immediately for the Dakshineswar temple garden. They arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. And there they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence.

*M.* stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup and the other devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna said, "When hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply Om." Continuing, he said, "The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om."

*M.* looked around him with wonder and said to himself: "What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot! After a few minutes he thought, "Let me see the place first; then I'll come back here and sit down."

As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum and cymbal. He could hear music from the nahabat, too, at the south end of the garden. The sounds traveled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship. *M.* and Sidhu visited the twelve Siva temples, the Radhakanta temple, and the temple of Bhavatarini. And as *M.* watched the services before the images his heart was filled with joy.

On the way back to Sri Ramakrishna's room the two friends talked. Sidhu told *M.* that the temple garden had been founded by Rani Rasmani. He said that God was worshipped there daily as Kali, Krishna, and Siva and that within the gates many sadhus and beggars were fed. When they reached Sri Ramakrishna's door again, they found it shut and Brinde the maid, standing outside. *M.*, who had been trained in English manners and would not enter a room without permission, asked her, "Is the holy man in?" Brinde replied, "Yes, he's in the room."

*M.*: "How long has he lived here?"

Brinde: "Oh, he has been here a long time."

*M.*: "Does he read many books?"

Brinde: "Books? Oh dear, no! They're all on his tongue."

*M.* had just finished his studies in college. It amazed him to hear that Sri Ramakrishna read no books.

*M.*: "Perhaps it is time for his evening worship. May we go into the room? Will you tell him we are anxious to see him?"

Brinde: "Go right in, children. Go in and sit down."

#### 4. Nirala's Hindi version: 'Vachanamrita'

– translated into English

##### CHAPTER ONE

##### THE FIRST DARSHANA

(1882 A.D., March)

Tava kathāmṛtam ...

– *Srimad-Bhagavatam, Gopi-Gita Rasapanchadhaya*

On the eastern bank of Sri Gangaji, some six miles from Calcutta is (situated) the Kali temple in Dakshineswar. Here lives Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Deva. The teacher (*M.*) went to have his darshan for the first time in the evening. He saw people seated silently in Sri Ramakrishna Deva's room drinking the nectar of his words.

When does *Karma-tyaga* (renunciation of Karma) come about? Sri Ramakrishna says: "When by taking Sri Bhagavan's name once your hair stands on end – a stream of tears flows from your eyes, know it for certain that the *Karmas* (devotions) like *sandhya* have ended – then one has acquired the right to renounce *Karma* – the *Karmas* then get renounced by themselves." He also said, "*Sandhya* and other devotions merge into the Gayatri and the Gayatri into Omkar."

Sri Ramakrishna's room was full of the perfume of *dhup* (incense). The teacher



was an English knowing man. He could not enter the room all of a sudden. Vrinda (the maid) was standing at the door. The teacher asked her, “Is the Sadhu Maharaj in at this time?”

She replied – “Yes, he is in.”

The Teacher – “How long has he been here?”

Vrinda – “He? Well, for a long time.”

The Teacher – “Well, does he read many books?”

Vrinda – “Books? He has them all on his tongue.”

Sri Ramakrishna read no books – hearing this the teacher was all the more amazed.

The Teacher – “Perhaps he has to perform his *sandhya* now. May we go in? Why don’t you announce us?”

Vrinda – “Why don’t you go in? – Go in and sit down.”

The Teacher went in with his friend.

\* \* \*

## 2. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE HOLY QURAN

It may be of interest to our reader to know some details of the history of The New Testament and the Quran. It will help him see the *Kathamrita* in the right perspective.

The rise of the New Testament literature was delayed as Christ himself left no writing and his disciples and followers did not consider it necessary to record the doings and sayings of their Lord for the instruction of future generations – they were simply awaiting the second coming of the Messiah. Gradually, however, grew up a tradition of the life and sayings of the Christ. The apostles and disciples began to feel the necessity for some written account of the life of Christ. The basis for the written account of the life of Christ and fixing that life on definite lines was the constant intercourse of the disciples, their recollection of the sayings and doings of the Christ supplemented by one another. The earliest form of the Gospel, generally known as the Logia consisted of the sayings of Christ which were written down in Hebrew by Matthew. It forms the core of the Gospel of St. Matthew and St. Luke which came after that of St. Mark and supplemented the tradition and gave the first complete Gospel written at Rome between A.D. 64 and 70. The Fourth Gospel – that of St. John – was written probably by the end of the 1st century.

“The canon of The New Testament was much disputed. The various churches adopted varying canons for the literature of The New Testament. At the Council of Carthage, however, the canon of The New Testament was fixed as we have it at the present day.” (Everyman’s Encyclopedia, Vol. II, 3rd ed., p. 296).

The four Gospels of The New Testament are different versions, which complement and supplement each other. There is particularly a vast difference between the style of the Gospel of John and the other three Gospels. Not that Jesus spoke in different styles on different occasions; it was John rewriting in his own style of Greek what Jesus spoke in Aramaic.

We may also add here that about the Gospel of Mark written about 65, Mr. J.B. Phillips says, “The manuscript of Mark ends abruptly at 16:8 and nearly all scholars

regard the subsequent verses as a later addition.”

### **The Quran**

A few well-known facts about the Quran, the sacred book of Islam can also bear repetition here. The word ‘Quran’ means Recitation in Arabic, the language of this holy book. It consists of revelations received by the Prophet Mohammed from God. It was compiled after the Prophet’s death by his secretary Zaid-ibn-Thabit by order of the Caliph Abu-Bekr. About the text of the Quran, it is said that during his trances Hazrat Mohammed uttered messages which were carefully remembered and written down... After his death, the sayings of his revelations were collected and being bound together formed the Quran. These sayings were scratched on bones, written on palm leaves, some of them on parchment. The final arrangement was made long after the Prophet’s death.



## SRI 'M.', THE RECORDER OF THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

ॐ कथामृत यस्य जीवनं, कथामृतलेखनं हि यस्य ज्ञानं, कथामृतकीर्तनं तु हि यस्य

ध्यानं,

नमो तस्मै कथामृतकाराय श्रीरामकृष्णव्यासाय,

श्रीमाय नमो नमः ।

*Sri Ramakrishna* (to Sri M.) – With these very eyes, I saw you among the singers of Sri Chaitanya's *sankirtana*... Hearing you read the Chaitanya Bhagavata, I recognized you... You belong to the ever-perfect class... You are my own, of the same substance as father and son... You are one of those who trade in the jewellery of Spirit... You will have to do a little of the Divine Mother's work, you will have to teach the Bhagavata to people.

– The *Kathamrita*

Om! Whose very life-breath is the *Kathamrita*,  
Whose *jnana* is but the writing of the *Kathamrita*,  
Whose *dhyana* is but the chanting of the *Kathamrita*,  
To him, the recorder of the *Kathamrita*,  
To the Vyasa of Sri Ramakrishna,  
Sri 'M.', to him the salutations!

– *Swami Nityatmananda*

## HYMNS TO SRI M.

### 1. श्री म स्तोत्रम् \*

ॐ प्रशान्तचित्ताय निराभिमानिने कर्मक्षेत्रे सिंहतुल्याय रसराजरसिकाय च श्रीरामकृष्णप्रियभक्ताय साधुभक्ताय दासानुदासाय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ १ ॥

ॐ अहर्निशं यस्य कण्ठे श्रीरामकृष्णगुणकीर्तनं नारदवत् रामकृष्णनामसेवारूपं ग्राहयामास तस्मै रामकृष्णप्रियशिष्याय भक्ताग्रणिन्ये श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ २ ॥

ॐ यो वेदव्यासवत् सर्वशास्त्रसारं कथामृतरूपं भवरोगौषधं निरन्तरं वतरयामास तस्मै परदुःखकातराय श्रीरामकृष्णशिष्यसेवकाय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ३ ॥

ॐ यस्यान्तरे पूर्णज्ञानं बहिर्भक्तिः प्रकाशिता महवीरतुल्याय श्रीरामकृष्णचरणोपविष्टाय तस्मै रामकृष्णान्तरङ्गभक्ताय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ४ ॥

ॐ यो जगदम्बाकृपया कलामेकं शक्तिं लेभे यस्त्या शक्त्या जीवदुःखकातरः रामकृष्णकथामृतमहर्निशं बवर्ष तस्मै श्रीरामकृष्णप्रियपार्षदाय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ५ ॥

ॐ यस्तु पूर्णकामोऽपि गुरोरादेशेन लोकशिक्षार्थं गृहस्थाश्रमं जग्राह तस्मै परदुःखमोचनप्राणाय श्रीरामकृष्णलीलाप्रकाशकाय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ६ ॥

ॐ गृहस्थाश्रममवस्थितोऽपि दासीवत् भक्तानां सहस्रेभ्यः ज्ञानभक्तिप्रदानकृत् यस्योपदेशेन बहवः सन्यासव्रतं धारयामासुः तस्मै श्रीरामकृष्णप्रियभक्ताय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ७ ॥

ॐ प्रह्लादवत् ज्ञानभक्तिसम्पन्नाचार्योऽपि दासवत् यो जगत्सेवाव्रती बभूव तस्मै रामकृष्णप्रियभक्ताय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ८ ॥

ॐ यस्य गृहवासः शार्दूलस्य मांसस्य भण्डारप्रहरीवत् यः सर्वगुणसम्पन्नः यः सर्वविद्याविभूषणः तस्मै श्रीरामकृष्णशिष्याय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ ९ ॥

ॐ यः ज्ञानभक्तिसम्पन्नः विश्वविद्यालयस्नातकः अहर्निशं दासीवत् साधुभक्तेभ्यः कथामृतं उपादीदिशत् निरंकुशं तस्मै श्रीरामकृष्णप्रियभक्ताय श्रीमाय नमो नमः ॥ १० ॥

श्रीमाय नमो नमः । श्रीमाय नमो नमः । श्रीमाय नमो नमः ।

Swami Nityatmananda

### 2. HYMN TO SRI M. ♦

Swami Chandikananda, Belur Math

Renunciation and Service too were the  
twin great ideals of your life;  
Love-filled words of nectar of Thakur – The Gospel  
you purveyed to the world in strife.

\* For this hymn in English translation please see the end of Part III.

♦ Translated into English by Swami Mukhyananda. Original text in Bengali with musical notation at the end of Part III.

Thakur Himself utters these words  
    verily through thy noble mouth –  
Confirmed the Holy Mother that  
    thou hast written only the Truth.

Blessed was the universe as it ushered  
    a New Age Sublime,  
Vivekananda was in ecstasy while praising  
    the holy gospel benign.

Fervently we pray to thee Lord:  
    grace our hearts with Love Divine!

## 21. GRANTHA-KARTA MAHENDRANATH

Swami Harshananda

We are happy to present the following piece written in *Deva-bhasha* Sanskrit by Swami Harshananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore. The article, albeit small, brings out in a nut-shell the broad facts of Sri M.'s life.

**“Although *Sadhakavara* Mahendranath had limited wealth, he was very generous in helping others with money etc. He was so secretive that his left hand would not know whom he gave money with his right hand. Often those who got his help did not know that it came from him.**

जगतो महापुरुषवृत्तान्तलेखकानां मध्ये ‘म’ इति विख्यातस्य महेन्द्रनाथगुप्तमहाशयस्य स्थानम् अति विशिष्टम् । स्वकृतग्रन्थस्य विषयभूत-श्रीरामकृष्णपरमहंसदेववद् महेन्द्रनाथोऽपि बहुशो निरुपम एव ॥

कल्कत्तानगरस्य उत्तरस्यां दिशि भवे सिमुलियपट्टीति नाम्नि उपनगरे जन्माभूत्तस्य १८५४ क्रिस्ताब्दे जुलैमासस्य १४ दिनांके । माता स्वर्णमयीदेवी पिता च मधुसूदनगुप्तः । महेन्द्रनाथस्तु तयोस्त्रितीयः पुत्रः । तस्य मेधाशक्तिः असाधारणी आसीत् । अत एव बाल्यकालीनाः बहुघटनाः स्मर्तुं समर्थः । प्रकृत्या मृदुस्वभावोऽयं कदाचिदपि पितरौ न क्लेशितवान् । कर्मकौशलं व्यसनमिव अभूत्तस्य । यत्किञ्चित् तस्य मन आकर्षति तस्मिन् तदेकाग्रिकर्तुं स्वभावस्तस्य । स्वरमधुर-सुकण्ठः स भजनगायनानि सम्यग् गातुं शक्तः ॥

सोऽतीव प्रतिभावान् विद्यार्थी आसीत् । विश्वविद्यालयस्य ‘एन्ट्रन्स्’ ‘एफ ए’ ‘बि ए’ इति अंकितासु परीक्षासु क्रमेण द्वितीयं पञ्चमं तृतीयञ्च स्थानं प्राप्य विद्यार्थिवितनं चानर्ज । त्रिस्तशकस्य १८७४ संवत्सरे ‘बि ए’ श्रेण्यामध्ययनकाल एव निकुञ्जादेव्या सह तस्योद्वाहोऽभूत् । तस्मिन् संवत्सरे एव परीक्षामपि उत्तार ॥

एवं विश्वविद्यालयस्य पदवीं प्राप्यानन्तरं राजकीये कार्ये नियुक्तः । अचिरेण तद्विहाय कस्यचिद्विनिजः कार्यालये आजीव्यमेकं स्वीचकार । स्वल्पकालानन्तरं तदपि परित्यज्य अध्यापकवृत्तिं स्वीचकार । ‘रिपन् कालेज’ (Ripon College) ‘सिटी कालेज’ (City College) ‘मेट्रोपालिटन् कालेज’ (Metropolitan College) इत्यादि विविधविद्यालयेषु तस्य अध्यापनं बभूव । आंग्लभाषा गणितशास्त्रम् अर्थशास्त्रं च तस्य अध्यापनविषया आसन् । कालान्तरे अनेकपाठशालासु प्रधानाध्यापककर्मापि कृत्वान् ॥

महेन्द्रनाथः संस्कृतभाषायां प्रवीण आसीत् । आंग्लभाषासाहित्यं पाश्चात्यदर्शनानि विज्ञानम् अर्थशास्त्रं च



रोचन्ते स्म तस्मै । बैबल-शास्त्रस्य नवीननियमभागः (The New Testament) तस्यातिप्रियोऽभूत् ॥

बाल्यादारभ्यापि भगवद्दर्शनार्थं तीव्रव्याकुलता आसीत् तस्य । सैषा सहजा प्रवृत्तिस्तं नवविधानाख्यस्य ब्राह्मधर्मस्य प्रणेतुः श्रीकेशवचन्द्रसेनस्य सङ्गं गमयाञ्चकार । केशवचन्द्रस्य प्रभावात् महेन्द्रनाथो निराकार-सगुण ब्रह्मविषये श्रद्धे ॥

भाविगुरोः श्रीरामकृष्णदेवस्य समीपं तस्यागमनम् अकस्मादेव बभूव । क्रिस्ताब्दे १८८२ संवत्सरस्य फेब्रवरीमासस्य २६ दिनांके रविवासरेऽपराह्णे स्वस्य मित्रेण सिधुना सह गंगायाः पूर्वतीरे वराहनगर्या भवानि कतिपयोद्यानानि द्रष्टुं गतः अन्तर्भूतकालिकामन्दिरं दक्षिणेश्वरोद्यानं प्रविश्य श्रीरामकृष्णपरमहंसदेवस्य कक्षम् आययौ । तत्रानेकभक्तैः परिवृतं तदनुग्रहार्थं सदुपदेशान् अनुशासितारं श्रीरामकृष्णदेवं ददर्श । दैवात् प्रक्षिप्त एष सत्समागमस्तस्य मनोऽत्यन्तम् आकर्षयाम्बभूव । अत एव कतिपयदिवसपर्यन्तं, यावत्कालं वराहनगरे उवास तावत्कालम् , प्रतिदिनं तत्रागत्य श्रीरामकृष्णदेवस्य दर्शनसौभाग्यं प्राप्तवान् । एतदारभ्य स काले काले दक्षिणेश्वरक्षेत्रमागत्य परमहंसदेवस्य सत्संगे बहुकालं क्षपयति स्म । अचिरेण स श्रीगुरोरन्तरङ्गशिष्याणां वर्गे सम्मिलितो बभूव ॥

दैनिकवृत्तान्तलेखनरूपोऽमूल्योऽभ्यास आसीत्तस्य । एवञ्च दिनान्ते श्रीगुरुमुखेन यद्यच्छ्रुतं तत्सर्वमलिखत् स्वस्य दैनिकवृत्तपुस्तके ॥

विरामकालस्तु वारं वारं तत्पठनतदालोचनादिषु नीतः । किन्त्वेष विषयो बहुप्रयत्नेन गोप्यमान आसीत् । तस्य परममित्राण्यपि तं न ज्ञुः ॥

महेन्द्रनाथः सदाऽऽत्मानं कीर्तिपथाद् वारयामास अदाम्भिकस्वभावयुक्तत्वात् । यो यस्तं ददर्श स सर्वोऽपि तं सामान्यपाठशालाध्यापकमेव चिन्तयति स्म । न तस्य महिमा कस्यचिद्बुद्धिमारुरोह सङ्गुप्तत्वादेव । यदा यदा श्रीरामकृष्णदेवस्तस्य विशेषगुणान् कीर्तयामास तदा तदा स्वस्य पुस्तके महेन्द्रनाथ आत्मनो नाम्नः स्थाने मणीन्द्रादिनामानि लिलेख ॥

आध्यात्मिकसाधका महामनसः । अत एव साधकवरो महेन्द्रनाथो मितैश्वर्यवानपि मुक्तहस्तेन दानादिकं कुर्वन्नासीत् । तस्य दक्षिणहस्तेन दत्तं वामहस्तो नाजानात् क्षीणकीर्तिकामत्वात् । दानपात्रः प्रायशो दानकर्तारं तं नैवाजानात् ॥

श्रीरामकृष्णपरमहंसदेवस्य महासमाधेरनन्तरं महेन्द्रनाथः पूर्ववदेव अध्यापकवृत्तिं कुर्वाणोऽपि काले काले एकाकी सन् हिमगिरिस्थक्षेत्रेषु वा श्रीरामकृष्णमहासंघस्य सन्यासिनां सत्संगे वा मासकालं तद्ूर्ध्वं वा तपश्चर्यां कुरुते स्म ॥

ये ये साधकास्तस्य सत्संग भेजिरे ते सर्वेऽपि तेनैव महासंघस्य वृद्धसंन्यासिनां समीपं गमिताः इत्येतत्  
तस्यापरोऽमानित्वलक्षणो विशेषगुणः ॥

तस्यैतस्य ग्रन्थस्य प्रथमभागः क्रिस्ताब्दे १९०२ संवत्सरे प्रकाशितः। पञ्चमभागस्तु १९३२ संवत्सरे।  
पञ्चमभागप्रकाशनं समाप्य एकद्वि-दिवसानन्तरमेव क्रिस्ताब्दे १९३२ संवत्सरस्य जून् मासे ४ दिनांके  
भक्तशिरोमणिमहेन्द्रनाथगुप्तमहाशयः तनुं विहाय श्रीगुरुपादपद्मं गतः ॥

## 22. MAHENDRANATH GUPTA – THE MAN AND HIS CONTRIBUTION

Swami Tathagatananda

In this deep study of the life and work of Sri *M.* Swami Tathagatananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of New York gives, in a tabloid form, some of the most relevant information about Sri *M.* which, along with the next article admirably serves to introduce the Evangelist of Sri Ramakrishna to our readers and enable those not yet so familiar with him to appreciate other learned appreciations to follow.

**“... man of mystical proportions... his being was fully integrated with his Master.”**

“You are well established in God already. Is it good to give up all? The Lord keeps the speaker or preacher of the Word in the world, otherwise, who will speak the word of God to people? That is why the Mother has kept you in a worldly life ... Mother has told me that you have to do a little of Her Work.” This was the remark of the Master to *M.* when the latter, out of his own inner compulsion to become a *sannyasin*, broached the issue before the Master.

Sri Mahendranath Gupta – better known as Master Mahashaya amongst the devotees, or still widely known to the readers of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by his pen-name, *M.* was born on the fourteenth of July, 1854, in Calcutta. His father, Madhusudan Gupta, an officer of the Calcutta High Court, and his mother, Swarnamayi Devi, were both very pious people. Of the Master’s disciples, Adharlal Sen and *M.* were academically brilliant. *M.* stood second in the Presidency in the Entrance Examination from the Hare School. In the F.A. Examination he stood fifth, and he graduated from the Presidency College in 1875, securing the third place in the University. He was a great scholar, and the wide range of his studies included the classics of Indian and Western lore. He made an extensive study of Western philosophy, literature, history, science, economics, etc. and gained mastery over each field. He was well versed in Sanskrit literature and grammar, Indian philosophy, Jainism, Buddhism, the Puranas and Smritis; and Astrology and the Ayurveda were likewise very well known to him. In three colleges of Calcutta, *M.* taught as a professor of English Literature, Mental and Moral Science, History and Political Economy, and, further served as headmaster in many prominent schools. At one time, he simultaneously acted as headmaster of three different Calcutta schools (each, in turn, for one hour), moving to and fro in a palanquin, which speaks of his respectable reputation as teacher and administrator alike. *M.* also was intimately associated with several Calcutta celebrities of his time – i.e. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Surendranath Banerjee – and with them notably worked with dignity and efficiency.

However, the Master Mahashaya, an ideal householder, truly fulfilling the high expectations due upon a man of rectitude in that station of life, never compromised in principle. His integrity of character and idealism were indeed exemplary. In 1886, the year of the Master’s demise, *M.* was serving as headmaster of a school managed by Vidyasagar. The school’s reputation suffered a little that year at the annual public examination. Vidyasagar himself attributed the cause of the setback to *M.*’s inadequate vigilance, due to his preoccupation with spiritual life and frequent association with Sri

Ramakrishna. *M.*, notwithstanding his heavy family obligations and responsibility, forthwith resigned his post, without any thought of consequence. Thus thrown into dire poverty within a fortnight, *M.* naturally became restless, when suddenly he received a letter from his friend Surendranath Banerjee, requesting him to accept a professorship at the Ripon College. Similar situations recurred three or four times in *M.*'s life when he found himself confronting utter poverty due to forsaking a post on the ground of principle or for intense spiritual practice.

Even from early years, *M.* was susceptible to religious influences. As a boy, while going to school, he would pass through the Siddheswari Kali Temple at Thanthania, and there would bow down before the Deity out of sincere devotion. During Durga Puja he was found sitting for long hours in meditation before the Images, quite oblivious to distraction. Seeking the holy company of sadhus and spiritually oriented people was *M.*'s important passion in life. This ingrained habit ultimately brought him to Sri Ramakrishna in his later life. He was drawn, like others, to Keshab Chandra Sen who was an outstanding personality by virtue of his erudition, oratory and spiritual leadership. Through marriage *M.* became related to Keshab Chandra and attended his services both at his family residence and outside. *M.* came under the spell of the Brahma Samaj, like hosts of other educated people at that time.

Inscrutable are the ways of God. The epoch-making event that finally brought *M.* to the Master is widely known. Being depressed consequent to family quarrels, *M.* left his home at 10 p.m., as did Tolstoy, but, unlike Tolstoy, *M.* was accompanied by his wife. Thoroughly disgusted with life in the world, he wanted to commit suicide and thereby extinguish his suffering. However, one whom the Divine Mother commissions for Her work cannot die in that way. And so, on one Sunday in March\* of 1882 (the exact date of which is unknown), *M.* met his Master in the temple at Dakshineswar. The opening section of the first chapter in *M.*'s immortal work, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, gives a vivid account of this historic meeting. From the very first acquaintance, *M.* was very much impressed by the personality of the Master and so paid regular visits to Dakshineswar. Referring to this, the Master humorously remarked, "A peacock under the spell of opium." But even the extraordinary love of the Master and his unique divine nature, although offering relief, could not yet mitigate *M.*'s depression and make him wholly at peace. The idea of giving up his life was still haunting him. The Master, knowing his mood and resolution then finally dissuaded him by instilling a new faith and hope in his drooping mind. The loving words of assurance that completely removed *M.*'s depression and gave him an altogether new life, full of promise, bear million times repetition: 'God forbid! Why should you take leave of this world? Do you not feel blessed by discovering your Guru? By His grace, what is beyond all imagination or dream can be easily achieved!' In later life, *M.* used to articulate his deepest feeling: "Behold! Where is the resolve to end life, and where the discovery of God! That's why sorrow should be looked upon as a friend of man. God is all good." (Swami Nityatmananda, *M.* – *The Apostle and the Evangelist, Part I*, p. 33). This world – "a playfield of deception", is really a hard place for anyone. An illumined teacher alone can lead us to the abode of peace. Hence, *M.* was perfectly right when he said, 'Human life is an excellent apology for suicide without a Guru.' (Ibid.p.21).

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\* We believe with Mr. Christopher Isherwood that the date of *M.*'s first visit to the Master was 26 February 1882. Please see the article entitled *A Submission* in this volume, sub-head; Dates of *M.*'s first four visits to Sri Ramakrishna, pp.167. [Ed].

Sri Ramakrishna was an adept jeweler. The Master read the inner mind of *M.* almost at first glance. Long before their meeting, the Master saw *M.* in a vision. In that state, the Master saw that *M.* was an ardent disciple of Sri Chaitanya. Even with his “naked eye”, the Master saw that *M.*, in his earlier incarnation, was taking part in the ecstatic mass singing of the Lord’s name under the leadership of Sri Chaitanya. In another context the Master told *M.*, “You are my own, of the same substance, as the father and the son,” indicating thereby that *M.* was one of the chosen few destined to play a conspicuous role in his divine mission.

In the estimation of the Master, *M.* was a highly developed soul. The Master explained to *M.*: “I can see from the signs of your eyes, brows and face that you are a yogi. You look like a yogi who has just left his seat of meditation.” Being satisfied with all tests, the Master accepted *M.* as an intimate of his inner circle. Since then, the Master took upon himself the supreme task of making him fit in all respects. The Modern Vyasa was trained as a divinely ordained partner in the fulfillment of his heaven appointed mission. The Master even solicited the grace of Mother: “Do not make him give up everything. Do in the end what You will. If You keep him in the world, show Yourself to him now and then. Otherwise, how will he remain in the worldly life, where will he find the zest for living?” The Master’s sincere prayer was duly responded to by the Mother. Today we find how the Master’s prophetic vision has been magnificently fulfilled, through the intense spiritual *tapasya* of *M.* The Master told him, “So long as you did not come here, you forgot yourself.” The latent possibilities of *M.* blossomed forth, in later years, into the great Maharshi of our age.

One of the insignia of a great life, as Carlyle pointed out, is “the transcendental capacity of taking trouble.” The Master was really a hard “task-master”. Everyone of his disciples was subjected to constant and un-relaxing spiritual discipline, more than Spartan in severity. *M.*’s patience never flagged, though, and his enthusiasm never waned. Sri Ramakrishna’s constant inspiration gave him the proper motivation to enable him to pass through the treadmill of hard spiritual *tapasya* in Calcutta, Mihijam, Rishikesh and other places with herculean courage and indefatigable energy to reach the goal. The resultant spiritual experience transformed *M.*’s entire outlook, widened his mental horizon, enlarged his heart, and endowed him with power to develop a one-pointed mind. Divine grace, like radium, penetrated *M.* through and through; he was thoroughly renewed by the spiritual vision of life and emerged as a fully integrated personality. His scholarship matured into wisdom, beauty blossomed into holiness, intellectual agnosticism turned into genuine devotion and love for Truth. Carlyle holds that “a deep, great, genuine sincerity is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic.” *M.* was so deeply absorbed with divine life that the light of burning renunciation was always seen in his eyes. A divine glow suffused his whole being and his divine personality could be recognized even by a stranger.

Paul Brunton, the celebrated author and seeker after Truth, has recorded his experience of *M.* in this way: “When at last – for he moves with extreme slowness – he enters the room, I need no one to announce his name. A venerable patriarch has stepped from the pages of the Bible, and a figure from Mosaic times has turned into flesh; this man whose shoulders are slightly bent with the burden of nearly eighty years of mundane existence, can be none other than the Master Mahashaya... In that grave, sober presence I realize instantly that there can be no light persiflage, no bandying of wit and humour, no utterance even of the harsh cynicism and dark skepticism which overshadow my soul from time to time. His character, with its commingling of perfect faith in God and nobility of conduct, is written in his appearance for all to see.” Mr.

Brunton came under the spell of *M.* Night after night he came, “less to hear ... than to bask in the spiritual sunshine of his presence ... he (*M.*) has found some inner bliss and the radiation of it seems palpable.” Tangibly touched by that bliss, Mr. Brunton further articulated that, “Often, I forget his words, but I cannot forget his benign personality.” ... “He has strangely stirred me. I banish the thought of sleep and wander through many streets. When at length ... I reflect that if anyone could free me from the intellectual skepticism to which I cling and attach me to a life of simple faith, it is undoubtedly the Master Mahashaya.” (Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India*, Rider and Co., P.181).

“Many are called, a few are chosen.” One of the most significant traits of *M.*'s character was his unflinching devotion to the Master. Almost from the very beginning *M.*'s allegiance and faithfulness to the Master was phenomenal. Never, even for a moment, do we find him wavering in his total surrender to the Master. Doubt never crossed his mind about the Master's spiritual eminence and, as such his hunger and thirst for the Master's association went on increasing daily. He had had the unique privilege of rendering personal service to the Master in many ways and on many occasions. His firm faith in Sri Ramakrishna's *avatara-hood* was really commendable. In the Cossipore days of Sri Ramakrishna, *M.* visited Kamarpukur and other holy places sanctified by the Master's early days. After hearing the detailed narration from *M.*, the Master remarked, “How could you ever go into such out of the way places infested by robbers?” and drawing the attention of a nearby devotee he said, “Look at his love! Nobody has told him. Yet he of himself has with infinite care and love gone over those places and scenes because this person (pointing to himself) has walked in those places. His love is like that of Vibhishana ...” It may not be out of place to mention that *M.* had a wonderful experience at Kamarpukur. “By the grace of the Master, he saw all Kamarpukur as a holy place bathed in an effulgent light. Trees and creepers, beasts and birds and men all were made of effulgence. So he prostrated to all on the road. He came across a tomcat luminous with the light of consciousness. Immediately he fell to the ground and saluted it.” He had a similar experience at Dakshineswar also. (Swami Nityatmananda, *M. – The Apostle and the Evangelist, Part I*, p. 40).

*M.* was a man of mystical proportions, far deeper than the so-called saints. Great mystical insight and profound humility were co-tenants in his noble soul. “While at home, he would sometimes get up at night, carry his bedding to the open verandah of the Senate Hall of the Calcutta University, and there sleep among the waifs of the city in order to feel that he was homeless. When questioned why he went to such extent, he said, “The idea of home and family clings to one and does not leave easily.” (*The Disciples of Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, p. 430-31). Truly, deeper than his genius, greater than his spiritual insight, even higher than his scholarship, is the character of the man, which at once excites our wonder and admiration, love and respect. His utmost humility, steadfastness and spiritual conviction thoroughly molded his character; his being was fully integrated with his Master. Swamiji\* highly appreciated *M.*'s integrity and quality of being. In a letter of October 4, 1895, Swamiji wrote from London, “... If Master Mahashaya be willing, tell him to be my Calcutta agent, for I have an implicit faith in him.” Again in another letter from the U.S.A., he wrote: “When Ramakrishna left his body everybody gave us up as a few unripe urchins; but *M.* and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We cannot repay our debt to them.”

*M.* represented an ideal and philosophy of inward living and became a living example of that idealism. That is character. The zenith of *M.*'s character lay in one-

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\* Swami Vivekananda.

pointedness. Swami Raghavananda, who was an inmate with *M.* during his last six years, remarks:

“Among those who lived with *M.* in later days some felt that he always lived in constant and conscious union with God even with open eyes.” (*Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. XXXVII p. 442). Saturated through and through with the memories of Sri Ramakrishna, *M.*'s elevated life inspired many to take up spiritual life earnestly. He truly was a refuge for a countless multitude of persons in the city of Calcutta, those who in their broken lives found in the character of *M.* deep solace, comfort and inspiration. *M.*'s residence, the Morton School, became literally a “Naimishyaranya”.

To the downtrodden, how paramount is the source of spiritual motivation. As Lord Christ has said, “Man does not live by bread alone.” Spiritual aspiration lies choked under the heavy weight of secularism, the fever of which can only be cured by spiritual life. In prefacing his original rendering of the Bengali *Kathamrita*, *M.* has so appropriately quoted the verse from the *Bhagavatam*: ‘Only nectar sweet words of God soothe lives scorched in the fire of mundane life.’ Actually, the Master told *M.* “Whatever you hear falling from this mouth, know, it is the Mother that is speaking.” The genesis of *M.*'s wonderful *Kathamrita*, or simply *The Gospel*, can be traced from the fact that Sri Ramakrishna commanded *M.* to “live in the world unattached”. In obedience to the Master's advice, *M.* therefore had to stay at home constantly practising the ideal of a *grihastha-sannyasin*. The reasons for his recording the daily conversations with Sri Ramakrishna have been given by him thus: “I was in the worldly life bound to my work – and could not visit the Master whenever I wished; so, I used to note his words and impressions in order to be able to think on them in the intervals before I met him again, so that the impressions made on my mind might not be overlaid by the stress of worldly work and preoccupation. It was thus for my own benefit and good that I first made the notes, so that I might realize his teachings more perfectly.”

In 1897, long before *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* was published, short extracts were written into Biblical English by *M.* and published in a series as “Leaves from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna”. *M.* was a great devotee of Holy Mother, and it was with her blessings and permission that he published the pamphlet. It is most important to remember Holy Mother's remarks about the Gospel: ‘When I heard the Kathamrita I felt it was he, the Master, who was saying all that.’ In a letter written from DehraDun on November 24, 1897, Swamiji addressed, “My dear *M.*, Many many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise – so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy, I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our teacher and Lord was so original and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you – this great work. He is with you evidently... The Socratic dialogues are Plato all over; you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it here and in the West.” (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. V, p. 140). Girish Chandra Ghosh further wrote in a letter dated March 22, 1900: “If my humble opinion goes for anything, I not only endorse the opinion of the great Swami Vivekananda but add in a loud voice that *Kathamrita* has been my very existence during my protracted illness for the last three years. You deserve the gratitude of the whole human race to the end of days.”

When the first volume of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* was published in 1902,

Sri N. Ghosh wrote reviewing the volume in *The Indian Nation*, May 19, 1902: ‘He (*M.*) has done a kind of work which no Bengali had ever done before, which so far as we are aware no native of India had ever done. It has been done only once in history namely by Boswell. But then the immortal biography is only the life of a scholar and a kind-hearted man. This *Kathamrita*, on the other hand, is the record of the sayings of a Saint. What is the wit or even the worldly wisdom of the great Doctor by the side of the Divine teaching of a genuine devotee? Its value is immense. We say nothing of the sayings themselves for the character of the Teacher and teaching is well known. They take us straight to the truth and not through any metaphysical maze. Their style is Biblical in simplicity. What a treasure would it have been to the world if all the sayings of Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammad, Nanak and Chaitanya could have been thus preserved.’ (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Part V, Calcutta, 1932, p. 288).

In 1942, when the *Kathamrita* was translated into English by Swami Nikhilananda in New York, Aldous Huxley wrote in the Foreword of the work: ‘To a reverent love for his master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master’s teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, ‘*M*’ produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable as Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative’s daily life been described with such wealth of intimate detail.’

The language of the illumined teachers is universal. The words of such souls enlighten millions down the ages. Currently, in the West there is particularly a demand for detailed information of these great ones. The West very much lacks such genuine accounts. However, by dint of *M.*’s “prodigious memory combined with extraordinary power of imagination” enabling him to “completely annihilate the distance of time and place from himself,” the world has been blessed with the genuine account of Ramakrishna Paramahansa in the *Kathamrita*. “Even after the lapse of half a century, he (*M.*) could always visualize vividly scenes from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Superb too was his power to portray pictures by words.” (Swami Nityatmananda, *M. – The Apostle and the Evangelist*, Part One, p. 38). Everything in the life of Ramakrishna has been thoroughly and exhaustively recorded by *M.* This extremely satisfies the Western passion for exactitude. The mastery of the work is not simply due to *M.*’s massive intellect, but more so because *M.* loved the Master – that unflinching devotion made it possible. Love is the discovery of the greater self. “What we call love is, in truth, the finding of our own life in the life of another, the losing of our individual selves to gain a larger Self.” (John Caird, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 116). *M.* himself was a great mystic and articulated his experiences in the *Gospel*; his recording was not mere intellectual understanding. As stated by R.M. Jones: “The mystical experience has undoubtedly a poetic value. But it consists in leaps of insight through heightened life, in an intensifying of vision through the fusing of all the deep-lying powers of intellect, emotions and will, and in a corresponding surge of conviction through the dynamic integration of personality, rather than in the ‘gifts’ of new knowledge – facts.” (R.M. Jones, from the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.)

In Bengal the impact of the *Gospel* was felt immediately. Swami Vijnanananda, a direct *sannyasin* disciple of the Master and a President of the Ramakrishna Order, once remarked to *M.*: “By enquiry I have come to the conclusion that eighty or more per cent of the *sannyasins* have embraced the monastic life after reading the *Kathamrita* and coming in contact with you.” (Swami Nityatmananda, *M. – The Apostle and the*



*Evangelist, Part One*, p. 37). It is not known to many that *M.* was providentially instrumental in inspiring a group of young college boys about Sri Ramakrishna. *M.* was a professor of English in the Ripon College. His grave demeanour, reticence, contemplative life and idealism were conspicuous. The boys talked with *M.*, with much apprehension. But contrary to their misgivings, *M.* cordially discussed about his Master and told them, “Look here, Sri Ramakrishna renounced lust and gold; therefore to understand Sri Ramakrishna rightly, one has to come in touch with those who renounced everything and have been endeavouring to put into practice the ideals of the Master and to realize God.” These were the very first batch of youths who embraced monastic life in the Ramakrishna Order in 1897. (Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, p. 68). Thus began the first generation of monks after the direct disciples from whom the dissemination of the Master’s teaching would become further widespread.

Those who spread the *Gospel* are indeed the highest benefactors of humanity. The historian, Vincent Smith, in his book – “Akbar, The Great Mughal” – says, “Yet that Hindu was the greatest man of his age in India and greater even than Akbar himself, inasmuch as the conquest of the hearts and minds of millions of men and women affected by the poet was an achievement infinitely more lasting and important than any or all the victories gained in war by the monarch.” ... Tulsidas was the name of the Hindu for whom such pre-eminence is claimed. (Quoted by Prof. S. N. Sharma in his book, *The Jewel of Hindu Literature*, p. XV). Sir George Grierson, a great western Hindi scholar, thought that Tulsidas was the best man in his century in India. About the impact of the *Manas*, he said, “I have never met a person who has read it in the original and who was not impressed by it as the work of a great genius” and he added\*: “I give much less than the usual estimate when I say that fully ninety millions of people base their theories of moral and religious conduct upon his writing. If we take the influence exercised by him at the present time, he is one of three or four writers of Asia... Over the whole of the Gangetic Valley his great work is better known than the Bible is in England.”

Saint Nishchaladasa of ‘*Vichara Sagara*’ fame was a great genius. Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that no greater work of Vedanta or spirituality was produced in the last two hundred years. The writer spoke of his own work: “My *Vichara Sagara* is full of water – the Vedic dictums; this is quite deep, only expert divers can be delighted in tasting it” (1.6) On the other hand, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* brings us home to Reality in simple homely language. The words are soaked with the elixir of devotion, and yet, exalt in profoundest wisdom. Entire humanity for ages to come stands to gain in its sharing. Arnold Toynbee, conscious of the impact of spiritual values in the scheme of human well-being, has unhesitatingly marked the great spiritual leaders as the “greatest benefactors” of mankind. (Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, p. 156.) Pritim A. Sorokin of the Harvard fame has said in the same vein, “If we ask ourselves what kind of individuals have been most influential in human history, the answer is persons like Lao-Tze, Confucius, Buddha, Zoroaster, Mahavira, Moses, Jesus, St. Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi ...” “The purity of these few *paramahamsas* is all that holds the world together. If they should die out and leave it, the world would go to pieces.” (Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, vol. VII, p. 85).

Today the great thinkers of the world are of the opinion that one of these rare *paramahamsas*, Sri Ramakrishna, is a “moment in the consciousness of mankind.” “Not

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\* “Tulsidas, Poet and Religious Reformer”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1903.

for many a century past has India produced so great, so powerful a teacher of religious synthesis.” (Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, vol. VI, p. 465). There is a fragrance in all what the Master says, an impress of divine grace in his expression, for he is universal compassion incarnate. The spirit of universalism permeates the pages of the Gospel through and through. Harmony of religions, universality of Truth, divinity of human life and unity of existence – these profound ideas were pondered over, experienced and retested through the long slow Indian culture down the ages. But they reached a radiant flowering in the last century in Sri Ramakrishna. He spanned in one lifetime those great rolling centuries and gave us, in simple and universal language, the essence of their matured wisdom. This is positive breadth of vision, a genuine advancement in the quality of spiritual ideas and limitless expansion of spiritual consciousness. The conception of spiritual consciousness and its direct experience in the life of Ramakrishna staggers our imagination. It is deeper than the ocean and vaster than the sky, so wide it is in its comprehensiveness, so deep in its significance and so rich in its beneficence that it is bound to transcend the limitations of time and space. Is not Truth timeless? Christopher Isherwood, in his book, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Calcutta, 1965, p. 279) says: ‘If I had to use one single word to describe the atmosphere of the *Gospel* narrative, it would be the word *Now*. The majority of us spend the greater part of our lives in the future or the past – fearing or desiring what is to come, regretting what is over. *M.* shows us a being who lives in continuous contact with that which is eternally present. God’s existence has no relation to past or future; it is always as of *now*. To be with Ramakrishna was to be in the presence of that *Now*.’ The luminous personality of Sri Ramakrishna will be looked upon as a beacon to future mankind in all ages and climes. In the *Valmiki Ramayana* (Balakanda II. 36-37) we read the prophecy of Brahma: “As long as hills stand and rivers flow on earth, so long will the story of Rama be current in all parts of the world.” Likewise, the immortal work which *M.* has given the world in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna will for time immemorial influence entire humanity. Every enlightened seeker of Truth owes a great debt of gratitude to *M.* We, on this sacred occasion, pay our humble reverential homage to this Modern Vyasa.

## 23. THEY LIVED WITH GOD – M.

Swami Chetanananda

Swami Chetanananda, Head of the Vedanta Society, Saint Louis (U.S.A.) is known for his deep studies of Sri Ramakrishna, his apostles and the *Gospel*. In this write-up the Swami studies Sri M., and as the title says puts him in the category of men who 'lived with God'. Herein he has touched the main aspects of Sri M.'s life and unveiled the hidden man behind the *Gospel*. His quotations in this study from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (by Swami Nikhilananda) remain 'untouched' but the magazine quotations are slightly edited at places for readability and clear understanding. "If we let the Westerners edit our ideas in their language," says Swamiji in a recent letter to us, "they will feel comfortable and read more." And the Swami has also not put the references because they may frighten the readers.

**"In the eye of a lover, every detail of his beloved's life and activities is important. So it is with the devotee of God."**

Men who have walked with God have walked with their hands free of worldly possessions and their minds emptied of everything except the thought of God. People generally are bound to the world by their desires for wealth, sense-pleasures, and name and fame. When these desires are given up, the desire for God can arise in the mind. Thus, for ages, spiritual aspirants have practised renunciation, giving up the things of the world, in order to turn their minds fully to God.

It is not possible for spiritual aspirants who are householders to give up everything. The householder is the mainstay of the social order, and that role requires family and social responsibilities; he cannot easily answer the call to "Give up and follow me." In the present age, Sri Ramakrishna has given a new teaching especially for householders: "Let the boat be in water, but let there be no water in the boat; let an aspirant live in the world, but let there be no worldliness in him." He molded the lives of his householder disciples exemplifying this principle. Each disciple played a very different role in the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna, as can be seen by studying their lives. Yet along with taking care of their families, family problems, household duties, social commitments, and jobs, all of them, at the same time, led God-centered lives. Sri Ramakrishna taught them this technique: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all – with wife, and children, father and mother – and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you ... If you enter the world without first cultivating love for God, you will be entangled more and more." Sri Ramakrishna's inspiring teachings uplifted his disciples; his divine love protected them as a mother bird protects her fledglings from rain and wind by spreading her strong wings over them.

M., the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was one of the householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In later years, people would say, "If you want to forget the world, go to see M. He knows how to remove worldly desires from the mind and instill the thought of God there." People flocked to him, and he would talk to them only about God. When they would ask, "Please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna," he would quote the conversation between the disciple and the teacher in the *Kena Upanishad*: The disciple said, "Teach me the Upanishad," and the preceptor replied, "I have already told

you the Upanishad.” By this, *M.* meant that as he knew only Sri Ramakrishna and nothing else, whatever came through his lips was about him.

Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Subodh, one of his young disciples, to visit *M.* and talk with him about God. The boy, who was to become one of Sri Ramakrishna’s monastic disciples, replied: “Sir, he lives with his wife and children. What could I learn from him?” Sri Ramakrishna smiled at these words expressing stern renunciation but told Subodh: “He will not talk about his personal life. He will talk only of what he has learned here.” When Subodh went to see *M.*, he related this conversation to him. *M.* said humbly, “It is quite true. I am nobody, but I live beside the ocean, and I keep a few pitchers of that water with me. When a guest comes, I offer that to him. What else am I to talk about?”

*M.* was the pen name of Mahendra Nath Gupta. He was born in Calcutta on July 14, 1854. His parents were spiritually-minded people, and he was very devoted to his mother. When he was four years old, he went with his mother to attend the car festival of Jagannath at Mahesh, and on their way back they stopped at the Dakshineswar temple garden. He later recounted his memory of that day: “The temple was all white then, new and glistening. While going around the temple, I lost sight of my mother and was crying for her on the temple porch. Immediately a handsome brahmin came out of the temple and, touching my head, consoled me. Then he called out, ‘Whose child is this? Where has his mother gone?’ “ *M.* told the devotees, “Most probably he was Sri Ramakrishna, because at that time he was the priest in the Kali temple.”

From his childhood *M.* had religious and mystical inclinations. When he was five years old, he used to climb to the roof of his house to gaze at the vastness of the sky or to stand there during the monsoon and experience the torrential rains. He read in the *Mahabharata* that one should love and worship one’s teacher, so when the family priest visited their home, *M.* saluted him and served him personally. On his way to school he would bow down at the temple of the Divine Mother which was on the other side of the College Street Market. When he was in the eighth grade he started to keep a diary, and the following entries show his religious nature: “I got up in the morning and prostrated before my parents.” “As usual, on my way to school I saluted Mother Kali and Mother Sitala.” The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* ultimately originated from this habit of keeping a diary, and *M.* himself commented about his great work: “I was an apprentice for fifteen years.”

*M.* was a brilliant student. He received his secondary education at the Hare School in Calcutta, where he was second in his class, and in 1875, he graduated third in the University of Calcutta from the Presidency College. He was a favourite student of C. H. Tawney, a well-known professor of English, who later wrote a brochure on Sri Ramakrishna. While *M.* was in college he married Nikunja Devi, a cousin of the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen. At that time Keshab was the hero of modern Bengal, and *M.* was very much influenced by him.

*M.* took up the profession of a teacher. He served as headmaster in several schools in Calcutta. In February 1882, when he met Sri Ramakrishna, *M.* was the headmaster of the Shyambazar Branch of the Vidyasagar School. He was an excellent teacher, well-versed in both Eastern and Western philosophy, and in history, literature, astronomy, and science. Moreover, he had studied the New Testament so thoroughly that he could quote many passages from memory. Long after *M.* had met Sri Ramakrishna, a Christian minister once expressed his amazement at the depth of *M.*’s knowledge of the Bible. *M.* told him politely, “Sir, we lived with Christ [to *M.*, Ramakrishna and Christ

were the same], so we understand his teachings a little.”

God’s divine play in this world is such that we sometimes find suffering leading to happiness, and again, success leading to a downfall. *M.*’s mother had died when he was young, and without her, family squabbles had gradually disrupted the harmony in the joint family. *M.* was a peace-loving soul, and he finally could no longer bear the pettiness and selfishness of his family members. He decided to leave home. One night at ten o’ clock he left for his sister’s house at Baranagore, accompanied by his wife. He hired a horse carriage, but one of the carriage wheels broke near Shyambazar. He approached a friend’s house nearby for lodging for the night, but got a cold reception. Luckily, at midnight he found another carriage and was able to reach his sister’s house. *M.* said later that at that time of his life his mental anguish was so great that he was thinking of taking his life.

The next afternoon he went for a walk with his nephew Sidhu, whose father, Ishan Kaviraj, was Sri Ramakrishna’s physician. Sidhu took him to the temple garden of Dakshineswar, and there, *M.* met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. *M.* put it beautifully: “I was thinking of killing myself, but instead I found my real Self. My family troubles led me to God.” It is interesting that Sidhu, who took *M.* to Sri Ramakrishna himself never visited Sri Ramakrishna again.

*M.* writes of that first visit:

They [*M.* and Sidhu] arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna’s room. And there they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face, he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence. *M.* stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as it Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri ... *M.* looked around him with wonder and said to himself: “What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words are!”

As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum, and cymbal ... The sounds traveled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship.

On this first day, *M.* spoke very little with Sri Ramakrishna. He later said to the devotees: “After meeting Sri Ramakrishna, I completely forgot my past. His towering personality and spiritual magnetism erased my sad memories.”

On his second visit *M.* was scolded by Sri Ramakrishna and, as he describes, his ego was crushed. With a humility born of greatness, he immediately perceived the truth in Sri Ramakrishna’s words and accepted it. It is as if *M.*’s belief in intellectual knowledge were overpowered by Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual wisdom once and for all. Generally people prefer to hide their weaknesses, but *M.* was so sincere that he has meticulously recorded all the scoldings he received from the Master, as well as his reactions to them. *M.*’s record runs: “Thus rebuked, *M.* sat speechless. His pride had received a blow. After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna looked at him kindly and said affectionately: ‘You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person’s forehead, his eyes, and so on.’ ”

On this occasion *M.* asked four vital questions of Sri Ramakrishna. For readers of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* it is as though he had asked them on behalf of humanity:

(1) “How may we fix our minds on God?” (2) “How ought we to live in the world?” (3) “Is it possible to see God?” (4) “Under what conditions does one see God?” Reading Sri Ramakrishna’s responses to these questions in the first few pages of the book, one can already see how he incorporated parables, symbols, songs, stories, folklore, myths, scientific reasoning, day-to-day household examples and examples from nature and from animal and human behaviour in his teachings. He seldom used scriptural testimony. “Sri Ramakrishna never taught anything, which he had not himself practised three times,” said one of his disciples. He taught from his personal experience and explained the deep truths of spiritual life in an utterly simple way, and this captivated *M.* Never before had he met such a man.

On his fourth visit, *M.* found Sri Ramakrishna in his room surrounded by a group of young men. As soon as *M.* came in the room, the Master laughed and said to them, “There! He has come again.” Then he explained the cause of his laughter: “A man once fed a peacock with a pill of opium at four o’ clock in the afternoon. The next day, exactly at that time, the peacock came back. It had felt the intoxication of the drug and returned just in time to have another dose.” For the remaining five years of the Master’s lifetime, *M.* returned for dose after dose of this divine intoxicant – direct association with God Incarnate – and then shared it freely with other seekers of God. At the beginning of each volume of the Bengali *Gospel*, he has quoted a verse from the *Bhagavatam*: “O Lord, your words, like sweet nectar, refresh the afflicted; your words, which poets have sung in verses, vanquish the sins of the worldly. Blessed are they who hear of you, and blessed indeed are they who speak of you. How great is their gift!”

Only a jeweler can determine the real value of a diamond. Sri Ramakrishna recognized *M.*’s greatness at first sight, and his comments about *M.* indicate that he was not an ordinary person. As other incarnations of God have had someone to witness or collect their teachings, perhaps *M.* was this same great soul born again for that purpose. “I recognized you on hearing you read the *Chaitanya Bhagavatam*. You are my own. The same substance, like father and son ... Before you came here, you didn’t know who you were. Now you will know.” “Once (in a vision) I saw Gauranga and his devotees singing *kirtana* in the Panchavati. I think I saw Balaram there and you too.” “Yes, I know everything: what your Ideal is, who you are, your inside and outside, the events of your past lives, and your future.” “I can see from the signs of your eyes, brows, and face that you are a yogi. You look like a yogi who has just left his seat of meditation.”

At one of their first meetings Sri Ramakrishna wanted to evaluate *M.*’s understanding of his spiritual state. He asked *M.*, “What do you think of me? How many annas of knowledge of God have I?” “I don’t understand what you mean by ‘annas,’” replied *M.*, “But of this I am sure: I have never before seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in God, renunciation, and catholicity anywhere.”

On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna asked, “Have you found anyone else resembling me – any pandit or holy man?” *M.* replied, “God has created you with His own hands, whereas He has made others by machine.” This remark made the Master laugh.

On July 28, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna, with *M.* and others, visited the house of two brahmin sisters, one of whom was grief-stricken because of her daughter’s death. One sister was busy with the arrangements for the Master’s refreshments, while the other, the grief-stricken one, was so overwhelmed with joy at his presence that she would not leave the room where he was. *M.* was reminded of the story of Martha and Mary in the Bible, and later he told that story to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master then said:

“Well, after seeing all this, what do you feel?”

*M.*: “I feel that Christ, Chaitanya Deva, and yourself – all three are one and the same ...”

*Master*: “Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed one. Don’t you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way.”

*M.*: “You explained clearly, the other day, how God incarnates Himself on earth.”

*Master*: “Tell me what I said.”

*M.*: “You told us to imagine a field extending to the horizon and beyond. It extends without any obstruction; but we cannot see it on account of a wall in front of us. In that wall there is a round hole. Through the hole we see a part of that infinite field.”

*Master*: “Tell me what that hole is.”

*M.*: “You are that hole. Through you can be seen everything – that Infinite Meadow without any end.” Patting *M.*’s back, Sri Ramakrishna expressed his pleasure at *M.*’s understanding.

After he had been visiting the Master for some time, *M.* felt the urge to renounce family life and become a monk. But Sri Ramakrishna had set out a different path for him and discouraged him from this idea. “You are well established in God already. Is it good to give up all?” “God binds the *Bhagavata* pandit to the world with one tie: otherwise, who would remain to explain the sacred book? He keeps the pandit bound for the good of men. That is why the Divine Mother has kept you in the world.”

Again, one evening when *M.* was alone with him at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna said in an ecstatic mood: “Let nobody think that if he does not do Mother’s work, it would remain undone. The Mother can turn even a straw into a teacher.” This erased any doubts left in *M.*’s mind; he understood that he should surrender completely to the will of the Master. He remained living as a hidden yogi in his family setting. He practised inner sannyasa, without being indifferent to his duties and responsibilities. He was successful as a teacher, yet he had the calm of a yogi. He was very humble and would serve monks and devotees with deep sincerity. Thus he combined the virtues of a householder with the spiritual intensity of a sadhu.

As a headmaster, *M.* had much contact with students. Many of Sri Ramakrishna’s disciples were his students – Rakhal, Subodh, Sarada, Baburam, Purna, Binod, Bankim, Tejachandra, Khirod and Narayan. He was teased by the devotees for being a “kidnapper-teacher”, for many of the boys came to Sri Ramakrishna through him.

*M.* practised spiritual discipline under Sri Ramakrishna’s guidance. Once the Master found him meditating on the veranda of the *nahabat* at Dakshineswar and said: “Hello! You are here? You will get results very soon. If you practise a little, then someone will come forward to help you ... The time is ripe for you. The mother bird does not break the shell of the egg until the right time arrives.” These words gave *M.* tremendous encouragement, and he often quoted them in later years. As he visited Sri Ramakrishna more and more, he gradually lost interest in reading Western philosophy and science, and he did not care much about listening to the lectures of Keshab Sen and other scholars. He thought constantly of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, such as, “One can certainly see God through the practice of spiritual discipline,” or “The vision of God is the only goal of human life.”

Sri Ramakrishna’s love and affection captivated *M.*’s mind, and he felt very close

to the Master. “You are my very own, my relative; otherwise, why should you come here so frequently?” said the Master. On another occasion he said to *M.*, “You don’t want anything from me, but you love to see me and hear my words. My mind also dwells on you. I wonder how you are and why you don’t come.”

Another passage in the *Gospel* gives us a glimpse of the deep relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples:

It was the day of the Car Festival [July 14, 1885]. Sri Ramakrishna left his bed very early in the morning. He was alone in the room, dancing and chanting the name of God ... It was about half past six in the morning. *M.* was going to bathe in the Ganges, when suddenly tremors of an earthquake were felt. At once he returned to Sri Ramakrishna’s room. The Master stood in the drawing room. The devotees stood around him ... The shaking had been rather violent, and many of them were frightened.

*M.*: “You should all have gone downstairs.”

*Master*: “Such is the fate of the house under whose roof one lives; and still people are so egotistic. (To *M.*) Do you remember the great storm of the month of Aswin [October 5, 1864]?”

*M.*: “Yes, Sir. I was very young at that time – nine or ten years old. I was alone in a room while the storm was raging, and I prayed to God.”

*M.* was surprised and said to himself: “Why did the Master suddenly ask me about the great storm of Aswin? Does he know that I was alone at that time earnestly praying to God with tears in my eyes? Does he know all this? Has he been protecting me as my guru since my very birth?”

Undoubtedly *M.* received many blessings from the Master, but his personal life was full of trials and tribulations. He was worried about his wife, whose mind was a little unbalanced. One day he spoke of this to the Master: “What should one do if one’s wife says: ‘You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide.’?” “Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life ... The wife that hampers her husband’s spiritual life is an ungodly wife.” This stern answer put *M.* into a serious mood. The other devotees who were present remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna understood *M.*’s predicament, and after a little while he whispered in *M.*’s ear, “But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control – the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband’s part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life.” These words of hope soothed *M.*’s worried mind.

Sri Ramakrishna taught that religion is not a matter of preaching, but of transforming oneself and thus inspiring others. One day toward the end of his life, he compared himself and his blessed group to a troupe of *bauls*, religious minstrels who suddenly appeared, danced, and sang the name of God, and then disappeared into the unknown, leaving people amazed and inspired. On *M.*’s second visit, the Master scolded him for his criticism of those who worship images. “That’s the one hobby of you Calcutta people – giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others? He, who is the Lord of the Universe, will teach everyone.” On another occasion, the Master said to *M.*, “The less people know about your thoughts of God, the better for you.”

Sri Ramakrishna used to present religion according to his own experience and in a tangible way. Once *M.* asked him what meditation on the formless God was like. The Master told him: “You see, one must practise spiritual discipline to understand this



correctly. Suppose there are treasures in a room. If you want to see them and get hold of them, you must take the trouble to get the key and unlock the door. After that you must take the treasures out. But suppose the room is locked, and standing outside the door you say to yourself: 'Here I have opened the door. Now I have broken the lock of the chest. Now I have taken out the treasure.' Such brooding near the door will not enable you to achieve anything. You must practise discipline."

Then one day eight months later, Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by *M.* and other devotees, went to visit Mati Seal's garden house at Belgharia. *M.* recorded: "For a long time the Master had been asking *M.* to take him to the reservoir in the garden in order that he might teach him how to meditate on the formless God. There were tame fish in the reservoir. Nobody harmed them. Visitors threw puffed rice and other bits of food into the water, and the big fish came in swarms to eat the food. Fearlessly the fish swam in the water and sported there joyously.

"Coming to the reservoir, the Master said to *M.*: 'Look at the fish. Meditating on the formless God is like swimming joyfully like these fish, in the ocean of Bliss and Consciousness.'"

During Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime, *M.* visited Kamarpukur, the Master's village home, and bowed down to all the places associated with the Master's boyhood and later life there, regarding them as places of pilgrimage. Sri Ramakrishna was touched by *M.*'s devotion and remarked, "His love is like that of Vibhishana, who, when he found a human form, at once dressed it in rich apparel and worshipped it by waving lights, saying, 'This is the form of my Ramachandra.'"

The great teachers of the world keep religion alive. They teach with the authority of direct experience and transmit power to their disciples, who in turn spread their teachings among humanity. Sri Ramakrishna commissioned *M.* to carry his message, just as he commissioned Swami Vivekananda. At the Cossipore garden house, the Master wrote on a piece of paper, "Naren [Vivekananda] will teach people.\*" When the young man objected, the Master told him, "Your very bones will do it." Regarding *M.*, Sri Ramakrishna once said in an ecstatic mood, addressing the Divine Mother, "Mother, why have you given him only one *kala* [a small part] of power? Oh, I see. That will be sufficient for your work."

Once Sri Ramakrishna remarked about *M.*, "This man has no ego." Where there is ego there is no God, and where there is God, there is no ego. Sri Ramakrishna had effaced *M.*'s ego forever, and thus he became a perfect instrument in the hands of the Master.

When one of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees asked *M.* to show him his diary, *M.* refused, saying, "I am writing it for myself, not for others." Whenever he would get a little extra time during his work as a teacher, he would retire to a solitary room on the roof to read his diary and reflect and meditate on the words of the Master. Once speaking of the origin of the *Gospel*, *M.* said: "I was involved in worldly activities, bound to my work, and could not visit the Master whenever I wished. Therefore I used to note down his words in order to think about them in the intervals before I met him again, so that the impressions made on my mind might not be overlaid by the stress of worldly work and responsibilities. It was thus for my own benefit that I first made the notes, so that I might realize his teachings more perfectly."

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\* See Frontispiece to Part II of this volume and the write up at p. 163. [Ed.]

Like *M.*, Tarak, who later became Swami Shivananda, once started to make notes of the Master's teachings and conversations, but Sri Ramakrishna forbade him to do so, and Tarak threw all of his notes into the Ganges. The job of recorder was earmarked for *M.* from the *Gospel* it seems that sometimes the Master would not begin an important discussion without *M.* being present. And again, the Master sometimes asked *M.* to repeat to him what he had said, and if *M.* had not understood it correctly, he would clarify the meaning for him. (See the entry in the *Gospel* dated November 9, 1884).

*M.* was gifted with artistic ability and an accurate memory, which enabled him to faithfully recreate in writing what he had seen and heard. The scenes in the *Gospel* are so vividly depicted, that it is as if the reader were transported to the very time and place and were watching and listening to the Master and his devotees. *M.* had been influenced by the writings of medieval Sanskrit poets such as Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti and had imbibed the contemplative spirit and serene atmosphere of the hermitages of ancient India through them. His own poetic nature can be seen in the descriptive passages in the *Gospel*, such as the following:

'Sri Ramakrishna was going to the pine-grove. A beautiful, dark rain-cloud was to be seen in the northwest ... After a few minutes *M.* and Latu, standing in the Panchavati, saw the Master coming back toward them. Behind him the sky was black with the rain-cloud. Its reflection in the Ganges made the water darker. The disciples felt that the Master was God Incarnate, a Divine Child five years old, radiant with the smile of innocence and purity. Around him were the sacred trees of the Panchavati under which he had practised spiritual discipline and had beheld visions of God. At his feet flowed the sacred river Ganges, the destroyer of man's sins. The presence of this Godman charged the trees, shrubs, flowers, plants, and temples with spiritual fervour and divine joy.'

Aldous Huxley wrote in the foreword to the English translation of the *Gospel*, "Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, *M.* produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography." One can challenge the historicity of Christ, Buddha, or Krishna, but no one can challenge the historicity of Sri Ramakrishna. His conversations are meticulously documented according to place, persons, time, day, month, and year, and have come directly from *M.*'s diary. He himself said, "My account is not a collection from other sources. I recorded whatever I heard with my own ears from the Master's lips and whatever I saw of his life with my own eyes." He wrote at the beginning of each volume of the Bengali edition that there are three kinds of information about Sri Ramakrishna: the first is recorded by the person who observed it on the same day as it happened; the second is recorded by the observer but at a later time; and the third is also recorded at a later time, by someone who heard it from someone else. The *Gospel* belongs to the first category. *M.* would struggle to make his account accurate, for he once said: "Sometimes I meditated on one scene over a thousand times. Sometimes I had to wait for a word of the Master to come to mind as a *chataka* bird waits for a drop of rainwater to fall."

Although tautology is a weakness in logic, it is not a weakness in the scriptures. The scriptures will reiterate the same truth in different ways so that it penetrates into us. *M.* was once asked to remove some of the repetitions from the *Gospel*, but he replied; "I cannot do that. Sri Ramakrishna told the same parable to different people. If I remove a particular section, the train of the conversation will be broken. Moreover, you won't be able to see the effect of the *Gospel* in a particular person's life. You see, sometimes the brilliance of a diamond is enhanced by changing its setting. Putting it on the dusty

ground gives one effect, and putting it on a green lawn will give another; but putting it in a blue velvet casket will give the most brilliant effect of all. The same is true of the words in the Gospel.”

*M.* was reticent about himself even in the *Gospel*. His family name was Mahendra Nath Gupta, but he referred to himself always impersonally, using names such as Mani, Mohinimohan, Master, a devotee, an Englishman (meaning an English educated person), a servant, or, most often, *M.* (in Bengali, Sri Ma). Among Sri Ramakrishna’s immediate circle of devotees, he was known as Master Mahashaya, respected teacher, but since the publishing of the *Gospel*, he has come to be known almost universally as “*M.*”

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the other disciples asked *M.* to publish his diary, but he was reluctant to do so. However, one day he read some of his notes to Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, and she approved of them. *M.* regarded this as a divine sanction. In 1897, he published two pamphlets in English under the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. A few years later, the *Gospel* was published in its original Bengali language in five volumes as the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*\*. This was then translated into English by Swami Nikhilananda and published in one volume in 1942. Swami Vivekananda wrote to *M.* in response to the earliest publications: “You have hit Ramakrishna in right point. Few alas, few understand him!” “The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer’s mind, as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise – so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy ... I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you – this great work. He is with you evidently ... The Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden.”

After the passing away of the Master, *M.* supported his monastic disciples in every possible way and regularly visited the Baranagore Math. He used to join them in practising spiritual disciplines, and he was never tired of speaking of their fervour to others. He would idealize the monk’s life of renunciation and purity above all. To him the monks were the full-time lovers of God, while the householders were part-time because of their worldly obligations. *M.* regarded Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of renunciation and purity and the monks of his Order as those continuing to carry that same lofty banner. When a monk would come to visit him, he would give up his work and sit near him like a servant, saying, “A holy man has come, the Lord himself has come in one form, as it were. Shall I not postpone my eating and bath for him? Absurdity can go no further if I cannot do that.”

Though outwardly *M.* was a householder, inwardly he himself was like a monk, full of intense devotion to God and renunciation of things of the world. Sometimes he would get up at night and, taking his bed roll, would leave his home to sleep on the open veranda of the Calcutta University Senate Hall among the homeless people of the city. When asked why, he explained, “The idea of home and family clings to one and does not leave easily.” He led a simple, unostentatious life. The same plain style of clothing that he wore when he first met Sri Ramakrishna he continued to wear all through his life. He had one change of clothes – an extra shirt and an extra wearing cloth for going out.

Sometimes he would go to the railway station to watch the stream of pilgrims returning from Jagannath at Puri. He liked to see their bright, serene faces, and

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\* Volume I in 1902, Volume II in 1904, Volume III in 1908, Volume IV in 1910 and Volume V in 1932.

occasionally he would ask for a little *prasad* from them. He had heard from the Master that one who eats *prasad* attains devotion; if anyone brought him *prasad*, he would even save the containers in which it was carried, thinking that they would remind him of God. He would bow down to the place on Bechu Chatterjee Street where the Master's elder brother had once run a school, and also at the house of the Mitra family at Jhamapukur where the Master had once worked as a priest. Observing his companions' surprise, *M.* would say, "Do you know that anyone who walks through this street will become a yogi?" Sometimes when he went to Dakshineswar, after the Master's passing away, he would bring back a wet towel with him, squeeze the water from it, and sprinkle the water on the devotees, saying, "I brought this water from the ghat on the Ganges where the Master used to bathe."

In 1905, *M.* gave up his position as a headmaster and purchased the Morton Institution, a school, which was then situated in Jhamapukur Lane but was later moved to 50 Amherst Street. He used to live there in a solitary room on the roof of the school building, and there he would meet the monks and devotees who came to see him in the morning and evening. Swami Raghavananda's record runs: "In the sweet and warm months of April and May, sitting under the canopy of heaven on the roof garden at 50 Amherst Street, surrounded by shrubs and plants, himself sitting in their midst like a Rishi of old, the stars and planets in their courses beckoning us to things infinite and sublime, he would speak to us of the mystery of God and His love, and of the yearning that would rise in the human heart to solve the eternal riddle, as exemplified in the life of his Master."

*M.* went on pilgrimage to Varanasi, Vrindaban, Ayodhya, and other holy places. At Varanasi he met Trailanga Swami, a tacit, illumined monk, whom he fed with sweets. He also met Swami Bhaskarananda, with whom he had a long talk. In 1912, he went on a pilgrimage with Sri Sarada Devi to Varanasi again, and from there travelled to Hardwar, Kankhal, Rishikesh, and Vrindaban in the company of monks. He visited Puri and Bhubaneswar several times. But his main attraction was to places connected with Sri Ramakrishna, especially Dakshineswar, where the Master had lived for thirty years. In the eye of a lover, every detail of his beloved's life and activities is important. So it is with the devotee of God. He has intense interest in all things, places, and persons associated with God's manifestation on earth; he takes great pleasure in visiting or hearing about such places, because, they make the Lord more real to him. To the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, every spot at Dakshineswar is sacred. *M.* would sometimes accompany the devotees to the temple garden and would point out places where special conversations, meetings, or incidents had taken place. He was never tired of narrating those stories.\*

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\* In the first volume of the Bengali *Gospel* and in the first English edition, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Volume I (published by Ramakrishna Math, Madras) *M.* has left a short description of the Dakshineswar temple garden for future pilgrims, pointing out the places they should see: the *beltala*, where the Master practised tantra; the pine grove; the *panchavati*, a sacred grove of five trees (*banyan*, *pepul*, *neem*, *amalaki* and *bel*); the *madhavi-lata* plant, which was planted by the Master; the meditation room, where the Master practised Vedantic sadhana; the goose tank; the *bakultala-ghat*; the *nahabat*, where Sri Sarada Devi lived; the *chandani-ghat*, where the Master used to bathe; the flower garden; the Kali temple; the *nat-mandir*, or theatre hall; the office rooms and guest rooms; the twelve Shiva temples; the Radha-Krishna temple; the new image of Krishna and also the old one with the broken leg which was repaired by the Master; the red-tiled courtyard, which was touched by the blessed feet of the Master; the southern, northern, and western semi-circular verandas around the Master's room; the room itself where he lived for fourteen years; the *kuthi*, where he lived in a room on the ground floor for sixteen

Once a devotee told *M.* that he planned to visit Dakshineswar. *M.* told him to prepare himself for the visit. Then, suddenly in an inspired mood, *M.* said, “When you see Dakshineswar, you will have an idea of what Sri Ramakrishna’s surroundings were like. The temple garden was the backdrop for divine scenes. At Dakshineswar you will see the *bel* tree under which the Master practised great tantric sadhanas. There is the *Panchavati*, where he went through many spiritual exercises. You will also see the Master’s room. When you enter his room, visualize the Master seated with his disciples and talking to them on divine subjects. We always found the Master absorbed in spiritual moods. Sometimes he would be in *samadhi*. Sometimes he would be singing and dancing; at other times he would be talking to the Divine Mother. We were fortunate enough to see a man who actually talked to the Divine Mother; we were fortunate enough to see a man whose experiences form, as it were, a living Veda. It is the revelations of such people that we have to rely upon, not our ‘ounce of reason’. For the intellect cannot go far in spiritual matters; it has been weighed and found wanting. Christ said to his disciples, ‘I speak of things, which I have seen with my own eyes; and yet you believe me not.’ One has to put one’s faith in the words of a man of realization. When, you go to the temple, you must purify yourself and strip yourself of all sensuality. Only, the pure in heart can see God. You must also open yourself to the Master’s presence and influence. This pilgrimage to Dakshineswar will help you a good deal in progressing toward God-realization.”

On another occasion *M.* advised: “One should see everything connected with the Master in detail. For example, in the Master’s room there are cots, a jar containing Ganges water, pictures of gods and goddesses – Kali, Krishna, Rama, Chaitanya and his *Kirtana* party, Dhruva, Prahlad, Christ extending his hand to the drowning Peter, and a white marble image of Buddha which was given to him by Queen Katyayani, the wife of Lalababu. There was a picture of the goddess of learning on the western wall. Whenever a new person would come, the Master would look at that picture and pray, ‘Mother, I am an unlettered person. Please sit on my tongue,’ and then he would speak to him. If a person can imprint these divine sights on his mind, he will have deep meditations, and even sitting at home he can live at Dakshineswar with the Master.”

*M.* made a wonderful comment about Dakshineswar: “The spiritual fire is blazing intensely there, and whoever goes there will be purified. The body does not burn, but mental impurities are consumed in no time. Then a man can attain immortality. God Himself, in a physical form, lived there for thirty years! One can tangibly feel the spirituality at Dakshineswar.”

There is a beautiful verse in the *Chaitanya Charitamrita: Adyapiha sei lila kare gora rai, kono kono bhagyavana dekhbare pai*: “Chaitanya is still performing his divine play; only the fortunate ones can see it.” Sri Ramakrishna’s divine presence is still at Dakshineswar, and the temple garden is not much different today from the way it was during his lifetime. But until we are able to see the eternal play of the Master at Dakshineswar, like the fortunate ones who see the play of Chaitanya, we are indebted to *M.* for his devoted first-hand account of what took place.

Once Miss Josephine McLeod asked *M.*, “What was your experience of Sri Ramakrishna?” *M.* replied, “He was always God-conscious. He was never separated from that state, and we saw him twenty-four hours in the day. This is not possible for an ordinary God-realized man, but only when God incarnates in a human body. He declared

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years; the *gazi* pond; the *gazitala*, where the Master practised Islam; the main gate; the back gate; and the orchard.

that in his body Satchidananda had descended on earth. One day he told me. ‘Christ, Chaitanya Deva, and I are one and the same entity.’ When he thus revealed his real nature to us, we would feel bewildered and wonder, “Is this the temple priest or God Himself speaking?”

*Miss MacLeod*: “How did he speak to you?”

*M.*: “He told us, ‘The Mother of the Universe speaks through my lips.’ He spoke from inspiration. On several occasions he said, ‘I am an illiterate man, but Mother pushes heaps of knowledge to me from behind.’”

Once a devotee said to *M.* “You are very fortunate. You have seen and heard Sri Ramakrishna; you have even touched him and served him.”

*M.* replied, “Don’t think in that way. The Master said that all his wealth and power will go to his children. Discrimination, renunciation, knowledge, devotion, and love are his wealth. These good qualities will come to the soul who thinks of him.”

On another occasion, *M.* said to a devotee: “Do you know what we received from the Master? Burning faith.”

Like Job in the Old Testament, *M.* took the trials and tribulations of life as a test of his faith in God. He regarded the world as a seething cauldron, but he kept his mind above it. When people would come to him with their difficulties, he would say: “God created anger, passion, and other troubles in order to mould great souls. An expert boatman can manage his boat in a cyclone. He enjoys navigating in the teeth of tidal waves, but weak people sit inside the boat and cry. There is a kind of bird called the stormy petrel. When a storm begins at sea, the animals on the shore hide in the forest; but the stormy petrel comes out of its nest and flies into the gusty wind with its wings spread. We should follow its example. Be of good cheer. We need strength and should have determination to surmount the troubles and depressions of life. As long as we have human bodies we will have to face these.”

On another occasion, a young man came to visit *M.* “Do you have a question?” asked *M.* The young man answered, “Sir, I am in turmoil and have no peace.” *M.* burst into laughter and then said to the others present: “Do you hear what this young man says? He is in the world and says, ‘I have no peace.’ After drinking a bottle of wine you are asking, ‘Why should I be drunk?’ “ *M.* had heard from the Master again and again, “Lust and gold alone is the world. It makes one forget God.” “All seek to enjoy lust and gold. But there is too much misery and worry in that.”

Sri Ramakrishna had asked *M.* to work for the Divine Mother, and he did so for fifty years. Even though his health was delicate, he never gave up working. Swami Nityatmananda wrote of a touching incident in his memoirs: “I was responsible for the printing of *the Kathamrita* [the Bengali *Gospel*] while it was at the printer’s, but I had many things to do and was unable to finish the proof-reading in time. At one o’ clock at night I saw a light in *M.*’s room. I entered and found he was reading the proofs of the *Gospel* by a kerosene lantern. He was not well at all, and moreover, as he was working at an odd hour, his eyes were watering. I was pained at this. I lovingly chastised him and he replied with affection, ‘People are finding peace by reading this book, the Master’s immortal message. It is inevitable that the body will meet its end, so it is better that it is used for spreading peace to others. We are in the world and have utterly experienced how much pain is there, yet I have forgotten that pain through the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I am hurrying so that the book may come out soon.’ Indeed, *M.* died while the last portion of the last volume was at the press. He was born to write and

teach the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.”

On June 4, 1932. *M.* left his body in full consciousness. He breathed his last saying this prayer, “Mother – Guru Deva – take me up in Thy arms.” The Mother took Her child up in Her arms and the curtain fell.

When *M.* would talk about Sri Ramakrishna, he would forget body-consciousness. It seemed as though his souls were trying its utmost to break out of its cage of name and form, trying to encompass the Infinite. His love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna was so great, it would spread to those who heard him speak. One day in an inspired mood, *M.* was trying to describe his Master:

“The Master was like a five-year-old boy always running to meet his Mother.

“The Master was like a beautiful flower whose nature was to bloom and spread its fragrance.

“The Master was like a bonfire from which other lamps were lighted.

“The Master was like a celestial *vina* always absorbed in singing the glory of the Divine Mother.

“The Master was like a big fish joyfully swimming in calm, clear, blue waters, the Ocean of Satchidananda.

“The Master was like a bird which had lost its nest in a storm and then, perched on the threshold of the Infinite, was joyfully moving between the two realms, singing the glory of the infinite.”

After trying to describe the Master in many ways, he said that all these similes were inadequate; the Infinite cannot be expressed in words.

*M.* offered his life at the feet of his *guru* and attained eternal life, and through his great life’s work, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, he has been immortalized.

## 24. MASTER MAHASHAYA AS I SAW HIM

by Swami Chidbhavananda

Swami Chidbhavananda, Founder President of Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, Tirupparaitturai, Tamil Nadu joined the Ramakrishna Order in March, 1923. He was naturally very happy when it was suggested to him at the Belur Math that he might visit the recorder of the utterances of Sri Ramakrishna in the company of his guide Swami Akhilananda. Sri *M.* was then living in his Morton institution building and devoting himself entirely to the spreading of the message of his Guru, himself living the life of a veritable *sannyasin* in household.

In the following article, Swami Chidbhavananda gives a graphic picture of Sri *M.* as he saw him – his physical appearance, his spiritually significant humility and worshipful attitude towards sannyasins and other visitors, his phenomenal memory, his complete identification with the Great Master when talking of him, in short his ‘*multiphased*’ nature. Swamiji describes how sympathetically Sri *M.* solved the knotty problems of the family life of those afflicted men and women who came to him for succour by giving a spiritual turn to the most mundane of their problems, what a ‘spiritual repast’ he would offer to the devotees who frequented him and what reverence he had for the ‘New Order of Sannyasins with Swami Vivekananda as the model.’ While describing the meeting of all the living disciples of the Great Master at the Belur Math in November, 1923, the young Swami felt that the group constituted ‘an enlarged edition of Sri Ramakrishna’ himself and that seeing them was ‘equivalent to seeing the Master in physical form’.

Swami Chidbhavananda also gives some intimate facts of Sri *M.*’s spiritual life hitherto unknown to most of us. He considers him as a typical sage who embodied in his life the teachings of the Gita – a model for mankind.

Swamiji concludes his reminiscences by talking of an earnest Muslim – how kindly he was received by the Master Mahashaya in his home and treated as a member of his own family. This is not surprising for hadn’t Sri Ramakrishna said that all devotees of God had but one caste. And wasn’t Sri *M.* a spiritual child of the Paramahansa Deva?

**“Creeds and cults got themselves dissolved in the life water of being and becoming.”**

As a novice fresh from college, I had joined the Ramakrishna Order in March 1923. Swami Akhilananda of Sri Ramakrishna Math at Madras was then my guide. He escorted me from Madras to the Belur Math. On the way, at Bhubaneswar, we had broken our journey with the object of participating in the opening ceremony of the newly started Sri Ramakrishna Math. There, I was introduced to Sri Mahapurushji Maharaj, the second President of the Order. He accepted me as a disciple and initiated me. From Bhubaneswar we then proceeded to the Belur Math, the headquarters of the Order. Swami Akhilananda was sparing no pains in getting me fixed up in the new surrounding. Every day he was taking me to the places and centres connected with Sri Guru Maharaj’s earthly career. One morning in April, Swami Akhilananda said that he was taking me to the Master Mahashaya. “Who is that person?”, was the question I put to the Swami. The reply came that he was the person who had recorded the utterances of the Paramahansa Deva. That book goes by the name, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, according to “*M.*, a son of the Lord and disciple”. Hearing this an agreeable surprise sprang in me. It was as follows:—

From 1920 to 1923 I was an inmate of the Victoria Hostel at Chepauk in Madras. In those days the ideal set up in the city for a *mofussil* student was admission in the



Presidency College and residence in the Victoria Hostel. And that was congenial too. Saturdays and Sundays being weekly holidays the students would confine themselves to the hostel or the places where educational meetings were held. Victoria Hostel has a spacious compound. Between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. students would walk from the main building to the dining section for lunch. At that time, under a spreading *banian* tree a second-hand book-seller would spread out his stock for sale. On one such occasion a book titled "*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*" had come for sale. A student was casually turning over its pages. Though I had heard something about Sri Ramakrishna as the Guru of the world famous Swami Vivekananda, I had no idea that his utterances were recorded in the manner suggested in this book. Therefore I was anxious to purchase that book. But already it had fallen into the hands of another. I waited hoping against hope. The student however put it back on the carpet stating, "Every X, Y and Z wants to write a gospel"! Now I was relieved of my anxiety. But immediately I must not pounce on the book lest I should make the seller understand that I was keenly interested in that book. So I took up another book and while glancing through it I casually asked for the price of the book, titled *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The man demanded one rupee for it. I felt supremely happy: I had procured a treasure that day. Carefully going through that book I had my ideas of religion clarified and fixed.

Now when Swami Akhilananda said that he was taking me to the author of that book my joy increased twofold. Firstly I never thought that the compiler of this book was still living and secondly I never imagined that some time in my life I would personally contact that great author. For all these reasons my joy increased.

Mahendranath Gupta is the real name of this august person. He was reverentially called Master Mahashaya by all. Teaching was his *swadharma*. That noble calling was approved of by his Master, the Paramahansa Deva. The building that housed the High school provided suitable living quarters for the Master Mahashaya's family. After the school-work was over at 4:30 p.m., the entire building maintained its calmness for spiritual pursuits. The sons and grandsons of the Master Mahashaya looked after the secular side leaving the venerable old man to attend to the spiritual ministry entirely. The Master Mahashaya kept himself occupied with divine pursuits all day long and in the evening between five and seven o' clock he attended to, the spiritual ministry of the devotees. This act was to him as sacred as communion with Divinity.

We had all taken our seats in the parlour. Within a few minutes there emerged from the adjoining room a venerable person. It was evident that he was the spiritual man whose holy contact we had sought. With folded palms and slightly bent head he affectionately greeted all of us. In that greeting itself there was the act of the Self communing with the Self. It was not the tradition worn formality. It was actually the act of the self waking up to its original state. The importance of the holy company was self-evident. It was a question of waking up to the spiritual consciousness in oneself.

Advanced as he was now in age, it was but natural that he should retire from the teaching work and take to spiritual pursuit exclusively. His dutiful sons had now taken up the responsibility of running the School. In India, sons and disciples are of the same status from all points of view. The sons of the Master Mahashaya discharged their duties very faithfully. Besides their schoolwork, they attended to receiving the spiritually inclined visitors and escorting them to the Master Mahashaya. From the sacred and the secular points of view the management of the Institution went on very smoothly. The Master Mahashaya whom I was seeing for the first time looked like a patriarch of yore. He was neither tall nor short – a middle sized venerable person he

was. Calmness and serenity were the distinguished features of his face. The bald head bespoke of his advanced age. The beard added to his venerable appearance. The prominent and lotus-like eyes sparkled with spiritual luminosity. The lips indicated the ethical chiseling they had undergone.

The attitude with which the Master Mahashaya greeted the visitors is full of spiritual significance for all of us. The worshipping priest invokes Divinity in the image made of inert matter. That invocation has its effect. This act is necessarily much more effective in the highly evolved human beings. The saint alone sees divinity and can invoke it in others. And that is what the Master Mahashaya was doing all through his earthly career. He made no distinction amongst people. The young, the old, the devout, the rustic – all were looked upon by this sage as the embodiments of Divinity. His reverential attitude had a wholesome effect on all visitors. Those with a lukewarm interest were roused to ardent pursuit. There were cases of those who came to scoff but returned with a prayerful attitude. The spiritually sleeping souls were awakened to the love of God by this God-realized Mahatma. Even a solitary visit to this benign person had its salutary effect on the visitor. Contact with the Master Mahashaya was *satsanga* in the true sense of the term.

Master Mahashaya had a keen memory for the devotees who contacted him. At the first meeting itself he would get fully acquainted with the visitor and would never fail to make a kind enquiry about his welfare on all future occasions. But he would not drag on the worldly talk unnecessarily. Visitors from provinces other than Bengal were all attended to with meticulous care. On such occasions the talk would be mainly in the language known to the visitor. Considerations of this kind would spontaneously come forth from him. The talk would then develop from the secular to the sacred. This development would be natural and appetizing to the listener. The teacher in Master Mahashaya was at his best on such occasions. The speaker and the spoken to would both merge in the topic chosen for the occasion. That was the way of Master Mahashaya. He received nourishment from the topic and in turn nourished the listener with it.

Hanuman was once asked about the date and other particulars regarding the earthly existence. His thought provoking reply was that he was not concerned with all those phenomenal affairs while he was constantly absorbed in the thought of his Master, Sri Rama. Though erudite and truly learned, Hanuman subordinated all his versatile genius to devotion to his Lord. Parallel to Hanuman was Master Mahashaya, the profoundly educated teacher of modern times. He utilized all his learning for the service of his Lord, Sri Ramakrishna Deva. His body, property and life were all completely at the disposal of Sri Guru Maharaj. His delight, sustenance and purpose in life were the presentation of the Godly career of his lord to the daily thronging devotees. Soon after the preliminary talk, he would switch on to his favourite theme – the Master's earthly *leela* in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. Man delights in recounting his favourite in life. The invaluable treasure in the life of Master Mahashaya was his own Master, the Paramahansa Deva. He was at his best when he was giving a verbal presentation of his Master. Blessed are they who got the opportunity of listening to such talks. The narrator, the listeners and the topic chosen got coalesced for the time being. This divine gift in Master Mahashaya was a boon to mankind as long as he was in his mortal coil. In the presence of the assembled devotees he would recapitulate his holy contact with the God-man of Dakshineswar. Then it would transform itself into verbal expression. By this act he mentally took the devotees to the realm of joy. What was not physically possible due to the barrier of time was more than compensated by the mental union. Day after day this good shepherd escorted the religiously inclined ones to the presence of his

chosen ideal. The presence of the Paramahansa would be tangibly experienced by the listeners. They would feel themselves personally presented to the God-absorbed superman. Time and space are no barriers for one enlightened soul introducing the other ardent one to his intimately known Godman. This rare cosmic function the Master Mahashaya was very efficiently discharging all through his earthly career.

A correct and comprehensive exposition of facts pertaining to the life of a spiritual man is very difficult. The speaker usually tries to attract the listeners to his own cultivated art of speaking. A fluent speaker on a variety of objects may be able to draw a large audience for a long time. But then slowly he becomes a back number. This is usually the case with a large section of public speakers. In this respect the Master Mahashaya differs from others and stands on a pedestal of his own. Though a teacher by profession he was not given to the idea of educating others. This predilection for teaching others was no doubt strongly ingrained in him before he came in contact with the Paramahansa. But the spiritual impact of the God-man thoroughly changed his attitude. It happened thus:—

*Guru Maharaj:* Are you a believer in God?

*Master Mahashaya:* Yes, I am.

*Guru Maharaj:* God with form or without form?

*Master Mahashaya:* God without form.

*Guru Maharaj:* That is good. Hold on to it. But don't think God with form is wrong or inferior.

*Master Mahashaya:* But should we not educate the common man that the inert stone and the metal that he worships are not God?

*Guru Maharaj:* You people of Calcutta are anxious to educate others, not yourself. The creator of the world does not assign this task to every common man; you seem to believe that that holy task is entrusted to you. Why should you think the stone and the metal are inert? Are they not *Chinmayam*?

The Master Mahashaya felt humbled. He changed his attitude. He became a willing instrument in the hands of the Master. Because of the absence of egoism and because of the soul invigorating spiritual themes, his talks were always a source of inspiration to the listeners. They would flock to him any number of times – there was no question of being bored. There were spiritual men who went life long to him to draw Godly succour from his talks. And the speaker ever felt himself spiritually refreshed by his talks on the Master.

Here is a parable of Sri Ramakrishna. A dyer was a specialist in dyeing clothes. A customer would come and ask the man to dye his cloth green. The dyer would put the cloth into a tub and make it green. The next customer would want his cloth to be made yellow. The dyer would agree and soak his cloth into the same tub and bring out a yellow cloth. In this manner the artisan could produce clothes dyed in several other colours dipping them all into the same tub. A customer watched this marvel and was surprised. He gave his cloth to the dyer and asked him to dye his cloth in any colour that was pleasing to the dyer. The artisan dipped it into the tub and brought it out as white as it was. Now, God the Creator of the universe is this wonderful dyer. All the varieties seen in the world are His creation. God is both with form and without form. His manifestations are many. This parable of the Paramahansa can very well be applied to himself. He is not the saint of one particular pattern. He is as universal as the God he

worshipped. He is a Bhakta, Jnani, Yogi, Tantrika and so many other embodiments of spirituality. He is an Advaitin, Visishtadvaitin, Dvaitin, Muslim and Christian all rolled into one. He himself is an embodiment of infinite possibilities. While Sri Ramakrishna represented the tub and the dyer, the disciple *M.* was the revealer of this truth to the public. That position was providentially assigned to him. As long as he lived, he went on enlightening the devotees in regard to the variegated aspects of Sri Ramakrishna. The more people contacted the Master Mahashaya the more they learnt about the God-man of Dakshineswar. He recounted Sri Ramakrishna in numerous patterns with his inborn originality. The all-inclusive career of the Master was graphically presented by the able disciple to the ardent devotees. This holy act continued life-long, it never became stale or stereotyped. The verbal picture ever retained its freshness, variety and soul elevating absorption. The variety in the character of the Master required elucidation. The Paramahansa was not prosaic in his extra-mundane career. His moods changed into various patterns ranging from *Nirvikalpa samadhi* to humanitarian activities. He was as multiphased as Mother Nature.

As the mother gives her breast to the baby with all love and earnestness, the Master Mahashaya gave spiritual succour to the seekers with all calmness and devotion. There was no haste in his talk. In measured voice modulated to the gathering, with clear accent, life-elevating ideas would emerge from his lips. With keen attention and earnest devotion the assembled men and women would partake of the nectar dripping from his sanctified mouth. Occasionally there was a pause in his utterance. In that interval he would muse unto himself. In an undertone he would sing a devotional song not intended for the audience. Still if a nearby listener paid attention to his musing it was a devotional treat by itself. This habit of suspending the holy communion and soliloquizing or perhaps communicating with his Master, he maintained to the end. This practice has a background not known to all. It had its origin this wise: During his third or fourth visit to the Paramahansa, our school master found his Guru indulging in innocent mirthful talk with his young disciples. He (*Sri M.*) was the only adult among the visitors. The Paramahansa asked him to sing a song. But the teacher politely apologized for his inability to sing. While doing so there was a vacant grin on his face. The Paramahansa noticed it and curtly remarked: "He eloquently shows his teeth to the school boys, but he does not care to sing the glory of God." This observation of the Master deeply touched his heart. He resolved then and there to compensate for his folly. In an undertone he recited a song in prose form unable, as he was to sing. He maintained this act of atonement life long for the folly of not readily responding to the call of the revered Guru to sing in praise of the Lord. Such was his veneration to his Master. The deep devotion with which he sang exclusively to himself and his Master had a charming effect on the small gathering. It was a further indication of the sort of *Guru Bhakti* that he had developed. *Guru Bhakti* is the panacea for all other defects in the disciple.

Men and women of all ages thronged to the Master Mahashaya for inspiration, consolation, sympathy, encouragement, advice, direction and to get healed. The single dyeing tub of this holy man religiously served all according to their desires. Serving mankind in accordance with its needs was to this sage equivalent to the service to the Creator.

At that time there was in Calcutta an educated and active young man who had inherited a sizable fortune from his parents. He could have chosen to live a comfortable and easy going life relying on that wealth. But he did not want to be a drone on society. His ambition was to start some business, make money on right lines and engage a large number of people in his concern and serve society in that way. He launched a few

concerns one after another only to lose a large slice of his capital and to find himself left in the lurch. He became frustrated. This man had heard of the Master Mahashaya. He went one evening to this sage and presented his plight. The holy man gave a patient and sympathetic ear to the tale of woe of the young man. He was silent for a while. Then he came out with his words of wisdom. Nobody has a smooth sailing all through life. Hardship, trial, tribulation and adversity are as much part and parcel of life as affluence, easy-going, pleasantness and prosperity are. It is a good life-training to face hardship with calmness and perseverance. During the days of adversity one should not invest one's money liberally. The fisherman's policy should be followed then. What he spends on the bait is very little when the prospect of catch is bleak. Whereas on bright days the farmer's policy of liberally spending on improving the soil and selecting the right sort of seed should be followed. While in difficulty mental peace and poise should be maintained. The man given to sorrow and dejection never succeeds in life. Every failure in life is a teacher in disguise. Every failure is also a stepping stone to success. Hold fast to the right path and maintain equilibrium depending on God and you are sure to succeed in the end. The man who came dejected and despondent saw a new approach to life in this dissertation. He picked up courage and opened a new chapter in life. He became a prosperous merchant and a useful member of society. Above all he became a good devotee of God. This lesson has universal value.

Evenings, between five and seven, was the time when devotees would resort to the residence of the Master Mahashaya for spiritual repast. One evening the parlour was full with devotees to its maximum capacity. They were all inclined more to silence than to gossip. At five sharp the apostle emerged from his room. With eagerness looming large on the faces, the assembled people stood up to greet the holy man. The formal exchange of greetings was over. The day's topic was not always decided in advance. As chance and circumstances would impel, the theme would develop of its own accord. 'The grace of God' was the topic that emerged from the mouth of the holy man on that day. He spoke of it very eloquently because of his own experience: "The sun and the rain are the sources of life on earth. Even so the grace of God is no less a life giving factor to the devotee. But for it life would be dreary on earth. The breeze of the grace of God is eternally blowing. The devotee is only to avail himself of it. After tasting the mercy of the Lord the devotee becomes completely changed. Earthly tribulation is no bar to his career on earth. The more he meets obstacles, the more his devotion increases. Grace is to the devotee what air is to the worldly man. Life becomes unbearable to him if he forgets the grace of his Maker. The Gopis of Vrindaban are the models to the lovers of God. Unalloyed was their love of Krishna. Even so the more the devotee gives himself over to God the more he feels blessed. Any estrangement from the love of the Lord gives him excruciating pain." In this strain the Master Mahashaya lost himself as he delineated the grace of God. However, there was an interruption from a young sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Order. He apologized for intrusion and made the statement that the mercy of God also came under a higher category of the law of nature. This statement struck a jarring note in the minds of all. The Master Mahashaya remained silent for a while and then resumed his talk: What the bosom of mother is to the baby the grace of God is to the devotee. The baby does not rationalize. It knows for certain that its safety and refuge are in the mother. This is the highest and surest mark of the divine grace manifesting at the human level. Sparks of divinity are in evidence at other levels also. The parental love and sacrifice for the sake of the son is a sure mark of divine grace. Again in the case of genuine friends the sacrifice that one makes for another does not come under any law of nature. The element of divinity is evident in it. Above this, there is the mutual love of the lovers. It can go to the extent of giving one's

life for the sake of the lover. All these cases have their origin in the divine grace permeating earthly love. The love between the mother and the baby stands on a footing of its own. It is next only to the grace of God towards the bhakta. The more the bhakta gives himself over to the Lord the more he finds that the grace of God is immeasurable. God is *Bhaktavatsala*, the lover of devotees. He goes mad in the love of the devotee. The devotee also goes mad in the love of the Lord. It is difficult to say whose love is greater. The divine love between Sri Krishna and Srimati Radha stands as a specimen of Supreme Love. Because of their divine love their heads tilt towards each other. It cannot be measured whose love is greater. We may only say that the grace of the Lord reigns supreme. That indefinable attraction drives the Lord and the bhakta to be mutually submerged in each other. Human life is worth living only for the sake of immersion in this divine ecstasy. When God goes mad after His devotee, the grace He is made of becomes secondary. It is like a wealthy man bequeathing his entire property to his faithful servant without going into the pros and cons of his act. The bhakta also gets lost in the mad love of the maker. He is overtaken by varying moods: now he laughs, now he weeps, now he remains like a stone or a stump. Occasionally, the divine power flows profusely through him. In short his individuality is lost once for all in the divine fervour. Blessed we become when we understand this divine possibility and resign ourselves completely to Him.”

Womenfolk had free access to the Master Mahashaya in the manner in which the daughters approach their fathers for the solution of their domestic problems. The Master was always kind to them and spared no pains in attending to their problems. The gravity of a problem was more subjective than objective. The Master Mahashaya knew it, but his complete identification with the person helped mitigate the poignancy of the problem. Invariably he would take up the attitude of the father. A young woman in tears once presented her family complication. She put it to the holy man that her mother-in-law was always harsh to her and the husband paid no heed to it. This was her serious handicap. The Master Mahashaya sympathized with her and asked her to accept the order from her mother-in-law as a mandate from the Maker Himself. Once that attitude was assumed all her difficulties would vanish as trifles. Young age was the time to practice fortitude. This world is a training ground. The Cosmic Mother Kali is assuming millions of forms and shaping the careers of beings in tune with their disposition. She is both kind and stern alternately. As the mother of this young woman She was kind. But as her mother-in-law she was stern, which is absolutely necessary. All commands that came from her were to be taken as orders from Mother Kali. By implicitly obeying the mother-in-law, the woman was building her character. Such an attitude would change her distress into discipline. Earnestness would take the place of weariness and disgust. This revelation from the Master Mahashaya opened her eyes. She turned a new chapter in life. Henceforth she had no problems. Instead she saw new venues to the otherwise monotonous and humdrum domestic duties. Right disposition and right understanding solve many a distressing problem in life. The Master Mahashaya was the source of inspiration to many sufferers of unwary domestic tangles. Patiently he solved the family problems of those who had resorted to him for consolation.

In September 1923, Swami Iswarananda hailing from Kerala was ordained to *sannyasa* at the Belur Math. As he was new to Calcutta, I escorted him one evening to the Master Mahashaya. That venerable old man received him with all cordiality. On coming to know that the new Swami was from Kerala, the Master Mahashaya first made some remarkable observations on the social order in that province: That was the only province in India where matriarchy was in usage. He seemed to be well acquainted with

the details of this complicated system. He also remarked that untouchability was in full rigour in that part of the country. The Master Mahashaya however did not fail to make a reference to the advanced state of that province in the field of education. In Sanskrit education Kerala was leading.

The topic then changed to that of pure religion. Sri Ramakrishna had created a new Order of Sannyasins with Swami Vivekananda as the model. To those of the householders who were tarnished and tormented by worldly life he gave the message of recoil, retirement and exclusive devotion to God. But to the untarnished pure young men of Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) type his message was different. The young men who were born not to be allured by lust and lucre formed a group by themselves. Sri Ramakrishna exhorted them not to get entangled in worldly meshes. Fruits un-pecked by birds were alone fit to be offered to deities in the temple. Even so young men free from worldly desires were alone competent to pursue the path of pure religion. To them religion did not mean fleeing from the world, viewing it as a snare. Instead the world was to be regarded as the manifestation of Divinity. Service to mankind was equated with the adoration of the Almighty. Vegetating quietism was erstwhile regarded as the goal of sannyasa. Sri Ramakrishna through his personal life gave go-by to that view. To him renunciation meant all inclusiveness. His apostle Swami Vivekananda created a new Order of Sannyasins after that pattern. Elimination of selfishness through activity is the order of the day. "Blessed are all of you young men who have dedicated yourselves to the two greatest causes: self-emancipation and service to mankind. Life is fleeting. Death may overtake man at any moment. This insecure life on earth you have dedicated to God. There is no nobler action than this. May you be blessed by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna", thus he addressed the new Swami Iswarananda. After this benediction there was serene silence for a while. That silence added sanctity and deep impress to his solemn pronouncement.

Sri Ramakrishna Deva used to stare in the face of his disciples while they were in deep sleep. That is how he would discern the core of their mental make up. He would then prescribe some simple special *sadhana* required by each individual. It is said that Sri Mahendranath Gupta (Sri M.) also received special instructions that way. He was advised by his Master occasionally to sit alone in a nude state in a room and meditate. He was to feel himself as the child of the Cosmic Mother then. The Master Mahashaya stuck to this holy habit life long.

Swami Subodhananda, the youngest among the sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was advised by the great Master occasionally to visit the Master Mahashaya. But the young disciple observed that there was no purpose in a sannyasin going to a householder. The Master corrected the youth by saying that he would stand to gain by going to the Master Mahashaya who only spoke of great things. The youth took this piece of advice as a gospel truth and gave effect to it all through his life. We would see him go from the Belur Math once every two months to the Master Mahashaya and return the same day in the evening. But for these periodical visits to the Master Mahashaya Swami Subodhananda would never stir out of the Belur Math for months together.

Women folk are generally much more afflicted with domestic problems than men. Invariably they would resort to the Master Mahashaya for the solution of their difficulties.

As was our wont, a few of us, the junior sannyasins and the brahmacharins of the Belur Math, went one evening to the residence of the Master Mahashaya to draw

inspiration from his holy utterances about Sri Ramakrishna. While our chronicler of the *Gospel* was absorbed in his talk on the Godman of Dakshineswar, a middle-aged mother made her way to a seat very near the speaker. The Master Mahashaya could not help taking note of the intruder. Dejection, anger and disgust were written large on her face. He abruptly put an end to his holy talk and interrogated, "What is wrong with you mother?"

In a slow voice she gave vent to her feeling: "My son D. for whom I sacrificed life and everything else, whom I brought up so dearly, has abandoned me and gone to the Belur Math. This ungrateful wretch is harboured by them as a hero. I say I am undone."

*Master Mahashaya:* "Does not death mercilessly snatch away the beloved ones, and the props of the family?"

*The grieved mother:* "Death is providential and unavoidable, whereas this act of my son is a wanton betrayal of the family bond".

*Master Mahashaya:* "Will you classify your son as a fallen one bringing disgrace to your family?"

*The grieved mother:* "Not so but he has left the family in a lurch. It is so unbecoming of a loving son. And his hard-heartedness is approved of by the Belur Math: they have given him shelter."

*Master Mahashaya:* "There are boys who run way from home as vagabonds joining hands with others of the same type. Yet others are put in jail for theft and other crimes. Has your son left you for any of these faults?"

*The mother:* "I am glad my son is above these defects."

*Master Mahashaya:* "Will you not willingly send your son for a few years to a distant foreign land for higher studies or for earning money in plenty?"

*The mother:* "In family interest I will surely do these things. But how can I willingly part with my son who is misguided into renouncing us?"

*Master Mahashaya:* "Mother, now let me sum up your position. All those who are joined by family bonds have to separate some day for one reason or the other. So far death has not separated your son from you. No criminal offence has separated your son from you. You also say that for the acquisition of knowledge or wealth one has to leave his kith and kin and go elsewhere. Your son has gone in search of the Divine. It is the noblest quest. Some day you will meet him with pride, as did the mother of Swami Vivekananda. Blessed you are that you have begotten a son who has gone in search of Godhood. It is not given to all to have such a son". This solemn observation opened the eyes of the grieved mother. She took leave of the holy man with a relieved mind. Within a few months the woman got herself fully reconciled to the holy resolve of her beloved son! The Master Mahashaya was an expert in healing the hearts of the distressed.

In the beginning of November 1923, all the living disciples of the Paramahansa Deva met at the Belur Math. The Master Mahashaya also was invited on the occasion. Sri Mahapurushaji Maharaj, the President, Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj, the vice-president, Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj, the Secretary, Swami Abhedanandaji Maharaj the America-returned disciple, the Master Mahashaya, the chronicler of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Subodhanandaji Maharaj, the youngest among the direct disciples – all these were happily assembled in the Visitors' Room at the Belur Math. The picture would have been complete had Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj also



been present. But it was physically impossible for him to move out of his Ashrama at Allahabad. Even so the set up was inspiring. It was a day of divine delight for one and all. The Math was charged with ecstasy. Each of the disciples of the Paramahansa Deva was a replica of the Master. When six of such surviving giants meet, it has to be counted as an extraordinary event. This was the constellation of so many spiritual dynamos – an assemblage as good as seeing the Paramahansa Deva himself in body and flesh! In a way it was the expanded, enlarged replica of the Master. In those days they rarely ever came together in their entirety. This being one such unique occasion all of them were in the best of moods. In and through this gathering the younger generation had a peep into the grand old days at Dakshineswar. The mutual love among these holy men indicated what great veneration they had for their Master. Recollection of their early life with the Master made them re-do the same now mentally. A catchword from the mouth of one brother would bring to their memory some thrilling incident of those memorable days. They would all immediately switch themselves over to that past incident and plunge into a peel of laughter. Mentally they would all go back to those grand old days and get lost in them. All of them were actually in ecstasy. The youngsters watched with amazement the love, cordiality, concern and intimacy among the holy men untouched by worldliness. They were all immersed in *anandam* in its original grandeur. Those brothers together formed an enlarged edition of Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing that group in ecstasy was equivalent to seeing the Master in physical form. Their ethereal love and contact was an object lesson in religion. No sermon or book can ever come up to that level. It was a memorable day for the Belur Math. At the close of the day, Swami Saradanandaji, Swami Abhedanandaji and the Master Mahashaya left for Calcutta. Fortunate were the junior Swamis and Brahmacharis who witnessed that day's incidents.

The Master Mahashaya was at his best whenever he indulged in recounting the glory of the prophet of Dakshineswar who was to him God and Guru rolled into one. In those days the old and the young were equally drawn to that holy place because of the presence of this prophet. This world that we live in is verily what we are prepared to see in it. To some people this world is a veritable hell because they view it with that frame of mind. There are others who behold it as a covetable heaven. Their attitude is the basic cause of it. Sri Ramakrishna viewed it as the mansion of mirth because he was constantly attuned to Divinity. The people that were drawn to him were also constituted the same way. Among the disciples of this prophet it was the Master Mahashaya who availed himself the most of the presence of this holy man at Dakshineswar. He equated going to Sri Ramakrishna with going to Kailas or Vaikuntha. In the midst of his heavy duties as the Headmaster of a High School, he could yet find the time required to observe the saint, his daily life, his talks and make a permanent record of them. That monumental work now serves the world in guiding it in the field of spirituality. But the chronicler was not aware of his great work. He went to the Godman because he was helplessly drawn towards him. In the presence of his Gurudev he forgot the world. The disciple himself got switched on to Divinity, as a result of the holy contact. The experiences that he then had remained permanently fixed in his mind. Recounting them any number of times was no boredom to him. Every time he narrated them he got himself refreshed in that spiritual feast. The listeners were also sumptuously feasted with the spiritual food. The more the holy food is served the more it grows and increases. The legacy he has left behind for mankind is the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. As he immersed himself in it in his lifetime so can we do for all time. Though Sri Ramakrishna is not in body in the world he is there in spirit in and through the *Gospel*. By doing what the Master Mahashaya did, we can spiritually evolve as he did. And this is the gift he has made for the good of mankind.

That man should hold on to worship, gifting and life long austerity is the message of the Bhagavad Gita. The enlightened man is no exception to this holy rule. Rather he ought to be the model to mankind in this respect. The Master Mahashaya may be cited as a typical sage who literally embodied this teaching. That his life was constantly given to worship and austerity goes without saying. The manner in which he made gifts to mankind however, requires enumeration. The countless devotees that thronged to him in the evenings did not all seek spiritual enlightenment. The majority went to him to have their social problems solved. They were people entangled in worldly commitments and attachments. As sons would go to their parents for mental relief they resorted to this sage for consolation and advice. It would have been nothing extraordinary if he had saved himself the botheration of granting them interviews. But to Sri Mahendranath Gupta carefully attending on these people was a religious duty. He responded to their needs just as meticulously as he served his Master. And that was the Karma Yoga he practised. An arresting case may be cited as an example.

A young widow came to him dazed with her problems. Death had suddenly snatched away her loving husband. The woman had no issue. The relatives of her husband were all callous about her future. On her parental side also there was hardly any who could help her. The means at her disposal were meagre. She thought of suicide, but did not have the courage to resort to it. Life was gloomy. In that sad plight she approached the Master Mahashaya staggering and afflicted. The sage, however, received her calmly and with all love and affection. And that was the first ray of hope and consolation for the forlorn young widow.

“The apparent blow is an act of mercy come to you from God. A few years back you did not know anything about your departed husband. You were an utter stranger to him. A social usage brought you in contact with him. Providence has now kindly broken your bonds with him. There are other ways of making life more useful. The husband-and-wife life is good in its own way. But God has in his mercy provided the woman with innumerable other avenues, more useful and greater in purpose. Daughter, sorrow not. Please listen to the message of hope and benediction come to all of us from the Paramahansa Deva of Dakshineswar. A chartered libertine who became a staunch disciple of the Master put it to him this wise:

*The query:* If you happen to be enmeshed in an earthly career but have the freedom to choose a life to your liking within bounds, what sort of life would you like to have?

*Answer:* I would choose to be a young widow.

*Query:* Why so?

*Answer:* All earthly obligations are over for an issueless widow. She can therefore chalk out a career of her choice. A cottage in a village, a bit of land adjoining it and a cow are sufficient to provide her with earthly needs. She can then remain heart and soul immersed in Godly pursuits. She can forget all her worldly concerns. She can create a divine world of her own. That would be a blessing to herself and to the world. There is nothing happier than this in this world of impermanence and uncertainty.

“Daughter, ponder over this message of the Great Master. It seems he has given this, benediction to you in particular. Dependence upon human beings is always uncertain. Whereas dependence on God and his grace is everlasting.”

This analysis by the aged sage opened a new vista on human life in the mind of the erstwhile depressed and forlorn young widow. She acted on the advice of the Master

Mahashaya and carved a new chapter in her life. There have been many such stranded souls who were put on the right path by this noble and enlightened Master.

From 1926 to 1940 I was in Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Ootacamund. Then I was in close touch with one Mr. Ahmad Ali, a cultured Muslim gentleman who was the Principal of the Islamia College at Vaniyambadi in the North Arcot District in the then Madras Presidency. This gentleman was well grounded in Vedanta and lived an exemplary life. There was no trace of the narrow-minded sectarian outlook in him. In fact he was more a Vedantin than a Muslim. Every summer he would come to Ootacamund and spend about a fortnight with us in the Ashrama. We found a congenial friend in him. During his stay with us one year he was invited by the Cosmopolitan Club at Coonoor, just twelve miles from Ootacamund, to speak publicly under the auspices of that club, on a subject of his choice. Mr. Ahmad Ali chose to speak on "Sri Ramakrishna, the Ideal Muslim". This caption roused the curiosity of the public. At 5 p.m. on the appointed day the hall was packed to its maximum capacity. People also thronged on the broad veranda. Mr. Ahmad Ali was suitably introduced by the President of the Club. The speaker rose gracefully, chanted a prayer from the Koran in a melodious voice and then started to speak in English. His command over the language was perfect, his accent clear. Besides he was quite audible to the entire audience. In no time it became evident that he was a master speaker. He gave a quotation from the Koran with its meaning and then its implication. Then he linked it with the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Some half a dozen illustrious teachings from the Koran with exposition in and through the life of Sri Ramakrishna was his theme for the day. There was nothing vague or abstruse in his talk. Truth is always simple. It is common to the child and the philosopher. This point was driven home clearly in the minds of all. He concluded that the fundamentals are the same in all religions. Quarrels arise due to ignorance. Sri Ramakrishna has beautifully harmonized all religions. He is the latest among the prophets. Though a Hindu by origin he actually belongs to the entire humanity.

Mr. Ahmad Ali spoke for an hour and fifteen minutes. There was spell bound silence till the end. Then there was a loud and prolonged clapping indicating that the talk had been very well received. The audience seemed inspired by the union of religions in their pristine purity.

But this elevating talk was not without its adverse repercussion. A few of the orthodox Muslims took Mr. Ahmad Ali aside and pleaded with him not to talk in this fashion again. The talk, they said, went against the core of Islam. The speaker listened to them with a calm smile on his face. He did not wound their sentiments. After returning to the Ashrama at Ootacamund, he related to the inmates what had transpired between him and the pious Muslims. We had our own curiosity in the matter. We asked Mr. Ahmad Ali how he could imbibe such clear ideas about Sri Ramakrishna. In response to our query he narrated his spiritual experiences.

Mr. Ahmad Ali said, "I took leave from my office as the principal of a college, dressed myself like a fakir and traveled all over the country. I came across pious people everywhere. There were genuine religious persons in all religions. My experiences at the Belur Math, the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Movement, are worth mentioning. As a visitor, I was cordially treated. My queries were all handled to my entire satisfaction. But as a guest I was not permitted to stay at the Math. The authorities had their own reasons for this strict regulation. On the one hand, the British Government in India was viewing the activities of the Belur Math with suspicion. On the other all sorts of political and revolutionary elements were seeking connection with the Belur Math for

their own reasons. Therefore the Math authorities were very careful in entertaining guests. As I was not known to any of the Swamis or the branch centres I could not be allowed to stay in the Math even for a night. I was naturally somewhat disappointed.

“The next alternative was to approach the famous compiler of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This I did hoping against hope. I approached Sri Mahendranath Gupta and furnished him all my particulars. As I was proceeding towards the residence of Sri Mahendranath Gupta, all sorts of conflicting ideas were cropping up in my mind: ‘At the Belur Math the Swamis are beyond all caste restrictions. Inter-dining is a matter of course with them. Further, they are Vedantins rising above all sectarian views. Therefore religion can be easily discussed with them. Whereas Sri Mahendranath Gupta is a family man. He has his social restrictions. He may even be an orthodox Hindu. Some of them do not freely associate with the followers of other religions. The Hindu-Muslim social barrier in South India is nominal and flexible. Whereas in the north it is rigid and annoying.’ Weighed down with these ideas I managed to reach the residence of the chronicler of the world famous *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

“The interview I sought was easily granted. I was escorted to the august presence of this venerable person. I felt I was in the presence of a revered Mullah, but no, he was not so creed bound – I felt I was in the presence of a man of universal love. In the proximity of this person I automatically outgrew all conventional religious barriers. Supreme love was what I experienced in his presence. I became his and he became mine. I was bathed in bliss. I briefly introduced myself to this personification of simplicity.

*The August Person:* “If you have no objection you may stay a day or two with us here.”

*Myself:* “I am a Muslim.”

*The Holy Man:* “You are a lover of God and so you are our own.”

“This observation stupefied me. My mouth got parched up. I took some time to become normal. Then I told him that I had come with that intention. In no time I became a member of his family. I was given a room to stay and my requirements were meticulously looked after by the sons of this holy man.

“As God is common to all, God-men are also common to all. This supreme fact I found in Sri Mahendranath Gupta. In the morning of the blessed day, I met him I was an utter stranger to him. We had descended from different stocks. The religion that I professed was not in harmony with the universalism that I subsequently found in him. Our tongues were unknown to each other. We could only converse in English, which was foreign to both of us. In social customs and manners we had nothing in common. Such divergent elements had in no time become united in one Supreme Reality, the basis of all. This is really unity in variety.

“I was privileged to stay three days and nights with this Godman. I felt convinced that this privilege did not come except through the grace of the Almighty. Those three days were the most eventful in my life. It was a matter of my being transformed into a spiritual being. Blind theorizing in religion gave place to practicing it. Creeds and cults got themselves dissolved in the life water of being and becoming. Three times a day I joined the family prayer. It was not the formal prayer. That atmosphere created a spiritual awakening in me. Coming in contact with a realized person is real religion. Thereby my inner eye was opened. Since then I have opened a new chapter in my spiritual life. The Master Mahashaya has changed my entire frame of mind. The blabbing person in me has been transformed into one who is switched on to quietude.

The Master Mahashaya made me understand that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was the personification of spiritual perfection. All religions can claim him as the embodiment of their tenets. Because of this conviction I chose the caption 'Sri Ramakrishna, the Ideal Muslim'. The epitome of all religions can be found in this man of God. Fortunately for me the Master Mahashaya has made me understand the core of all faiths in and through the Paramahansa Deva. I am blessed that way.

“Remaining in an orthodox Hindu house for three days I came to know the Hindu way of religious life. I have taken to it in my own way. That is the reason why I seek shelter here every now and then for I mean to be a confluence of the Hindu Muslim culture.” This attitude Mr. Ali maintained to his last days. The Master Mahashaya was instrumental in bringing about this transformation in him.

The two vital stages in life, that of the householder and that of the ascetic get themselves well blended in Siva, the Lord of the Universe. He is simultaneously the family man of the three worlds, *Trilokakutumbin* and the king of the ascetics, *Tyagaraja*. The embodied aspects of these two stages are found in Sri Ramakrishna. Nominally he married and lived a typical family man's life. At the same time he was also a typical sannyasin. When he told his guru, the rigorous ascetic Tota Puri, that he was married, the latter paid no heed to it because he found in him a perfect man of renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna was simultaneously an ideal family man and an all renouncing sannyasin. What was personified in him got itself divided into two types of disciples. The all renouncing young men formed one group under the leadership of Narendra who later became the Swami Vivekananda. They were the sannyasin disciples of the Master. Parallel to them were the householders who were also rigorously trained in spirituality. They were on a par with the other group. To be in the world and not of it at the same time is not an easy matter. Nag Mahashaya, Balaram Bose and Sri Mahendranath Gupta were such men of extraordinary calibre. They were conquerors of the senses in their own way. Though a *zamindar*, Sri Balaram Bose was free from the *upadhi*\* that he was a rich man. Though utterly penniless Nag Mahashaya was never a slave to the *upadhi* that he was poor. The Master Mahashaya was completely free from the *upadhis* that he was a learned man, that he was the headmaster of a High School, that he was the chronicler of a great prophet. He was free from all *upadhis*. He was always the spiritual child of the Paramahansa Deva.

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\* Delusion born of one's position in life (Ed.)

## 25. THE BLISSFUL DEVOTEE AND HIS COSMIC ROMANCE\*

Paramahansa Yogananda

In the early years of his *sadhana*, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda met many great saints, among them Sri *M.* Although Sri *M.* told the youthful seeker, “I am not your guru, he shall come a little later”, Paramahansa Yogananda revered throughout life this exalted devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and the Divine Mother whom he called the incarnation of purity! The following passages give a glimpse of the divine relationship these two great souls enjoyed and a peep into Sri *M.*’s personality.

**“... he surveyed the world with eyes long familiar with Primal Purity. His body, mind, speech and actions were effortlessly harmonized with his soul’s simplicity.”**

“... Silently I had entered the room in great awe. The angelic appearance of Master Mahashaya fairly dazzled me. With silky white beard and large lustrous eyes, he seemed an incarnation of purity. His upraised chin and folded hands apprized me that my first visit had disturbed him in the midst of his devotions.

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“...I was overwhelmed by memories. This house at 50 Amherst Street, now the residence of Master Mahashaya had once been my family home, the scene of my mother’s death. Here my human heart had broken for the vanished mother, and here today my spirit had been as though crucified by the absence of the Divine Mother. Hallowed walls! Silent witness of my grievous hurts and final healing.

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“The sun on the following morning had hardly risen to an angle of decorum when I paid my second visit to Master Mahashaya. Climbing the staircase in the house of the poignant memories, I reached his fourth-floor room. The knob of the closed door was wrapped around with a cloth: a hint, I felt, that the saint desired privacy. As I stood irresolutely on the landing, the door was opened by the master’s welcoming hand. I knelt at his holy feet. In a playful mood, I wore a solemn mask over my face, hiding the divine elation.

\* \* \*

“Master Mahashaya possessed control over the flood gates of my soul: again I plunged prostrate at his feet. But this time my tears welled from bliss, and not a pain, past bearing.

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\* Taken from the ‘Autobiography of a Yogi’, by Paramahansa Yogananda (a copyrighted work), and reproduced by the kind permission of Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA. (in India: Yogda Satsanga Society of India, Ranchi, Bihar).

“Think you that your devotion did not touch the infinite Mercy? The Motherhood of God that you have worshipped in forms both human and divine, could never fail to answer your forsaken cry”.

“Who was this simple saint, whose least request to the Universal Spirit met with sweet acquiescence? His role in the world was humble, as befitted the greatest man of humility I ever knew. In this Amherst Street house, Master Mahashaya conducted a small high school for boys. No words of chastisement passed his lips, no rule and ferule maintained his discipline. Higher mathematics indeed was taught in these modest classrooms and a chemistry of love absent from the textbooks. He spread his wisdom by spiritual contagion rather than by impermeable precept. Consumed by an unsophisticated passion for the Divine Mother, the saint no more demanded the outward forms of respect than a child.

“I am not your *guru*, he shall come a little later...”

\* \* \*

I sought Master Mahashaya’s divine cup, so full that its drops daily overflowed on my being. Never before had I bowed in utter reverence, now I felt it an immeasurable privilege even to tread the same ground that Master Mahashaya’s footsteps sanctified.

\* \* \*

“Sir, please, wear this *champak* garland I have fashioned especially for you.” I arrived one evening, holding my chain of flowers. But shyly he drew away, repeatedly refusing the honour. Perceiving my hurt, he finally smiled consent.

“Since we are both devotees of the Mother, you may put the garland on this bodily temple, as offering to Her who dwells within.” His vast nature lacked space in which any egotistical consideration could gain foothold.

“Let us go tomorrow to Dakshineswar to the Temple of Kali, forever hallowed by my Guru.” Master Mahashaya was a disciple of Christ like master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

\* \* \*

“The four-mile journey on the following morning was taken by boat on the Ganges. We entered the nine-domed Temple of Kali, where the figures of the Divine Mother and Siva rest on a burnished silver lotus, its thousand petals meticulously chiseled. Master Mahashaya beamed in enchantment. He was engaged in his inexhaustible romance with the Beloved. As he chanted Her name, my enraptured heart seemed shattered, like the lotus, into a thousand pieces.

“We strolled later through the sacred precincts, halting in a tamarisk grove. The manna characteristically exuded by this tree was symbolic of the heavenly food Master Mahashaya was bestowing. His divine invocations continued. I sat rigidly motionless on the grass amid the pink feathery tamarisk flowers. Temporarily absent from the body, I soared in a supernal visit.

“This was the first of many pilgrimages to Dakshineswar with the holy teacher. From him I learnt the sweetness of God in the aspect of Mother, or Divine Mercy.

\* \* \*

“He can serve as an earthly prototype for very angels of heaven!” I thought fondly, watching him one day at his prayers. Without a breath of censure or criticism, he surveyed the world with eyes long familiar with the Primal Purity. His body, mind, speech and actions were effortlessly harmonized with his soul’s simplicity.

“My Master told me so.” Shrinking from personal assertion, the saint usually ended his sage counsel with this tribute. So deep was his sense of identity with Sri Ramakrishna that Master Mahashaya no longer considered his thoughts to be his own.

\* \* \*

Another day found me walking alone near the Howrah Railway Station. I stood for a moment by a temple silently criticizing a small group of men with drum and cymbals who were violently reciting a chant.

“How undevotionally they use the Lord’s divine name in mechanical repetition,” I reflected. Suddenly I was astonished to see Master Mahashaya rapidly approaching me.

“Sir, how come you here?”

The saint, ignoring my question, answered my thought. “Isn’t it true, little sir, that the Beloved’s name sounds sweet from all lips, ignorant or wise?” He passed his arm around me affectionately; I found myself carried on his magic carpet to the Merciful Presence.

\* \* \*

“Would you like to, see some *bioscopes*? This question from the reclusive Master Mahashaya was mystifying to me; the term was then used in India to signify motion pictures. I agreed, glad to be in his company in any circumstances. A brisk walk brought us to the garden fronting Calcutta University. My companion indicated a bench near the *goldighi* or pond.

“Let us sit here for a few minutes. My Master asked me to meditate whenever I saw an expanse of water. Here its placidity reminds us of the vast calmness of God. As all things can be reflected in water, so the whole universe is mirrored in the lake of the Cosmic Mind. So my *Gurudeva* often said.”

Soon we entered a university hall where a lecture was in progress ... varied occasionally by lantern slide illustrations ... So this is the kind of bioscope the master wanted me to see!

“If anyone observed the unpretentious master and me as we slowly walked away from the crowded pavement, the onlooker surely suspected us of intoxication. I felt that the falling shades of evening were sympathetically drunk with God.

\* \* \*

“Saints of all religions have attained God-realization through the simple concept of the Cosmic Beloved. Because the Absolute is *nirguna*, “without qualities,” and *achintya*, “inconceivable”, human thought and yearning have ever personalized it as the Universal Mother. A combination of personal theism and the philosophy of the absolute is an ancient achievement of Hindu thought, expounded in the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. This “reconciliation of opposites” satisfies heart and head, *bhakti* (devotion) and *jnana* (wisdom) are essentially one. *Prapatti*, taking refuge in God and *saranagati*, flinging oneself on the Divine Compassion are really paths of highest knowledge.



“The humility of Master Mahashaya and of all other saints springs from a *recognition* of their total dependence (*seshatva*) on the Lord as the sole life and judge. Because the very nature of God is bliss, the man in attunement with Him experiences a native boundless joy. ‘The first of the passions of the soul and the will is joy. (St. John of the Cross).’

“Devotees of all ages, approaching the Mother in a childlike spirit, testify that they find Her ever at play with them. In Master Mahashaya’s life the manifestations of divine play occurred on occasions important and unimportant. In God’s eyes nothing is large or small ...”

## 26. *M.* – THE VYASADEVA FOR SRI RAMAKRISHNA INCARNATION

Swami Shraddhananda

Gouri-Ma was a great *tapasvini*. When asked to go in for marriage, she openly said that she would marry only that One who does not die. And when Sri Ramakrishna hinted that she would have to work for the cause of women she thought that she couldn't give up her love of *tapasya* for anything. Yet later when she saw the miserable education available to women of her time, she had to found and develop the Saradeshwari Ashrama for Girls in Calcutta. This great lady, a companion of the Holy Mother and a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was perhaps the first to welcome Sri *M.* by calling him the Vyasa Deva of Sri Ramakrishna Avatara.

Swami Shraddhananda, President of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento (USA) points out that Vyasa Deva is famous as the compiler of the *Vedas* and the author of the *Brahma sutras*, the *Mahabharata* and the eighteen *Puranas*. It is said that even after writing these great scriptures Vyasadeva's mind was restless when it was suggested to him that he would not know peace until he wrote a scripture of devotion narrating the divine love of Lord Krishna. Thus Vyasadeva authored the greatest work of devotion; the Srimad-Bhagavata and he felt he was in harmony with himself and the world.

**“In *M.*'s company one felt a wonderful harmony with the world ... Yes, this sage was at peace with all nature. Nothing disturbed him.”**

It was a day of festivity at Belur Math – the celebration of the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. The year, I cannot exactly recall. Towards late afternoon at the southwest corner of the lawn in front of the main Math building, the venerable Sannyasini Gouri Ma, a dear woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was seated on the grass. Several devotees had clustered around her listening to her spiritual conversation. The attention of the group was suddenly drawn toward the southern extensive meadow. Some of the devotees joyfully shouted, “Master Mahashaya! Master Mahashaya is coming”. Gouri Ma also looked in that direction and her face glowed with delight. Along the path at the east end of the meadow running parallel to the river Ganga, *M.* accompanied by a few devotees was walking slowly towards the Math building. As he came near the place where Gouri Ma was sitting, the latter stood up and reverently joining her palms said, “Here comes the Vyasadeva of Sri Ramakrishna-Avatara”. *M.* smiled and also with folded palms greeted the much-respected elderly *sannyasini* who had been associated with Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother for many years and had established the Saradeshwari Ashrama in Calcutta for girls.

Indeed Sri Mahendranath Gupta or ‘Master Mahashaya’, as devotees called him, is aptly comparable to the great sage Vyasa – the author of the Mahabharata, the Brahma Sutras, and the eighteen Puranas including the Srimad Bhagavatam. In the Mahabharata and the Bhagavatam, Vyasa vividly presented the glories and the significance of Bhagavan Sri Krishna's life. *M.* in his monumental work – *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, has done the same thing for Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. In the pages of the *Kathamrita* or the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as the English version is called, the Master appears to us as a living presence, moving and talking, singing and ecstatically dancing before us. We need not imagine him. We just see and hear him face to face. What amount of meditation the narrator *M.* had poured into this superb work!

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is not just a book; it is a spiritual dynamo. What the world would have missed in the life of the Spirit without these authentic volumes from which flow out the words of Divine love, self-knowledge, mystical visions, and various spiritual practices spontaneously uttered by the great Avatara of this age! Fascinating scenes open up before us – Sri Ramakrishna meeting devotees, instructing them individually and in groups at Dakshineswar, in Calcutta, at Cossipore and other places, visiting temples, going in a horse carriage through the streets of Calcutta, seeing in the company of devotees religious dramas, participating in religious festivals at diverse places and occasionally even viewing a circus performance. In all these different scenes Sri Ramakrishna's figure emerges as a gigantic spiritual personality made up through and through with a radiant God-consciousness. And what literary merit the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* can claim for itself! The description of the surroundings, pen-pictures of the people, the clearly presented psychological and philosophical interpretations are all touching sidelights around the main run of the narrative. For devotees of Sri Ramakrishna the *Kathamrita* is a source of perennial inspiration and joy. This book has brought spiritual awakening to many lives through the years. A good number of sadhus of the Ramakrishna Order received the urge for renunciation by the perusal of this book.

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I met *M.* for the first time in Calcutta one late afternoon in the summer of 1924. I had read the *Kathamrita* when I was a school student of Class X (the topmost class in Indian high schools in those days) in a town in North Bengal, and now I had come to Calcutta for college studies. Eager to see the writer of that wonderful book, I went to the Morton Institute at 50, Amherst Street. I was led to a room on the third floor where a Brahmin youth was sitting on the floor reading a book. He received me very cordially and learning that I wanted to see *M.* said that I had to wait till evening when usually he meets devotees. We were engaged in chats. Suddenly at the door an old gentleman appeared and stood looking at us. He was very casually dressed and was holding a towel in his hand. The youth stood up respectfully and signaled to me by his eyes that this was he. I stood up and bowed at his feet; a thrill passed through my body. What an appearance! A wonderfully proportionate fair body with a pair of calm beautiful eyes – the radiant face wearing a gentle smile, the white hair and beard – all this made me feel that I was indeed standing before a Rishi of ancient time. The youth introduced me to him. *M.* greeted me affectionately and told me to wait a little. In the meantime he would finish his pre-evening ablutions. In half an hour or so, I was called to the terrace where *M.* was seated in a chair. He asked me to sit on a bench by his side. In a sweet soft voice he talked about love for God. He asked me whether I knew any devotional song. I replied that I could not sing but knew some by heart. “Why don't you repeat one”, he said. I obeyed him. He was very moved by the words of the song, which expressed a deep craving of the writer-devotee for the vision of God.

Very soon devotees began to come and took their seats on the benches near *M.*'s chair. *M.* introduced me to them and said, “This young man knows by heart an inspiring song.” He requested me to repeat the song once again.

The English rendering of the composition was like this.

“Oh Hari, Thou art so near to me, right in the midst of my heart, yet my foolish mind thinks that Thou art far away. Just as a bee without knowing in what forest honey-yielding blossoms may be, flies far and near in its search, so my heart eager to

find Thee, wanders through unknown regions.”

“Just as a musk-deer carrying the musk in its navel but not knowing it, runs wildly in search of the source of the fragrance, in the same way, not realizing that Thou art all the time stationed in my heart, I search for Thee fruitlessly outside here and there.”

“Just as a blind man even though bathed in sunlight does not know what light is, so too even though I am enveloped and permeated by Thee, I cannot discover Thee.”

*M.* began to speak very feelingly about the theme of the song – ‘Craving for God’.

This first meeting with him made a profound impression in my mind. I began to visit him from time to time and attend the evening sessions on the terrace of his school. This went on for five years till 1930 when I joined the Belur Math. Even from there I would occasionally come in the company of other sadhus to Calcutta to have his *darshana*.

The evening sessions at the terrace were always inspiring. They spontaneously lifted the mind to a level of spiritual joy and peace. Readers of *Sri Ma Darshan* or its English version – *M., the Apostle and the Evangelist* are sure to have a graphic picture of the nature of these meetings with *M.* Words of deep spiritual insight just flowed from his mouth. His reminiscences of the Master brought Sri Ramakrishna very close to the listeners. He would quote from the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Bible. His presentation of the words of Jesus Christ was very original. In *M.*’s company one felt a wonderful harmony with the world. The sky, the moon, the stars, the trees, the songs of birds, even the hustle and bustle of the city were all attuned, as it were, to an underlying Peace which is God. *M.* often gave expression to this feeling in his talks and behaviour. Sometimes he would pace up and down silently on the terrace looking at the sky. Sometimes he would point at the moon and say, “See, see, our moon.” Then he would quote a verse from the Gita where the Lord says, “The radiance of the Sun and the Moon is My Light.” Yes, this sage was at peace with all nature. Nothing disturbed him.

When sadhus came to visit him his face glowed with a noticeable joy. Even a young brahmachari was to him worthy of special respect as a symbol of renunciation. I have seen him several times bringing a plate of refreshments and entertaining a sadhu. He also poured water on the visitors’ hands for washing. *M.* liked to do such service to monastics. It was a great object lesson to the householders. I had noticed that he would not allow the latter to sit on the same bench with sadhus. When I came from Belur Math to see him for the first time as a brahmachari, he greeted me with a benign smile and remarked, “The old person in a new attire!”

It was my blessed privilege to see *M.* on several occasions in the company of the direct sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Once Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda) and Khoka Maharaj (Swami Subodhananda) had come to the Ramakrishna Mission Students’ Home, Calcutta on the occasion of a festival. I was a resident student in that institution. The whole day passed in great festivity – pujas, bhajans, distribution of prasad and so on. *M.* came in the evening. Mahapurush Maharaj was seated on a bed in a big room. He greeted *M.* with great joy. *M.* returned the greeting with folded hands and sat on the carpet below. They began to converse. The head of the institution Swami Nirvedananda, other monastic workers and students, were either seated or standing. What an atmosphere was created! It is simply inexpressible. The way in which the two apostles were looking at one another was indeed a divine sight. Another time I saw three

of them together at the Gadadhar Ashrama, Calcutta. It was Annapurna Puja. Mahapurush Maharaj, Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) and *M.* were seated in a room talking about olden days. Devotees were coming and saluting them. *M.* looked so happy in meeting his two brother disciples. Everybody seemed to be feeling the presence of Sri Ramakrishna tangibly.

On another occasion, I saw *M. in* Mahapurush Maharaja's room at Belur Math. It was the latter's birthday, The whole day was full of festivity. Hundreds of sadhus and devotees had been coming upstairs to salute Mahapurushji. He had to greet and talk to everyone. It went on for hours. He had no rest. The exertion was too much for his aged and ailing body. He felt exhausted. But when *M.* came in the evening, Mahapurushji was a different person. He looked so cheerful. They talked for sometime. One could see their mutual respect for each other and their contentment.

I last saw *M.* just a few days before his death. I had gone to see him with another sannyasin of Belur Math. *M.* was lying on his bed spread on the floor in his room in the '*Thakurbadi*' (his family home). Though ill he talked with us very cheerfully. When the news of his sudden passing away came to the Math (June 4, 1932) Mahapurush Maharaj was very much grieved. He wanted as many sadhus as possible to go to Calcutta for attending the funeral ceremony. I also went and accompanied the funeral procession to the Cossipore cremation ground with hundreds of monastic and devotees. It was a very solemn occasion. In death his face looked even more serene. The body was decorated with many flowers...\*

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\* The second part of this write-up is reproduced as the leading article in Part IV of this Volume. [Editor]

## 27. MEMORABILIA ABOUT M.

Swami Ananyananda

Swami Ananyananda, President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati has written this short but beautiful Memorabilia on Sri M. Earlier in this volume we have reproduced his inspiring article on Sri Ramakrishna.

**‘... how silently but surely, the legacy left by M. is spreading far and wide and changing the course of lives of innumerable men and women all over the world.’**

‘Sri Ma Trust’, Chandigarh, is celebrating the Centenary of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in the near future. To commemorate this event, a memorial volume is being published by the Trust. We heartily pray that the devoted endeavours of all those connected with the Centenary may be crowned with unprecedented success, and may open out new vistas for the propagation of the unique message of Sri Ramakrishna contained in the *Kathamrita*, both in the original and in the translation in diverse languages all over the world, for the spiritual welfare of mankind.

M. has left behind an invaluable and a rich spiritual legacy for posterity. Sri Ramakrishna himself had marked out M. for this special assignment. The blessed author of the *Kathamrita*, who faithfully recorded the divine gospel issuing forth from the lips of the Saint of Dakshineswar every time he visited the Master, had brought out in pamphlet form parts of the book and sent it to Swami Vivekananda, even as early as in 1897, who was then resting in Rawalpindi after his strenuous work in the West and in India since his return. Swamiji was overwhelmed after going through the book, and wrote back to M.: ‘... You are doing just the thing. Come out man. No sleeping all life; time is flying. Bravo! That is the way ... Let it see the blaze of daylight. You will have many blessings on you and many more curses – but ‘that is always the way of the world!’

When a second pamphlet was sent to Swamiji in Dehradun the same year, he acknowledged it to M. by writing: ‘It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer’s mind as you are doing. The language also is beyond praise, so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn’t it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted His life before. *It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently ...* Socratic dialogues are Plato all over – you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it – here or in the West.’

The letter written by Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, to M., on 4 July 1897, brings out in bold relief the role and spiritual significance of the *Kathamrita* in rousing man to divine consciousness. She wrote: ‘Whatever you had heard from Him is nothing but the Truth. You need not feel any diffidence about it. At one time, it was He who had placed those words in your custody. And it is He who is now bringing them to the light of

the day according to the needs of the times. *Know it for certain that unless those words are brought out, man will not have his consciousness awakened.* All the words of His that you have with you – *every one of them is true.* One day, when you read them out to me, I felt as if it was He who was speaking.’

Aldous Huxley, the renowned English author, has written a ‘Foreword’ to the English translation of the *Kathamrita* by Swami Nikhilananda, under the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, first published by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York. Speaking about *M.* in his ‘Foreword’, Aldous Huxley writes: To a reverent love for his master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master’s teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, *M.* produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. *No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative’s daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity.’*

The world has witnessed with admiration and understanding the forceful and ever-widening impact produced by the original Bengali *Kathamrita*, published more than eight decades back, and its English translation, nearly forty years ago. Since then, it has been translated into different languages, both Indian and foreign. The demand for this book is ever growing day by day. Earnest spiritual seekers slake their thirst in the pages of this book. It has a perennial gospel for all mankind, who are spiritually awakened and are struggling for perfection. There are countless people the world over who have made it a practice to read a few pages from the *Kathamrita* every day as part of their daily routine, in whatever language it may be.

The advent of Sri Ramakrishna on the Indian scene was most timely; it was the need of the hour. With his appearance and the spread of his *Gospel* in the world, a new type of mankind is emerging endowed with the spirit of renunciation and service, both men and women, of sterling character, deeply spiritual; and divinely inspired. The Gospel is silently making its way into the hearts of men and women, without much ado, in the typically Indian way, with blessings before it and peace behind it, and slowly transforming the lives of individuals and transporting them to a realm of peace that is beyond comprehension.

The present writer had a memorable and a very touching experience nearly three decades back in Calcutta. He wishes to share it with the readers of this Memorial. It was in the early 1950’s. At that time, the writer was associated with the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture (then in 111 Russa Road, Calcutta). One afternoon, a certain foreign gentleman suddenly appeared at the Institute of Calcutta and wanted some guide to accompany him to Dakshineswar to see ‘with his own eyes’ (as he put it) the places mentioned in the *Gospel!* On enquiry, it was found that he was from Iceland – a backward nation from Western standards – that he had procured a copy of the Gospel from New York and gone through it, that he was passing through Calcutta to the Far East on business, that he had only a few hours to spare before he could resume his journey by another flight, and that he wanted to visit *the only place* in Calcutta he considered worth visiting – Dakshineswar – during those few hours. The present writer was deeply moved to hear about the profound influence the *Gospel* had made on the mind of this Icelandic gentleman (even his name is forgotten now, but the gentleman’s devotion to and faith in the Master left an indelible impression on the present writer’s

mind), and he offered himself to take the gentleman to Dakshineswar and show him round the place. The gentleman was full of inexpressible gratitude. When they reached Dakshineswar, the gentleman was visibly moved; he was full of emotion when they entered the Master's room and spent a few quiet moments there. Emerging out of the hallowed Master's room the gentleman spoke words coming straight from the heart: 'Today, my long-cherished desire has been fulfilled. I feel blessed now.' From Dakshineswar, he drove straight to the Calcutta Airport to catch his flight to the Far East. The present writer is mentioning this episode only to impress on the mind of his readers how silently, but surely, the legacy left by *M.*, the immortal author of the *Kathamrita*, is spreading far and wide, and changing the course of lives of innumerable men and women all over the world.

Blessed is *M.* who received the grace of the Master in an abundant measure. The world remembers *M.* today for the precious gift he left behind for us and for future generations. The present writer offers his humble homage to *M.* on this sacred occasion, when the Centenary of the *Kathamrita* is being celebrated, and prays that the 'Veda, of this age' may penetrate deeper still and find its way to many more homes in all parts of the world and bring spiritual joy and blessedness to those who read it no matter in what language irrespective of creed or community, race or sex.



## 28. MAHENDRA, THE MODERN VYASA

Swami Siddhinathananda

*The Kathamrita* is perhaps the most objective record of any Godman the world has ever seen. Mahendranath Gupta (Sri *M.*) had hid himself behind the screen, says Swami Siddhinathananda (Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trichur) in this short but profound study of the Scripture and its Recorder. But he adds that 'behind every word of it is the hand of *M.*' It is photographic in its recording, poetic in its setting, dramatic in its description, and absorbing in its appeal . . . '

**“... a born poet who was made a Rishi by his Master.”**

Sri Ramakrishna had two '*Indras*' among his prominent disciples: Narendra and Mahendra; the former was a *Datta* and the other a *Gupta*. Both the name and title of both of them are significant, as they indicate the roles they subsequently played in the divine dramatic troupe of Ramakrishna. One was *Datta*, an open gift to the world at large and the other *Gupta*, one hidden behind the screen: Narendra was the spokesman, and Mahendra the scribe of Ramakrishna.

Swami Vivekananda said he was a voice without a form; *M.* was his Master's voice. Both were naturally gifted, but Ramakrishna shaped them both in his own image. Narendra was like unto Arjuna to Sri Krishna who fought for His cause. Mahendra was the Vyasa of Sri Ramakrishna who recorded the modern Bhagavata. Mahendra was a born poet who was made a Rishi by his Master, and thus he became a superb composer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Domestic worries drove Mahendra to despair. He wanted to do away with his life and started with that intent. But fate led him to his sister's house at Baranagore and the next day to the temple garden of Bhavatarini. Even in that agitated state of mind, he was attracted by the beauty of the garden and the calm atmosphere. The *Gospel* opens with a poetic description of the flower garden, the temple and the sacred river. It was his poetic temperament that enabled him to discover the artless art of his Master. It was the Master's will that retrieved Mahendra from his fatal step. His meeting with the Master was a resurrection of his soul. The *Gospel* has the rare capacity of giving hope and life to the mortally desperate. At least two cases we know where the *Gospel* has acted as the saviour of life. It retains the power of renewing life, which the author himself experienced. The *Gospel* contains two artistic styles: one, the inspired, limpid, spontaneous, conversation of Sri Ramakrishna and two, the learned, gifted, poetic description of Mahendra. Both mingle imperceptibly; but to a sensitive mind the difference is discernible.

Mahendra was reprieved by Ramakrishna in order to write the *Gospel*. When another disciple, Tarak, once attempted to, record the teachings of the Master, he was told that one suitable hand had already been chosen for it. We find in the *Gospel* the Master making Mahendra repeat some of the important points in the conversations the former had with some notables. Whenever he went to visit well – known persons, he used to take Mahendra also along with him. Inspired by the ideal of renunciation the Master stood for; *M.* many a time sought the permission of the Master to embrace

monastic life. The Master did not agree. He said *M.*'s mission was the preservation and propagation of the new *Bhagavata*. He was advised to live in the world like the maid-servant in a rich man's house and open the jack-fruit of the world after smearing the hand with the oil of devotion to God. He lived like the mud-fish without getting tainted with the mire of worldliness. He was the ideal householder that Sri Ramakrishna visualised. Though nominally a householder, he led a very austere life. He spent many years at the foothills of the Himalayas practising severe penances. Many a monk of the Ramakrishna Order got inspired from personal contact with *M.* and his *Gospel* is continuing to inspire people the entire world over. At Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna poured forth the good tidings of divine delight. *M.* gathered it in good measure and continued to preach it all through his life. Swami Vivekananda by his brilliant personality and eloquence casts the net of Ramakrishna and the fish that are so caught flourish in the waters of the Gospel that Mahendra has collected.

The *Gospel* is the modern Veda. The Veda deals with the paths of work and salvation. According to the old Veda, the path of work leads to happiness here and hereafter. The new Veda of the Gospel transforms work into worship of God. The old view was that the world is an illusion. According to the new Veda, the world is a mart of bliss divine. No act is secular; everything is sacred. The conclusion of both the old and the new Vedas is the same, but the symbologies vary. The old Veda said, 'I am Brahman'. The new Veda says, 'I searched for my "I" but I could not find it. In its place I found the Mother'. According to the old teaching, 'I shall be free when my ignorance is removed'. The new Veda says, 'I shall be free when "I" shall cease to be'. According to the old teaching Brahman is beyond word and thought. Sri Ramakrishna, while describing his supreme spiritual experience would go into samadhi and coming down, he would say that the Mother is catching his throat and would not allow him to speak about it. Sri Ramakrishna has rediscovered and re-evaluated the old treasures. The old gold is still valuable, but the current coin is; minted at Dakshineswar.

But for the, new re-evaluation, the world would have discarded religion. He is the new way and the Truth. But for his teachings and experiences, many a passage in our religious lore would have remained obscure.

Of all the religious books, it is the *Bhagavata* that has received most the valid attestation at the hands of Sri Ramakrishna. Suka, the born knower of Brahman narrates the Bhagavata to Parikshit who was under a mortal curse on the banks of the Ganges for seven days. Sri Ramakrishna, the child of Kali went on for years on end imparting to ailing humanity the saving wisdom of God, which is known as the *Gospel*. The Bhagavata speaks of several ways of reaching the Lord. Ramakrishna practised most of them and proved their validity. Bhagavata suggests a way to transform even lust, anger and other enemies of man into methods of realizing God. Sri Ramakrishna advises to feel proud of being a devotee of God, to lust after spiritual beatitude, to be cross with those who stand in the way of one's love of God.

Parikshit, to whom the words of Suka were the veritable water of life, would ask for more and still more. The delighted sage would go into ecstasy, remain transfixed for a while and with a bewitching smile would pour forth the ambrosial words of divine wisdom. This was constant occurrence at Dakshineswar also and would happen several times a day.

Uddhava, on his way to Badri after taking his final leave of Sri Krishna, came to the banks of the Yamuna where he met Vidura, another great devotee of Krishna. Vidura asked Uddhava about the welfare of Krishna and His kinsmen. Uddhava broke

down; he could not open his mouth, for his heart was rent with grief. What else could he do, asks Vyasa. He, who, as a lad, while playing at worship with clay models of Krishna, when called to breakfast by his mother, refused to leave off his worship, who spent all his life in the service of the Lord, who, now at the fag end of his life, was separated from his beloved Master, how could he answer Vidura's questions about Him? Grief-stricken he remembered Krishna and he felt the presence of Krishna in his heart and then shedding profuse tears, भगवद्भोकाद्भूलोकं पुनरगतः coming down from the Lord's realm to the earthly plane, he started answering his friend's queries. This scene of one possessed of God, merging in divine bliss and coming down to the normal human level was enacted several times a day at Dakshineswar. Narendra would sing a song or the Master himself, sing a hymn on the Mother. Off the Master would soar into the Mother's lap, remain there absorbed for a time and then slowly come down saying, 'I would drink a little water'. This slight thread of desire for water brought him back from flying off.

Suka was narrating the glories of God, Parikshit was listening. When Suka stopped, the king would plead for more. The sage would be immersed for a while and then with added zeal would dwell on the Lord. The more the king heard, the more he craved for and it went on till the end of his days. Devotees from far and near would at all hours of the day, come to the Master at Dakshineswar and ask for spiritual instruction. The busy Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar would remain for hours together drinking in the nectar from the Master's lips forgetting his medical engagements. The Gita has transformed many a life. The Gospel is transforming innumerable lives. Krishna's sports and teachings would have been incomprehensible but for the verification and revalidation by Sri Ramakrishna. Verily Sri Ramakrishna is the proof of the Vedas.

Mahendra is the Rishi that has preserved for us this modern revelation of the Veda. The spirit of the *Gospel* is Sri Ramakrishna but its body is *M.*'s. Behind every word of it is the hand of *M.* The world is laid under an irredeemable debt by this unpretentious recorder of the *Gospel*. It is photographic in its recording, poetic in its setting, dramatic in its description and absorbing in its appeal. Sri Ramakrishna is the flame, the *Gospel* the oil and Mahendra the wick of this everlasting Light of the Spirit.

The readers of the *Gospel* will be thankful for an authoritative and comprehensive biography of this modern Vyasa.

## 29. SRI MAHENDRANATH GUPTA M. – THE RECORDER OF THE GOSPEL

### Parivrajika Atmaprana

Sri *M.* as the recorder of the teachings of a Great Master is unique, for no biographer before him ever recorded how his Master spoke, sat or walked, how he ate, slept or moved about and what were his exact words in a particular context of atmosphere and listeners. It is generally believed as we have seen earlier, that Sri *M.* was specially brought by Sri Ramakrishna to record his message to the world and live it so as to serve as an illustration of how words can be translated into life. Parivrajika Atmaprana, Secretary of Sri Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, New Delhi in this short article emphasizes how Sri Ramakrishna himself tutored Sri *M.* to make the *Gospel* the most exact record in the history of hagiography.

**“... this process of tutoring by the Master ... went on day after day.”**

‘Fix your mind on Me, become My devotee and sacrifice unto Me; have Me as your supreme goal, and having your Atman united thus with Me, know that you will come to Me’, says Bhagavan in the last verse of the ninth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. This is the central teaching of the Sanatana Dharma – the Eternal Religion – for all believers, whatever religion they follow. God is the Infinite One and all roads lead to Him; the divergence in the paths, however, is due to the freedom of choice which He has allowed man. What a beautiful concept! This is summed up in only four words by Sri Ramakrishna: ‘*Jato mata tato patha*’ – as many as there are paths, know that they are the different beliefs of men.

This is the latest and loudest note we hear today and it has reached the ears of many people in many lands. Through what channel did it reach the world? Who proclaimed it? And who became the instrument in spreading the message? In this case, the Master had chosen his own instrument; Sri Ramakrishna had chosen Mahendranath Gupta or *M.*

One hundred years ago – on February 26, 1882, *M.* met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, and on that day, we can say, the seed of the Gospel called *Kathamrita* was sown in his mind. It is good that this occasion is being remembered through the pages of this volume.

When anything excellent attracts the mind, it immediately gets interested in knowing about its minutest details. For example, when Sri Krishna put before Arjuna the ideal of a *sthita-prajna*, the first question Arjuna asked was: ‘What are the characteristics of the *sthita-prajna*, steeped in contemplation? How does he speak, how does he sit, how does he walk? In the same way, when we come to know about the wonderful teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, our minds become interested in knowing about his life in all its details. Where did he live? What did he look like? What were the exact words he spoke? What did he do the whole day; how did he eat, sleep, move about?’ And, when there is someone who has actually seen him, one would like to sit quietly at his feet and eternally listen to him. Such a wonderful narrator, the world found in *M.* and for the last one hundred years people have been literally ‘drinking’ the nectar of the

words of Sri Ramakrishna – *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* – which he has poured out in abundance. His book is a most authentic record and its authenticity is vouchsafed by the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and all his other contemporaries.

The Holy Mother wrote to *M.*:

‘What you had heard from him is true. Once he had kept all that in safe custody with you; now, as he thinks necessary, he is getting it published. Know that unless these talks are brought to light, the consciousness of people will not be roused. What all you have recorded is true. One day when I was hearing what you had recorded, I thought that he himself was speaking.’

Swami Vivekananda refers to the publication of the first and second leaflets thus:

‘Now you are doing just the thing ... Many many thanks for your publication. Only I am afraid it will not pay its way in a pamphlet form ... Let it see the blaze of daylight.’

Again:

‘Many many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer’s mind as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. Strange isn’t it? Our Teacher and Lord were so original and every one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you – this great work. He is with you evidently...’

In Sri Ramakrishna’s plan of work, it was indeed left to *M.* to take up the task of a recorder. We get ample evidence in the book how Sri Ramakrishna tutored him in this art, slowly and cautiously, so that his words would not be mistakenly recorded. That is why, though we sometimes find that *M.*’s interpretation is not adequate, the words themselves have the ring of truth in them. It is interesting to know how this process of tutoring of his disciple by the Master went on day after day. When Sri Ramakrishna said something important or told a parable in context, he would leisurely discuss with *M.*, the next day, all that had been said, correcting him when necessary. He would sometimes ask *M.*’s opinion about himself and then laugh at it. To quote an instance:

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘Let me ask you something. What do you think of me?’

*M.* remained silent. Again Sri Ramakrishna asked.

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘What do you think of me? How many annas of knowledge of God have I?’

*M.*: ‘I don’t understand what you mean by “annas”. But of this I am sure: I have never before seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in God, renunciation and catholicity anywhere.’ (March 1882) The Master laughed.

On another occasion the conversation went on like this:

*Sri Ramakrishna* (smiling): ‘What sort of topics were discussed today?’

*M.*: ‘It was all wonderful.’

*Sri Ramakrishna* (smiling): ‘How about the story of the Emperor Akbar?’

*M.*: ‘Yes, that was wonderful too.’

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘Say, what was it?’

*M.*: ‘A Fakir had come to meet Emperor Akbar who was saying his prayers. While praying he was asking God for money; so the Fakir slowly started moving out of the room. Later, when Akbar asked him about it he said, “If I want to beg, why should I beg from a beggar?”’

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘What was the other thing discussed?’

*M.*: ‘A lot was said about hoarding.’

*Sri Ramakrishna* (smiling): ‘What was said?’

*M.*: ‘As long as man has the awareness of making an effort, he must labour. How wonderfully you had spoken in Sinthi about hoarding.’

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘What was said?’

*M.*: ‘God takes this burden of him who depends on Him, just as a guardian takes the responsibility of a minor. I heard you say another time that a young boy is not able to find his own seat at a dinner party. Someone leads him to a seat.’

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘No. That is not correct. The child whose hand is held by the father never fails down.’

*M.*: ‘And today you spoke about three kinds of sadhus. He is the best sadhu who ... and so many more wonderful things you spoke about.’

*Sri Ramakrishna* (smiling): ‘What else did we talk about?’

*M.*: ‘The story of the crow on the Pampa Lake .... And that story about the book of the sadhu, which had nothing but “Om Rama” inscribed in it. And that about which Hanuman told Rama...’

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘What did he say?’

*M.*: ‘Hanuman said to Rama, “I went and saw Sita; only her body was lying there. All her mind and life were given to you.” And the story about the Chataka bird. It only drinks rain water ... Then the other day you spoke nicely to Ishan Mukherjee regarding flatterers. They gather around a worldly man just as vultures gather around dead bodies. This you had told Pandit Padmalochan too.’

*Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘No, I had told it to Bamandas of Ola.’ (November 9, 1884)

Thus, as it were, the drafting and redrafting of the manuscript went on till it took its present shape and size, making it the best classic in the hagiographic literature of the world. The vivid pictures of the precincts of the Dakshineswar temple – garden; the different temples with the deities installed in them, Sri Ramakrishna’s room and the *nahabat* – the music tower, make us *see* Dakshineswar and *know* it all, even before visiting it. Besides, from Sri Ramakrishna’s words we come to know of his childhood days, his days of intense *sadhanas* and ecstatic spiritual realizations, his meetings with many sadhakas, devotees, learned men and leaders of society. Especially, Ramakrishna – the man is portrayed with a fineness that is incomparable. All this *M.* has done with the skill of a superb artist. As Romain Rolland wrote to him:

‘The book containing the conversations recalls at every turn the setting and the atmosphere. Thanks for having disseminated the radiance of the beautiful smile of your Master.’

The world is indeed indebted to Mahendranath Gupta – *M.* – for his work.

## 30. M. THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Balaramananda

Swami Balaramananda, President Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius, traces briefly in the following study, 'the gradual spiritual unfoldment of *M.*'s personality', as he came more and more in contact with Sri Ramakrishna – how the magic of the Great Master's touch gradually transformed our Western educated intellectual of Calcutta into a sage, as indeed he did in the case of the galaxy of his other intimate disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Balaramananda concludes: many other examples can be cited from the Gospel, which can throw a flood of light on the personality of *M.* though he has tried to keep himself hidden.'

**“On Sunday, 26 February 1882 ... his destiny presented him to Sri Ramakrishna, the great sculptor of the human mind.”**

Through *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Mahendranath Gupta has served a bowl of nectar to humanity. Whoever reads the *Gospel* experiences that the problems which appeared like Gordian knots are solved automatically and he gets solace at heart. For the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna it is a holy scripture, which gives them, besides many other things, firsthand knowledge about the teachings of their Master, his philosophy, and necessary directions for leading a truly spiritual life. Just as Vyasa was divinely ordained to record the dialogue between Bhagavan Sri Krishna and Arjuna, and place it before humanity in the form of *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*, Mahendranath also appears to have been divinely ordained to record the conversations between Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees. His memory was wonderful. Although he jotted down in his diary some points in brief after listening to the conversations, he could exactly reproduce them in full years later when he decided to write the *Gospel*. The beauty of the *Gospel* is not only in the words of the Master but also in its style of presentation. Mahendranath has kept himself concealed throughout the *Gospel*. This was possible because, as the Master said, 'He had no ego.' Although words of incarnations are found recorded in the *Bible* and the *Gita*, they lack historical proof. For the first time in the history of religions such an authentic record of the teachings of an Incarnation is available to us. Mahendranath has provided the time, day, and dates on which the conversations took place. Its authenticity has been further strengthened by what the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda have said about the *Gospel*. One of the names which Mahendranath adopted in the *Gospel* to conceal himself is '*M.*'

### **Spiritual Transformation in *M.***

In the *Gospel* not only do we get the glimpse of life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the surroundings in which they were given, but we also get an idea about the gradual spiritual unfoldment of *M.*'s personality. As we know from his life, *M.* was the follower of Keshab Chandra Sen, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, before he met the Master. He believed in God without form (*nirakara*) but with qualities (*saguna*). He was a graduate of the Calcutta University and had studied Western philosophies like those of Kant, Hegel, Hamilton, and Herbert Spencer. He was a teacher in several

schools of Calcutta at various times. He was under the impression that he was learned enough to guide and teach others, and naturally one who is illiterate is ignorant. He did not know that there is a way of life higher than that of a married life.

With such angularities of mind his destiny took him to the garden of Dakshineswar on Sunday, 26 February 1882, and presented him to Sri Ramakrishna, the sculptor of human mind. At the very first sight the Master must have recognized him as his own, and when *M.*'s angularities became revealed to him during the course of his first few visits, the Master did not hesitate to chisel them down and give proper shape to *M.*'s mind. But chiseling was not required forever. Later on only rubbing, brushing and polishing served the purpose. Thus *M.* became a fit instrument to preach the teachings of the Master to numerous spiritual aspirants through his *Gospel* and conversations.

### ***M.*'s First Visit to the Master**

From the *Gospel* it appears that *M.*'s first visit to Dakshineswar was more for seeing the garden of the Kalibadi and the Paramahansa than to visit the temples there. *M.* writes in the *Gospel*: 'They arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room.<sup>1</sup> After listening to the nectar like words of the Master for some time, they went to have a stroll in the garden and see the evening service at the temples. This might be due to the influence of the Brahma philosophy, and his liking for the formless aspect of God. But after coming in close touch with the Master *M.* understood gradually that God is both with and without form. He must have heard a number of times from his Master: 'No one can say with finality that God is only this and nothing else. He is formless and again He has forms. For a bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jnani, that is, for him who looks on the world as a dream. The bhakta feels that he is one entity and the world another. Therefore God reveals Himself to him as a Person.'<sup>2</sup>

As a matter of fact *M.* got this illumination from his Master during the course of his visit, when the Master asked him whether he believed in God with form or without form. In reply *M.* said, 'Sir, I like to think of God as formless.' In order to broaden his vision the Master said: 'Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right; but never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.'<sup>3</sup>

*M.*, however, does not seem to have been convinced of the truth at the very first stroke. The scholar in him retorted: 'Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!' The Master replied: 'But why clay? It is an image of spirit.'<sup>4</sup>

Really! Till one comes in contact with a competent teacher, one's ideas about religion remain very crude and narrow. To make his condition worse, some narrow-minded and bigoted preachers add butter to the fire. *M.* must have felt blessed to get a broad and illumined teacher like Sri Ramakrishna. He appears to have been caught in the spell of the Master's bewitching words. When he heard the Master for the first time *M.* reflected: 'What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words

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<sup>1</sup> *M.*, The *Gospel* of Sri Ramakrishna, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, (hereafter *Gospel*), p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *Gospel*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Gospel*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Gospel*, p. 4.



are! I don't feel like moving from this spot.'

During the first few visits, *M.* seems to have learnt a great deal from the Master, and whatever pride he had about his learning was flattened by the thunder like words of the Master. He must have thought of preserving the nectar like words of the Master, which had done him so much good. So he recorded them in his diary regularly for his own good (*atmano mokshartham*) and for the good of the humanity (*jagaddhitaya cha*).

### **The Test of Learning is in Teaching**

Whether *M.* imbibed the teachings of the Master correctly or not is clear from what he said to Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar years later. On 23 October 1885, *M.* went to the house of Dr. Sarkar to bring him to the Master who was then residing at Shyampukur. The conversation between them runs thus:

*Doctor* (laughing): 'How well I told him (Master) yesterday that in order to be able to say "Tuhu! Tuhu! (Thou! Thou!)", one must fall into the hands of an expert carver!'

*M.*: 'It is true, sir. One cannot get rid of egotism without the help of a capable teacher. How well he spoke last night of *bhakti*! *Bhakti*, like a woman, can go into the inner court.'

*Doctor*: 'Yes, that is very nice. But still one cannot give up *jnana*.'

*M.*: 'But he does not say that. He accepts both knowledge and love, the Impersonal Truth and the Personal God. He says that through the cooling influence of *bhakti* a part of the Reality takes the solid form of the Personal God; and with the rise of the sun of *jnana* the ice of form melts again into the formless water of the Absolute. In other words, you realize God with form through *Bhakti* Yoga, and the formless Absolute through *Jnana* Yoga.'<sup>5</sup> This shows how correctly had *M.* grasped the message of the Master.

### **Literary Grace**

Besides this, we also get an idea of *M.*'s literary grace from the original Bengali edition of the *Gospel* (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*). He has not only reproduced the conversations between the Master and the devotees, but also drawn beautiful pen-pictures of the situations, and the places in which they took place. This gives the *Gospel* a realistic touch and saves it from becoming monotonous. In order to draw exact pen-pictures one must have thorough mastery over the language. Of course, we mean here the Bengali language in which the original *Gospel* has been written, because some of the descriptions have been dropped in the English edition.\* For instance, the first chapter of the first canto of the Bengali edition is charming in this respect. And there are many others in other parts of the same work. Therefore, through the *Gospel* we not only know the spiritual side of *M.*'s life, but also his literary grace.

### ***M.*'s Concept of Sri Ramakrishna**

From the *Gospel* it is clear that *M.*'s concept of Sri Ramakrishna's personality became higher and higher as he spent more and more days in the Master's holy company. On March 6, 1882, in the course of *M.*'s fourth visit to the Master, the latter asked him: 'Let me ask you something. What do you think of me?' *M.* remained silent. Again Sri Ramakrishna asked: 'What do you think of me? How many annas of knowledge of God have I?' In reply *M.* said: 'I don't understand what you mean by "annas". But of this I am sure: I have never seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in

<sup>5</sup> *Gospel*, pp. 856 – 57.

\* Please see also the write-up entitled 'A Submission', page 164 onwards in this Volume. [Ed.]

God, renunciation, and catholicity anywhere!<sup>6</sup>

This statement of *M.* shows how deeply *M.* had studied the personality of Sri Ramakrishna during the course of his first few visits, and that *M.* was understanding him correctly was endorsed by the Master a few months later. On 22 October 1882, during the course of conversation, *M.* said to Sri Ramakrishna: 'You are as infinite as He (God) of whom we have been talking. Truly, no one can fathom your depth.' Hearing this the Master said, 'Ah, I see you have found it out.'<sup>7</sup>

About a year later (7 September 1883) the Master asked *M.*, 'Well do you find me to be like anybody else?' In reply *M.* said: 'No, sir.'

*Master:* 'Like any other Paramahansa?'

*M:* 'No sir. You can't be compared to anybody else.'

Later on *M.* remained silent and thought to himself '... Is the Master himself an Incarnation ... Is Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God like Krishna, Chaitanya, and Christ?'<sup>8</sup>

This reveals how gradually *M.*'s concept of Sri Ramakrishna was becoming higher and higher. About two years later (28 August 1885) *M.* said to the Master: there are many similarities between you and Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> A month earlier Sri Ramakrishna had asked *M:* 'Well, after seeing all this what do you feel?' *M.* replied: 'I feel that Christ, Chaitanya, and yourself – all three are one.' On hearing this, the Master said: 'Yes, yes, One, One! It is indeed One. Don't you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way.'<sup>10</sup>

From these instances it is evident that *M.*'s concept of Sri Ramakrishna was that he was an Incarnation of God like Sri Chaitanya or Jesus Christ. But later on he must have revised his opinion when he must have learnt from Swami Vivekananda's hymn that Sri Ramakrishna is the greatest of all the Incarnations, and that there is no parallel to him in the religious history of the world.

### **Sri Ramakrishna's Opinion about *M.***

From the *Gospel* we understand that the Master recognized the spiritual calibre of *M.* at the very first sight. He knew that he was to do Mother's work. On one occasion the Master said to *M:* 'I can see from the signs of your eyes, brows and face that you are a yogi. You look like a yogi who has just left his seat of meditation.'<sup>11</sup> On another occasion, he prayed to the Divine Mother for *M:* 'O Mother, why hast Thou given him only a particle?' Remaining silent for a few moments, he added: 'I understand it, Mother. That little bit will be enough for him to teach people.'<sup>12</sup>

*M.* did the work of the Mother and guided a number of spiritual aspirants Godwards, but he never had the pride of a preacher. He used to say: 'I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean. I keep with me a few pitchers of sea-water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his

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<sup>6</sup> Gospel, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Gospel, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Gospel, pp. 223-24

<sup>9</sup> Gospel, p. 823.

<sup>10</sup> Gospel, p. 809

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in the Disciples of Ramakrishna, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1955, p. 416

<sup>12</sup> Gospel, p. 210.

words!<sup>13</sup>

When the Master was alive, *M.* brought many youngsters at his feet; and after his passing away also he inspired many young men to lead a spiritual life and some of them joined the Ramakrishna Order later on.

### **A Companion of Births**

From the *Gospel* we learn that *M.*'s relationship with the Master was not only for this birth, but also in previous births. When Sri Ramakrishna came as Sri Chaitanya, *M.* was one of his associates. About this, the Master said on 9 December 1883: 'Once I saw the companions of Chaitanya; not in a trance but with these very eyes. Formerly I was in such an exalted state of mind that I could see all these things with my naked eyes... I saw the companions of *Chaitanya* with these naked eyes. I think I saw you there, and Balaram too.'<sup>14</sup>

This corroborates the fact that *M.* was the *lilasahachara* (companion in the spiritual sport) of the Master whenever he came down as an Incarnation.

### **Loyalty to the Sannyasin Brother-Disciples**

When Sri Ramakrishna entered *mahasamadhi*, Narendranath and other young disciples of the Master were mere boys. Naturally the elderly householder disciples of the Master urged them to go home and continue their studies: but the youngsters did not follow their directions and they established a Math under the leadership of Narendranath at Baranagore, a suburb of Calcutta. At the Math they installed a shrine for Sri Ramakrishna and passed their time in worship, study and meditation. At this critical period, the elders thought that the boys were headstrong and they did not keep any contact with them. About this period Swami Vivekananda wrote to Swami Brahmananda years later: 'Rakhal, you remember, I suppose, how, after the, Master's passing away, all forsook us as so many worthless, ragged boys. Only people like Balaram, Suresh, Master (Mahendranath Gupta), and Chunibabu were our friends in that hour of need. And we shall never be able to repay our debts to them.'<sup>15</sup> It is due to this loyalty that *M.* has included in the *Gospel* some chapters on the life of the sannyasin disciples at the Baranagore monastery after the passing away of the Master. This portion of the *Gospel* reveals his intimate relationship with the sannyasin disciples of the Master, especially Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda).

Besides these many examples can be cited from the *Gospel*, which can throw a flood of light on the personality of *M.* although he has tried to keep himself, hidden. Sincere spiritual aspirants will surely feel indebted to *M.* for storing the nectar of the Master's words in the *Gospel*.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in the *Gospel*, p. 263

<sup>14</sup> *Gospel*, p. 276.

<sup>15</sup> *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama 1979, p. 191

## 31. M. AND THE NEW BHAGAVATA

Swami Sevananda

In the following study, Swami Sevananda of Dumka has traced ‘the magnificent part played by Sri M. in producing a new Bhagavata.’ Among other things, he talks briefly of Sri M. as: 1. a seeker, 2. a companion of the Godman, 3. a medium for transmission of ideas, 4. an interpreter, 5. a recorder, 6. a writer and finally 7. a biographer. He concludes: Sri M, was a *Charitakar* (biographer par excellence) by any standard. He became so by His grace whose *charita* (life) he wanted to picture and of whom he was an integral part ...’

The translation of the article into English has been done by Professor S M. Chatterji.

**“... the spotless part played by him in the grand drama, Sri Ramakrishna Lila ...”**

The limited purpose of this write-up in the wake of the centenary celebration of 26th February 1882, the day to mark the germination of *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, is to bring out in nutshell the magnificent part played by Sri M. in producing a new Bhagavata as an eternal source of inspiration to seekers after truth.

Sri M. (Mahendranath Gupta) was a teacher. Having had a brilliant academic career, he was drawn to the profession of teaching in schools and colleges. This again was perhaps preordained. He had to marry early before he could complete his education in the University and was required to seek employment without delay. It was not difficult for persons securing top position in schools and colleges in those days to enter service other than teaching (teachers used to get poor salaries). In fact, he had the desire to go abroad and get himself trained for the Indian Civil Service. Providence, however, willed it otherwise, and things did not mature in his favour. Ultimately he joined a school as its Headmaster and functioned as head of several schools in Calcutta.

Subsequent events of Sri M.’s life proved beyond doubt that he had the qualities of a born teacher, which were destined to be oriented in a direction altogether different from the precincts of formal education. He was to take up the role of an *acharya* in the true sense of the term and inspire many a student or learner to long for true education or *para vidya* that leads to the path of self-realization.

Knowing his background of a teacher, Sri Ramakrishna used to address him fondly as ‘master’ (teacher) as though that was his nickname. Sri M. with all humility bore the name and used it while referring to himself in the *Kathamrita*. The letter M. [or Ma in Hindi and Bengali] stands for the initial both of Mahendranath in English and ‘Master’ in Bengali. A coincidence indeed!

True to the profession of teaching, Sri M. not only excelled in the art of teaching diverse subjects but also acquired wonderful capacity to transmit, in a crystal clear way, whatever good ideas he himself gathered from different sources. The development of this versatile faculty because of his close association with a wide range of learners made him a fit person for the great mission he had to fulfill.

Sri M. cultivated the habit of keeping daily record of events and thoughts right from his boyhood. This also helped him a lot in combining the rare qualities of clarity in

thought and precision in expression. The diary he maintained all through his life bears testimony to the sincerity of purpose and truthfulness he had in abundance. What a genius he was in identifying the principal points out of a mass of deliberations in any situation and presents a faithful as also illuminating picture of the same! A tape-recorder can catch sound, a camera can catch light, but it requires an artist to paint a picture revealing the real feeling behind an event. A penetrating mind with searching intelligence is no doubt necessary to collect crystals out of dust. And Sri *M.* by his habit and disposition perfected himself in this art.

His first visit to Sri Ramakrishna was followed by subsequent ones in quick succession. It took little time to overcome his shyness, hesitation and notably his ego as a man of education. He realized, or should it be said, he was made to realize once for all the limitation of intellect alone to map the inner world. Sri *M.* got his confusion cleared, ignorance dispelled. He surrendered himself to Sri Ramakrishna and a new chapter of his life began.

The surrender was symbolic of an age of disbelief, so-called rationalism and positivism, dilution of faith, intuition and idealism. Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) had to have similar experience though in a different context. Sociologically the situation was perhaps ripe for the emergence of a new era to reclaim what was lost in the battle for cultural conquest. Many an educated young man (Sri Ramakrishna used to call them jokingly as 'Englishman') fell victim to the propaganda of the Christian church and began to malign Hindus as idolaters and find fault with their religion. The Brahmo Samaj movement captured the imagination of a section of intellectuals and in a bid to give up religious prejudices many of them out-stepped the limit to fight against religion itself.

As a man sincere to the core, Sri *M.* placed before Sri Ramakrishna at the earliest opportunity his own query about the existence of God, with or without form and his own doubt about *pratima-puja* (Idol worship). He was really struck with wonder to hear the assertion from Sri Ramakrishna that God exists both with and without form. The coexistence of two apparently contradictory entities could not be accepted by the logical mind of Sri *M.* and he had to obtain further clarification. This is how discussion originated marking the genesis of the *Kathamrita*. Details have been given in the first chapter of the first volume of the book. Many more questions were posed by him subsequently. The majority of them, however, were intended to facilitate elaboration of any point made by Sri Ramakrishna, rather than to intercept it or superimpose his own feelings. In fact on one occasion, he was commanded by Sri Ramakrishna to do away with *vichar-buddhi* or argumentation (though in a different context) and Sri *M.* remained cautious enough thereafter to avoid putting unnecessary questions.

One should not, however, carry the impression that Sri Ramakrishna avoided *jijnasa* (enquiry). Far from it; He himself posed a thousand and one questions to dispel doubts and elaborate the answers for the benefit of humanity. He was forbidden by doctors to speak while he was sick, and yet He would continue to talk till His listeners stood thoroughly convinced of the truth of what He uttered. He wanted Mahendranath, (Sri *M.*) to enter into discussion with Narendranath, Girish Chandra, Dr. Mahendra Sarkar and others having the background of English education, enjoying the heat of their debate from a distance. It was against His nature to allow tame acceptance of any proposition.

Consequently, it was a tough job for Sri *M.* to strike a balance while participating in the discourses. He had to remain ever conscious not to project himself and at the same

time not to suppress any doubt or difficulty in understanding what was being explained to the audience. Occasionally, he was asked by Sri Ramakrishna to recapitulate what He had said about any concept or what example he had cited to illustrate its significance. May be, this was to ascertain if Sri *M.* had correctly followed the discussion or if its exactitude had been violated in any way. Several such instances are on record in the *Kathamrita* itself. It is also recorded that Sri *M.* did not hesitate to get a matter clarified anew by Sri Ramakrishna whenever he was not sure of the real import of anything noted earlier. This was obviously to solicit His approval without which no Bhagavata could be created in the manner it was done.

It will be incorrect to suppose that Sri *M.* was just a recorder without having a major share in the turn of events. His silence did not always mean abstention. Occasionally, he acted as a catalytic agent in bringing about fusion of ideas, himself remaining unnoticed. One really wonders to discover the manifold functions of Sri *M.*, and the spotless part played by him in the grand drama, Sri Ramakrishna Lila, in which it was not required of the contemporary companions to move about in search of heaven but to enjoy the same around Him with infinite joy.

Looking at the scheme of presentation of the *Kathamrita*, one may analyse Sri *M.*'s role as a seeker (*jijnasu*), a companion (*parshad*), a medium (*madhyam*, transmitter), an interpreter (*bhashyakar*), a recorder (*anulekhak*), a writer (*lekhak*), and finally a biographer (*charitakar*).

As a **seeker** he would not only put relevant questions but also let Sri Ramakrishna elaborate what he wanted to know. Many concepts he got clarified in the light of the basic teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, for example, the concept of 'one in all and all in one' – a real synthesis. From the beginning to the end of the *Kathamrita* one finds how Sri *M.* functioned as a seeker after truth at every step, and the dialogues reproduced verbatim bear testimony to that aspect of Sri *M.*'s character.

As a **companion**, either at Dakshineswar or elsewhere he was a figure in the form of a *sevak* and perhaps instrumental in enriching the discoveries, in giving appropriate information, in inviting persons to join the holy company and serving his Bhagavan in every possible way. It is futile to make a quantitative measure of the share he had in creating situations, or in stimulating discussions. Nevertheless it should be appreciated that Sri *M.* had a distinct role to play as a *parshad* in spite of the fact that he was not a full renunciate to leave home and stay with Sri Ramakrishna all the time. As a householder devotee he had distinct duties to perform. It was so willed by the Lord of Dakshineswar.

Sri *M.*, the Master Mahashaya, was held in high esteem by his pupils because of his eminence as a teacher and the loving personality he possessed. As already mentioned, he was a powerful **transmitter** of ideas. Whoever came in touch with him felt induced. He was instrumental in guiding some of his students to visit Sri Ramakrishna; a few of them actually became His chosen disciples and led a life of renunciation at his command. Sri *M.* was also instrumental in bringing a few eminent persons of the time notably Vidyasagar in touch with Sri Ramakrishna. It is true that no introduction was necessary for the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna whose radiance was enough to win over. Nevertheless, it was the sacred duty of Sri *M.* to spread His divine sayings as much as he could, in the sphere of his activity. Sri *M.* performed his duty most efficiently in this regard.

Of Sri *M.* as an **interpreter**, occasional references are to be found in the

*Kathamrita* itself. Some of the narrations are not merely physical descriptions of the environment but are as though a concrete interpretation of the feelings generated though mostly in question form. The imageries used in descriptions are highly suggestive, and the literary style of presentation is unique. The Biblical simplicity of exposition coupled with the utterances of the Simplicity Incarnate, has made the *Kathamrita* an immortal document. Every move of Sri Ramakrishna has been given the right interpretation to focus His divinity. Sri *M.*'s powerful pen was indeed a blessing!

The role of Sri *M.* as a faithful **recorder** needs no elaboration. Every page of the *Kathamrita* speaks of his thoroughness and devotion in this regard. It is true that all the events around Sri Ramakrishna could not be recorded by him for the simple reason that he was not with him all the time. Counting the number of days depicted in the five volumes of the *Kathamrita* it is found that only 174 days have been covered during the years 1882-86. Nevertheless, the sequence though not always chronological is enough to produce a sense of fullness. Moreover, a Bhagavata is not to be treated as a chronicle of events. Its purpose is entirely different. Some of the events find place in other books, and one must concede that the other chosen disciples who were in constant company with Sri Ramakrishna might have many more things to present in addition to what have been given in the *Kathamrita*. Sri *M.*'s association with them and the respect he commanded from them are enough to ensure that no substantial gap has been left out in the *Kathamrita*, except perhaps some of the incidents mentioned by Swami Saradananda in *Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga* and by Swami Abhedananda in his *Amar Jiban-katha*. Some more might also be there of similar nature.

As for the exactitude, what more is needed for the authentication of the work than the blessing given by the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi? She said, "All His words retained by you are true."

As a **writer**, Sri *M.* excelled many in the field of literature. The *Kathamrita* is not merely a biography in the ordinary sense of the term. Life divine has a special field of its own and the selection of events to focus the divinity in a Godman is as important as the events themselves. "It has been reserved for you – this great work," said Swami Vivekananda. The comment is extremely significant.

A *charitakar* is much above the level of a biographer. The former is to bring out *the charita*; sum total of character while the latter is primarily to deal with events during the span of life lived. *Charita* is a comprehensive concept about the mission, the philosophy and the purposefulness depicted. A real *charitakar* has to flash the *charita*, like an artist, to reveal the glow of character leaving aside the gross\*, whereas a biographer is more interested in details than in the inner traits.

Sri *M.* was a **charitakar** by any standard. He became so by His grace whose *charita* he wanted to picture and of whom he was an integral part. Blessed is *M.* for the noble work he has done. Salutations to him for the invaluable gift he has made to humanity.

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\* Of course there was nothing really *gross* about Sri Ramakrishna [Ed.]

## 32. THE TRANSFORMATION OF M.

### Swami Virupakshananda

Sri M.'s first four visits to Sri Ramakrishna transformed him completely – his subsequent visits for a little more than four years were only in the nature of trimming and polishing of the sculptured model – into a householder saint from a mere Calcutta school master, a westernized young man who considered reading of books as the sole means of gaining knowledge and the only worthwhile pursuit. He did not believe in idol-worship and had Keshab Chandra Sen, the famous leader of the New Dispensation in the Navavidhan Brahmo Samaj, as the hero of his heart before he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. But his 'clay image' was soon to be turned into 'the image of Spirit' by the divine touch of the Godman. It may be added that those were the days when the Indian intellectuals considered image worship as gross ignorance and superstition. Besides Christian missionaries, the reformist ideas of the Brahmo Samaj and Swami Dayananda's Arya Samaj were making great impression on the intellect of the educated masses.

The following extracts from Swami Virupakshananda's article which he has titled, 'A Devotee Becomes a Prophet' highlight Sri M.'s transformation by his Master who himself moved up from 'image-worship', to the 'worship of Ishwara' and then to Brahman-bhava and *nirvikalpa samadhi*, that is identity with the formless, attribute-less Brahman.

Swami Virupakshananda is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, Chingelput (T. N.)

**“M.: Sir, suppose one believes in God with form, certainly He is not the clay image!”**

**Master (interrupting): But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.”**

Sri Ramakrishna came not to destroy but to fulfill. His capacity to give old values and ideas a fresh lease of life by refashioning and re-interpreting them prompted Swami Vivekananda, his most intimate disciple and chief apostle, to declare: “The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is really able to understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the *shastras*. He showed by his life what the Rishis and Avatars really wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realization.”

\* \* \*

In and through the pages of the *Gospel* we see the unfoldment of a wonderful saga of a priest of Mother Bhavatarini gradually blooming forth as a prophet of uncommon dimensions. A humble priest becomes an ardent devotee; a devotee becomes a perfected saint; a perfected saint is elevated to the divine stature of an *avatara*. As a priest he enters the divine drama at Dakshineswar. He emerges as a mystic of uncommon spiritual attainments and extraordinary self-perfection.

The *Gospel* captures many an event that metamorphosed this priest into a world prophet of infinite possibilities and a universal heart. It also tellingly narrates events that inspired the founding of a movement of world dimension for the spiritual regeneration of humanity.

\* \* \*

Recalling his restlessness for a glimpse of Her vision, Sri Ramakrishna would say



to his disciples: “One must be restless for God. If a son clamours persistently for his share of the property, his parents consult with each other and give it to him even though he is a minor. God will certainly listen to your prayers if you feel restless for Him. Since He has begotten us, surely we can claim our inheritance from Him. He is our own Mother. We can force our demand on Him. We can say to Him, ‘Reveal Thyself to me or I shall cut my throat with a knife.’ ...

“I used to pray to Her in this way: ‘O Mother! O Blissful One! Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must.’ Again, I would say to Her: ‘O Lord of the lowly! O Lord of the universe! Surely I am not outside Thy universe. I am bereft of knowledge. I am without discipline. I have no devotion. I know nothing. Thou must be gracious and reveal Thyself to Me.’”<sup>1</sup>

### **Sri Ramakrishna and Image Worship**

Sri Ramakrishna had no patience with a lukewarm approach to spiritual things. He never believed in stopping at halfway houses. His ideal was *Charaiveti* – Be ever on the march till you reach the goal. Days and nights rolled on in fervent prayer and intense meditation. Dejected at his failure to have a vision of the Mother, he decided to put an end to his own life. Mother condescended to reveal Herself as Her devotee seized a sword to put an end to his life in extreme anguish. She revealed Herself as an effulgent ocean of infinite consciousness. Later, when *M.* confronted him with the usual question of Calcutta people: “Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!” Sri Ramakrishna sharply retorted, interrupting *M.* “But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

His retort to *M.*, “But why clay? It is an image of Spirit”, looks simple on the surface. But it was a statement fraught with tremendous meaning, particularly at a period when Hinduism was being vilified as a religion of idolatry. The prophetic dimension of Sri Ramakrishna’s realization of the Supreme Godhead through image worship is revealed by the emphatic proof he provides by his own attestation to the truth that image worship too is a valid *sadhana* if one is sincere in one’s approach to the practice of spirituality. Addressing a devotee who doubted the efficacy of image worship to lead one to the realization of God, he says: “Why do these images raise the idea of mud and clay, stone and straw in your mind? Why can’t you realize the presence of the eternal, blissful, all conscious Mother even in these forms? Know these images to be concretised forms of the eternal and formless essence of all sentiency. If a man thinks of the images of gods and goddesses as symbols of the Divine, he attains divinity. But if he considers them as mere idols made of stone or straw or clay, to him the worship of those images produces no good.”

Swami Vivekananda provides a rational interpretation of his Master’s realization: “We are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good, because it is in the nature of man. Who can get beyond it? Only the perfect man, the Godman. The rest are all idolaters. And yet how people fight among themselves calling one another idolater! Two sorts of persons never require an image – the human animal who never thinks of any religion, and the perfected being who has passed through these stages. Between these two points all of us require some sort of idol, outside and inside ... It has been a trite saying that idolatry is wrong, and every man swallows it at the present time without questioning. I once thought so and to pay the penalty of that, I had to learn my lesson sitting at the feet of a man who realized everything through idols! I allude to Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 1981 Edition, p. 385

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 80

Take a thousand idols more if you can produce a Ramakrishna Paramahansa through idol worship, and God speed to you.”

\* \* \*

At the end of his *Dvaita and Tantric sadhanas*, Sri Ramakrishna came to be identified at all times with the immanent aspect of Brahman. It was revealed to him that it was Brahman alone that had become everything. When he was in the Kali temple, he saw everything, the image, the altar, the water vessels, the doorsill, the marble floor, in fact everything that his eyes beheld, vibrant, sonant with Divine Consciousness. He found everything inside the room soaking, as it were, in the bliss of Sat-Chid-Ananda. Once he fed a cat with the offerings meant for the Divine Mother, for he saw in the cat the presence of the Mother. He would salute even a woman of bad reputation, for he saw in her too the Divine Mother Kali. Similarly, after he had the vision of Sri Krishna at the end of his *Madhura Bhava sadhana*, he underwent the same experience. He saw every thing Krishna-filled. The moving and the unmoving appeared to him only the multiform of the One Krishna, the embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Thus, from image worship he was transformed into the worshipper of *Virat*, God in universal form. When he was in these moods he could not even pluck flowers, *bel* leaves or *durva* grass. The Upanishadic dictum '*Isavasyamidam sarvam*' had its latest authentication in his life.

\* \* \*

### **Role of Rituals And Symbols**

If one takes to worship with a sincere longing for God-realization and perseveres in his adoration of the Deity through total dedication to the Ideal by living a pure and holy life, one will certainly reach the goal. This has been convincingly demonstrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. In the preparatory stage on the path divine, one needs forms and symbols, rites and ceremonies, bell ringing and group singing. The frequent exposure of oneself to spiritual vibrations and lofty ideals will certainly have its effect in bringing about a change in a person's outlook and understanding. The crude, fanatical attempt to eradicate mythological and symbolical aids takes away the props of a spiritual infant crawling his way to God. It is true that love for ceremonies and other external form of religion has relevance only to the senses rather than to the spirit. But these have been provided to help the beginners to strengthen their spiritual quest. Minds, which are incapable of grasping the abstract truths at the beginning, have been provided with all these concrete forms to encourage them on their soul-pilgrimage. The exuberant growth of mythology and ritualism has its origin in this need for providing initial supports to spiritual seekers in various ways. It is very significant that religions rich in mythology and rituals have also produced the greatest number of saints and prophets. The ritualistic *upasana* of *Ishwara* through various names and forms, the adoration of incarnations like Rama and Krishna, Buddha and Christ, are like the many ridge-poles of the spiritual roof. They furnish the formative material to the spiritual plant growing in the human soul. Sri Ramakrishna proved not only the pragmatic appeal of rituals, of *vighraha aradhana*, but also demonstrated a state of ritual-transcendence in his life. Beginning with *vighraha aradhana* – image worship – he was firmly established in *virat upasana* – worship of *Ishwara* – in His immanent aspect in the universe, and finally merged himself in the supreme realization of God in *Brahma-bhava* – the state of formless and attribute-less Brahman.

No wonder that this Master was able to transform great disciples of his, who were

initially non-believers of God with form, into such deep devotees of the Mother in the Dakshineswar temple.

### 33. *M.* AS A WRITER

#### Nancy Pope Mayorga

We shall let Mrs. Mayorga introduce herself to our readers. Says she in her letter of October 3, 1980:

“... There was an editor in Los Angeles who asked me to write something for his magazine and gave me a couple of sample copies. The first one I opened had an article about Swami Prabhavananda and the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Unfortunately, shortly after that, the magazine failed, but, as far as I was concerned, it had served its purpose. Vedanta has undoubtedly been the greatest influence in my life. A small miracle.

“The second miracle, perhaps not so small, was the steady and gradual influence of Ramakrishna. And, of course, for that I owe a great debt to *M.* we all do. I was very happy to be asked to do the article. But I must admit it was a most difficult thing to do. What little is known about *M.* is well known by everybody. But from the beginning, as a writer, I have felt esteem for him and gratitude towards him for his literary talent.”

Mrs. Mayorga, well-known as a contributor to many journals, is from Santa Barbara, California (U.S.A.).

**“ ... a reporter such as the world has never known  
... who knew artistically how to handle this  
overwhelming outpouring of love, and wisdom.”**

The true conception of a biography is a faithful account of a human soul along its journey from birth to death. Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* is perhaps the most interesting biography written in any language. It is a great temptation, therefore, to compare *M.*’s account of Ramakrishna with Boswell’s account of Johnson. Artistically, the two biographers have similarities. Both have a mastery of the language, a fine literary taste, and honesty. The great difference is in the subjects they chose. And here, if there is a temptation to compare them, there is also a great joy in doing so, because it becomes evident right away that there is a real and intrinsic difference in writing about an *avatar*.

The only other comparable biography we have of an *avatar* is the Christian New Testament, the life of Jesus. The New Testament covers three years of Jesus’ teaching life. *M.*’s biography covers four years of Ramakrishna’s teaching life. But detail is scanty in the New Testament. No doubt it is abundant in Boswell, but what a different kind of detail! The sententious, worldly pronouncements of Dr. Johnson on literature, art, philosophy, society sound empty, even absurd when placed alongside of the simple, spiritual words of Ramakrishna.

But aside from his perfect subject, aside from the greater than human material he was given, in the art of writing *M.* was a great craftsman. His prose is superb. On reading it, Swami Vivekananda wrote to him enthusiastically, “The language is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I am really in a transport when I read it.”

To begin with, *M.* was a reporter par excellence, a reporter such as the world has never known. He had a phenomenal memory, to be sure, but his technique of recording was unique. In his own words, “I would carry the nectar-like words of Thakur in my

memory and would record them briefly in the diary on returning home. On every scene I had meditated a thousand times. Therefore I could recreate, re-live those moments of Thakur's grace. When I did not feel satisfied, I would plunge myself into meditations on Thakur. Then the correct image would rise before my mind's eye in a bright, real, living form." Nevertheless, it is one thing to see something in the mind's eye. It is another to catch it on paper. Literary description detailed and live, is a difficult task. *M.* was not only a craftsman, he was an artist. And he always set his stage. The opening of the Gospel, for example, has a masterful description, which takes us into the gardens of Dakshineswar as though we were there, and which draws us into the book as though we were starting a great romantic novel –

"As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum, and cymbal. He could hear the music from the *nahabat*, too, at the south end of the garden. The sounds traveled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship."

And on another evening: "The sun was still above the horizon as the Master stood on the embankment in an ecstatic mood. On one side of him was the Ganges flowing north with the flood tide. Behind him was the flower garden. To his right one could see the *nahabat* and the *Panchavati*. Narendra stood by his side and sang. Gradually the darkness of evening fell upon the earth." This is description with economy and taste.

It was not only scenes of nature that he described. He was a master of human portraiture. Every time he introduced a new character he gave, with well-chosen particulars, a thumbnail sketch of his background and nature. There is the perverse Hazra who had a family and "a few debts" and whose mind was "a jumble of undigested religious moods". There was the devout and reformed Girish Ghosh, actor and dramatist, who believed that "God Himself had been born in the person of Ramakrishna". There was the highly respected Dr. Sarkar who was shown to be a shy and veiled personality. Who can ever forget the picture of a dying Keshab Sen, emaciated, holding to the wall as he walked into the room to greet Ramakrishna? Or the venerable Vidyasagar, whose name meant "Ocean of Learning", showing Ramakrishna to the carriage with a lighted candle and asking *M.* in a low voice, "Shall I pay the carriage hire?" for though wealthy and a great pandit, he was a man "of utter simplicity". All these people and many more, live in *M.*'s account and live on vividly in our remembering.

As in any fine biography, we are given a view of the life and activities of the place and time – Calcutta at the end of the nineteenth century. We see the streets crowded with people, a pair of drunkards dancing, and Ramakrishna, infected with their joy, jumping from his hackney cab to join them for a minute. We are in a carriage passing through the European quarter, through brightly-lighted streets, past beautiful mansions surrounded by verandas and gardens. The carriage stops at the India Club to get a drink of water for Ramakrishna. And, "as the carriage drove on, the Master put his head out of the window and watched everything that went by – the people, the vehicles, the horses, and the streets all bathed in the light of the moon. Now and again he could hear the European ladies singing to the music of the piano."

Then we are in the Star Theatre and we meet some of its actresses, pretty girls of questionable character. "The hall was brilliantly lighted." Girish Ghosh had reserved a box. "The Master looked down at the pit and saw that it was crowded. The boxes also were full. For every box there was a man to fan those who occupied it." We drive through

the Maidan, that great park with its monument from the top of which “people look like ants”. We take a boat trip on the Ganges. “The paddles of the boat churned the water with a murmuring sound... Gradually the ebb tide set in. The steamboat was speeding toward Calcutta. It passed under the Howrah bridge and came within sight of the Botanical Garden. The Captain was asked to go a little farther down the river... Finally the boat cast anchor at the Kayalaghat and the passengers prepared to disembark – The full moon was up. The trees, the buildings, and the boats on the Ganges were bathed in its mellow light.”

When it comes to the principal character of his biography, *M.* could easily have lapsed into panegyric, could have given us just the ideal view of Ramakrishna, calm, majestic, white-robed, floating on a cloud of spirituality. But no, *M.* was a meticulous reporter and wise enough to know that every small detail of Ramakrishna’s life added dimension to the picture he was presenting. So we see the *avatar*, as He was, sublime and childlike. His teachings sublime, his actions very often childlike. He throws off his cloth with complete lack of self-consciousness or modesty. He complains shamelessly about his injured arm. He cracks earthy jokes and has his young disciples role in on the floor with laughter. How human He is! And in the next moment, how divine!

No doubt Ramakrishna was an eccentric character, often falling into *samadhi* and creating very difficult situations for his young followers. At one time, boarding a boat, he went into *samadhi* and they all had great trouble in finally getting him aboard. Honest *M.* described it in detail. He also mentions Ramakrishna’s rustic language and slight stammer.

One of *M.*’s outstanding literary achievements is how fully he remembered and recorded Ramakrishna’s teaching. *M.* never hesitates to repeat his Master’s words again and again, as He spoke them. This very repetition has its incalculable value in impressing the teaching on our minds as it was impressed on the minds of those who heard Him. The repetition also gives the feeling of things happening naturally, day after day, as life was being lived.

In a biography the recorded events depend on the choice and taste of the author. He has always the temptation to make his own role in the proceedings look better. *M.* did not fall into this trap. He was a faithful chronicler and he never spared himself, even at risk of appearing inferior or ridiculous. He was candid with us at the very beginning when Ramakrishna severely rebuked him, equally candid when Ramakrishna poked gentle fun at him in front of the others, and just as open and honest when reporting Ramakrishna’s praise. But for the most part he was consistently self-effacing. As Swami Vivekananda wrote him, “Many many many many thanks. It is indeed wonderful. Never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer’s mind as you are doing.” And again, “He is with you evidently ... Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden.”

One wonders how far he realized what a marvelous picture he was painting of himself. It probably never entered his mind. Nevertheless, we see him clearly, such a serious intense young professor, with not very much humour\*, standing always in the background, taking in everything, storing it in his phenomenal memory, and, no doubt, getting his reward when he looks up occasionally to find Ramakrishna’s eyes upon him. Even in later life, although revered as a disciple of the Master, his humility was such that he never allowed his visitors to pay their respects by taking the dust of his feet.

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\* ‘an unfamiliar kind of humour’, Aldous Huxley [Ed.]

When in 1923, Swami Prabhavananda was leaving India for the United States he went to say good-bye to *M.* *M.* would not allow him to bow down before him. So, as Swami told it, he asked him if he would meditate with him and when *M.* closed his eyes; Swami quickly leaned forward and touched his feet. *M.* opened his eyes and laughed, "You ...! You tricked me!"

One great thing *M.* certainly was aware of, and that was his own part in that great drama. On many occasions Ramakrishna made it very plain to him. He would not allow others to take notes, but "There is already a man for it," he said. Often he would say to *M.*, "Did you get that? Shall I repeat it?" And when he had something to say to a gathering, he would often send for *M.* as Swami Vivekananda said after reading *M.*'s account, "I now understand why none of us attempted His life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work."

To the end of his life *M.* was editing, revising, adding to his remarkable biography. He never took any credit for it, never thought of himself as anything but the most humble of men. "I am an insignificant person," he said. "But I live by the side of an ocean and keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but His words?" So he was to the end his Master's mouthpiece.

He drew his material from a divine source, to be sure, but we cannot overlook the fact that he was a masterful writer who knew artistically how to handle this overwhelming outpouring of love and wisdom. If only as a literary achievement, *M.*'s *Life of Ramakrishna* stands alone, great incomparable, a unique monument to God Himself.

## 34. MASTER MAHASHAYA FOR EVER

Nirmalya Bose

Sri Nirmalya Bose is a noted Bengali writer. That he is a deep devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and of the two Mahashayas, the Master Mahashaya and Nag Mahashaya, will be evident from the following contribution he has made to this Centenary Memorial. We wish we could reproduce his words in Bengali, the language in which he has clothed his tribute for in translation by us we have perforce lost some of the flavour and grace of the original. Our apologies.

**“This Great incident took place on a Sunday, the 26th of February 1882, the raindrop of the *Swati nakshatra* falling within the mother-of-pearl.”**

In the play of Sri Ramakrishna we have two Mahashayas – the Master Mahashaya and Nag Mahashaya. The unworldly character of these two Mahashayas has brought in the Ramakrishna *Lila* a hitherto un-tasted *rasa*, unspeakably scintillating with the supreme greatness of these narrators of the *Lila*. Both of them were householders, both were married.

Sri Ramakrishna fashioned them both somewhat in the mould of his own life pattern for our sake who have been kept in this den of soot, sucking at the soother of the deceptive worldly lust and lucre. We have to learn from the lives of these two Mahashayas how to live in the world, how to tread over this thorny forest path and how to attain to the highest and the ultimate aim of human life of seeing God. When we the householders see sannyasins how our minds get filled with dispassion, what fire of renunciation gets started in us! We are all praise for them, we put our faith in them, we make our obeisance to them and that is the end of it but we never want to be like them. We consider them the denizens of an unapproachable world of the ochre clothed; we do not feel one with them; in vain do we feel that our duty is over when we pay our respects to these all-renouncing sadhus. This stark truth was first realized best by the greatest of the realists of the world, the supreme intellectual and the most sublimely mysterious of men, Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna. It was this motiveless ocean of grace, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna who with the divine ingredients of his own life brought into being these two Mahashayas who did not renounce the world, yet manifested Ramakrishna in their lives. Though Sri Ramakrishna had received initiation into formal sannyasa after the usual *Viraja homa* he was not exactly the traditional sannyasi – there lies the most characteristic difference. He never donned the ochre; instead he wore a shirt socks and shoes\* like anyone of us, and went happily to theatres *jatras*, circus and so on – he had seemingly his love and liking, he had his own few desires. He had no objection to this or that food. He was not a dry sadhu; contemptuous of others – he was a pleasant man full of the joy of life. At the time he embraced sannyasa or later on he never made anybody cry. Though the king of renouncers himself, he did not renounce anybody – neither his mother, nor his wife nor any other near or dear one. On the other hand, he accepted them more firmly. He looked to be feeling concerned at the illness, sorrow or trouble of his dear ones. He took vows of offering to deities for their sake. He even cried. He did not

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\* The chatti juta or slippers



have his head shaved lest his mother should be pained at the thought of her son becoming a sannyasin. He even prepared himself to perform the *tarpana* (rites for the dead), forbidden to the sannyasins, for his mother after his initiation into sannayasa. He did not call the world a veil of deception like the other world-renouncing sannyasins. On the other hand, he said, unlike the other sannyasins, that the world is the abode of joy. He did not content himself by just saying so, he demonstrated in his own life how to live life joyfully in the world and yet save sannayasa and he elucidated more clearly this great secret principle through the medium of two more lives – that of the Master Mahashaya and of Nag Mahashaya. The word Mahashaya means a man of noble character. These two men were the living commentaries of Sri Ramakrishna, the *Ved-Purusha*. Both of them were full of intense dispassion. They implored Sri Ramakrishna to initiate them into sannayasa again and again. But for them there was no need of the traditional sannayasa, so Thakur did not accede to their request. Instead he completely destroyed their *I-ness* and filled their whole being with his own essence. He who has lost his *I-ness* has already lost all – what more can he renounce? What use has he for the ochre cloth? Sannyasa is nothing but destroying this I-ness, dispassion is nothing but transforming *I-ness* into Thou-ness – dispassion means: not-I, not-I, Thou, Thou!

What was Sri Ramakrishna? To give a sufficient idea of it, He created these two great personalities for us who were without dispassion. The Master Mahashaya and Nag Mahashaya, though they had two different names, were both beyond name and adjunct. When the river joins the sea it is no longer a river – it becomes the sea itself. In the same way, they no longer remained *they* but became He. Thakur's blessed lips again and again uttered these words: 'You will inherit the nature of him on whom you fix your thoughts. By fixing your thoughts day and night on God, you inherit His Divinity. The cockroach becomes a beetle by constantly pondering over it. By thinking of Madhava every moment Srimati (Radha) herself became Madhava.' Becoming Ramakrishna means imbibing His nature. This is not difficult if by His grace one thinks of Him every moment with a concentrated mind, if one keeps oneself constantly in touch with Him. These two Mahashayas attained to Ramakrishna by meditating on Him every moment, asleep, dreaming or awake. Here we shall talk of one of these two Mahashayas – of Sri M., the Master Mahashaya, the writer of the story of Sri Ramakrishna. Talking of the Master Mahashaya one is reminded of the famous lines of Tagore's song:

*Karuna tomar kon path diye*  
*Kotha niye jay kahare*  
*Sheshe dekhinu nayan meliya*  
*Enechho tomar duare.*

– How and where Your compassion takes one, I know not! When I open my eyes I see myself at Your door.

As soon as he had taken his degree with high credit, he had to take up work. He had intended to enter the Indian Civil Service – he had the ability for it but it did not come about for various reasons. His household was having difficult times. At one time, things came to such an unbearable pass that a desire to commit suicide flared up in his mind – his dejection reached a point one day where he who was by nature so peaceful found it impossible to live on in the world. Without mentioning it to anybody, he left home at about ten at night but his wife accompanied him. Then his immediate destination was the home of his sister in Baranagore; later on anywhere his fate would take him. The sister's husband, Ishan Kaviraj, had the privilege of having Sri Ramakrishna's grace. Master Mahashaya left by a hackney-coach. As it approached Shyambazar one of its wheels broke down. Helpless as he was, he was obliged to seek

shelter for the night at a friend's house with his wife. The friend was, not happy with this untimely visit of the unwanted guests. Realising it he left the house forthwith in that dark night.

Life seemed meaningless, serving no purpose just in one night. Everything had become insipid, colourless. Why should one bear the burden of such a purposeless life? This question confused his mind throughout the next day. Like a mad-man he wandered from one street to the other. In the evening he reached Dakshineswar which was his supreme goal, his very life-breath. He had with him his sister's son Siddheswar Majumdar. The latter had said to him, "There is a small beautiful garden on the bank of the Ganga. Would you care to visit it? A Paramahansa is living there ...". The auspicious moment had arrived; the first, the greatest message of his life had been received – his first *darshana* of Thakur took place in the evening twilight. The Master Mahashaya, as though having crossed the endless desert, had reached the bank of the stream of nectar, the room of Sri Ramakrishna. He saw a roomful of men seated spell-bound drinking the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words. Sri Ramakrishna seated, on a wooden divan, was talking of God with a smiling face. The bhaktas were seated on the floor. The Master Mahashaya looked on wonderstruck. He felt that Sukadeva himself was narrating the Bhagavata, that all the holy places of pilgrimage had met there, and he felt that Sri Chaitanya was seated with Ramananda, Swarupa and other bhaktas in the holy land of Puri singing the Lord's glories.

This was the Master Mahashaya's first *darshana* of Sri Ramakrishna, and with it ours too and of others who would come after us. This *darshana* of Sri Ramakrishna through the *Kathamrita* is happening today and will happen forever. In the very first meeting the surgeon cast the light of his lamp for a moment on his own face. He let him (Sri M.) see his benign visage, he showed him that he was the personification of *vijnana* and of the bliss of love. Never before did Sri Ramakrishna show his real self to anybody all at once in the very first *darshana*. Why did he do so to this western-educated person believing only in God without form? The reason was that he was to reveal himself through the *Kathamrita* for all time so that the world could see him and recognize him through the *Kathamrita*. For this purpose it was necessary that he should let himself be known from the very first to the person who was to write his *Kathamrita*. This great incident took place on a Sunday, the 26th of February 1882, the raindrop of the *Swatinakshatra* falling within the mother of pearl.

And thereafter, how many *darshanas*, personal touches, realizations, how much of joy and merriment! – all this is known to everybody. Having been scalded by the fire of life when the only escape, he thought, lay in death; he saw the sea of nectar surging in front and met with the unfailing touch of the Divine, in the words of Tagore:

*Pathe chole jete jete kotha konkhane*  
*Tomar parasha ase kakhon ke jane.*  
*Sahasa darun dukha tape sakala bhuvana jabe kanpe*  
*Sakala pather ghoche chinha, sakala bandhna jabe chhinna*  
*Mritu aghat lage prane*  
*Tomar parasha ase kakhon ke jane.*

– As one walks along; who knows when and where one will receive Your touch? When the world trembles at the sudden troubles and tribulations, when all the signposts are obliterated, when all the bondages snap asunder and death strikes its blow who knows from where comes Your healing touch?

Who knows? He asked for death and got immortality! And with that nectar the

Master Mahashaya did not content himself, selfishly drinking alone and wiping his lips; he called us all, served it liberally to us and is still doing it. That is why he is one the best of Srimad Bhagavata's *bhuridajanas*. A *bhuridajana* means a great giver, the giver of givers. That is why he is *Mahashaya*, a highly noble character.

He whose life is filled with Vedas, he whose words are the utterances of the Veda and the Vedanta, he whose throat is the seat of Sri Bhagavan for speaking, he whose utterances are taken up by the writers of the Veda, the Vedanta, the Bhagavata, the same motiveless Sea of Grace, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, appearing as the guru dissolved Himself in the world-purifying Ganga of the *Kathamrita* with its waters rolling with a delightful murmur of compassion. What a debt we all, his later men, owe to Sri Ramakrishna can only be mentioned very cautiously lest it should be inadequate but no such problem is faced in the case of the Master Mahashaya for there is no measure of this debt. He has given us Ramakrishna himself. Can there be a greater charity than this? Just as he used to take so many persons to see Sri Ramakrishna in the great Master's lifetime he is doing as much for us even now – sometimes he is taking us to Dakshineswar, sometimes to the Balaram Mandir, wherever Sri Ramakrishna may be. It is only through his *Kathamrita* at present that we can see Thakur, hear his voice and be in his divine presence. A Vaishnava poet had put this question: "Had there been no Gauranga what would have happened? Who would have sung to the world the greatness of Braj, the love and yearnings of Radha?" The same can be said of the Master Mahashaya. Had he not come to the world, had he not met Sri Ramakrishna, could we have got Thakur in this way? We simply cannot think of it. Bhagavan, therefore, brings the narrator of his *Lila* with him, otherwise who will narrate the Bhagavata? The same Bhagavata was narrated in this Avatara Lila of Sri Ramakrishna by Sri *M.* who was both Narada Muni and Veda Vyasa rolled into one. And the *Kathamrita* is the same 'cleanser of sins and the delight of the listening ears' – the Bhagavata.

*The Kathamrita is Akshar Brahman* – that is, the words of Sri Ramakrishna are a form of Brahman, his story, his body, his speech his image. Bhagavata, Bhakta and Bhagavan – all the three are one. While describing the form of the Bhagavata, Sri Sanatna Goswami said, "(It is) Sri Krishna transformed" He meant that in the Bhagavata Sri Krishna, the complete Brahman, had been transformed into *Shabda Brahman*, that is God as Word. That's how the Bhagavata and Sri Govinda (Krishna) are undifferentiated. In the same way, the *Kathamrita* and Sri Ramakrishna are one and the same. The *Kathamrita* is the *Guru Grantha* for all of us; in other words, it is the Guru Himself. In the *Kathamrita* have been recorded the nectarine words from the throat of Sri Ramakrishna, that is why it is eternally sweet. The *Kathamrita* speaks – yes, the Book can speak. Had there been no *Kathamrita* it would have been difficult to believe it. The *Kathamrita* is a great wonder of the world. That is why on hearing the *Kathamrita* the Holy Mother said to the Master Mahashaya, "Hearing it from you I felt that Thakur himself was speaking." The *Kathamrita* is a sound film of the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Like a play to be acted, written from life, this *Kathamrita* is a beautiful dramatic piece, beautiful in its dialogues, full of hidden meaning, incomparably romantic, wonderfully joyous, enjoyable at every step. Even aesthetically the *Kathamrita* is unassailable. In the hagiographic literature of the world it occupies perhaps a supreme place. But its author has claimed not the least credit for this great wonderful creation. Once the great philanthropist and patron of literature Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi embraced Sri *M.* and said, "What a unique book you have written! In every home it is being given today a place beside the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Gita and the Chandi. You are indeed blessed. Your *Kathamrita* has

brought a flood of nectar in the Ganga of the country.” In reply, the Master Mahashaya humbly said, “All this is nothing but the feat of that juggler. It goes to no man’s credit. It is the play of Him whose ‘yes’ is the only yes and whose ‘no’ the real no.” About the Chaitanya Bhagavata, the author of the Chaitanya Charitamrita, Sri Krishandas Kavirai Goswami said that no man could write such a book; that it was Sri Chaitanya himself who was speaking through the mouth of Vrindavanadas. The same thing was said by the Master Mahashaya about the *Kathamrita*. Therefore, though the *Kathamrita* was written by the Master Mahashaya it is really ‘Thus speak the Master’. What a beautiful picture of humility! By the grace of the *Kathamrita* today we can easily witness the *Nitya Lila* of Sri Ramakrishna without any effort. Thakur could enable man to see God, the Master Mahashaya showed Ramakrishna, the veritable Bhagavan of this age.

In the context of the *Kathamrita*, Swami Premananda said, “By reading the *Kathamrita* thousands of people are getting a new life; thousands of devotees are attaining joy. Hundreds of men scalded by the fire of life are obtaining peace in this world of sorrow and attachment.” It was the *Kathamrita* which first brought Sri Ramakrishna before the eyes of the people as the world-saviour, the *avatara* of the age, as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (come down) as the Guru, as the greatest of the avatars. As the *Kathamrita* appeared, new devotees began to meet daily at the Math and the home of the Holy Mother, tyagi sannyasins began to grow in number. That’s why Swami Virajananda, an intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna said one day to the Master Mahashaya, “I have found on enquiry that *14 annas* (about 85%) of the Math people became sadhus by reading the *Kathamrita* and meeting you.” It is strange that this same Master Mahashaya was himself a householder. Everything about Thakur was novel and strange, full of mystery. The most mysterious thing he did was that he made a father of a family, a man in service, a man of the world his instrument for making sannyasins and recording his *Kathamrita*. After his *Lila* in this world was over, Sri Ramakrishna entered the Master Mahashaya’s throat to speak to the people from there. This was confirmed by no less personalities than the Holy Mother Sarada Mani and Swami Premananda.

Here is an incident. It was a day of worship when Sri Ramakrishna’s birth anniversary was being celebrated according to the Hindu calendar. The Master Mahashaya arrived at the, Belur Math. He was not keeping well and was living on curds and parched rice. The hour of meals arrived. He had his thrashed rice with him; only a little of curds was needed. He asked a brahmachari to see if there was any curd in the pantry. When the pantry-in-charge was asked, he said that curd was there, only it could not be given, as it had not been offered to Thakur yet. While the brahmachari was returning empty-handed from the pantry, he met Swami Premananda. When the latter asked him why he had been to the pantry he explained the whole matter. Swami Premananda immediately went to the pantry and brought a mugful of curds from the pantry, stood before the image of Thakur and closing his eyes offered it to Him. Then he sent the same to the Master Mahashaya through the brahmachari. Full of emotion, said he to the brahmachari, “See, what a grace of Thakur is on us! How He has saved us from a blunder! There was so much of curds in the pantry. Had some of it not been made available to the Master Mahashaya, could it be offered to Thakur? Nowadays Thakur eats through the mouths of these people. Night and day, Sri Ramakrishna’s *Kathamrita* is coming out of the Gangotri of the mouth of the Master Mahashaya. Now Thakur talks from the throat of the Master Mahashaya, Today, on the *puja* of Thakur’s birthday we were going to commit a blunder. He, the ocean of grace, has saved us from it.”

When so many *tyagis* and householders were there, why did Thakur give the *chaprās*, the authority, for this work of making sadhus to the Master Mahashaya? Was it because of his extraordinary education and unmatched qualities? This question was answered by Sri Ramakrishna himself a number of times in different ways. He would say: “The Master (Sri *M.*) is so pure, he has no ego. He is my own, of the same substance as father and son.” The Gita says: यस्य नाहंकृतो भावो बुद्धिर्यस्य न लिप्यते (XVIII. 17) – He who has given up his ego, who has rubbed off his troublesome I-ness, is the best of sannyasins, the highest of them. Only such a *sannyasin* can create sannyasins. Only such a sannyasin is forever the great artisan who can build other sannyasins. And such a man was our Master Mahashaya. One day, seeing that Sri *M.* was always dreaming of renouncing the world, Sri Ramakrishna said, “Till you came here you had forgotten your real Self. You will now know yourself. He who is to disseminate the words of Bhagavan is kept by Him in the world with some bondage. Otherwise who would spread his message? That’s why you have been kept in the household by the Mother of the Universe.”

What kind of a worldly man the Master Mahashaya was, how he lived in household – this can be understood from a small incident of his life. Sri Ramakrishna had asked him to live in the household like a maidservant in rich home. This maidservant performs all household work but her mind remains attached to her home in the countryside. She brings up her master’s children as her own. She says, “This is my Rama; this my Hari,” but in her heart of hearts she knows quite well that none of them is hers. The Master Mahashaya truly practised this precept in his life. Not only did he write the *Kathamrita*, he translated it too into his own life. He was then the Rector of the Morton School. For quite some time he was in the company of sadhus in the Gadadhar Ashrama at Kalighat. It was Christmas. Suddenly he decided to go to the Morton School. He left at 9 p.m. with a companion. By the time he reached there it was half past ten and almost everybody had taken his dinner. The Master Mahashaya went up to his room on the fourth level with his companion without exchanging a word with anybody. His people did not know when he was to return and had therefore not prepared any dinner for him. His companion, therefore, was impatiently going downstairs. The Master Mahashaya understood that he was going to ask the ladies of the house to prepare his dinner. He called him back halfway at once and said, “If the maid-servant of this house had returned from her village at this hour, would the householders have prepared her dinner?” The companion, of course, said, “No”. “What would have they done then?” asked Sri *M.* again. The companion replied, “They would have brought something to eat from the bazar.” The Master Mahashaya repeated, “Thakur asked me to live like a maid-servant. If the maid-servant could not get her dinner prepared how can I? And even if they prepare my meals at this unearthly hour how can I take it? What right have I to trouble my people unnecessarily? Please go to the bazar and buy two *rotis*.” The Master Mahashaya’s dinner consisted of two *rotis* and some milk. But there was no milk for him in the house, and he would not take boiled milk from the bazar. So he contented himself with two dry *rotis* and a glass of plain water for dinner. The Master Mahashaya was not only made to write the *Kathamrita*, Sri Ramakrishna kept him in the household also to show how the teachings of the *Kathamrita* could be practised in life. That’s why even though living in family Sri *M.* was never of the family.

During those days, there were a number of hurdles and many difficulties in going to Dakshineswar. So Thakur said to the boy Khoka (later Swami Subodhananda), “Master Mahendra lives in your vicinity. You should go to him.” Hearing this Khoka who

was thirteen or fourteen replied, “What use would it be to go to him? He is a family man.” Thakur said, “No, the *Master* is not a worldly man. He speaks of nothing but *this*.” ‘This’ refers to Sri Ramakrishna. The Khoka of that day who later became a great sadhu would visit the Master Mahashaya regularly even in old age for *sadhusang* (company of the holy). How far back Sri Ramakrishna had asked him to do so – and how he obeyed his guru!

Again, Sri Ramakrishna once said to the Mukherji brothers in *Dakshineshwar*, “You must always go to meet him (Sri *M.*) and talk to him.” Priya Mukherji laughed and said, “He is going to be our master now!” Why did Sri Ramakrishna say so? Because though the Mukherjis were devotees they remained busy with worldly affairs all the time and would not find time to see Thakur frequently. But for their spiritual progress, the company of the holy was absolutely necessary. That’s why Sri Ramakrishna, the beloved of the devotees, thought of this alternative.

To be in the company of the Master Mahashaya was to be in the company of Thakur, for the former was all filled with Ramakrishna – his very life-breath was Ramakrishna – he was another expression of Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur anticipated the future and gave recognition to this pure-souled mahatma in the beginning. Though a householder, he lived in Rama’s Ayodhya. That’s why we see in his person the truth of this adage of the Gita दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः । वीतराग भयक्रोधः ... (II: 56) – ‘He whose mind is not perturbed by adversity, who does not crave for happiness, who is free from attachment, fear, anger ...’ He was homeless in his own home, steady of wisdom, lion-like in the field of work, with his near and dear ones so full of humour, so learned, and with sadhus and bhaktas so full of humility – ‘the servant of their servants’.

Sri Ramakrishna had given divine eyes to the Master Mahashaya, so he could see into the characters of other men with a wonderful insight. Even in the case of intimate *Ishwarkoti* devotees like Naren, Niranjan, Purna, the opinion of the Master Mahashaya was valued by the Great Master.

About the Master Mahashaya, the author of *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* has said, “The cow-elephants are employed to entrap the bull-elephants. Similarly the Master Mahashaya was employed to enlist pure-souled boys. It was through him that Sri Ramakrishna used to collect his men who were unmarried and full of dispassion and who would later bear his standard. That’s why the Master Mahashaya was accused of being ‘*chheledhara master*’, that is a kidnapper of boys. Lest the Master Mahashaya should make a sadhu of Purna, the latter was removed from the school. That very notoriety became the symbol of his victory as a teacher.” The greatest duty of a teacher is to erase ignorance and impart knowledge. And only that education is real knowledge, which helps discriminate between truth and untruth, and tells which one to accept, *preya* or *shreya* (the path of pleasures or the way to Him.)

The Master Mahashaya imparted divine knowledge to his pupils and is still doing it. ‘He is going to be our Master now’ – it’s Thakur Himself who made Priya Mukherji say so – it has become as though the word of God. The Master Mahashaya is the Master Mahashaya forever and we his pupils – for ever. His school bell has not yet rung the end of school hours! Even now he is taking us with him, now to Dakshineshwar, now to the Balaram Mandir, now to the house at Shyampukur and now at Cossipore. We all have but one destination, one aim – to attain to the fear-removing feet of Sri Ramakrishna, to meet our Great Lord.

Victory to the *Kathamrita*! Victory to the recorder of the *Kathamrita*! By making

our salutations to the Master Mahashaya may our obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna become a reality!

## 35. SRI M.'s PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Dr. Roma Chaudhuri

Dr. Roma Chaudhuri, formerly Vice-Chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University, speaks of Sri *M.* as one of the greatest saint-scholars of West Bengal. He saw, practised and taught the eternal oneness of life, the essential harmony in the world order – between thinking, feeling and doing in the individual; between worldly life (*garhasthya*) and ascetic life (*sannyasa*), the two ways of life open to man; between God and man who are really not so far away from each other; between man and man, for all men are of the essence of Brahman; and last but not least between religion and religion, which are only different paths leading to the same goal, as taught by Sri Ramakrishna.

Though Sri *M.* was echoing his Master, yet his echo had its own peculiar ring, for no echo is ever identical with the sound it purports to echo. He was a philosopher without knowing it.

**“Sri *M.*, a real philosopher saw life steadily and saw it whole... realized this fundamental Samanvaya, harmony in the entire world... and also practically practised the same in every thought, every speech, every action...”**

The exhilarating, exalting, enchanting philosophy of life of Sri *M.* – one of the greatest saint-scholars of West Bengal, of that timorous yet turbulent, distressed yet dedicated, hopeless yet hopeful age i.e., the great and good, grand and glorious, golden and gorgeous 19th century, unparalleled, in many respects, in the entire chequered history of India – was to be nothing but a living image of Sri Ramakrishna himself, however faint, however incomplete, however unworthy, yet an image and nothing else, with nothing as his very own separately, with nothing as anyone else's very own separately, with nothing, in short, over and above, beyond and besides his life, his soul, his God, Sri Ramakrishna.

Thus, Sri *M.*, as befitting a true *bhakta* or a devotee, had no other desire, no other enterprise for anything else than to spread Sri Ramakrishna's ever-shining light all around, sprinkle his ever-flowing nectar all around, sing his ever-reverberating song all around.

And the result? The result was a most wonderful one – the unique, unparalleled, soul-stirring, heart-captivating, mind-purifying, life-lifting *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 'The Nectarine Discourses of Sri Ramakrishna', a work of incomparable beauty, sweetness, freshness – without which our knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna's thrilling Gospel of Life would have only been half of what it is today. Our gratitude to Sri *M.* for that is really illimitable, indescribable; our debt inconceivable, immeasurable.

We know, however, that Nature is a great humorist, her special joke, special play or special pleasure is to avoid repetition or reduplication of any kind whatsoever. “No two men are exactly alike.” Even twins are never exactly alike. Even a reflection and the reflected object are never exactly alike. Even an echo and the sound echoed are never exactly alike. So here too, Sri *M.*, however much he may take pride in calling himself a mere reflection, a mere echo, a mere image of his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, he himself too, shines in his own light, reverberates in his own song, flows in his own



nectar, over and above the light, the song and the nectar he received so gratefully, so joyously, so humbly from Sri Ramakrishna himself.

That is why Sri *M.* too was a great guru, a supreme spiritual preceptor, with hundreds of disciples who flocked together to him enthusiastically to drink his own sweet *Kathamrita* or the nectar of his own enchanting discourses. To them, Sri *M.* revealed his own philosophy of life, the philosophy which was at once Ramakrishna's and his very own; which he himself at once not only preached, but also lived throughout; which at once had its roots on earth and its fruits in heavens. What was such a soul stirring, heart-warming, life-lifting philosophy of life – sweet, soft, serene, supreme, sublime?

It is very briefly this:–

Philosophy, as well-known, has an inner side, or a side of “vision”, and an outer side of “mission” – i.e., a side of knowing or “jnana” and a side of doing or “karma”. Here, “knowing” must end in “doing”, or it is fruitless, and “doing” must begin with “knowing”, or it is rootless. Thus, in this case, the roots to “knowing” must tower forth in the fruits of “doing”; and the fruits of “doing” must spring forth from the roots of “knowing”. But what is there in between? There is the trunk from the roots, thence the branches, thence the leaves, thence the flowers, thence finally the fruits. In exactly the same manner, in between the roots of “Knowing” and the fruits of “Doing”, there lies as the trunk “Feeling”, – the feeling of “Reverence” (*sraddha* or *bhakti*), as due to the master from a servant (*prabhut-bhava*), more intimate feeling of “Fellow-feeling” (*sahanubhuti*), as due to a fellow-being from a fellow-being (*aikya-bhava*), the more intimate feeling of “Fraternity” (*sakhya*), as due to a friend from a friend (*bandhu-bhava*) and finally, the most intimate feeling of “Love” (*prema* or *pritti*) due to a beloved from a beloved (*kanta* or *priya-bhava*), corresponding roughly to the above division of trunk (Reverence), branches (Fellow-feeling), leaves (Fraternity) and flowers (Love).

In short, there are, as well-known, three sides of our nature – Thinking, Feeling and Willing; or the cognitive side, the emotional side and the practical side. Here, the ordinary view is that just as according to the fundamental Law of Conservation of Energy, the total amount of energy at our disposal is constant, so if one side preponderates, then, the other sides are bound to suffer to that extent. Thus, it is often found that much too scholarly persons are emotionally callous and practically lethargic. In exactly the same manner, much too emotional persons are often found to be averse to steady learning and hard work. In exactly the same manner, much too practical persons have little time or energy for lengthy discourses and flighty imagination.

But – there is a big incontrovertible *But* here – how can we ever pluralise that which is eternally one, divide that which is eternally indivisible, rake up controversies regarding that which is eternally harmonious? And is not *life* such, is not life one, indivisible, harmonious whole? Undoubtedly, life is such a whole, such a concrete, organic whole. That is, it is not an abstract, blank whole – a whole, rather a so-called whole, which has no parts (e.g. Brahman of the Advaita Vedanta or the strictly Monistic Schools of the Vedanta, viz. those of Shankara and others) or which wholly swallows up the parts, but a whole of equally real parts, equally honoured parts, equally essential parts (c.f. Brahman of the Bhedabhedavada Schools of the Vedanta, viz. those of Ramanuja, Nimbarka and others). That is why, “thinking” essentially leads to “feeling” and that as essentially to “willing.” Thus, if we know anything well, naturally, we have a strong feeling with regard to it; and a feeling has a natural tendency towards willing or doing something with regard to the person or object known and felt. In this way, if a

scholar or a poet or a labourer makes the mistake of exclusively emphasizing one and one alone amongst the total three – through *ajnana* or *avidya*, ignorance and delusion – then, his inevitable fate would be nothing but to lead the life of an unnecessarily disharmonious and so a distressed person.

And so, our very wise, very benevolent, very thoughtful Sri *M.* always took special pains to instruct all regarding the essential and eternal oneness of life, with all its parts, interests, values harmoniously conglomerated into one beautiful whole, where each has its own proper place, honour, dignity, necessity – yet, nothing beyond that. As a matter of fact, Sri *M.*, a real philosopher, “saw life steadily and saw it whole”, not only theoretically realized this fundamental *samanvaya* or harmony in the entire world order – which according to all counts is a cosmos and not a chaos – but what is more, a thousand times more, also practically practised the same in every thought, every speech, every action, to the great joy and benefit of all.

The great and good, grand and glorious *samanvayavadin* Sri *M.* taught us equally vehemently, equally uncompromisingly, equally lovingly the second equally fundamental kind of essential harmony needed in our lives, viz., that between worldly life and ascetic life (*garhasthyajivana* and *sannyasajivana*). Here also, ordinarily in our ignorance, we take the two to be somewhat contradictory or opposed to each other. Thus, we often think that one who has chosen the life of an ordinary householder have no time or energy for higher, more difficult spiritual practices, as befitting a sage or a saint. In exactly the same manner, we also ordinarily think that a hermit or a sannyasin must leave the world, go out to a forest, think of God there in peace and strive for his *mukti* or salvation alone, beyond all worldly worries, temptations, disturbances, failings and the like.

But, here too, the above logic holds good – viz.; there can never be such artificial divisions in life, which is a beautiful whole, a harmonious whole, a self-adjusted whole eternally.

Hence, in this case too, a *grihastha* or a householder is also a sannyasin and vice-versa. But how? In this way: a householder, too, though in the midst of what is ordinarily called “*samsara-panka*” or “the mire of worldly existence”, must never be submerged in it. On the contrary, he, through his own independent efforts, must rise above, conquer and sublimise *samsara-panka*, and just as a lotus or a *pankaja* springs up gloriously from the *panka*, filthy stinking mire, so he too must bloom forth like a lotus out of the mire of mundane existence.

So says Sri *M.*:

“Though man is very weak, yet he can attain Him (God) through his *manas* and *buddhi*: mind and worldly mental states and processes. A lotus blooms forth in the midst of mires. What is needed is to change the course of the mind. The very same poison that kills can also become nectar. The very same mind and worldly mental states and processes, which bind us also free us, if the method be known. God incarnates Himself to teach us the same. Sri Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) has just come. He has shown us the easiest path. Go on, You will get the result soon.”\*

Hence, it has been correctly said,

*“Brahmanistha grahastha syat tattva-jnana parayanah*

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\* *Sri Ma Darshan* by Swami Nityatmananda in Bengali, Vol. II, Chapter 9, p. 97 – quotation translated by the writer himself.

*Yat yat karma prakurviva tat brahmani samprapayet.*"  
Mahanirvana Tantra, 8,22

A householder should be devoted to Brahman,  
And possessed of knowledge of Truth.  
Whatever he does every day  
Should be dedicated to Brahman, forsooth.

So, an ordinary householder, too, must live the life of a selfless ascetic, even in the midst of his thousand and one ordinary daily duties and transactions: do everything as the work of God Himself, without any selfish desires on his part, and lead his life as wholly devoted and dedicated to God and God alone. Why not? This is possible for him, nay, essential for him, if he wants to live happily, successfully, peacefully, perfectly.

On the other hand, an ascetic would be acting in a very selfish manner, if he callously leaves the world, caring for his salvation alone. He has to remain here and stretch out his loving, helping hands to all for enabling them also to attain salvation like himself.

In this connection, we are reminded of the very appropriate distinction, which Swami Vivekananda of eternal fame made between an ordinary sannyasin and a real sannyasin. Listen to his thundering voice:—

“The ordinary sannyasin gives up the world, goes out and thinks of God. The real sannyasin lives in the world, but is not of it.” (VI, 50 – Mayavati Edition)

Again –

“For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many is the sannyasin born. His life is all vain, indeed, who embracing sannyasa, forgets this ideal. The sannyasin is, verily, born into this world to lay down his life for others, to stop the bitter cries of men, to wipe the tears of the widow, to bring peace to the soul of the bereaved mother, to equip the ignorant masses for the struggle for existence, to accomplish the secular and spiritual well-being of all through the diffusion of spiritual teachings, and to rouse the sleeping lion of Brahman in all by throwing in the light of knowledge.” [VI, 50 – Mayavati Edition]

India, and only India can think of such an absolutely wonderful harmony between *garhasthya* and *sannyasa jivana* – ordinary life of a householder and the extra-ordinary life of an ascetic; and make both ordinary from one standpoint and extraordinary from another.

The third equally glorious kind of *samanvaya* or harmony, which Sri *M.* preached and practised through his holy life, was that between God and man. It is ordinarily supposed, here too, that God and man must be absolutely different, not only that, but also opposed to each other, like the ruler and the ruled, the king and the subject, the master and the slave and so on. But, following his great Master Sri Ramakrishna’s holy footsteps, Sri *M.* throughout took special pains to prove and convince all that there could never be such an opposition between God and the individual soul. On the contrary, God is very near and dear to man – not an object of fear, but of love. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna preached the motherhood of God. The relation between God and man is the sweet, soft, serene, sublime, selfless, close, intimate relation between a mother and her son – what else can be closer, purer, fuller, happier?

The fourth kind of equally great, equally necessary harmony which Sri *M.* taught

us by his own living example is that between man and man. Here too, we in our ignorance, think that we are absolutely different from and opposed to one another; that our self interests always clash, that if we ourselves want to attain success and happiness in life, we have to snatch the same from our fellow-brethren invariably.

But, according to the unique philosophy of India, viz., that the same Brahman or God is present in all without any distinction whatsoever, although apparently we are different from the side of the body-mind complex, we are really one and the same, the very same Brahman, from the real side viz., that of the soul. In that case, how can there be any disharmony, animosity, hatred amongst us? Let us remember carefully that great mantra of the well-known Ishopanishad –

*Yastu sarvani bhutany atmanyevanupasyati  
Sarvabhutesu catmanam tato na vigugupsate.* – (Isa: 6)

– He who sees all things on earth  
In the soul, forsooth,  
And the soul in all things on earth,  
Never scorns anyone, in truth.

Again –

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।

उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

(Hitopadesa, 1st Chap., Mitra-labha, Sloka 106)

– ‘This is mine and that is not’,

So count the narrow-minded.

But to the broad-minded always

The whole world is a relative dearest.

So, in a perfect society, based on this ever-true spiritual realization that the whole world is one, the whole mankind is one, being manifestations of the very same Supreme Soul, there can never be any conflict or clash between the interests of different individuals. In such a society everything is adjusted in such a harmonious manner that all are happy together, all are successful together, all are perfect together.

Last but not least, Sri M. taught the fifth great kind of *samanvaya* or harmony, viz., that between religion and religion, following the unique footsteps of Sri Ramakrishna. We all know, to our great pride and joy, that Sri Ramakrishna’s enthralling doctrine of “*yata mata, tata patha*” – so many views, so many ways – is absolutely unparalleled in the whole history of mankind, in the sense that it was not only theoretical, but also fully practical, as Sri Ramakrishna, amongst all the rest, took special pains to adopt and practise many religious systems of the world, one by one, with equal respect, equal eagerness, equal thoroughness; and then on the basis of direct experiences, he proclaimed, with great joy and hope, that all philosophical and theological views, (*yata mata*), are equally good, equally efficient, equally beneficial ways or paths to salvation, (*tata patha*). We know as to how, by means of very simple, well-known, easily intelligible examples from our daily lives, he made the same very clear to even the man in the street. Consider just one or two:–

“Just as there are different ways of climbing to the roof, viz., stairs, ropes, bamboo poles and the like, so there are different ways of going to God – each religion is such a

way.”

“Just as, there are different ways of cooking a fish, to suit the tastes of different individuals, viz., boiling, frying, making a curry etc. – so different individuals may worship and approach God in accordance with their own inclinations and capacities.”

“God has infinite names and infinite forms. But by whatever name the devotee may call Him, in whatever form he may worship Him to suit his own inclination – he is sure to get Him. You may eat sweetened bread lengthwise or breadth-wise, it will taste equally sweet.”

Listen also to Sri M.’s feeling account through a well-known verse

*“Rucinam vicitryat rju-kutil-nana-patha-jusam nrrnam.  
Ekogamyastamapi payasamarnava iva.*

– Because of the differences in tastes, men come to have many paths – some straight, some tortuous and so on. But the goal is the same for all, like different rivers falling into the same sea.”

“Many rivers fall into the sea and become the sea. The rivers are many, but the sea is one. Views are many, the aim is the same, viz. the attainment of God.”

“Views are not God, they are only paths to reach Him. God is one. The same thing has been asserted by the Vedas too – ‘The Existent alone was, my dear, in the beginning – One only without a second.’ “(*Chandogya Upanisad 6.2.1.*)

“He came here for this unity or harmony of all religious systems of the world. After coming here, he said, “God exists – I have seen Him. You also will be able to see Him. Adopt and follow a path. Do not quarrel unnecessarily regarding views or theories.”

A disciple said, “Revered Sir! Doctrine of harmony is found in our own scriptures long ago. So, where lies Sri Thakur’s originality?”

Sri M. – “True, but his life was nothing but a kind of demonstration of the scriptural truths. He was a living embodiment of religion. The scriptural truths have re-appeared assuming new forms. Sri Thakur was the living image of the inner and essential harmony of all religious systems.\*

As a matter of fact, this noble doctrine of the harmony of all religious systems of the world (*sarva-dharma-samanvaya*) is really nothing new to India. Right from the golden dawn of human civilization, India, the holy land of unity and universality, harmony and adjustment, peace and bliss, has preached this superb doctrine forcefully and fearlessly. Compare the following –

*Dharma yo badhate dharmah  
Na tat dharma, kudharma tat  
Avirodhat yo dharmah satya vikramo  
Sa dharma iti nishchaya. (Mahabharata, Vana Parva, 131/II)*

– Religion coming into conflict with others  
Is not true but false, forsooth.  
Religion not coming into conflict with others  
Is a real religion, in truth.

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\* *Sri Ma Darshan*, Bengali, Vol. I, Chapter 17, pp. 187-188, in translation into English by the writer.

But as has been pointed above, and as has also been pointed out by Sri *M.* very wisely, no one else gave such a living, burning, practical demonstration of the eternal, ancient truths as Sri Ramakrishna, and herein lies his wonderful novelty, his unparalleled wisdom, his unfathomable love and mercy for us all.

Our thousand salutations to Sri *M.* who in this way preached and practised the Doctrine of Samanvaya, the most needed, yet the most rare doctrine of today. May his noble example inspire us all, and lead us to the great, grand and glorious goals of *visva-priti*, *visva-maitri*, *visva-seva*, *visva-tyaga*, and *visva-santi*: Universal Love, Universal Fraternity, Universal Service, Universal Sacrifice and Universal Peace, for ever and for ever.

Om Santi – Peace be upon all!

## 36. THE GREAT 'GUPTA' AND HIS KATHAMRITA

A.C. Bhattacharya

Dr. A.C. Bhattacharya, Professor of Philosophy, author of 'Sri Aurobindo and Bergson' is a well-known scholar of contemporary Indian thought. He came in close touch with Swami Nityatmananda and is thoroughly steeped in the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri *M.*

In the following study Dr. Bhattacharya brings out the shy but unique character of Sri *M.*, his extraordinary method of work and how he managed to hide himself for almost half a century. Perhaps he would have remained Gupta (hidden) had Swami Nityatmananda not brought him out, in the same way as Sri *M.* brought out Sri Ramakrishna by the *Kathamrita* and Swami Vivekananda by his lectures and writings. Not that Sri Ramakrishna shines by any light other than his own – it is only because all light needs a medium to be perceived by the common eye. It is also true that Sri *M.* concealed himself completely behind the personality of his Master as Dr. Bhattacharya says but perhaps it was not so much a self-conscious effort as the natural result of Sri *M.*'s 'I' becoming 'Thou' in Sri Ramakrishna since Sri *M.*'s earliest *darshans* of the Great Master. It is, indeed, surprising how the world around us does not let us see greatness in its proper perspective till a genius comes to discover it.

**“So long as the sun and the moon rise, the name of Sri Ramakrishna will remain alive, and with him the name of the writer of the Kathamrita.”**

It will be most gratifying for all devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to learn that the Kathamrita Centenary is being celebrated by the 'Sri Ramakrishna Sri Ma<sup>1</sup> Prakashan Trust' and also it has been planned to bring out a Centenary Volume on that occasion. But let us not forget that the recent interest in *M.* and his great work the *Kathamrita* and a fresh attempt to determine his place in the Ramakrishna Movement being witnessed in different quarters is the result of the life-long sadhana, exemplary renunciation and a total self-abnegation of Srimat Swami Nityatmanandaji who succeeded in bringing to light the vast materials of *M.*'s life and conversations contained in his own diaries and preserved so carefully in his unsettled, unprotected and uncared for life of a sannyasin.

For a devotee, the *Kathamrita* stands for Sri Ramakrishna, for it contains not only the words of the Master but also vivid and living imageries of him. The depiction of different scenes and events is so graphic and picturesque that there is always a possibility for a serious reader with a strong sense of imagery, mistaking himself as a passive participant in the situations depicted therein or at least confusing at times whether a particular scene has been actually perceived or merely read. That is the *Kathamrita*. It is almost a substitute for a company with a living Ramakrishna. It has been said very truly “the Great Master lives in men’s mind today as *M.* has portrayed him in the pages of his great work, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.”<sup>2</sup> However, no appreciation of this unique work can surpass the comments of the Holy Mother: “One day while hearing (the words of the *Gospel*) from you (i.e. *M.*) I felt as if it was He who was speaking.”

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<sup>1</sup> The celebrated writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In the Bengali *Kathamrita*, he adopted 'Sri Ma' as his pen-name.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from the jacket of *the Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, July, 1978.

It cannot be denied that the author of the *Kathamrita* was not only a ‘master’<sup>3</sup> as Sri Ramakrishna used to address him, but also a ‘master-artist’. How many readers of the *Kathamrita*, if we try to determine, know even the full name of the author, Mahendranath Gupta, not to speak of his life and activities, we shall certainly see that the number will not be many. It is no mean achievement for an author of a work of *Kathamrita*’s stature which has been translated perhaps in every civilized language, not only to remain ‘incognito’ as a writer but also to keep himself completely concealed throughout the work while remaining present everywhere, particularly in this critical age. Swami Nityatmananda, the celebrated author of ‘*Sri Ma Darshan*’<sup>4</sup> sometimes used say: “He was very truly a ‘Gupta’ i.e. concealed in every respect. We remained with him like shadow for years together but could not detect even a momentary manifestation of his ego – he was all Ramakrishna.”

Thus the great ‘Gupta’ remarkably succeeded in the literary art of self-concealment adopted by him as a self-abnegating devotee. For decades together the *Kathamrita* was taken for granted and very few people bothered to enquire about its author or tried to know about him, a man who spent nearly fifty years or his life after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in portraying the various scenes of his Master’s life with the help of his diaries and long periods of deep recollection and reflection. From all available evidence there seems to be not a shadow of doubt that it was a positive endeavour of *M.* to merge his entire self in Sri Ramakrishna and to conceal himself thoroughly behind the curtain. His efforts bore fruit and for about half a century after the publication of the *Kathamrita*, he almost managed to go to oblivion in spite of his *Kathamrita*. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission, rather helped *M.* to remain behind the curtain, although it was the organization with which *M.* was connected from its very inception and its founder, Swami Vivekananda had paid perhaps the highest tribute to him and his *Kathamrita*.<sup>5</sup> While the recent English edition of the *Complete Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* contains a fine preface dealing with a small biography of *M.* all the earlier editions mention in relatively smaller print the name of the writer – “*M.*, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna”. However, a photograph of *M.* has always found a place in the *Gospel* and the monastic Order of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has always had the highest regard for *M.* and, is appreciative of his great contribution towards the Ramakrishna Movement.

So we see that in spite of a world-wide recognition of the *Kathamrita* in the field of religion and of spirituality as a pioneer work of its own type, its author remained, till recently, relatively little known to the world at large. For this, circumstances helped the positive efforts of the author himself to remain in the background as we have described above.

## 2

In the *Kathamrita* we find this shy and bashful man sitting silent at the feet of his Master, hardly participating in any discussion and preferring to keep his lips tight

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<sup>3</sup> Teacher.

<sup>4</sup> Swami Nityatmananda, a sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Order had the privilege of sitting at the feet of *M.* for several years. He recorded the talks of *M.* in his diaries and *Sri Ma Darshan* (Bengali) in fifteen volumes is the result of his incessant work and *tapasya* for twenty years. Ten volumes have been translated into English with the title, *M., the Apostle and the Evangelist*. [Vol. XVI in Bengali has appeared posthumously. All the volumes have been translated and published in Hindi. – Ed.]

<sup>5</sup> c.f. The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.



even when provoked. On account of this bashful nature we find Girish<sup>6</sup> making him a butt of humour and even Sri Ramakrishna admonishing him. Narendra also certifies that “*M.* here, is a man of few words – and shy.”<sup>7</sup> He preferred to talk to his Master when alone and discuss with him his own problems, spiritual or even secular. We discover from the *Kathamrita* that so long as *M.* kept sitting in the room of his Master together with other visitors, his eyes were always fixed on him (Sri Ramakrishna) and he used to observe him intently. Sometimes Sri Ramakrishna with an appreciative tone used to comment on him in his absence, “If collecting the whole mind one could offer it here, what, else would remain to be done?”<sup>8</sup> From spiritual point of view it is a state of perfect concentration and self-absorption with the desired object. It is with this intensity of concentration or *śaravat tanmayatā*<sup>9</sup> that *M.* used to merge himself with his Master in different situations and perhaps that was the reason why he could, reproduce thereafter those scenes and conversations so vividly and exactly.

There is a misconception among some people about *M.*'s mode of writing his diary. We have come across some people who believe that *M.* used to note down events then and there as they occurred. We find that Swami Madhavananda in his youthful days once asked *M.* the same question. “(I) Believe, you used to write down immediately after hearing from the Master?” *M.* replied, “No, I did not write on the spot. Everything has been written from memory after returning home ... sometimes (I) used to write about a single sitting for seven days together, which song, *samadhi*, followed by what – remembering them one after another.”<sup>10</sup> In another context *M.* says, “Thakur had moulded my mind in such a manner that I had been hearing him for seven or eight hours together, watching him and then writing all this a night after returning home could remember everything.”<sup>11</sup>

*M.* believed that he was chosen by his Master for this particular work of writing the *Kathamrita*. Of course, it was not his belief alone. Swami Vivekananda also expressed the same view after going through the *Kathamrita* in leaflet form: “I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you – this great work.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, if we go through the *Kathamrita* between the lines, we may very easily discover that Sri Ramakrishna himself had told *M.* the work he was chosen for. On being requested by *M.* to give him the vow of mendicancy or sannyasa, Sri Ramakrishna advised him to, continue as a householder, for the *Mother* wants that the *Bhagavata Pandit*<sup>13</sup> should remain within the household and She gives him a *pass* for that. Or else who will bring forth the ‘Gospel’ – the good tidings to those who are bound within the world and are suffering? We understand that *M.* was more interested in the beginning to switch over to the life of a sannyasin and reluctant to do the work allotted to him, till one day he was admonished by the Master and was told: “Let nobody think that he is *indispensable*... there are so many pipe-lines. If one of them bursts does the watering machine stop? The engineer changes the broken one and replaces it by the right one.”<sup>14</sup> After this incident *M.* never murmured and carried on the work of catering

<sup>6</sup> Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous poet and dramatist of the 19th Century Bengal and a close householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

<sup>7</sup> *Condensed Gospel*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, July 78, p. 310.

<sup>8</sup> *M.*, the Apostle and the Evangelist, Part 11, 1971, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> One pointed like an arrow. c.f. *M. – the Apostle and the Evangelist*, Part 1, 1972, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Sri Ma Darshan, Part IV, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, Part V, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Condensed Gospel*

<sup>13</sup> The person who showers the holy name of the Lord among the householders.

<sup>14</sup> Sri Ma Darshan, Part II, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 266

the ambrosia of his Master's words to the suffering mortals all around him till the last days of his long life of eighty years.

Sometimes *M.* used to say in reminiscent mood: "Past life when looked at in a retrospective way makes one realize that it is He who is making us do all this. Whatever He wants to be done by whomever is predestined and gets done."<sup>15</sup> He felt that he started the work of apprenticeship for writing the *Kathamrita* long before he met the Master. It was in 1867 when he was only thirteen and a student of class eight of the Hare School, Calcutta, that he began writing his diary. Fifteen long years were being spent as an apprentice, he tells us, and only at the end of February 1882 that he had the privilege of meeting the Master.

3

Here one thing needs special mention. According to our own analysis, the *Kathamrita* in its present form is a result of three phases of workmanship. The first phase is that of witnessing and participating in the scenes depicted in the work by the author – a stage of deep concentration and spiritual rapport with the entire situation. The second phase is that of writing those incidents in the diary on the same day as far as possible. And the third is the phase of writing the *Kathamrita* in the present form with the help of his diaries and periods of deep recollection. We have discussed earlier the first phase of deep concentration with which he watched his Master and all that happened with him. About the second phase, i.e. writing of the diary, *M.* says: "The happenings of six or seven hours, even of the whole day came to my mind at night, one after the other, so sharpened did the Master make my memory. Even the first lines of the songs I tried to retain in my mind one after the other."<sup>16</sup> But these diaries were written in such a style that it was not possible for anybody other than the writer himself to make out the meaning. The author of *Sri Ma Darshan* says that *M.* had his own method of shorthand and he could condense vast materials in a very short space.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in the pages of these diaries some corner-notings\* are there, which are purely, personal and connected with his own spiritual life and experiences. They are more or less enigmatic in nature. For example, the present writer had the privilege of seeing the photostat copy of a page of the diary which contained *M.*'s first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna on Sunday, February 26, 1882. Apart from the notings about this first meeting, it is also written in one corner: 'Was it really the first meeting?' Similarly, there is also mention of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration at Dakshineswar a few days back in the same diary. *M.* writes names of some who were present on that occasion, and about himself he writes: 'I – absent'. But again he has written in a corner: 'Was I really absent?' Thus we see these diaries which contained *M.*'s meetings with Sri Ramakrishna, were undoubtedly extremely valuable for the writer but they were of little use for others. We learn from the pages of *Sri Ma Darshan* that one day Swami Shuddhananda, Swami Dhirananda and Swami Madhavananda of Belur Math and Mr. Kiranchandra Dutta, Secretary, Vivekananda Society, came together to meet *M.* in his Morton School residence and told him: "Today we have come in a deputation. If it is not possible to write the *Kathamrita* any further, will it not do to get the diaries printed as they are?" *M.* answered smilingly: "All His will. My own will is to write another part. It can be done if He gives strength. Who will understand if the diary is printed? It may

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Part I, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Part XV, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 399 for reference.

\* See the frontispiece p. 85, and p. 163 in this volume. [Ed.]

lead to opposite results.”<sup>18</sup>

The third phase, i.e. the actual writing of the *Kathamrita* was equally important and it was perhaps more strenuous, and time-taking. It also demanded deeper and longer periods of concentration. We have just seen that *M.* told Swami Shuddhananda and others: “All His will. My own will is to write another part. If He gives strength it can be done.” This indicates that writing of the book from the materials of the diary demanded far greater strength and energy from the writer than what was usually presumed. It is said that *M.* had with him materials in the form of diaries, which were sufficient for another ten volumes of the *Kathamrita*. But *M.* had to content himself only with five volumes and they too were possible since he lived a sufficiently long life and worked for it continuously till the last day. It may be said that each of the five volumes of the *Kathamrita* in Bengali took about ten years of his life since he lived about fifty years after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. It should not be presumed that *M.* used to transform the materials of his diary in book-form according to his convenience in a more or less leisurely manner. We should remember that apart from his routine school work which was essential as a source of earning for his subsistence and some very important expenses<sup>19</sup> he devoted most of his time in writing, publishing, proofreading and even packing and posting of the book. We find him working on the *Kathamrita* even on that night when his own grand-daughter’s marriage was being celebrated in his house. He goes to a lone corner with a lantern and his diary after midnight and starts writing.

We have heard from the writer of *Sri Ma Darshan* that while writing the manuscript of the *Kathamrita*, *M.* was found invariably beyond the ordinary plane of consciousness and it appeared for the time being as if he was forgetful of his present environment. In Volume XV of the *Sri Ma Darshan*, the writer wonders and stands speechless as he sees *M.* writing the *Kathamrita* from the notes of his diary. He tells us: “It appears that Sri Ramakrishna himself has brought this extraordinary man with him after having wrought his mind with divine intelligence and memory. It (his brain) is like a slide of a photograph. Everything that he heard was being imprinted in his mind. It also appears that he was in communion with Thakur mentally while writing the *Kathamrita*. He was writing whatever was rising in that pure and composed state of his mind with the help of notes preserved earlier. This very thing has been very truly said by Swamiji: “It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.”<sup>20</sup> Thus the *Kathamrita* in the present form is a product flowing from a different plane of consciousness in which *M.* had to enter in order to get back into the past and have a communion with his Master. This process of his spiritual journey into the past and that of coming back again to his normal consciousness had a benumbing effect on his nerves and it became more and more difficult for his body, as he advanced in age, to stand the strain so created.

We find that even during his last days he had been faithfully doing the job entrusted to him by his Master, of course with much difficulty. On the 25th May, 1932 we see him writing the *Kathamrita* from his diary,<sup>21</sup> and on the 28th May, 1932, we see him correcting the proof of the XIII and XIV parts of volume V of the Bengali

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, Part III, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. Pp. 11-12

<sup>19</sup> *M.* was one of the silent donors in the Ramakrishna family. In earlier days he used to look after the Holy Mother and help his brother monks with money whenever they needed it. He used to send regularly postal money orders to many a sannyasin practising penance in the Himalayas.

<sup>20</sup> Sri Ma Darshan, Part XV, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 399.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. pp. 399-400

*Kathamrita*,<sup>22</sup> and on 4th June 1932, *M.* breathed his last. We also find that after writing a few pages, “All of a sudden the pain starts in *M.*’s hand. The pain (neuralgia) increases as the mind is concentrated more.”<sup>23</sup> But in spite of it *M.* had been struggling with his failing health. He was, however, helpless. He realized fully well that the bundles of his diaries so carefully preserved would serve no purpose after his passing away. Neither was it physically possible for him to prepare more parts of the *Kathamrita*. Thus he ultimately reconciled with the will of the Lord. Of course, at times we see *M.* lamenting on the fate of these diaries, the most valuable possession of his life. Having opened the trunk containing his diaries, he exclaims: Alas! With so much care have I preserved them, what will happen when my last breath will take to wing?<sup>24</sup>

4

It will not be out of place to mention here that the publication of the *Kathamrita* in those days involved quite a serious risk for the author. It is somewhat difficult for us now to understand and appreciate this factor. Swami Vivekananda was the first person to give a timely warning and to inspire *M.* to have courage and confidence to face the challenge. “Let it<sup>25</sup> see the blaze of daylight. You will have many blessings on you and many more curses, but this is always the way of the world, Sir”<sup>26</sup> In the pages of the *Kathamrita* many contemporary facts came to light which caused embarrassment to many and created difficulty for others in the way of their self-interest. Those vested interests joined hands against the writer of the *Kathamrita* and he was asked to stop the publication of the book or face the consequences. *M.* was openly threatened several times and had been receiving threatening letters for a pretty long time. *M.* faced all these challenges confidently and never retreated from his mission. Later on, he used to say: “After the publication of *Kathamrita* I received so many letters cursing me. Noble deeds, selfless service – they are all good but they carry these things too. First build up the strength to bear them and then proceed to work. See, the Christ was nailed to the Cross. Doing good work is not a joke – the world will stand against you.”<sup>27</sup>

5

Lastly, it is our humble suggestion to all readers that we should start celebrating the *Kathamrita Festival* from this Centenary year. We have strong reasons to believe that *M.* had a fascination for the introduction of such a festival. Though he was himself an extremely shy man and consciously resisted self-publicity in every form including attempts from his friends and admirers to write his biography, he considered on the other hand that the words of Sri Ramakrishna being collected in *the Kathamrita*, should reach every corner for the well-being of humanity, since he felt that they are revealed Truths or Vedas. That had been his first impression on the very first day he visited the temple-house of Dakshineswar and heard the words of his Master. Here we quote *M.*’s description of his own feelings: “*M.* looks in and stands speechless. *M.* wonders if it is Sukadeva before him that talks of the Lord. *M.* feels as if he were standing on a spot to which have come together the various holy places of pilgrimage to hear the Divine Preacher that is seated before him. It might have been the Lord Gauranga Deva (Chaitanya) seated before him with Ramananda, Swarup and other beloved disciples in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 457.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 400.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Part VI, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. P. 49.

<sup>25</sup> *The Kathamrita*.

<sup>26</sup> c.f. *The Condensed Gospel*.

<sup>27</sup> Sri Ma Darshan, Part IX, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., pp. 18-19

the holy land of Puri, singing forth the sacred name of the Beloved Lord and His glorious works.”<sup>28</sup>

It was not only the impression of *M.* that the words of Sri Ramakrishna are revelations but this was corroborated by Sri Ramakrishna himself. “Thakur is seated on the smaller bedstead,” *M.* tells us, “He asked me to come closer and then said: ‘You see it is He who speaketh through this mouth’. Nothing more, only this one sentence.”<sup>29</sup>

So *M.* was fully convinced that it was the Almighty Lord who had assumed the form of Sri Ramakrishna and the words that came out from his mouth were the words of the Lord Himself. We come across in the *Sri Ma Darshan* that once a devotee conveyed to *M.* the message of one of the senior monks of the Belur Math named Jnana Maharaj: “He talked about the Kathamrita Festival, the day of the first publication of the Kathamrita celebrated every year.”<sup>30</sup> Instead of dismissing the idea at the very outset as we find him doing on proposals like the further publication of the *Kathamrita* or writing his biography etc., observe his sympathetic approval for the idea. *M.* said, “Yes, Mahendra Goswami used to celebrate the Bhagavat Festival in the house of Jadu Mullick. Thakur used to go to the Festival. Mahendra Goswami had said to us: ‘The Bhagavata is the same as Bhagavan, God Himself – that’s why its Festival.’ All words of Thakur are Veda mantras. He himself said: “Bhakta, Bhagavata, Bhagavan – One.” The Bhagavata is the word of Bhagavan. The *Kathamrita* is His word, so it is the Bhagavata.”<sup>31</sup>

Let us start then the celebration of the *Kathamrita Jayanti* as a regular feature from this Centenary year of the *Kathamrita*. We have just seen that Mahendra Goswami used to celebrate the Bhagavata Festival every year and still many Vaisnavas must be celebrating it and keeping up the tradition. Similarly we have an age-old tradition to celebrate the Gita Jayanti on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Margasirsa, every year. We may celebrate the Kathamrita Festival on the day it was first published as was suggested by Revered Jnana Maharaj during the lifetime of *M.* But our plea is slightly different. We have found that it had been the persistent effort of *M.* to crush and destroy his ego in every form. It was not only the ‘scoundrel’ ego, the ‘worldly’ ego, but also the ego of ‘knowledge’, the ego of ‘devotion’. In his every day conversation also we find that he preferred to use the pronoun, ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ for himself. In fact, he wanted to disseminate himself completely in Sri Ramakrishna and the *Kathamrita*. Thus we feel that it will be quite justified if we observe the birthday of *M.* as the Kathamrita Day. *M.*’s birthday according to the Hindu Almanac falls on the fifth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Asadha, the day on which the festival of Naga Panchami is observed in eastern India. Let *M.* survive in the *Kathamrita*. We close with the remark of Swami Shivananda Maharaj, the second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, made by him about *M.*, after his passing away. Pointing out the volumes of the *Kathamrita* within the almirah, he said: “These will proclaim his immortal fame for all time to come. So long as the sun and the moon will rise, the name of Sri Ramakrishna will remain alive and, with Him will remain the name of the writer of the Kathamrita. A shining jewel has disappeared, like Vedavyasa or Narada.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Condensed Gospel, July, 78, pp. 25-26

<sup>29</sup> Sri Ma Darshan, Part II, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 145

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 145

<sup>32</sup> Ibid Part XV, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. Pp. 457-58



## 37. HE REMEMBERED HIS COVENANT FOR EVER

Sabita Sengupta

What is the remedy of the ills of the modern world, its moral and spiritual degradation, its atheism? Faith, 'a positive approach to Divinity,' answers Srimati Sabita Sengupta, a noted writer *in Bengali* and a sincere devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. It was his faith, his unalloyed devotion to his Master, 'the divine positiveness of existence' that saved Sri *M.* from a mighty disaster. It is a well-known fact that he had left home contemplating to end his life because of domestic troubles when he happened to meet Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.* has expressed himself thus: "Behold! Where is the resolve to end life, and where the discovery of God!"

**"The ultimate refuge is in the aunt's tulsi plant in the courtyard..."**

The century's sun is on its way down behind the dark clouds. Today there are endless clashes of self-interest, great disputes everywhere; sharp, blood-thirsty swords of revenge flash all around – and cruel greed is in the heads of all in the world. Perhaps the great men who wanted to make this world a happy place for all have been a mighty failure. Despite the tremendous advances in science and technology men and women the world over are in a state of utter puzzlement. They are restless; they suffer from total bankruptcy of faith. But this faithlessness is not the last thing. There must be a way of redemption from this extreme crisis of faith.

To whom will the people turn for succour? Whose hand will they clasp so that they might be pulled out from the abysmal depth of atheism?

For that we must turn our gaze from the distant horizon to our own homestead, to the tulsi plant in the courtyard where in the twilight hour the housewife lights the earthen lamp and in its supremely serene glow, she bows her head.

Sri Mahendranath Gupta, known throughout the world as *M.*, who gave us the taste of the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words, loved to recount the story of the agnostic gentleman who in his advanced years turned into a *sannyasi* and remarked that "the ultimate refuge is in the aunt's *tulsi* plant in the courtyard." At his tender age the gentleman who by strange turn of events became in his later years the revered Vaishnava saint, Charandas Babaji, watched his aunt bow her head before the *tulsi* plant and enquired of the old lady, "Aunty, what do you get out of doing this?" "My child," she replied, "I want nothing, I only pray that by God's grace this place beneath the *tulsi* plant should be mine for ever."

Positiveness is the humble unshakeable faith, which the old aunt had acquired through her devotion to the *tulsi* plant. That rock of positiveness in today's world, which is torn and tormented by inner conflicts, dubiousness and anxiety, is Sri Ramakrishna's gift to us.

Throughout his life Sri *M.*, the author of the holy *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, used to say that Thakur's sole message to the weary wayfarers of this world was, "Hold on to me and you shall have nothing to fear." Another word of assurance and promise of

Sri Ramakrishna to us mortals is available in the volumes entitled *Sri Ma Darshan* (in Bengali and Hindi) and *M., the Apostle and the Evangelist* (in English) written by Swami Nityatmananda. Said Sri Ramakrishna; “He who will think on me shall inherit my wealth and treasures even as a son does his father’s. My treasures are *vivek, vairagya and jnana, bhakti, prema, samadhi, shanti, sukh.*”

In these words Sri Ramakrishna gave himself away as Jesus did in “I and my father are one”. What the Gospels of Jesus the Christ are to Jesus, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is to Sri Ramakrishna. It has been said that the arch of Ramakrishna movement stands on two pillars-one, Vivekananda and the other, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Strangely enough, we know very little about the *Gospel’s* author. How he lived by day and by night-how he behaved when tossed about in the sea of tribulations of this world we have no idea. All his available biographical fragments are thumbnail sketches.

The sixteen-volume *Sri Ma Darshan* by Swami Nityatmananda fills this lamentable void and answers most of our queries about Sri *M.* and draws a life-size portrait of this unique apostle of Lord Ramakrishna. Through this massive work Swami Nityatmananda has held an array of lamps on the face of Sri *M.* in the authentic glow of which Sri *M.’s* countenance is revealed truthfully to us.

Sri *M.* had done just what his Master had instructed him to do. Even when he was old and infirm his dedication to his holy mission did not flag. At every moment he would make people around him listen to the *Amritavani* of Sri Ramakrishna that there is nothing to despair about.

In his youth he had met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time in the garden of Rani Rasmani and was blessed with the rare and priceless gift of the message of immortality and the rest of his life was transformed into a divine existence. At that time he was in serious domestic trouble and was forced to leave his father’s house. He was seriously considering ending his own life. It was at this calamitous juncture of his life that Sri Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar showed him the divine positiveness of existence and Sri *M.* was saved from a mighty disaster.

Ever since he went on pronouncing this golden *mantra* ceaselessly to whomever he came by. At the end of his long life he said, “My Master had raised his forefinger and thumb in the manner of taking a pinch and ordered me to preach just a little bit of *the Bhagavata* to the afflicted people. I have been doing that for the rest of my life, but even now the Holy Mother has not relieved me of my duty.”

He was indeed not relieved of his duty until the last proof-copy of the last page of the *Gospel* was seen through by him.

Once Sri Ramakrishna said to someone, “Go to the *Haritaki* garden and tell so-and-so meditating there that it would serve his purpose if he just thought of me.”

Then immediately he asked his Divine Mother whether he was wrong in saying that. He said, “Mother, I can see that You are everything – mind, intellect, consciousness, ego,” – which is why thinking of Sri Ramakrishna would amount to thinking of the Universal Mother. Sri *M.* incessantly reminded everyone of this ultimate truth. This positive approach to Divinity is the safest resort for an individual in this troublesome conflicting and tempest-torn life.

Many a time and oft he narrated to the devotees how Sri Ramakrishna saved him from death, both literally and figuratively, how he found priceless gems when he had



stooped only to pick up pieces of glass.

Sri Ramakrishna told Sri *M.* about the latter's real self. He told him that he had seen *Sri M.* in the *sankirtan* party of Sri *Chaitanya* – *Sri M.* had been a member of Sri *Chaitanya's* group in his previous birth.

Once Sri Ramakrishna told Sri *M.* that his condition was akin to that of a tiger's cub in a flock of sheep. The tiger had been reared by the sheep from the time he was a newly born cub and had come to forget his own identity. One day another tiger came upon this flock and was greatly amazed to see this tiger who behaved like a sheep. He caught the younger one by the neck, took him to a stream and showed his reflection in the water. He also made him taste a bit of flesh for the first time and it was then that the lost tiger realized that he was not a sheep but a different animal – a carnivorous tiger. Immediately he roared like a tiger and the hills and dales resounded with his powerful roar.

On the same day the Master told him about the thief who came to a pond to poach when he saw some guards approaching. He saw that there was no way to escape. He quickly besmeared himself with ashes and sat down under a nearby tree in the manner of a mendicant. When the guards came to the spot and found a *sadhu* under the tree instead of a poacher, they fell prostrate before him. This brought a sudden change in the thief and he turned into a genuine recluse.

Sri Ramakrishna has said that a person leading a householder's life can also attain self-realization. It is very difficult to achieve but it is not impossible. This reassures an individual giving him relief from all confusion, ignorance and superstitions to lead a clean and purposeful life of piety and compassion. Sri *M.* relentlessly repeated the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to the devotees that gathered round him everyday. His life is a model life for a householder to try to emulate; for the Master's sannyasi disciples are beyond him to grasp. But Sri *M.'s* life shows a householder how to live in the world yet not belong to the world.

It therefore follows that only Sri *M.'s* interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna can be our sole guide to the Master. We have to see Sri Ramakrishna in the light of the lamp held by Sri *M.*

Our countless salutations to Sri *M.* who was one of the noblest of the apostles and evangelists of Sri Ramakrishna.

## 38. *M.*, THE TEACHER OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA WISDOM

K.P. Hati

Graphic pictures of meetings with Sri Ramakrishna, says Sri Hati, could be presented in a book not for any dramatic effect but to produce a contemplative mood in the readers. Sri *M.* himself deeply meditated on every detail of the *scenes* of his meetings with his Master before he recorded them. During his talks to his devotees on the third floor of the Morton School too Sri *M.*, was mostly in a contemplative mood. Though he started by being a teacher of literature and philosophy – and he was no ordinary teacher of these disciplines either – Sri *M.*'s immortality as a teacher rests on his being a teacher of spirituality, and that too of Sri Ramakrishna's line of thought.

**“The greatest event in my life is my first meeting  
with Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineshwar”**

On the evening of Sunday, February 26, 1882, Sri Mahendranath Gupta arrived in Dakshineshwar to see Sri Ramakrishna and got acquainted with him. When Sri Ramakrishna learnt from the visitor that he was a teacher in a Calcutta educational institution, he started calling the latter, 'Master'. The term 'master' carries the meaning of a teacher in the then-Calcutta parlance. It is a queer coinage in the 19th century Calcutta Anglo-Bengali vocabulary, substituting the earlier and commonly used term *Guru-Mahashaya* or *Pandit Mahashaya*, who generally starts the teaching of alphabets to groups of children. Thus Sri Mahendranath Gupta acquired the new epithet and since then he was popularly known as Master Mahashaya in the circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees. As was the nature with him, he kept himself quite hidden in the public eye and abbreviated his name to *M.* (or 'Sri Ma' in Bengali) in his writings. Today he is widely known as Sri Ma, author of the renowned 'Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita' and as '*M.*' of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in its English rendering.

The first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna was short. There were few exchanges of talks between them and at the end of this short meeting he was asked to come again. The urge that was felt that evening kept Sri *M.* visiting Sri Ramakrishna frequently, though he could not visit him as often as he wished. Whenever he could get himself freed from household duties, he would try to visit him – mostly on weekends and holidays from his school. Such meetings took place with no definite plans or expectations – on some days when Sri Ramakrishna was all by himself, often when he was sitting in a crowd of visitors. He was seen in his different moods on different occasions – sometimes in a state of trance or in bliss, singing and dancing in spiritual ecstasy and again in pensive mood of silence or later in a light joking and conversational disposition. Sri *M.* would often accompany him to various places of entertainment like the zoological garden museum, circus, theatre and, also to temples, holy places and devotees' houses. In such varied company Sri *M.* kept short diary-notes of incidents, discussions and dialogues that took place in the course of his holy association with Sri Ramakrishna for four and a half years.

From the first day of his contact with Sri Ramakrishna, *Sri M.* listened very attentively to the discussions and dialogues that took place in his presence and tried to

retain a mental picture of the entire scene of the meeting recorded in his short diary-notes. The notes kept by him were short and cryptic; but later before he wrote each chapter of the script he would try to recollect the entire scene of the meeting from his memory. When Sri Ramakrishna was no more in the mortal world, Sri *M.* would sit quietly in his leisure hours and meditate upon the thoughts contained therein to feel inspired as if sitting in his presence. Thus graphic pictures of such meetings could be presented in the book not for any 'dramatic effect' but to produce a contemplative mood among readers – sometimes with appropriate quotations from the Gita, the Upanishads and other scriptures, in the beginning of a chapter.

Initially, he reproduced some of his notes in writing a few pamphlets. Later, in 1897 they were published in English, as *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* ('according to *M.* a son of the Lord and disciple'). Afterwards, at the request of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples to publish them in a consolidated form, in the original Bengali language in which the Lord himself spoke, these notes started appearing as contributed articles under the caption, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* – told by Sri Ma', in various monthly journals of Calcutta, like the *Udbodhan*, *Tattwa Manjari*, *Hindu*, *Banga-darshan* etc. Subsequently they were published in regular book form in Bengali in five volumes; spread over a period of years – the first volume was published in 1902 and the last in 1932 (the year of *Sri M.*'s demise). The notes were reproduced in such a masterly and absorbing way that readers at this distant day regret that the narrations do not continue longer and stop at the end of each chapter of the book. Romain Rolland, the famous biographer of Sri Ramakrishna (in French), was astonished at their exactitude which, he describes, as, 'almost stenographic'.

When Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was busy spreading the message of Ramakrishna-Vedanta in the West, Sri *M.* sent him English translations of some of his notes, authorizing him to edit and publish them. Thus the authorized English edition in a book form was first published as *Gospel of Ramakrishna* by Swami Abhedananda from the Vedanta Society, New York in December 1907. It was offered by Swami Abhedananda 'to the Western World with the sincere hope that the sublime teachings of Sri Ramakrishna may open the spiritual sight of the seekers after truth and bring peace and freedom to all souls struggling for realization'. Since then, various translations and adaptations have been attempted, based on the original composition.

When Swami Vivekananda first learnt about the published pamphlets in 1897, he went into raptures and expressed them in his letter dated 20th November 1897 –

'I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in transport when I read them.'

Swamiji did not live long to see the entire composition that came out in the course of years after he left the mortal world and we can only imagine to what height of delight he would have been carried to see the completion of 'the great work'.

Once *Sri M.* was asked what he considered to be the greatest event of his life. His instant reply with emphasis was: 'The greatest event in my life is my first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar'. He met Sri Ramakrishna when he was 27 years of age. He lived up to the ripe old age of 78. From the date he first met Sri Ramakrishna to the last date of his life, for more than 50 years, all his thoughts centred round Sri Ramakrishna. Lying on his sick bed, he finished the work of final print of the last chapter of the *Kathamrita* (Volume V), sent it to the printing press and peacefully

breathed his last on 4 June, 1932. Thus Sri *M.* produced ‘a book unique ... No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell’], as observed by Aldous Huxley in his memorable appreciation of the book and its writer.

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Sri *M.* kept himself concealed in his writing without mentioning his presence in all the meetings recorded in the *Kathamrita*. At times he assumed some pseudonyms like Mani, Mohinimohan, a devotee etc. to escape the readers’ notice. But still when some of his acquaintances spotted him and admired him in his presence, he felt embarrassed and came out with humility as when he talked to Subodh (later Swami Subodhananda):

‘I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean and I keep by my side a few pitchers of sea-water. When a visitor comes I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but His words?’

The *Kathamrita* is not a biography or hagiography in the accepted literal sense of the term as it does not contain any documentary life history or chronological events of Sri Ramakrishna’s life. The dates and events mentioned therein relate to the contacts recorded by Sri *M.* from the date of his first meeting in Dakshineshwar and almost the last days of Sri Ramakrishna in Cossipore with a few more incidents in Baranagore, the first monastery of the Order. The few glimpses we get therein of the earlier days of Sri Ramakrishna’s life story are from his reminiscences recounted by him in the course of his dialogues and discussions with his disciples. The book does not contain heresy stories nor unrecorded reports of others. They are the words of Sri Ramakrishna in their original form without editing – sometimes with local accents and idioms occasionally embellished by the habitual soft and sweet twists of his tongue. It is as if a tape-recording of his talks without his voice.

The meetings, mentioned in the *Kathamrita*, mostly took place in his Dakshineshwar cottage. Out of 178 meetings recorded therein, 91 were held in Dakshineshwar, and the rest in Shyampukur, Cossipore and in other places around Calcutta where Sri *M.* was present. These were homely gatherings, sometimes at some devotee’s place on invitation. Sri Ramakrishna’s dislike for formal lecture was well known and there were no ceremonial speeches. Talks with holy persons like Trailanga Swami of Varanasi, Dayananda Saraswati of Arya Samaj, Gangamata of Vrindaban, Padmalochan of Burdwan are mentioned in passing. Meetings with renowned persons of Calcutta of those days including Keshab Chandra Sen, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterji were described at length. The door was open to all and visitors from distant places like America, Sindh, Nepal came with intense eagerness along with saints, beggars, sweepers and even lunatics. The *Kathamrita* records names of about 250 persons including his intimate devotees, close associates, besides casual visitors. In such open gatherings of people from varied walks of life, some would come for philosophical discussions, some to improve their knowledge on points of doubt and quite a few to place their personal tales of grief and hardship at the feet of the Lord. He would meet the demands of all and give them a message of hope. At times, unknown visitors would also walk in to satisfy their curiosity and to measure the depth of his spiritual experience; and they would go back with a feeling of satisfaction.

There being no prepared subjects fixed ahead for discussion, the topics for discourse arose spontaneously, from queries and questions raised on the spot.

Sometimes the talks opened in a lighter vein when jokes were cracked in ridiculing common superstitions and hypocritical behaviour observed in people's routine life<sup>1</sup>; but Sri *M.* presents the account in such a masterly way that the narration takes us straight to the spiritual current that flows underneath such talks. Hard topics like synthesis of diverse systems of Yoga, harmony of different religious paths, unity of thoughts in various scriptures etc. were discussed with simple metaphors from common happenings of life. Abstract concepts of Maya, Shakti, Advaita-Vedanta, Divine Incarnation were made easy to listeners in the course of homely discussions with them. Theosophical discussions on divine grace, human destiny, holy company and so on were made interesting with anecdotes and similes from his early village life.<sup>2</sup> Pictures about duties of a householder's life as against rigours of a monastic life were drawn on separate backgrounds on different occasions and happy reconciliation of the two distinct ways of life was presented in the course of easy discussions. As has been aptly observed by many, after a close study of the *Kathamrita*, subjects discussed therein cover almost the entire range of spiritual thoughts of the past as well as of the future – and the speaker was Sri Ramakrishna, recording was by Sri *M.*

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Before Sri *M.* arrived at Dakshineshwar for the first time and met Sri Ramakrishna, many other close devotees had already started coming there and had the opportunity of attending the meeting and discourses. Some of them were writers of renown, but we do not find such a wonderful composition as the *Kathamrita* from any one of them. One wonders whether Sri Ramakrishna kept it for Sri *M.* and inspired him particularly for this great work. It seems that the Master's choice fell upon Sri *M.* without his knowing it.

Just a week after the memorable first meeting between the two, Sri Ramakrishna was invited to Sri Balaram Bose's Calcutta house along with some of his devotees.<sup>3</sup> Sri *M.* was then new in the circle of devotees, but Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to join them there and feel inspired in the devotional company. Sri *M.* was shy by nature and expressed his hesitation to visit an unknown person's house without being formally invited – specially at a formal gathering in a new circle of a rich man's house. But Sri Ramakrishna told him how to go there without hesitation.<sup>4</sup> Sri *M.* attended the meeting and described the visit with a short account of March 11, 1882. On many occasions mentioned in the *Kathamrita* Sri *M.* was encouraged to get over his initial shyness in joining the devotional songs and dances in such gatherings and get inspired.

Sri Ramakrishna wanted that Sri *M.* should get the benefit of the holy company of the gatherings at Dakshineshwar as often as possible.<sup>5</sup> Once Sri *M.* stayed for more than 3 weeks (14 December '83 to 5 January '84) at Dakshineshwar at a stretch and enjoyed the blissful atmosphere there.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, when he could not visit Dakshineshwar for some weeks in the summer of 1884 (25 May '84 to 15 June '84) his long absence was noted and commented upon.

<sup>7</sup>Very often Sri *M.* was taken into more confidence than others and important

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<sup>1</sup> *Kathamrita* III – 101, 144, 154

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* IV – 100, 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Kathamrita* – I, 37

<sup>4</sup> *Kathamrita* – III, 32; IV, 144, 99

<sup>5</sup> *Kathamrita* – IV, 59; III, 58

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* – I, 131; III, 92

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* – I, 180, 203; II, 262

matters of special interest were whispered to him aside by Sri Ramakrishna to draw his closer attention. <sup>8</sup>Sometimes interesting portions of his earlier talks were repeated intentionally for special notice of Sri *M.* who was considered as one of his ‘own men’ in the circle of Sri Ramakrishna’s intimate associates. <sup>9</sup>In order that devotion in him may deepen and he may not fall into distraction, he was lovingly cautioned against indulging in idle gossip in his presence and waste his valuable time there. For similar purpose, unnecessary visits to many others’ places were also discouraged.

<sup>10</sup>Personal services rendered to holy persons are accepted from chosen disciples as marks of affection. When Sri Ramakrishna wanted some small articles for his personal use Sri *M.* took immense care to ensure that the things were exactly to his requirements. <sup>11</sup>Homely instructions on behavior in household life and blessings bestowed on his chosen disciple by gentle touch to his head and heart by Sri Ramakrishna, so that deeper inspiration was felt within, were the Master’s marks of special favour on Sri *M.* When someone was seen to keep notes of the discussions in some of the meetings, he was discouraged by Sri Ramakrishna because, as it seems, Sri *M.* was considered fit for this great work and was being slowly and silently drawn towards it. Thus the task of writing the ‘unique book’ was undertaken in an unobtrusive way and was unnoticed by any one else. <sup>12</sup>Even a close friend like Girish Chandra Ghosh was unaware of it, though he was greatly interested in such writings. He first learnt about it in Cossipore garden-house and wanted to have a look at it. When he expressed his desire, Sri *M.* told him that those cryptic personal jottings were for his own use only and were not meant for use of others. Subsequently, however, the plan of printing and publishing them developed. When Swami Vivekananda saw the initial publications in 1897, he expressed his feelings about the choice of Sri *M.* for the ‘great work’, in his letter dated 24th November 1897 from Dehradun:

“I now understand why none of us attempted his (Sri Ramakrishna’s) life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.”

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Sri *M.* was well-known in his circle for his remarkable power of observation and precision in keeping details. In his daily life he could not stand slipshod manner of dealings in others. He would guide others to look into details when visiting any person or place of interest. Few could escape his keen observation and like a watchful class teacher, the varying moods and feelings of the gathering were caught in the brief notes maintained by him. Remaining unnoticed among others in the gathering, he recorded even a little inattentiveness of a light-hearted visitor with as much accuracy as the deep feelings of a devoted listener. Based on ‘direct and recorded evidence’ and not tainted by imaginary details, the narrations in the *Kathamrita* are highly esteemed for their authenticity and truthfulness.

Sri *M.* took up the career of a teacher and served many educational institutions in various capacities till the last day of his long life. As an ideal teacher he had the rare combination of poetic vision and pragmatic understanding which helped him to remove the distance between the teacher and the taught in the matter of age and stature. He

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid – I, 56; III, 34, 106, 107; II, 104; IV, 92

<sup>9</sup> Ibid – II, 7; III, 26

<sup>10</sup> Kathamrita – III, 106; IV, 142; I, 198, 203

<sup>11</sup> Ibid – IV, 92, 64

<sup>12</sup> Ibid – II, 312

loved teaching and could bring himself down to the level of his students to ascertain carefully how much they could grasp the subject-matter brought for discussion. It is said that he did not teach students only, but as the head of several teaching institutions where he worked, he taught teachers as well about the art of teaching. He was a teacher of teachers of his days and this experience gave him a scope in unfolding his 'writer's mind'. While conveying his high compliments for the wonderful style of writing the *Kathamrita*, Swami Vivekananda wrote to Sri M:

“The language is also beyond all praise – so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy.”

These are the attributes of a successful teacher-writer – freshness, pointedness together with plain and easy approach to the subject under discussion, and it was none other than Swamiji who had full appreciation of them in the revered “Master Mahashaya.”

The teacher follows the preacher in initiating a new movement and spreading knowledge. The preacher scatters the seeds and the teacher follows him in watering the plants. The preacher inspires a new move but needs a teacher to elaborate his inspiring ideas. Swami Vivekananda was destined to carry the message of Ramakrishna-Vedanta to lands far and near, and he did so during his historic wandering round the globe. The teachings of the *Kathamrita* followed Swamiji. The teachings of the Lord contained therein are the offerings of Sri M. to 'the whole of human race to the end of days'. The unique composition has now been translated and adapted in major Eastern and Western languages; and its wide circulation in different languages of the world has aided materially in giving Swamiji a firmer hold in his work of global mission.

## 39. SRI M., HIS MASTER'S VOICE

Dr. Satchidananda Dhar

The message of Sri Ramakrishna was the message of Vedanta for the permanent peace and happiness of mankind. Swami Vivekananda turned the attention of the materialistic modern man to this message by his own wonderful expositions while Sri M. recorded the message in the very words of the Great Master in the *Kathamrita* to serve as the Universal Gospel now and for ever.

Dr. Satchidananda Dhar, Principal, Jiaganj College, Jiaganj, sums up the contribution of these two pillars of Ramakrishna Movement in carrying the Master's message to the world for all time.

**“...he is all Sri Ramakrishna in thought, speech and action.”**

The advent of Sri Ramakrishna is the most significant event in the history of the Nineteenth Century. The aggressive outlook of the West towards the culture and religious faiths of the East was a threat to the very existence of the Indian culture only which can show the world the right path of coexistence for permanent peace.

Sri Ramakrishna was a protest to the Western outlook of life, which runs only after the attainment of selfish enjoyment of worldly pleasures, even at the cost of other individuals or nations. He was a check and a red light to stop the mad race of the Western nations to triumph over one another for material gains.

Swami Vivekananda, the messenger disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, echoed the voice of his Master and warned the Western nations against following the path of aggressive materialism and attacking the religious faiths of non-Christian countries. He, being inspired by his Master, toured over all America and Europe and openly criticised the Western outlook and philosophy of materialism and intolerance of other peoples' faiths. Swamiji turned the attention of the Western thinkers towards the Indian message of the Vedanta for the permanent peace and happiness of the mankind. Sri Ramakrishna is a model of the perfect life, which the Vedanta and the Indian culture aim at. Swamiji casually mentioned his Guru Ramakrishna to his Western followers. Any intelligent person, in search of spiritual truth, must recognise and accept Sri Ramakrishna as his ideal.

### **Message of Sri Ramakrishna – the Message of Vedanta**

Sri Ramakrishna had a definite purpose, a definite message to the world. His message was the message of the Vedanta, the eternal message of India. Pursuit of material enjoyment – *woman and gold* – can never satisfy a man. True happiness and permanent peace is to be sought in renunciation and service to others. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated the way of life following which an individual can solve the problem of his own life. He is the model of perfection to be attained by everybody. His life and gospel are the path, the way.

### **Sri M. – a special selection of Sri Ramakrishna**

Sri Ramakrishna after completion of his *sadhana* by all faiths and attaining the highest spiritual truth felt a strong urge to lead others also towards the path of the spiritual life. Accordingly, he trained some of his disciples – both monastic and



householders – who could show by their own life, the light of spiritual world even after his physical disappearance. Sri Ramakrishna had three types of devotees and followers: (i) those who took sannyasa (ii) those who were specially trained and directed to remain as householders to perform some special service to the Master and to the society and (iii) those who were intellectually influenced and inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, but did not directly recognize him as their master or guru. Sri Ramakrishna was however reflected in all of them according to their qualities of material as media.

Mahendranath Gupta or Sri *M.* was a special selection of Sri Ramakrishna for the special purpose of storing his Gospel faithfully. Sri Ramakrishna by his spiritual insight could see the ins and outs of every man whoever came in his contact. From the very first day of the meeting, Sri Ramakrishna could recognize that Sri *M.* was one of his chosen few. He specially and minutely enquired about his residence, his profession, his family, whether he was married and had children etc. During their conversation, Sri Ramakrishna made some pungent remarks about Sri *M.* but afterwards the former consoled and encouraged the latter saying that he had some good signs of a religious minded man. Sri *M.* though rebuked and criticized by Sri Ramakrishna, felt an indomitable attraction to meet him again and again. Sri *M.* would not spare any pains to meet Sri Ramakrishna – whenever he had a chance to meet him, even for a few minutes during the recess hours of his duty at school. Sri Ramakrishna would also become anxious and impatient to see Sri *M.* if the latter was absent for some days. This mutual attraction had a special significance and purpose.

Sri *M.* was specially selected by Sri Ramakrishna to keep records of his religious discussions with the visitors. Sri *M.* had the habit of maintaining the diary of his daily acts and thoughts from his early life. Wherever he would hear any new and good talks, he would record them in his diary. It is evident that simple and inspired religious discussions of Sri Ramakrishna attracted Sri *M.* from the very first day of his meeting with the Master. Sri *M.* would minutely listen to the uttering of Sri Ramakrishna and keep their record in detail in a special form, with some hints – to be understood by himself only. He would not miss anything he had heard from the mouth of the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna also noticed from the beginning that Sri *M.* was keeping the record of his utterings. He encouraged Sri *M.* and helped him by all means to record the statements correctly and exactly as uttered by him. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Sri *M.* was the fittest person for the purpose. So, he helped Sri *M.* and discouraged others whom he did not think competent to write about him or about his Gospel.

### **The Kathamrita – a faithful record, a product of deep meditation**

The *Kathamrita* or *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a faithful record of the utterings of the great religious Master of the Age. Sri *M.* had a sharp memory and a keen power of observation. Besides he would record, word by word, his Master's utterings with time, date, place, the mood of the Master and the persons present at the time of every discussion.

Sometimes, Sri *M.* would sit by Sri Ramakrishna alone and would revise, repeat and re-discuss the topics, which had already been discussed on previous occasions. Sometimes Sri Ramakrishna would ask Sri *M.* pointedly to state the details of some particular discussions. Sri *M.*, like a school boy preparing his class lessons, would answer and repeat what he had heard. Any omission or commission by Sri *M.* would be corrected by Sri Ramakrishna then and there. Thus the records were corrected by the Master himself for the verbatim preservation and presentation in time.

Sri Ramakrishna was obviously keen about correct and exact representation of his *Gospel*. He did not want that his speeches and uttering should be edited in any way. This is why he specially chose Sri *M.* as the most competent person for the purpose and trained him in a special way so that he did not alter, in any way, any word or thought expressed by him.

Sri Ramakrishna stopped all hesitations and doubts by Sri *M.* on the teachings and words uttered by him. At a time of stress Sri *M.* lived with Sri Ramakrishna in the temple-garden of Dakshineswar and practised meditation under his instruction and direct supervision for about a period of four weeks. At the time of his return home, Sri *M.* had to promise to Sri Ramakrishna that he would give up all doubts and hesitations on the words of Sri Ramakrishna and that he would not judge his Master and his words by his own intellect, but would accept them all as gospel truth. Sri *M.* totally resigned himself to the will and command of Sri Ramakrishna and from that time he became a completely changed person.

### **Sri *M.* – a shadow of Sri Ramakrishna**

After his complete surrender to the holy will of his guru Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.* gradually became the shadow of his Master. His thoughts, meditations, actions and utterings – all became Sri Ramakrishna’s reflection. He lost his self in Sri Ramakrishna. In other words, he became all Ramakrishna! Sri Ramakrishna after completion of his *sadhana* during the later part of his life, prayed to his Mother Kali to bestow spiritual powers on Sri *M.* and some other chosen disciples who would teach the world the spiritual lessons which he taught. The *Kathamrita* was written in a book form when Sri *M.* had been in such an absorbed and saturated mood in Sri Ramakrishna. This is why the *Kathamrita* is so vivid, so lively, such a dynamo of spirituality.

Whosoever used to go to Sri *M.* would feel the very presence of Sri Ramakrishna in him. He talked nothing but Sri Ramakrishna, he thought nothing but Sri Ramakrishna and he inspired everybody by the words and the light of the divine life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri *M.* was not only his “Master’s Voice” but he was also his Master’s shadow. He completely hid himself behind his guru and destroyed his ego while talking or writing about Sri Ramakrishna. In the whole *Kathamrita*, Sri *M.* is completely hidden.

### **The Kathamrita – a product of deep meditation, the essence of all shastras**

Sri *M.* was made the store-house of the *Gospel* of his Master by Sri Ramakrishna himself. In most cases he would keep the records of the *Gospel* in his diary in short notes and symbols to be understood only by himself. He had the privilege of coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna only for a period of four years and a half – from February 1882 to August 1886. During his every visit to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.* with all attention listened to every word spoken by the Master. On the very day or at his earliest he used to record hints and points of the *Gospel* in his diary. The notes of the *Gospel* in his diary were meant for himself. At first he was shy and had no idea of publishing them for the general public. He even said to his close friends– “These records are for me and me alone. None will get them till I am alive.”

But after the passing away of the Master, *M.* withdrew himself from the family and took shelter in a very secluded place. There he passed day and night, months and

years, meditating on the words and actions of the Master. The elaborate *Kathamrita* – the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* – is the result of his deep meditation on the words and scenes heard and seen by him many years ago while his Master was alive. His memory never betrayed him, his deep contemplation and earnest prayer to his Master gave him all possible inspiration to complete the records of five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in fifty long years, the last volume being published in 1932.

As Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of all religious faiths, so is the *Kathamrita* the essence of all the shastras. Sri Ramakrishna practised all faiths and realized the truth of the highest spiritual experience by all of them. His life is a spiritual synthesis. Similarly, the *Kathamrita*, is the synthesis of all the religious scriptures – the records of experiences of the highest spiritual truths.

Truly Sri M., the chosen son of Sri Ramakrishna, the ideal householder sannyasi, the compiler of the *Kathamrita*, the modern Veda, is the Vyasa of the modern age. He is also the ideal of spiritual life to be followed by the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. He is the voice of his Master, the shadow of his Master – he is all Sri Ramakrishna in thought, speech and action.

## 40. THE MASTER MAHASHAYA OF THE MORTON INSTITUTION

Mahima Ranjan Bhattacharya

Not many persons are alive today who can give us first-hand information, in some detail, on the Morton institution which was not merely a famous high school of its time but the veritable *Naimishyaranya* of the Master Mahashaya's spiritual ministries from 1905 to 1932, the year of his passing away. Sri Mahima Ranjan Bhattacharya was a student of this institution and had the privilege of being Master Mahashaya's beloved pupil. In the following article he talks of his school and its illustrious Rector with a sense of rightful pride, an understandable nostalgia. Many of his observations throw a flood of light on Sri *M.* not only as a saintly devotee of Sri Ramakrishna but also as a scholar, educationist and a teacher of his own class. Sri Bhattacharya also gives some interesting pen-pictures of Calcutta of the early nineteen-twenties – the last years of the times of Sri *M.*

**“Having taught us the poem ‘Abu-bin-Adham’, surcharged with emotion, he asked us to learn it by heart.”**

When I first came in contact with Sri *M.*, I was not old enough to understand him or to fully realize the greatness of his personality. It was forty-six years ago.\* I was not even eight then. The school, then known as the Morton Institution, was at its zenith – even three buildings were not spacious enough to accommodate all its students.

Sri *M.* generally known as Master Mahashaya, who had taken refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and recorded *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, his Gospel, was the proprietor and the Rector of the school. Among students of the school he was known as the ‘Rector Mahashaya’.

The main building of the school was a red-coloured house situated at 50 Amherst Street. Classes IV to I (the seventh to the tenth classes of the present day) were held in this building. On the turning of the Amherst Street and the Panchanan Ghosh Lane in a chariot-like four-storeyed building and a small house at the centre back of its compound, children's classes up to class V (the 6th class now) used to be accommodated. Later on, with the drop in admissions, classes from these two buildings were transferred to the red building itself.

I was to be admitted to class VI. My house was just at a stone's throw from the school and one had only to negotiate one turning of the road with vehicular traffic. That's why my people decided in favour of my joining this school. I well remember the day of my admission. It was the first week of January and it was so cold. My father took me to school before going out to work. The Rector Mahashaya had his office in the red building. His son, Prabhas Babu was the Second Master. The Head Master was Anil Gupta Babu and the superintendent Faqir Babu. They were all there. I, a boy of about nine, was so uneasy in their presence. After a brief talk with my father, the Rector said that the boy would be admitted after a test. The next day was fixed for my taking the

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\* This article was written in 1966 in Bengali for the *Shiksha*. The author is speaking here of the year 1920 or early 1921. Translated and reproduced by the kind permission of the author. [Ed.]

test. So I went with Daddy again. I was examined in English, Geography of Bengal, History, Hygiene and Health and Arithmetic – in all these. A teacher, I forget his name, who used to teach English to class VI examined me in reading, spelling, meaning of words etc. The Rector himself and Prabhas Babu gave me passages to translate from Bengali into English and from English into Bengali. Gauri Babu – I have seen none so full of affection and idealism – examined me in Geography and so on. And as far as I remember, the senior Arithmetic Master, Bimal Acharya gave me the test in Arithmetic. Excepting Arithmetic all other tests were oral. It was the first time that I had gone to a High School to seek admission. So I felt very nervous. In spite of it I did fairly well in my tests. I particularly remember that I scored 100% marks in Arithmetic. I would however like to whisper into the ears of my readers that this was my only record of having done so well in Arithmetic. I could never master in my life this mysterious science of numbers. Consequently, I gained admission and was allowed to attend classes from the very next day.

It was only then that I saw the Rector Mahashaya at close quarters. I was living so close to the school. I must have seen him earlier too at times but never could I imagine that one day I would be privileged to be his pupil and later on a dear pupil and that I had been his pupil would one day be my greatest introduction.

The 6th class used to be held on the 3rd floor of the house in the Panchanan Ghose Lane. The Calcutta of those days was very different from the Calcutta of today. It was not so crowded, the streets and roads were more open, studies more peaceful. On the footpath of the Amherst street in front of the School there were no more than three or four brick-built houses; mostly there were mud houses one of which was a smithy. The whole of the northern foot-path of the Amherst Street beginning from the Machhua Bazar was lying vacant. Moreover, the most important fact is that a number of trees stood on the edge of the path: one was the *Bakul*, many others were the *Kadambas* and the *Krishnachuras* (Gulmuhur). I still see them clearly in my mind. The Amherst Street police station and the Rishikesh Park were not there yet in front of Raja Rishikesh Laha's residential house. Instead, the whole of this area was occupied by the Alms House for Anglo-Indians. We would watch, from the third storey, these sahibs sweeping the *maidan*, working as gardeners and labourers. Though prohibited from doing it, occasionally they would come out to beg. Their mixed English Bengali language was very amusing to bear. Some of them were just Anglicized Indians – they spoke Bengali although they were in tight pants, sweating all over with heat. One could see far into the distance from the third storey. In between my classes I loved to see all this....

This heaven of delight did not last long. One of my class mates, Abhoy Pado Ghosh – I may add here that he and several others are still my very intimate and dear friends, and unselfish, pure and unbroken friendship is possible only with one's friends of childhood – had injured his knee when he was a mere child, in an accident and could never recover. In those days perhaps, modern scientific treatment was not available. It became painful for him to climb up to the third floor but he had the fortitude to put up with it without ever complaining – he would always go up or come down with a cheerful face. However, one day the Rector Mahashaya happened to see him. What a tender and affectionate heart he possessed one could see then. He immediately ordered that our class should in future be held on the ground floor. Not even in class X did our class ever sit above the first storey because of our handicapped friend. I was just a small lad then but my heart was touched by that order of the Rector. I felt I was blessed in witnessing such tenderness and such affection of the Rector Mahashaya.

As far as I can remember, I had entered school in January 1921. The memory of the Peace of 1918, which was celebrated, with so much of grandeur at the end of the First World War was still fresh. At that celebration each of us children was not only given refreshments, pictures and movie shows but also a brass medal. Immediately after my admission in a football match our class had defeated another. I can't recall whether the losing team was of my school or of another. The prize for the winners was one of those medals burnished bright. It was decided that we would approach the Rector for a half-day holiday. I can't say why but I was selected to represent the class. Perhaps it was because I was gentle, polite, reserved sort, not too much interested in games and sports. Perhaps, therefore, my pleading could be of some avail. The Rector Mahashaya used to take rest during mid-day in a room on the second storey, situated to the right as one climbed the steps in the house at the turning of the Panchanan Lane. Whether he had his residence in the room on the terrace of the Red Building during those days, I cannot remember. Promotion to this building, in those days, was a sweet dream come true for us. However, let me continue. That was my first visit to his room. I can still recall vividly the scene. There was a simple bed-roll with a striped blanket spread out on the floor – I particularly remember an ochre coloured bed-sheet – it was near the window. He was reclining on it, his ample beard reaching his chest. I believe, in a corner there was a table with some writing material and books. On the walls there were pictures of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) and gods.

The first picture on which my eyes fell was that of Sri Ramakrishna in the sitting pose. All the pictures had marks of sandal-wood paste and there was perfume of incense. I took off my shoes and entered the room on tiptoe. Seeing me enter he sat up and asked me immediately to sit down. Then he asked me the purpose of my visit. I explained my whole case and showing him the medal asked for a half-day holiday. Many had warned me that the Rector was a difficult man, what they call a strict disciplinarian, that he might be vexed, he might scold me and the result might not be very pleasant for me. But nothing like this happened. He heard me patiently throughout and gradually made me understand: "It is class VI which has won the match – a very good thing indeed!" said he, "Taking to sports, especially playing football is good for health but it should not be allowed to interfere with one's studies. Besides, it is not customary to allow a holiday on that score. If this is done a precedent would be established!" For these reasons he could not allow us a holiday but he was happy at our success. Though we did not get a holiday he made me understand the whole matter in such a way that I felt no bitterness in my mind. I returned to my class fully satisfied.

I had returned to my class but my mind was still lingering in that room. On entering the room I had felt that I was entering a temple – how pure, how peaceful, how neat was that room! Even so I was not old enough to understand the Rector Mahashaya. Nor did I know his place in the world of spiritual *sadhana*. But his room and his serene face had overwhelmed me emotionally.

The Rector Mahashaya had taught class VI three or four times whenever a teacher was absent – the Rector, and sometimes Prabhas Babu would take the class in his place. Mostly it was the Rector Mahashaya who would come. I particularly remember an incident. Our Geography teacher was absent on that day, so the Rector Mahashaya took the class in his place. The topic of the lesson was Arabia. He taught us in a manner I can never forget. The main fruit of Arabia is date. The story how a merchant threw away the stone after eating the fruit, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, Mecca and Madina and the story of the Prophet – how beautifully he narrated all these! Not only did I learn Geography, I also learnt so much else into the bargain. The

Geography teacher would come and give his lesson. I would also memorize it without understanding it and could reproduce it fast when needed. Then there was map painting. If we made even a slight mistake the teacher would pull our hair or press our fingers after putting a pencil in between them (I recommend to the reader to experiment it on himself!) and so on – such was the terrible punishment inflicted on us! Add to it confinement after school hours, writing twenty five times conjugation of Sanskrit verbs, sums involving long multiplications and divisions, simplification and so on – and all these had to be solved! If one failed to manage them caning was resorted to. As against this, the lessons given by the Rector Mahashaya were so beautiful, so interesting that they were memorized at the spot and are still remembered after forty-six years.

Besides these casual classes, the Rector would sometimes come for lessons on morals and ethics. He would also tell us the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, stories of great men and explain in simple language verses from the Gita: *manuṣyatvaṃ munukṣatvaṃ mahāpuruṣasamīśrayaḥ* – humanity, longing for liberation and the company of the holy – these are the three essentials of spiritual life. I knew this by heart. I can still hear the deep notes of his throat. Nobody had ever seen the Rector reprimanding anybody. He would never lose his temper, let alone inflict bodily punishment. But his personality was such that on hearing his deep voice even from a distance: “Please place your hands on your knees and sit up erect,” we would immediately place our hands on our knees and sit up straight. The whole class would become so quiet that one could hear one’s own breathing. He would sometimes enter the class to find out by a short test how lessons were proceeding or he would himself give a lesson in place of a teacher. We had never seen him raising his voice at anybody. In spite of it, in his presence, we would even forget the little antics of our childhood.

In Sri M.’s school, the study of Sri Ramakrishna’s life and the *Kathamrita* was compulsory. I remember that in class VI we had to read Ramlal Chattopadhyaya’s ‘Life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva,’ published by the Belur Math, its yellow title page with the emblem of a swan within a coiled snake and the words, *tannohanīsaḥ pracodayāt* - ‘May this swan of the soul arise’ – neatly and legibly printed thereon. We very much liked to read this book – I knew the whole book by heart. Our Sanskrit class teacher was Dharmavrata Chattopadhyaya. How he made lessons from the book so interesting and attractive, I have no words to express. The boys were very fond of him. Reason? He was the only teacher who would not inflict corporal punishment. He would speak sweetly and put up with all our childish demands. Add to it, that he had a sweet voice and an ability to recite beautifully. According to the present requirements, he did not perhaps possess high educational paper qualifications and could not be given a teacher’s post but in imparting education there were few who could equal him. Modern teachers mostly possess diplomas and degrees but not even a fraction of the education imparted by the moderately educated and the so-called untrained teachers of those years is available now.

Let us pass on. I was talking of the Rector Mahashaya. Along with his solemn and loving personality his dress was also notable. A kurta with a folded cloth round his back, its two ends hanging over the two shoulders opening out on his chest, long hair, ample beard reaching up to his chest and big eyes – peaceful and patient as if turned inwards. On his feet he wore polished shoes or sometimes slippers, his gait was firm but patient. Sometimes he would hold his hands clasped on his back. At the tiffin hour in school or at the close of the day or at the time of coming to school he would stand and keep on looking at the boys. Either he would be in the schoolroom going over the papers of the

day or he would walk up and down with his hands behind his back. I felt awed on approaching him but later on when I came in closer contact with him I realized what a gentle loving soul lay hidden behind the outer veil, a touch of which has blessed me forever.

The place Sri *M.* occupied in the midst of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna was beyond my ken at that age – I have earlier said so. But I was old enough to see that Sri *M.* was far above the common man. Many a high class sadhu and saint used to visit Sri *M.* from the Belur Math and elsewhere and so did many seekers who came to him for instruction – how to dispel their sorrows. I can still recall the faces of some of those persons. Much later I came to know of their identity. But then I had the simplicity of a child with his unshakable faith and unique curiosity. I have now lost that longing, and regret why I did not go nearer the Rector Mahashaya – had I at least spent some more time in closer contact with him my life would have become meaningful. In childhood itself, I would have earned enough of ‘traveling allowance’ to feed me for life.

‘One moment, half a moment, even half of the half,

Company of the holy, O Tulsi, takes away all your sins.’

I had come across the philosopher’s stone but, alas, could not recognize it.

I came under the shelter of another great personality of this very school. He was a teacher of Geography, History etc. of the senior classes. This was Sri ‘*J.*’ (Jagabandhu Roy). Later on, he was known as Swami Nityatmananda or Jagabandhu Maharaj. Sri ‘*J.*’ for some reason, I do not know why, had a high opinion of me. I remember, one day he asked the class what was our ambition in life. The others said what they wanted to be but I immediately said, “I would be a sannyasin.” Alas! who would imagine on seeing this clerk in a tattered coat and patched up trousers that he could ever have had such a high ambition? Would you believe it, dear reader? Sri ‘*J.*’ did not brush aside my remark by calling it a child’s fancy or an immature thought. Instead he took it, as in English they say, at its face value. So he explained to me that, without graduation it was not possible to gain admission into the Ramakrishna Mission. I do not know whether there really is such a regulation in the Ramakrishna Mission. However, I understood what he counseled: ‘First study and prepare yourself, then take the vow of service and then renounce the world.’ Sri ‘*J.*’ had embraced sannyasa much before I had matriculated. If I had allowed myself to have his continued influence in the later part of my school life, what would have happened, I cannot tell. But let me pass on.

For gaining nearness to Sri *M.* I am most indebted to Sri ‘*J.*’ I have already told you my story of Sri ‘*J.*’ I still feel blessed in recalling some of it in this new context. Whether he had talked to Sri *M.* about me, I had no knowledge. But Sri *M.* had begun to look upon me in a different way, with special sentiments. I got the right to enter his room – of it a little later. In the verandah, on the terrace of the fourth level, there were a double bench, a chair and a table. Sometimes, besides our class, the additional Sanskrit class was taken there. In the evening, when the holy men arrived, they would have their session there to converse with Sri *M.* and hear his teachings. I would enter suddenly. The Rector would beckon me to take a seat in a corner. Whether I understood it or not, this environment was very sweet for me. Maybe, the reflection of the room of the mad Thakur of Dakshineshwar was there in a more or less degree. I have earlier said that the Rector used to take our class at times; he would also take a period or two to impart instruction on religion, morality and patriotism. Incidentally, it was in these classes that we were able to gauge the depth of his love for the Motherland. This was the time when



Gandhiji had started his non-cooperation movement. With a piece of *khaddar* in her hand Basanti Devi was courting arrest; Acharya Prafulla Chandra was awakening the sense of patriotism among the masses; the thundering voice of Chitranjan Das was going straight to the country's heart; the poetry of Nazrul, its mere reading was enough to send people to jail; the tragic memory of the Jalianwala Bagh was setting the heart afire. The sonorous throat of Rabindranath was still reminding all: 'If it is a sin to perpetrate injustice, it is a greater sin to suffer injustice.' The grave sonorous notes of the Rector's voice are still resounding in my ears – he would talk to us of all these things. He knew the dictum, *नायमात्मा बलहीनेन लभ्यः* - 'There is no salvation for the feeble-hearted.' He who was not able to free the Motherland from the shackles of subjection even though he might be highly spiritual was merely wasting his spirituality. The Rector Mahashaya's part in awakening patriotism in our hearts was unparalleled for a teacher.

Even on those early days he had realized that it was possible to unite the whole country if all men and women were considered the children of the one Motherland, if provincialism could be banished. An Indian was an Indian first and last, not a Hindu, a non-Hindu, Bengali, a Punjabi, a Maratha or a Madrasi. The doors of the Morton Institution were therefore open to non-Bengalis and non-Hindus. You may not perhaps believe that -he had even made the study of Hindi compulsory along with Bengali and English with this object in view. We had to read Macmillan's English Hindustani edition of the King's Primer in class VI, I remember it well. Is not his keen foresight amazing? But I regret to say that this arrangement could not continue for long for various reasons.

Let me revert to my previous subject. Along with regular studies in those days it was customary in all schools to impart moral education. The voice of the present day secularism had not risen yet. 'The Life of Sri Ramakrishna' (*Ramakrishna Charit*), the *Kathamrita* parts one, two and four were of course prescribed books, but besides we used to meet on Sundays to discuss morality and religion. A topic was announced for every meeting in advance. The meeting would start with recitations from the Gita, religious songs, reading from the *Kathamrita* and the sayings of sadhus and saints and so on. Thereafter, there would be a discussion on the topic of the day. I remember once I was asked to speak on Prahlad. In those days, it was usual to read *Kritivasa*, *Kashidasa* and others at home. In the school too the Ramayana and the Mahabharata of Upendra Kishore were studied till class VII. Sanskrit studies were not yet taken up. We, Bengali boys, therefore knew some of the stories of the Puranas. Well, I spoke on Prahlad. The Rector liked it so much that he ordered that my name be inscribed in the Record Book – this was considered to be a big prize. However, for various reasons, I could not regularly attend those meetings.

On promotion to class V we had to attend, classes in the Red House, leaving behind both the houses in the Panchanan Ghosh Lane. The Rector was then living in the room on the terrace on the 4th level. In spite of it I could not muster courage to go to his room. When promoted to class IV, I came directly in contact with the great personality, Sri 'J.' I have talked of him earlier too. This Godly pure soul embraced sannyasa and gave his entire life to the practice of human welfare. Encouraged by Sri 'J.' one day I entered the room of the Rector Mahashaya in the recess period, full of trepidation. He was then seated on a blanket with both of his hands joined on his lap; perhaps he was meditating. On entering I immediately saw that it was not a residential room, nor even the usual puja room. It was a temple. There were pictures all around that of the Paramahansa Deva, the Holy Mother, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), Mother

Bhavatarini, and so many pictures of other gods and goddesses, even a picture of Jesus Christ. On each of the pictures there were devotional marks of sandalwood paste and flowers, and the perfume of the burning incense. Here one neither talked nor even listened to others; one had only to sit meditatively in this room. I felt something – this ‘something’ couldn’t be expressed in words. What indeed is this feeling that there is nothing and yet there is everything? One is not, yet one is? It isn’t possible for me to make it clear. I never again experienced this feeling of the first day. The words of the Rector roused me. He had seen me, so he had asked me to take my seat. He offered me some fruit etc. as *prasad*, which I accepted with a mind full of devotion. It contained a section of an orange, I can still remember. The Rector knew the faces of all the students of his school – he even knew their dates of birth and the main constellation under which they were born and who were the heads of their clans. Me also he knew well...

The Rector gave me some advice before I left – according to the present reckoning it was perhaps banal but to us of the older generation so invaluable: adoration of parents, complete dependence on God, compassion for created beings – these were his main instructions.

In this very context, I may also say that his main teaching in his classes on morals used to be where else is God if not in the various forms in front of you? That these words of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) should some how become a fact in our lives was his desire. To re-live the pain of the sick and the suffering, to serve them, is the real worship of God – this he would impress on our minds in various ways. In all religions there is no place for discrimination because of caste and creed, there is no expectation of return. This is *nishkama seva*, service without any expectation of reward, the best of spiritual practices. That’s why he would feel choked with emotion while speaking of such teachings of Vidyasagar, Swamiji and others.

Hereafter he would call me to his office every month. For a while he would ask me about general matters, then he would give me spiritual advice. Once in my childhood, I could not bear sight of animal sacrifice to the deity. Hearing of it he was so happy. He talked of it to all the teachers present and even called in others to tell them of it. I came to know afterwards that I could gain this affection only after he found out all details about me.

Through the encouragement and good will of Sri ‘J.’ I visited Sri M.’s temple of Thakur many a time, received *prasad* of fruits etc. and heard invaluable words of counsel. Sri ‘J.’ was very fond of me. I do not know whether I deserved all that, but I know that I am still receiving unbounded affection from him. Of what he said to Sri M. out of love for me, I have no knowledge but it appears that both Sri M. and Sri ‘J.’ had some expectations from me which I never could come up to. At that period of time, Swami Vivekananda was my ideal man; Sri Ramakrishna was, of course, the incarnation of God on earth. Obviously, therefore, the result of my association with them was that my mind would itself instruct me what was right for me to think, speak and do about the Ramakrishna pantheon. Being a pupil of Sri M. I used to consider myself as one of the holy circle and if my audacity is excused, I still feel the same way. One of their (Sri M.’s and Sri J.’s) teachings was that I should visit the Belur Math. Sri M. was already known as a ‘boy catcher’ – he had taken so many of them to Sri Ramakrishna! Many of them, later on, became revered personalities. Even though Thakur is no longer bodily alive, he had sanctified Dakshineswar by his presence. Besides, Belur is the ‘playground’ of his spiritual children. A visit to these places purifies the mind; it also purifies the body. Because of their counsel, I insisted on visiting these places.

Consequently, my father and my uncle took me to Dakshineshwar – in those days going alone even a hundred yards from home was prohibited. I remember well the first time I did so. It was some festival day. Dakshineshwar was full of crowds, many parties singing hymns in chorus. I had gone by a steamer from the Ahiritola Ghat. Dakshineshwar was then quite open – one could see the temple pinnacle through the village groves. After landing from the boat one had to walk some distance before reaching Dakshineshwar. I remember having seen a house named ‘Nandan Kanan’ in the forest. There was also a small temple of the Mother Adya with a small house attached to it. It was full of crowds and many parties were singing holy songs. Sri Annada Thakur was dancing with upraised arms surcharged with emotion – now he would go from the Adya Peeth to the Dakshineshwar Temple now he would come back. He had no outer consciousness – only at intervals a sound like ‘Om, Om’ coming out of his lips. My uncle took me round from place to place – the Panchavati Grove, the Nahabat drum-house, the Mother’s Temple, and the group of other temples, the pantry for the holy food, the Nata-Mandir for dancing, the block for animal sacrifice, Ramakrishna’s room along with the articles used by him. Near the Panchavati was seated a group of local persons discussing the importance of Armada Thakur. One young man said that Annada Thakur’s state of religious fervour was pretence, another expressed his disagreement adding: “Even if it is not true God-intoxication, what then? At least it depicts religious fervour. Even as pretence it is worthwhile.” I do remember all those sights. While returning I did not fail to bow at the Adya Peeth. Thereafter I went a number of times to Dakshineshwar; once all alone. The opportunity to visit Belur Math, however, came much later.

Sri ‘J.’ would jokingly say, “I say, Mahima, we are Rama-Christians”. When we talked of intense hunger we would term it Rama-hunger, intense sleep Rama-sleep. In the same way, we were Rama-Christians, meaning thereby that for us there was no difference between religions; for us all religions were alike. This particular feeling we imbibed when I was a student at Sri M.’s school. Fanaticism and narrowness in matters religious could never pry on my mind. That’s why from my school days it was possible for me to attend prayers at the Brahmo Samaj as well as go to church service, just the same way as I followed the tenets of my religion. The principal teaching of Sri M. was: ‘The main thing is how to attain God. All roads lead to Rome.’

As generally happens, one becomes more intimate with one’s teachers after leaving the school or the college. After I left the school my visits to my teachers became more frequent. And this went on till the day Sri M. breathed his fast. If I happened to do anything worthwhile I would run to tell him of it, and purify my heart with his joyous blessings. And whenever I was in need of sympathy or direction my visit to him never left me disappointed. Even today, though living so far away, whenever I go to my city, standing near the premises at 50 Amherst Street, I never forget to bow my head for a few moments and pay tribute from the core of my heart at the feet of that great man.

Whenever Sri M. visited Sri Ramakrishna he would record in his diary all he heard from him. Later on, these teachings were published under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The *Kathamrita* is the greatest wealth of the spiritual aspirant – the standards set in it are also of the utmost importance. The invaluable teachings of Sri M. have also been published by Sri ‘J.’ (Swami Nityatmananda) under the title ‘*Sri Ma Darshan*’ (M. *the Apostle and the Evangelist*, in English). That I was allowed the privilege of sitting at his feet is my greatest glory. I once read a story. A senior monk, on seeing Raja Janak, began to wonder how it was possible that this king submerged up to the neck in wealth and managing the affairs of his state so beautifully, could at the same time be a knower of Brahman, a self-realized soul? Raja Janak

guessing his thoughts put a shallow plate of oil on his palm and said to him, “Go round this kingdom and see it thoroughly. Only please see that not a drop of this oil falls on the ground”. When the monk returned, Raja Janak asked him, “Pray, what did you see and hear?” The monk replied, “Though I have seen everything yet I have seen nothing. Reason? Well, the mind was all the time concentrated on this oil plate.” Raja Janak said, “It is the same with me. I have my mind always fixed on the Para Brahman. What you see is just external to my mind.”

Seen superficially, Sri *M.* looked a worldly person. He would keep a perfect account of profit and loss of his money. He also ran his school so efficiently. In the matter of spending also he was so thrifty. Not only did he believe in thrift for himself he would also teach his pupils not to spend needlessly. How could such a man be a realized soul, and the winner of the grace of the Supreme Person? To understand this, one has to know Sri *M.* more intimately. Outwardly a man of the world when controlling all the modifications of his mind, he sat merged in meditation with perfect concentration one could see how far above sense pleasures, worldly ambitions, wealth and riches he was. Taking off his outer covering he would lose himself in Bliss Supreme. Like ‘the mud-fish’ of Sri Ramakrishna, though living in mud he would not allow his body to be soiled. How illusory was the outer covering he himself knew and therefore could demonstrate to others – one can teach religion to others only through one’s conduct.

I am reminded of another matter in this context. Many outsiders could not see how indifferent Sri *M.* was to physical comforts. And they did not know, possibly do not know even now, how unbounded was his charity. And yet his left hand did not know what his right hand gave away. Many years later when I read a book written by Swami Vivekananda’s second brother, Mahendranath Dutta, did I come to know that when Swamiji’s family was passing through terrible times because of want of money and was actually starving, it pulled through for three months with Sri *M.*’s financial help. Leave out others, not even Swamiji knew of Sri *M.*’s monetary help. At the end of every month he was seen filling a number of money-order forms. It can only be surmised that they were meant for the needy fellow-disciples of his Guru Deva who had fallen into straitened circumstances. There were those among them who could not afford medically prescribed diet, others who needed medical care, yet some other saintly persons who depended on charity for living. Sri *M.* knew them all – I believe he must have been noting down in his diary or some other note-book what and how much these persons needed. No doubt, he had a phenomenal memory. The *Kathamrita* is the proof.

Let me now return to matters concerning his school. There is a saying in Bengali – ‘A Bengali child does not cry at the time of his birth, he writes poetry.’ Writing poetry is in the marrow of the Bengali. One does not come across a person who might not have felt compelled, once at least in his youth, to rhyme two lines of a couplet. While at school, I also once had a fit of this disease. When I was promoted to 2nd class (now class IX) Sri Ramani Mohan Chaudhury, a highly educated gentleman joined the school as our new teacher of English. But only a little later he left to take up a government job. I, therefore, could never meet him again. I had showed my poems to him and to Sri ‘*J.*’ I wrote them all in a note-book, named my collection *Anjali* (offerings), and gave it to Ramani Babu – nothing could be more childish. Ramani Babu wrote a poem of eight lines on it – four of which I still remember. Here they are in insipid English translation:–

(I am) Neither a poet nor a litterateur.

What competence then have I to accept the ‘offerings’?

But affection is blind;  
I, a beggar of affection, therefore readily accept them.

I regret I cannot recall the next four lines however much I may try. Sri 'J.' also wrote a very encouraging note on the back of the note-book. But our Arithmetic teacher spoiled the whole game. One day coming to know of my *Anjali* he tore and threw away the note-book and scolded me into the bargain showering full-throated abuses on me. Thereafter, so long as I was in school I never openly talked of poetry. Needless to say, that the news reached the ears of the Rector. He conveyed his advice to me through Ramani Babu – 'No, no, he (the Rector) had not considered writing of poetry as wrong. This was only to ensure that with the writing of poetry I might not start neglecting my studies. After studies were completed one could attend to other things along with Dharma and Karma (spiritual duties and actions). Reason? Without studies it would not be possible to discriminate between right and wrong. First of all one must look around, understand all, then take only that which was worth accepting. For this process of elimination acquisition of knowledge was very necessary; without knowledge the analytical faculty would not develop.' What a beautiful advice!

It was perhaps during these days that it was made compulsory for the students to borrow books from the School Library. But, the selection of the book was not left to the students as at present. Either the Rector Mahashaya himself or Prabhas Babu would select the book. I still remember, the first book given to me by Prabhas Babu was the English translation of "*Swarnalata*". Later the Rector called me to his office to give me a copy of the 'Evenings at Home', asking me to read it thoroughly. And I did read that book thoroughly and liked it so much that in the later life I bought a copy of it. It treated in a very easy language, in the form of stories, philosophy and science, ethics worth knowing and learning all made pleasantly readable. I have no knowledge whether this book is still available and whether it is translated into Bengali and Hindi or not. If it has been translated it should be a very precious literary possession.

The result of our test was declared. I was so happy to see my name in the first list of the selected students for the Matriculation examination. It was the first day that I had won the right to chew the betel leaf in the- presence of the elders. The readers are perhaps surprised but in our times there was a special restriction called discipline! Talking in the presence of the senior teachers or smoking was unimaginable then – and is so for me even at this advanced age. Even chewing betel leaf in the presence of elders was unthinkable, as were laughing boisterously, whistling, singing, conversing loudly, remaining outdoors after seven in the evening, reading without permission plays, novels stories other than the prescribed ones in the presence of teachers – they were known as 'out-books'. I see the reader knitting his brows.

I was going downstairs in the company of some school mates whose names were also in the list, of 'sent ups' as they say in the language of the students. Suddenly, I heard the grave guru-like voice of the Rector Mahashaya. "Mahima, it should be very nice if your father could find time to see me. I have some important business with him." With a thumping heart I went home to tell my father. Later, I heard from him that I had not done well in Arithmetic; in other subjects I was quite well up...

Before the examination I had visited the School to pay my respects to the Rector Mahashaya and Prabhas Babu. Prabhas Babu blessed me, the Rector Mahashaya with a smile on his face put his hand over my head. I felt blessed by his silent prayer for me. I still remember, he was wearing a red-bordered cloth on that day; on his feet he had

slippers. On the day our Matriculation results were declared what a joy was there on his face, I still remember it. What could be a greater joy than the good name brought to the Institution by the students selected to be sent up? He was after all the Rector of the School. It was but natural that he should feel happiest at the success of his boys. In our days the relationship of the teacher and the taught was somewhat different. For the taught the teacher was not merely a teacher, he was like a parent, perhaps nearer and greater than that. On the other hand, the teacher did not content himself by merely imparting knowledge to him – he would also keep a close watch on his welfare; he would ensure whether his understanding of moral values and faith in justice were also getting established or not. Where he goes, what he does, whom he meets – all these would be known to him. Even after leaving him at the end of the term one was not beyond his reach. On his pupil's future also he would keep a close watch. The Rector Mahashaya was a typical teacher of his class. Even when I left his school he would not leave me. Till the day of his passing away he kept himself informed of my joys and sorrows and guided me on my path whenever there was need.

As is usual, after I left school, our closeness and association with Sri *M.* and Prabhas Babu continued; our two families would even meet at times. The one remarkable fact was that Sri *M.* had such a deep faith in his pupils. Sometime after I passed my Matriculation, the Morton Institution had to be closed down. The Rector started another school in the same building and named it Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Institution. It functioned for some time. I am reminded of an incident. Whenever I found time I would go to Sri *M.* to pay him my respects. One day while going to college I went to him with books and note-books in my hand. For some reason one of his teachers was absent. As soon as the Rector Mahashaya saw me he said, "I say, it's Mahima coming!" Then he asked me how much time I had at my disposal. When told that I had a little more than an hour to spare, he took my books and note-books and sent me to a class to teach in place of the absent teacher, without making sure whether I had the necessary ability to teach. So great was his affection and so deep was his faith in his pupils. Till the day of passing away his love and faith ever remained the same.

What a high place he occupied as a spiritual seeker I have neither the capability nor the right to evaluate. He had received infinite affection from the Paramahansa Dev. When Thakur needed a wearing cloth or a pair of shoes he would ask Sri *M.* to buy it for him. To places he visited – for example Vidyasagar Mahashaya's – mostly he would ask Sri *M.* to accompany him. I can understand, however, his place in the spiritual world to some extent. I know that the writing of the *Kathamrita* is his most wonderful, unparalleled spiritual exercise – a unique exercise which has taken him to the top of all spiritual practices. Did he receive the grace of only Thakur? No, he was also the beloved child of Sri Sri Ma Sarada, (the Holy Mother). How active he was in the company of devotees, I have seen with my own eyes. A householder yet a sannayasi, the time is now ripe for telling the tale of his *sadhana*, spiritual practices, undertaken so secretly by this holy man liberated in this very life. Sri *M.* had carried out *sadhana-bhajana* in a solitary hut in the forest of Rishikesh for some time like all-renouncing monks. Besides so many times he was seen returning late at night after meeting devotees. Many a time he would not wake up his people. Instead he would get a *roti* (a big-sized chapati) from some Hindustani eating shop – these shops remained open till late at night. He would eat it like a crow pecking with its beak a piece from here, a piece from there. His meal was very small in quantity – he had no desire for tasty foods of different kinds. Milk was perhaps his main drink.

There is another side of his personality, perhaps unnoticed by others. In the

school office, during his work, whenever he had a moment to himself and there was nobody to interfere in his meditation – whenever he was alone or even if there were other persons who were busy with their work and not likely to notice him – joining his hands on his lap he would sit calmly, without moving, his mind in full concentration. Perhaps even his eyelids did not move. I do not know whether the hallowed form of Thakur in *samadhi* rose before his mental eyes or whether it was the nectar of the words of Thakur which he had kept bound in words in his writings that resounded in his ears. I only saw in him a *yogi* plunged in meditation.

Sri *M.* had three personalities – as the Rector Mahashaya he was a teacher as seen by his pupils; as Sri *M.*, the unknown spiritual seeker and lastly a teacher of men as seen by those who have read the *Kathamrita*. Those who visited him late in the evenings on the terrace at the fourth level of the Red House or in the courtyard have also seen his personality as a teacher of men. But, except for the most intimate ones others know little about his personality as a seeker...

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True enough that I had not yet attained the age to understand him, but to cover up my incapacity by this pretext will not do. I have to confess that my eyes were shut. Otherwise, I had seen so many great personalities visiting Sri *M.* I had roamed about shouting in and around the house at 50 Amherst Street hallowed by the dust of their feet. Yet I could neither realize fully his greatness nor could I recognize the saints fully who used to visit him and live in the current of his thought and feeling in life. One day, somebody brought me a book. It contained the biographies and pen-pictures of many great personalities of the Ramakrishna Order. Reading many of these pen-pictures I felt I had seen those great men. Now, again and again I say to myself: “Alas! Had I recognized them, known them...” Needless to say that most of them were the pupils of Sri *M.*, it was Sri *M.* himself who took them to Thakur. That is why he was called ‘Master Mahashaya, the boy-catcher’...

During his student days Sri *M.* was a clever scholar. In his Entrance Examination he secured the second place in order of merit from the Hare School; in his F.A. he secured the fifth place and in B.A. the third. He studied for his B.A. at the Presidency College. He was happy when I also joined this very college. He had deep knowledge of Sanskrit literature. Once he gave a description of Mahadeva in meditation as described in the *Kumar Sambhava* of Kalidasa – how Nandi was keeping the whole creation silent, animals and birds, insects and even the plants were quiet so that Mahadeva was not disturbed in his meditation and how Mahadeva was himself seated like the steady flame of a lamp in a breezeless corner. While describing this state of Mahadeva Sri *M.*’s own face would get illumined by an uncommon emotion like Mahadeva himself in *samadhi* sitting in front...

Once Sri *M.* talked of Thakur during the lesson. Him he considered as an *avatara*, God in person. He would lose himself while talking of him. I remember, in the course of a discussion he mentioned the Gita. At one place, Sri Krishna himself says: ‘Whenever there is decay of Dharma and increase in non-Dharma, I come down to the earth – *yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata* (Gita IV: 7)’. I heard Sri *M.* reciting this. On being asked I was able to repeat the whole *shloka*. The Rector Mahashaya, I remember, felt very happy at it. Then he explained why Thakur came as an avatar, what were the compelling circumstances, what did he teach and then to attain God, cleverness and pretence were of no avail and that it was not possible to attain Him by sacred formulae,

Tantric figures, copper utensils and ringing bells – what was needed was a deep unmixed devotion, complete self-surrender and unshakable faith. To find God one did not need to live in caves or on mountain tops or on the banks of rivers, or in forests or in holy places. “You are looking for God but your eyes are shut to Him. Lo! He Himself stands before you in various forms.” He would impress on us the essence of the great saying of Swami Vivekananda that the highest religion is service to man.

Loving man is loving God. Having taught us the poem Abu-bin-Adham, surcharged with emotion, he asked us to learn it by heart. The son of Adham loved man. The angels of the Lord put his name at the top in their list of devotees of God. Whenever Sri *M.* would explain fables his face would begin to beam with a heavenly light. By his inspiration, I learnt by heart some poems of Swamiji – the ‘*Song of the Sannyasin*’ was one of them.

And then he inspired me also to read parts of the Gita and of Shankaracharya’s *Mohamudgar* and other texts. He explained the main principles of Hinduism for days in a language we could understand. In the same context we heard from him the story, ‘Swamiji and the picture of the Maharaja of Alwar.’ When the Maharaja of Alwar was arguing against idol worship, Swamiji asked everybody present to take down his picture from the wall and spit over it but none dared do so. Swamiji then explained that nobody had courage to insult the picture because it was an image of the Maharaja. It was a portrait, not the Maharaja in person, yet people were imagining the presence of the Maharaja in it and showing respect to it. In other words, people were not showing respect to the portrait but to the Maharaja himself. Similarly, in idol worship we do not worship the idol but God. The idol is only an external means to hold the mind... The Rector Mahashaya would make us all understand these things in his own beautiful way. It was forty-six years ago but I still remember it.

Not only did we hear about Swamiji, we were also told so much about so many sinless sadhus and saints of the Belur Math. Some of them I have met but as I confessed earlier I had not the capacity to recognize them. Like a fool when I threw away the “philosopher’s stone” I do not know. Of the four classes of sadhus described in the scriptures, they were all learned sannyasins. As for me I never felt the desire even of *markat sannyasa* (renouncing the world because of worldly problems). But, as the story goes, even without knowing, the hunter attained liberation just by accidentally showering bel leaves on Siva. Now that I am nearing the age of *Vanaprastha* (retirement from worldly affairs at 50) I say to myself: ‘Never mind, even if I was not able to recognize them, at least I had the privilege of seeing them. Why shall I not attain too?’ A number of other matters concerning Sri *M.* are struggling to come out of my memory. There is no end to them. I remember, once the building of a Muslim orphanage had fallen down causing death of a number of children and injury to others. Sri *M.* spoke of it to every class, collected donations and sent this money to them. While talking of the accident, his voice choked – he became so emotional. We came to know that he could not even take his meals that day.

Rev. Lal Bihari De and others like him are now forgotten but they used to be quite famous in our times. Such beautiful language as they wrote is rare now. There had been perhaps very few at any time who had not read Lal Bihari’s ‘Bengal Peasants’ Life’ and ‘Folk Tales of Bengal’. The descendants of the Rev. Lal Bihari fell on evil days for want of money. It was Sri *M.* who collected some money from us and arranged help for them. Jogendranath Basu Mahashaya was the teacher who used to collect these donations. The students used to talk of him as ‘J.B.’ – the initials of his name – and later named



the fund as 'J.B. Fund'. Sri *M.* would thus help so many suffering people.

Pranab Kumar, an extremely clever boy was studying in a class higher than ours. Suddenly he died of typhoid. Everybody had expected that Pranab would bring laurels to the school. Sri *M.* was shocked at his untimely death. By the labours of Sri *M.* and Sri '*J.*' a moderate amount was collected. Probably Sri *M.* also donated some amount from the school funds. This money was entrusted to the university. Its interest was to be used for awarding a silver medal every year to the students of the Morton Institution topping the list of successful candidates. During my school days my class-mate and intimate friend Shailendra Nath Ghosh won this medal. It was also stipulated that if the Morton Institution ever ceases to exist the medal would be awarded to the student standing first among the North Calcutta students passing the Matriculation examination. Perhaps this arrangement continues to this day.

Why did Sri *M.*'s teachings go straight to the heart? So many persons teach but their teachings have little effect. The reason is that Sri *M.* would teach only what he himself believed in and had practiced in his life. Without being determinedly true to one's vows nobody can do it.

Some days ago, I visited the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Kankhal. I met several Swamis and talked to them. How happy they were when I told them I had studied at the feet of Sri *M.* They sat with me for a long time to listen about Sri *M.* Many years ago, I had gone to take the dust of the feet of a Swami of the R.K. Mission. He had founded an Ashrama, the Sarada Peeth near Calcutta. Above eighty, he had difficulty in moving about because of age and bad health. As soon as I sent him a word I was allowed to enter. What a divinely illumined face! He had been made to sit on a divan, resting against a bolster and was the picture of Mahadeva or a silver hill. I paid my obeisance to him and introduced myself as Sri *M.*'s pupil. On coming to know of it he said at once: "Oh well, then you have already seen all that is to be seen and known." Sri *M.* occupies such a special place in Thakur's family of devotees...

Sri *M.*'s picture is still before my mind's eye. He would strike the palm of his left hand with the closed fist of his right hand whenever he was to emphasize a point of reference during his teaching and he would walk up and down or stand with his hands behind his back placed over each other. I still see him coming to the class, striking the palm of his hand with his closed fist and saying: *manuṣyatvaṇi munukṣatvaṇi mahāpuruṣasaśrayaḥ*. Whenever I am at the Red House at 50 Amherst Street, I have a feeling that he is inside standing in the verandah of the first storey and that he would now look at me and I would quickly climb the stairs, take off my shoes and touch his feet. His face was like that of Moses in pictures, his complexion fair like molten gold, with shining beard, rather long hair and eyes like lotus-petals full of compassion. Whenever he raised his arms for any reason, they would look like those of the idols of gods – the same rosy hue on his palms. In the *Kathamrita* and some other books one sees his photo of a comparatively younger age. It also shows long hair, a beard, fair complexion and big eyes. At that time since he was younger his hair and beard were black and he looked comparatively thin. His voice was sweetly grave and full-throated yet gentle. When he spoke to the group of devotees he would speak slowly yet the whole place would be charged with the deep notes of his voice.

In this essay I have spoken of Sri *M.*, a man of three personalities – as a teacher, as a spiritual seeker and as a teacher of men. I have seen him as a teacher. As a teacher of men the world has seen him. But what a great spiritual seeker he was is not given to

me to measure. Having received Thakur's command to take to the path of Brahmanhood – *yadaḥsarāṇi vedāvīdo vadanti viśanti yadyatayo vītarāgāḥ, yadicchanto brahmacāryāṇi caranti* – 'That which the knowers of the Vedas call the Imperishable and into which enter the sannyasins, self-controlled and freed from attachment and desiring which they lead a life of continence' [Gita VIII: 11] – he had taken upon himself the labour to show the world this path by the medium of the *Kathamrita*. I think of this supreme seeker, this self-realized great personality and bow to him again and again in testimony of my reverence for him.

# HYMN TO SRI M.

Swami Nityatmananda

This is a translation of an extempore composition (see p. 175), sung by Swami Nityatmananda on the bank of the Ganga, in Rishikesh, on 18 March 1970, which was recorded by a disciple.

1. Om! Of mind serene, bereft of ego, lion in action, prince among the witty, Sri Ramakrishna's beloved devotee, the devotee of sadhus, the servant of their servants, Sri *M.* to him salutations!

2. Om! Who like Narada, chanted the glory of Sri Ramakrishna, day and night, who took up service to the name of Sri Ramakrishna, the foremost disciple-devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.* to him salutations!

3. Om! His heart lacerated by human suffering, like Vyasa he ever dispensed the Nectar of the *Kathamrita*: essence of all scriptures, remedy of life's ills; the servant of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees, Sri *M.* to him salutations!

4. Om! He held ultimate knowledge within and outwardly displayed devotion, and sat like Hanuman at Sri Ramakrishna's feet. The intimate devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.*, to him salutations!

5. Om! Blessed with a *kala* of the Divine Mother's Power, by Her grace, he used it to shower the Nectar of the *Gospel*, day and night, grieved at the woes of humanity. Sri Ramakrishna's dear intimate disciple Sri *M.*, to him salutations!

6. Om! Who lived as a householder, at the behest of the Master, to teach mankind though himself of fulfilled desires; who alleviated man's suffering, who publicized Sri Ramakrishna's divine play, Sri *M.* to him salutations!

7. Om! Living like a 'maid-servant' in the household, he yet brought knowledge and devotion to thousands of devotees, and inspired many to embrace sannyasa. Sri Ramakrishna's beloved devotee, Sri *M.*, to him salutations!

8. Om! Though a teacher of men, endowed with Jnana and Bhakti, he took the vow of service to the world as its slave, the beloved devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.*, to him salutations!

9. Om! He lived in family – a lion guarding the store of meat! – endowed with all knowledge, the dear disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.* to him salutations!

10. Om! A university scholar, endowed with knowledge and devotion, he served freely day and night the Nectar of the *Kathamrita* to sadhus and bhaktas like a maid, the beloved devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri *M.*, to him salutations!

## Musical Notation & Text (in Bengali)

## SRI MA DARSHAN

### A Continuation of the Kathamrita

मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादी

धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः ।

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते ॥

‘Not in lofty words but in conduct does the true nature of man gets manifested, and what he wants to teach gets its life and force to influence by being reflected in the conduct of his daily life. This truth about religious ideals have found a shining example in the life and character of Sri M. as portrayed in *Sri Ma Darshan*.’

– *Udbodhan*

In *Sri Ma Darshan*, ‘... such spiritual gems kept so long hidden ...’

– *Prabuddha Bharata*

‘... Commentary on the life of the commentator of Sri Ramakrishna – that most wonderful life ... with a penetrating insight born of Intuitive Knowledge.’

– *Anand Bazar Patrika*

The doer who is free from attachment and egotism, who is full of resolution and zeal unaffected by success and failure is said to be of the nature of 'sattva'.

– *Gita, XVIII: 26*

**SWAMI NITYAMANANDA**

## 41. ‘SRI MA DARSHAN’ AND ITS RECORDER SWAMI NITYATMANANDA

Swami Shraddhananda

Swami Shraddhananda of the Vedanta society of Sacramento, USA, sent us an article entitled ‘M., the Vyasadeva of Sri Ramakrishna Incarnation’, for this Centenary Memorial. The first part of the write-up has been incorporated in Part III of the book; the second is reproduced below under a new heading to suit the scheme of the Volume. Our apologies to Swamiji.

In the following lines Swami Shraddhananda talks of *Sri Ma Darshan*, a sixteen-volume work in Bengali, the first three parts of which have so far been translated into English under the title ‘M., the Apostle and the Evangelist.’ Its author, Swami Nityatmananda, has made a signal contribution to Sri Ramakrishna literature by recording the conversations of Sri M. with his devotees in the same manner in which Sri M., had done his Master’s.

**“Words emerge bringing out Sri Ramakrishna as a living power.”**

Swami Nityatmananda, the founder of *Sri Ma Trust* will be remembered by thousands of devotees of Sri Ramakrishna for his monumental work *Sri Ma Darshan* in Bengali, running into fifteen volumes.\* Some volumes have already been translated into English and Hindi. May all other volumes be also similarly translated in time by the grace of God. The readers find in these volumes a replica of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The great Vyasa of Sri Ramakrishna incarnation now appears openly with a dynamic missionary spirit. In the *Gospel, M.*, the narrator is almost completely hidden. Through and through the pages one hears the Master speak. But in the *Sri Ma Darshan* the evangelist is the speaker. And what a speaker! Words emerge bringing out Sri Ramakrishna as a living power. The past is endowed with a dynamic presence. The conversations in *Sri Ma Darshan* range through a period of approximately ten years, from 1923 to 1932. M. had grown fairly old by then. His spiritual experience had been immensely enriched in its content. Past memories had condensed into an exquisite sweetness. All this is manifest as we visualize and hear him through the pages of *Sri Ma Darshan*. The description of M.’s visits to Dakshineswar, Belur Math, Cossipore garden house, and several religious festivals in other places in the company of devotees is simply fascinating. The way in which he stands before and bows down to the holy places, the joy and satisfaction that lighten his saintly face in his re-contacting the sacred old associations, the serene silence that surrounds him as he walks and makes some remarks – all these bring to the mind of the reader an inspiration of witnessing a spiritual drama. In the pages of *Sri Ma Darshan* we find M. elucidating the philosophy of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda which is indeed captivating. M. builds a bridge between the ancient sages of our Motherland and the two great prophets of modern India.

One wonders at the unusual capacity of Swami Nityatmananda in recording these day to day conversations of this Vyasadeva of our time and later developing his notes into this masterly work. One cannot fail to discover the special training he received from

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\* The sixteenth volume has been published posthumously.



*M.* himself in this direction while he was serving as a teacher in *M.*'s school and living with him for years.

It was my great good fortune to know Swami Nityatmananda even when he was Jagabandhu Babu. How he served the venerable sage day after day! He seemed to be a constant shadow by the side of *M.* We can well imagine the sub-conscious agony of his heart when he had joined the Belur Math and naturally had to be physically distant from the adored old savant. But really could there be any separation? Were not the illustrious evangelist and his humble attendant Jagabandhu eternally united in Sri Ramakrishna? Once I had the occasion to watch the remarkable gladness in *M.*'s face as he greeted and chatted with Swami Nityatmananda when the latter had come from Belur Math to see him. *M.* was surely happy that Jagabandhu Babu chose to become a monk. So often one could hear *M.* speaking on the blessedness of the life of renunciation.

Swami Nityatmananda once took me to show several places sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna's visits. He had known about those locations from *M.* It was a most enjoyable day. I vividly remember the beginning of his work on *Sri Ma Darshan*. He had come to Dehradun and was staying with a Punjabi devotee. The then President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Virajanandaji was also then in Dehradun. I was one of his sevakas. Swami Nityatmananda would come from time to time to pay his respects to the President Maharaj. One day he spoke to me about his diary of *M.*'s conversations and showed me an exercise book of his writing. He requested me to take it to the President Maharaj. Swami Virajanandaji read the sample manuscript with great interest because he cherished a profound respect for *M.* It was through him that in 1891 young Kalikrishna (the pre-monastic name of Virajanandaji) had come to know about the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna living in the Baranagore monastery. Kalikrishna was a student in the Ripon College, Calcutta, where *M.* taught as a professor of English. Virajanandaji's encouraging words about the manuscript made Swami Nityatmananda very happy. He began to try seriously for its publication. Of course he had to go through a hard struggle for a number of years for accomplishing his objective. Eventually by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna he succeeded. Those devotees and friends who helped him in this stupendous task deserve the gratitude of all followers of Sri Ramakrishna.

I saw Swami Nityatmananda for the last time in Chandigarh when I visited India in 1971 after fifteen years in the USA. Both of us were very happy to meet each other after a long time. The Swami treated me with the same kindness and affection as in past time. We visited a famous temple together in the city. He acquainted me with his project of the *Sri Ma Trust*. I was also very much impressed with the shrine, which was set up in the house where he lived. He introduced me to some of the devotees who were carrying on the work of the Trust. It was, for me, a joyful experience.

I do hope and pray that the *Sri Ma Trust* will, by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, gather more and more strength and stability and adequately fulfill the mission for which it was established.

## 42. A WORK IN CONTINUATION OF THE KATHAMRITA

Dilip Kumar Sengupta

Padmashri Sri Dilip Kumar Sengupta needs no introduction except perhaps to those who do not know the All India Radio. But he is one of us, which prevents us from talking about him. In this short study Sri Sengupta talks of Sri Ramakrishna, his *Gospel* and Sri *M.* with deep insight, throwing new light on each. He particularly emphasizes the fact that Sri *M.* was a veritable Rishi of our age in the tradition of Vedic rishis of yore, second to none in his rishi-like life and the service he rendered to humanity.

Sri Sengupta does not stop at Sri *M.*'s *Kathamrita* but takes us on to its continuation in the 16-volume work in Bengali by Swami Nityatmananda. In this monumental work Sri *M.* is heard speaking and elucidating what he had recorded in the *Kathamrita*.

**“In the ‘Gospel’, *M.* is the eye and the ear to see and hear the Master and his great associates, in Sri Ma Darshan, he is the mouth to talk about them.”**

Swami Vivekananda was the first man of God in India in a thousand years who went round the world with Scripture in one hand and Reason in the other. For him the acceptance of the one did not preclude the other. Which meant that nothing could be true by faith if it was not true by reason. It was not he who could say with Dostoevsky, “If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the Truth, I would prefer to stay with Christ and not with Truth.” If therefore Vivekananda acclaimed Ramakrishna – not however until he put him under searching investigation for long five years – as a supreme expression of divinity in man, his words must carry conviction with us. But Vivekananda himself asked us not to admit anything on the personal authority of anyone, however great or saintly the personage might be. We are not therefore fully convinced of Sri Ramakrishna's divinity on the authority of Vivekananda although Vivekananda's life and achievements remain the most shining evidence of Ramakrishna's divine mission in this world even as Paul's are of Christ's. We therefore look around for some records left by Ramakrishna's associates of how he lived and what he preached which help us to make our own assessment of him rather than our accepting some one else's assessment. Such recorded evidences could however be of three classes (i) direct and recorded on the same day (ii) direct but unrecorded at the time of the Master (iii) hearsay and unrecorded at the time of the Master. The third class of reporting has the least authenticity as the first one has the most. It is shocking to many Christians that the Gospels of Jesus the Christ have no better authenticity than that of the second and third categories. Modern scholars are generally agreed that St. Mark's is the oldest of the four Gospels and it was written probably 60-70 years after the death of Jesus on the basis of what Mark heard from Peter about the word and act of Christ. And there are discrepancies in the accounts of the Book of John and those of the synoptic *Gospels*. If the authenticity of the Gospels is not firmly established *The Acts* and other parts of the New Testament do not find roots.

Fortunately Ramakrishna had a Boswell in Sri *M.* (Mahendranath Gupta), head of an educational institution in Calcutta and a mighty scholar himself who picked up

every word – however trivial and absurd – that fell in his presence from the Master’s lips and treasured them in his personal diary soon thereafter, complete with the precise date according to the Gregorian and Bengali calendars, the day of the moon and of the week, the time of the day and the names of the persons present, their reactions to his words and so on. Each narrative had the movement of the living presence like a sequence in a scenario. A Dutch evangelist in Princeton, New Jersey and later Christopher Isherwood had said that Ramakrishna was a most wonderful phenomenon of the modern age. Sri *M.*’s records which were printed in their original Bengali in the form of five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* and in English translation as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* provided this spiritual phenomenon with a totally accurate base in reality which no other book on Ramakrishna could provide. Aldous Huxley called this *Gospel* “unique in the literature of hagiography”. “Yet Huxley’s praise was no ‘more than a statement of facts’, says Isherwood, “the service *M.* has rendered to us and future generations can hardly be exaggerated”. It has therefore been rightly said that the whole structure of the Ramakrishna Movement rested on two columns, one, the mighty lionic Swami Vivekananda and the other Sri *M.*, the humble, quiet and illumined proclaimer day and night of the glory of the Master.

The *Gospel* or as it is entitled in Bengali ‘*Kathamrita*’ is the Gita of the modern times. The Gita, compiled by Vyasa contained the words of God revealed by Him in the incarnation of Krishna in the Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra and the *Kathamrita* compiled by Sri *M.* contained the words of God as spoken by Him in the human form of Ramakrishna in the Tirthakshetra Dakshineswar. More than the killing of demons or guiding the Mahabharata war, the revelation of the Gita which has been bringing solace to the mankind for thousands of years was Sri Krishna’s supreme and most important act. As the compendium of the Upanishads, the Gita reconciled the four different schools of philosophy of action, devotion, knowledge and yoga emphasizing that each one of them was a highway leading to Godhead, independent of the others. Likewise the *Kathamrita* was also the essence of the Upanishads and it harmonised the scores of religious paths, broad or not-so-broad, seemingly cutting across each other. By acclaiming all and condemning none, Ramakrishna endorsed them after and not before having reached the same goal of truth traversing each path, unlike many others who may have said similar things by appreciation of the same through intellect only. Direct personal experience and not intellection illumines the pages of the *Kathamrita* even as it does of the Upanishads or of the Gita.

What message did the Upanishads or the Gita hold out to mankind? We could have no better authority to answer this question than Sri Ramakrishna himself. Sri Ramakrishna once when told that Hari (later Swami Turiyananda) was deeply engrossed in the study of the Vedanta, asked the latter on meeting him next, “Tell me Hari, what does the Vedanta say? Only Brahman is the Truth and this *samsara* is un-Truth; or does it say anything else?” About the Gita Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when the word GITA was uttered in rapid succession ten times, one heard it as TAGI i.e. Renunciation. That was the message of the Gita.

What was the message of the *Kathamrita*? The same as in the other two, only elucidated and explained through parables and examples drawn from Sri Ramakrishna’s immediate rural environment which naturally made it easier of comprehension to the people today. Can it be said that the Vedanta as well as its compendium, the Gita were treatises on pure science of spiritualism dealing with its theoretical aspects only, while the *Kathamrita* was a treatise on the applied science of spiritualism dealing with its practice and application? As a matter of fact, the Upanishads as the treatise on theory

had continued to be studied by a handful of Sanskrit scholars in *mutts* and *tols* but had little influence on the lives of the people during the thousand years preceding Sri Ramakrishna's birth. It would seem that to avoid being called upon to search for and look up these treatises on spiritual theory that he remained almost unlettered. If God is not to be found in books what good studying them? He had utter contempt for philosophical theories. And what scriptures did he need study when his life itself was a scripture of many parts and myriad chapters destined to bring solace and serve as a guide to millions hereafter. Be it said however that Sri Ramakrishna's near illiteracy was self chosen, not flowing from his family background. Consequently he could master a few Sanskrit mantras needed to discharge – when in normal mental state – his duty as a temple priest. Even if he sprouted from the soil, he grew and shot straight up. He did not thus belong to the country's folk tradition like Kabir, Raidas, the Alvars and other saints did. He stood quite apart from the array of unlettered saint-poets of India. Indeed he belonged to the Vedic tradition. He was not catapulted to the society of the affluent and the highly educated; they themselves were drawn towards him not obviously by his pedantry but by his effulgent purity and magnetic charm as well as by the depth and penetration of his wise thoughts.

To them Sri Ramakrishna had few new things to say. Shorn of the parables, bereft of the similes and repetitions pruned off, his teachings were utterly simple. The end of a man's life is to realize God. God can be seen or realized with a clean and pure mind. So make your mind free of lust and gold. That is the first precondition. Then in all earnestness call on Him. If you are a householder, always remember that those you know to be your near and dear ones are not in reality yours as you are not theirs. Think and act as though you are a servant-custodian in somebody else's house. If you are not married, don't marry for you are at a vantage point, don't fritter this opportunity away by getting enmeshed in the worldly life.

How did these messages of the Vedanta or the Gita on the one hand and the *Kathamrita* on the other, influence their two compilers, Vyasa and Sri M.? From the little that has come down to us about the life of Vyasa it would seem that Sri M. may not entirely suffer in comparison. Both were householders and had children, both were vastly learned and yet full of humility and devotion. However, from one or two episodes in Vyasa's life, e.g. his begetting at the instance of his mother Satyavati; Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura in the womb of his step brother's wives and maid or his long argument with his son, Sukadeva in an attempt to persuade the latter to take to wife and not to sannyasa, distinctly put Sri M. in a favourable light in comparison. We learn from Swami Nityatmananda's monumental work in Bengali entitled *Sri Ma Darshan* which runs into sixteen volumes (it bears the same name in Hindi translation and 'M., the Apostle and the Evangelist' in English) that the fifty years that Sri M. lived in separation from his Lord, Ramakrishna, following the latter's passing away in 1886, were spent in unbroken thinking on the Lord. If he talked it was about the Lord; if he wrote it was about the Lord; if he looked up in the sky or around at the trees or flowers, it was to reminisce about the Lord; if he went anywhere it was to be reminded of the Lord; if he met anyone it was to hear about the Lord; even in his sleep when he changed sides, he would say 'Thakur, Ma' as though he was sleeping in the Holy Mother's lap. If all that Sri M. spoke in fifty years could be termed a long elegy or a hymn, the constant burden or refrain of the song, repeated in varying melody and metre, could be said to be "Don't marry, keep the company of the sadhus who are the veritable oasis in the deadly desert of *samsara* and be a sadhu yourself" – which again was his Lord's persuasion.

A part of Sri Krishna Lila was depicted by Vyasa in the Bhagavata and a part of

Ramakrishna Lila was depicted by Sri M. in the *Kathamrita*. We have seen that the Vyasa of the modern age did not suffer in comparison with the Vyasa of *Dwaparayuga*.

But that was not all. It has to be understood that whatever Sri M. did was in fulfillment of the Lord's assignment. Did not Swami Vivekananda write on reading the first publication of the Gospel, "I now understand why none of us attempted his life before." Indeed no one else's work on Ramakrishna's life and teachings could ever be as authentic as Sri M.'s work for he had written on the basis of records maintained within the knowledge of the Master and in fulfillment of an assignment given to him by Sri Ramakrishna himself.

And compilation of the five-volume *Kathamrita* was not the only assignment of the lord that Sri M. had to fulfill. In addition he had also to provide and leave behind material for the sixteen-volume *Sri Ma Darshan* – material verging on the same quality and kind, varying only in quantity as what Sri M. collected in Sri Ramakrishna's company for about four-and-a-half years had to be much less than what Srimat Swami Nityatmanandaji as a Brahmacharin collected during about double that period which was spent in Sri M.'s constant company for he lived with Sri M. in the Morton School itself. He had then kept recorded in his diary all that Sri M. said or did exactly in the same manner in which Sri M. recorded Sri Ramakrishna's words and acts. Often it was that Sri M. himself checked the reports for detail and presentation. The author is therefore right in believing that Sri M. had commissioned him to publish these records in book form for the good of the people. *Sri Ma Darshan* has been variously described by reviewers as 'a kind of continuation of the Gospel', 'a companion volume to the *Gospel*', 'complementary to the *Gospel*' and so on. Of course there is one obvious difference between the two. In the one Sri Ramakrishna the God-man is the central figure; in the other Sri M. has that position. The time, the place, the dramatis personae are all different. That could have made a world of difference. But it does not. The reason is Sri M. himself who is there in both the books. In the *Gospel* they all appear before us as processed through the prism of Sri M.'s intellect. In the *Gospel* Sri M. is the eye and the ear to see and hear the Master and his great associates; in the *Sri Ma Darshan* he is the mouth to talk about them. Therefore, much of the magic and excitement of the Gospel is recaptured in this multi-volume work. And the Gospel's commentary by the author of the Gospel is bound to make any book of the series a companion volume to the *Gospel*, an invaluable reference book for future research on Sri Ramakrishna.

The continuity maintained in *Sri Ma Darshan* is also one of faith. In the *Gospel* what strikes the reader is the burning faith of Sri Ramakrishna in what he called the Universal Mother, his direct perception which he could transmit to other suitable media of men sitting around. Likewise *Sri Ma Darshan* presents the burning faith of Sri M. in the Master which was as persuasive, communicative and convincing to anyone who came in his contact. The continuity is also maintained by Sri Ramakrishna himself. He pervades the volumes of the *Kathamrita* by his personal presence. He pervades the volumes of the *Sri Ma Darshan* in absentia. The other two central figures in the *Kathamrita* are Vivekananda as Naren and Sri M. who is not seen save when he gets a chiding or a snubbing from the Master but whose hidden self-effacing presence is felt nonetheless all through. The *Gospel* is verily the *Triveni Sangarn* – a confluence of the three holiest of the rivers, the Ganga, the Jamuna and the Saraswati, the last remaining ever invisible is believed to be flowing underground. It goes to the credit of the author of *Sri Ma Darshan* to have worked wonders by making this invisible river Saraswati surface from under the ground and flow for the benefit of the people. Bhagiratha had brought the Ganga down from above to the plains of the earth, and the author of *Sri Ma*

*Darshan* as the *Nava-Bhagiratha* brought out the river Saraswati from under the earth to the surface.

The same Ramakrishna-Nam-Ganga which came out at the point of Sri *M.*'s pen in the Gospel, pours down from Sri *M.*'s mouth in the *Sri Ma Darshan* and flows through its volumes. So from the first volume of the *Kathamrita* to the last volume of the *Sri Ma Darshan* there is one unbroken continuity. The volumes of the *Kathamrita* and the *Sri Ma Darshan* series of books therefore deserve to be shelved together. An additional reason for that is the interpretation of the Gospel by the Gospel's author, which *Sri Ma Darshan* contains. Sri *M.* is perhaps the only hagiographer in the world who has been able to do so, his favourite disciple acting as his aid in keeping a record of his own words.

The words '*Sri Ma Darshan*' which is the title of this companion volume in Indian languages means either the philosophy of '*Sri Ma*' i.e. '*M.*' or observing reverentially Sri Ma or *M.* In either meaning or, both the reader is led to Sri Ramakrishna. For Sri *M.* did not have any philosophy which was not his Master's. And observing Sri *M.* would mean observing an aspect of Ramakrishna himself because Sri *M.*'s mind had completely and wholly taken after the Master (*Tadakarakarita*) by constant and deep thinking on his Lord. These volumes place Sri *M.* in the correct historical perspective for the future generations by revealing that Sri *M.* was not only a great "householder devotee" but had also experienced the highest spiritual truth as much as Sri Ramakrishna's monk disciples did. Isherwood says, "Of all those who visited Ramakrishna, *M.* was the only one who was aware from the very first day that he was in the presence of the Eternal Now". This shows the towering spiritual maturity which Sri *M.* already had when he came to Sri Ramakrishna. The *Kathamrita* itself records Sri Ramakrishna as saying "You belong to the ever-perfect class. You are my own, of the same substance as father and son. Mother, illumine him, illumine him, otherwise how will he illumine others. Except for me he knows nothing." Obviously these words of Sri Ramakrishna could not be doubted.

Being in the household does not, of necessity, take away from spirituality. Purna was hardly a teenager when he came in touch with Sri Ramakrishna. When Purna came, the Master thought that there the line was drawn and the last one among the intimate, inner circle devotees had arrived. He said in unequivocal terms that Purna was an '*Iswarakoti*', i.e. 'one of those who were of the same substance as Iswara was and were born as Iswara's associates whenever God incarnated on this earth. But when Purna grew up in years and went through schools and colleges, he took to a householder's life.

According to the *Sri Vidyarnav*, an important book in the Agam literature, among the fourteen top disciples of Adi Shankaracharya, five were *Sannyasin* and nine *grihi* (householders) but all of them possessed great spiritual and miraculous powers. In fact one of the householder disciples, Vishnu Sharma was the Parama-Guru of Lakshmanacharya who was the author of this book *Sri Vidyarnav*. Lakshmanacharya possessed extraordinary *Sri Vidya* and *Tapasya* which gave him tremendous miraculous powers. He was a *siddha purusha* too.

These cases are merely illustrative and not exhaustive. As a matter of fact our Puranas abound with names of householder *jnanis* and *bhaktas* of the highest order. Even among the kings, Janaka was not the only one who was a Rajarshi. Viswamitra, Dharmadhwaaja, Aswapati, Sibi, Dilip, Nahush, Brihadratha, Ambarish, Raghu, Bhagiratha, Ikshwaku, Bharat – to name only a few – were all Rajarshis. In fact, most of the rishis, maharshis etc. of the Vedic age were householders. Indeed, the qualitative

assessment of one has to be made not by whether one is in or out of the *grihashthashrama* but by whether desire with all its roots and branches has been torn up from one's mind and one's ego has been neatly effaced. The *Sri Ma Darshan* as a record of documented events and observed accounts of Sri *M.*'s conduct and life as he lived it from day to day and year after year leaves us with no doubt that Sri *M.* had attained *siddhi* in both. It is certainly extremely difficult of achievement for a householder but it is not beyond a rare few, assured Sri Ramakrishna. And no doubt Sri *M.* was one of the rare few also to realize Godhead both formless and with form.

We learn from the *Sri Ma Darshan* that Swami Vijnanananda, a former President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission and an *Antaranga Parshad* of Ramakrishna once said to Sri *M.*, "About eighty-five percent of the sadhus of the Math have become monks being motivated either by your book *Kathamrita* or directly by your company." It may seem intriguing why one who was transforming others into sannyasin was not sannyasin himself. Was Sri *M.* like the mythical philosopher's stone, which transformed other metals into gold but was not gold itself? Sannyasa was forbidden him by Ramakrishna himself. Sri *M.*'s divine assignment was different. Whenever Bhagavan incarnates on the earth He makes his associates of previous incarnations also accompany Him. Each one of them has to perform a role assigned to him. Among Ramakrishna's intimate disciples, the two most brilliant in intellect and scholarship were decidedly Vivekananda and Sri *M.* Of the two, Vivekananda, the born leader of men, had in addition, a great many other qualities – eighteen, said the Master. So Vivekananda was earmarked. for taking Sri Ramakrishna's message round the world conquering all opposition by dint of superiority of reasoning and purity of his life, The other stalwart in intellect, scholarship and devotion in the group, Sri *M.*, was retained in the household to lead his life as, an embodiment of the Master's teachings which would serve as a model to be followed by the afflicted men and women of the world. All his entreaties to be permitted to take to sannyasa were turned down by the Master, sometimes in feigned wrath, at others with soft words to assuage his grief and disappointment. We are not sure whose sacrifice or self-denial for serving the cause of the Master was greater, Sri *M.*'s or that of the monk members of the group. For after all, the latter renounced the despicable householder's life and Sri *M.* renounced his claim on sannyasa – his dreamland of life divine. Whose sacrifice was greater? Sri *M.*'s sacrifice is comparable to that of Nityananda's renunciation of sannyasa and Avadhut's life of some twenty-four years at the bidding of Sri Chaitanya and taking to a householder's life precisely for similar reasons. He was transplanted in the household to serve as a model and example for other householders to emulate.

In the householders' view, Sri Ramakrishna's monk disciples are to be worshipped from a distance. But that sense of remoteness is absent in the case of Sri *M.* who had himself got burnt in the inferno of the world as they are doing now and so in compassion and love they feel much closer to Sri *M.* than with the monks.

It therefore seems likely that Sri *M.* will be more and more appreciated as times pass and one day his picture will be reverentially hung up in every home where the holy trinity are worshipped.

## 43. SRI M. – THE BEST DOCTOR

Swami Nityatmananda

In answer to a query from a disciple: “Is it due to too much feeling of ‘*manapamana bodha*’, praise and blame, in me that I cannot bear bossism, interference and criticism?” Swami Nityatmananda wrote: “...The suggestion which you received sitting before Thakur and Me is true. You will be made to rise above *manapamana bodha*. Thakur is going to do it for your good. You simply try to cooperate with Him.

“At one time He gave you the feeling to strive for attaining *manapamana bodha*, to raise you in the world. It is again He who is now suggesting by the medium of a thought to remove it from your mind in order to obtain your divine inheritance – ‘the son of Immortal Bliss.’

“In everybody He plays this double game of raising up and then removing (him from there). ‘You have played the first part well. I remember your words: I am a most fortunate person...’

“According to Thakur, every bhakta should learn and practise cooking and do all things by himself. He who is free in these things of life’s necessity can be free also from Maya’s meshes – so said Thakur.

“He made Revered *M.* do all for his family. But *M.* did not take *seva* (service) from them. He lived outside.

“If you like to practise self service you may do so for your own benefit.

“*M.* made me do sadhu seva, bhakta seva, school seva, diary seva, *Kathamrita* save, sometimes bhaktas’ family seva, over and above my own seva.

“He taught me not to harbour grudge and not to grumble. If you are self-seeking, your mind will not grow,’ he said. ‘Do your own save; only do much more save to others’, he also said. Almost all the, twenty-four hours he made me work for others for a long time.

“In the eleventh part, press copy (of *Sri Ma Darshan*) I wrote a chapter (XII) depicting my struggle between personal comfort vs. comfort of others. I read out this chapter to Mummy and Vijaya at Mandi.

“Your personality as a normal householder (not a bhakta in Thakur’s sense) was built by Thakur upon these ideas – (i) I am a man. (ii) I am the husband. (iii) I am the bread earner. (iv) I am the father. (v) I am the head of the family and (vi) I am ...

“Now the personality will require the following ideas to be built upon, almost opposite ones: (i) I am a son and bhakta of Thakur. (ii) I will try to bring out my divine sonship. (iii) Thakur is in all, so all want service from me. (iv) Thakur is in all of my family members and relations – service to Him through them. (v) At least twice I have to remember this in the morning and evening. (vi) All members of family and people in general are objects of my worship. (vii) I am to pay every one his due – even if a servant is really bhaktiman (a man of devotion) I shall have to offer him my positive reverence ...

It is in this context that we reproduce in English translation chapter XII from *Sri Ma Darshan*, Part XI, by Swami Nityatmananda. He was a teacher in Sri *M.*’s school, with the pre-monastic name of Jagabandhu Roy and was residing in the School building itself with Sri *M.*

**“He who works whether it be for himself or his family or in the office without any selfish motive taking all his work to be God’s is already free from its bonds.”**

Office Room in the Morton Institution. It is 1 p.m. Sri *M.* is seated on the chief officer’s chair... He is clad in a white bordered *dhoti* and a ‘long-cloth’ shirt with a thick cotton shawl dangling from his shoulders. He has only a few hair on his head, some long white hair fall on the back of his head and on his eyes. His long white beard reaches to



his chest. Under a broad high forehead, his two big prominent eyes shine with the light of his inner divinity. Sri Ramakrishna had named those two eyes as two *Salagarams* and he would see the entire universe in them. Sri *M.* sits on this chair holding his head high, sometimes for six hours at a stretch. He has assumed a *rajasic* (authoritative) expression on his face – ‘a lion in the field of activity’ – this being one of the five characteristics of a self-realized worker, described by Sri Ramakrishna.

The School is closed for the day; some of the teachers have already left, others are in the office. Sri *M.* has given some extra assignment to a young teacher (the author). The teacher is a devotee and resides in the school building. He is not in a mood to work any more. He has his own programme (of relaxation). Besides even though the assignment concerns the School it is not a matter of routine. That’s why he is unhappy. He is working at it unwillingly. As soon as it is finished he leaves the room and goes out into the Maidan.

\*                                 \*                                 \*

It is quarter past eight on a winter evening. Sri *M.* is seated in the stair-room of the third storey, facing south, with his devotees. It is a fine gathering. Sri *M.* is happy and is exchanging pleasantries with the devotees. The young teacher enters. All eyes turn to him full of affectionate living interest. In Sri *M.*’s eyes and on his face also plays a childlike smile of mirth and mischief. The teacher does not take long to understand that he himself is the butt of today’s mirth. He can, however, see the sympathetic fellow feeling and affection in the eyes of the devotees.

Like a mother Sri *M.* today yields to the pride of the reverential teacher. To bring a smile on his face Sri *M.* employs a number of stratagems by way of jokes and lighthearted talk.

The devotee teacher is a young man. Taking Sri Ramakrishna as his sole refuge he has resolved to live a life of peace. By the grace of Sri *M.* he has been able to realize that Sri Ramakrishna is the *avatara* of the age. He who has been praised by rishis in various ways in the verses of the Vedas, He who is the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute beyond speech and mind had descended in our age as Ramakrishna in a human body. That’s why the teacher has chosen to live under Sri *M.*’s kind protection. Teaching in Sri *M.*’s school is only secondary; he has undertaken it only because Sri *M.* wanted it. Soon after their first meeting Sri Ramakrishna had instructed Sri *M.* to learn to be independent in all matters. Sri *M.* had taken to this teaching (of the Master) to earn his livelihood. When he met Sri Ramakrishna the latter not merely approved of this profession but he also encouraged him to pursue this career. Sri *M.* would quote Thakur as saying: Teaching is the profession of rishis, a very pure profession indeed! There is no deception, no cleverness in it. It goes well with the practice of spiritual wisdom. It is second only to *Brahman-Vidya*, knowledge of God. Acquisition of knowledge (of sciences) develops and refines the intellect. It ultimately helps to know God. He also said that the place of teaching is third amongst the four kinds of charities mentioned in the scriptures: giving away of food, sparing a life, teaching, and imparting knowledge of Brahman. It leads immediately to knowledge and devotion. When pursued without selfish motivation teaching itself ends in the knowledge of Brahman.

Thakur had given the following instructions to Sri *M.*: You will work for your household but you will live as an outsider, a little far away. You will cook your food, you will do all work yourself, you will not let your wife work for you. On the other hand you will serve her.

Sri *M.* added: Thakur asked me how otherwise I could hope to free myself from the ignorance, which had bound me to others for creature comforts. And he also asked how the mind, which was bound by the meshes of so many sensual desires, could free itself from the grip of the world-bewitching Maya.

Sri *M.* used to tell his intimate devotees: One must first free oneself from those on whom one is dependent for living and secondly from sense pleasures. That's why earning one's livelihood, simple living and self-dependence are absolutely necessary.

Sri *M.* had, therefore, asked the teacher to accept the assignment of a teacher. This would help him practise all the three essentials – earning one's livelihood, living a life of simplicity, and self-dependence. It would then be possible to meditate on God in peace, to enjoy the company of the holy and serve them.

Thakur gave instructions to Sri *M.* on another matter. He talked in particular to him on work. Said he, 'Living is itself work; body means work. Bonds of work are inevitable. That's why one should attend to work as soon as it crops up but one should not enjoy its fruits. One may, however, take only as much of benefit as may be absolutely essential, like the maid in a rich home.' All the credit and discredit would be His. He who works in this manner is freed from the bonds of work. He who works whether it be for himself or his family or in the office without any selfish motive taking all his work to be God's is already free from its bonds. God grants such a person a monthly allowance – he who obeys God without reservation is granted a pension by Him; he who dedicates all work to Him buys Him, as it were. One should mentally dedicate his body, mind, and soul to Him and try throughout his life to win Him over.

The principal aim of the teacher is to keep company of the holy man (Sri *M.*) and to serve him; teaching is secondary for him. However, by consenting to be a teacher he could watch Sri *M.* in different situations. The teacher still sees difference between one work and another. Though he has always been hearing that all works are God's he has yet to mature in this thought. He, however, feels blessed whenever he can work for Sri *M.* The latter, seeing his preparedness to serve him, always praises him to other devotees. Sometimes he says to them and other *brahmacharins*: "Here is an example of *sattvic* work. See, how prepared he always is, how handy. And then, *muktasaṅgo'nahairivādi dhṛtyutsāhasamanvitaḥ*... "The doer who is free from attachment and egotism, who is full of resolution and zeal is said to be of the nature of *sattva*, goodness.\*" Sri *M.* also hints that though the teacher works the whole day long for him, yet he cannot accept school work as his work or Thakur's work. Because of this his mind is restless, it has no peace. To cure the teacher of this weakness, he assumes the attitude of what Thakur called 'the best doctor', who kneels on the chest of the patient to force medicine down his unwilling throat. He orders him to take up work quite outside the routine even though he does not like it.

The teacher has the following duties to perform: to render a little service to Sri *M.*'s body, to officiate for Sri *M.* at different places and with different persons at Sri *M.*'s orders, to bring Sri *M.* report of lectures delivered in various religious places, to see the *Kathamrita* through the press and correct the press proofs, to meet foreigners at Sri *M.*'s request and discuss religion with them and to render service to the devotees to the extent possible. The teacher attends tirelessly to all these matters. Besides, he listens to Sri *M.*'s nectar like words during the whole day and records them at night. Sometimes it so happens that he is unable to write out the whole narrative even when he keeps awake

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\* Gita, XVIII: 26

throughout the night. His hours of sleep are from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. At three he has to rise for meditation and continue it till six. Like Thakur, Sri *M.* also cannot keep with him a devotee of unstable mind who would not meditate. Over and above all this he has to cook food for himself and of course attend to his school work. There has been a time when the teacher could not get leisure for years to sleep at night. He would record Sri *M.*'s words till three in the morning, and after three sleeping was prohibited – it was the time of meditation! Sri *M.*'s religious congregation would begin at 4 p.m. daily and end at 10 p.m. By the time one took one's dinner it was eleven.

Though prepared to work so hard the teacher was not able to accept the school work as Sri *M.*'s work. Why so? On analysing his own mind he could arrive at a single cause, the company of other teachers. They complained interminably. By listening to them dissatisfaction had entered his mind too without his knowledge. Sri *M.* had, however, seen this with his penetrating insight. For the spiritual aspirant even the company of teachers is bad. Even though their complaints were legitimate, for the aspirant teacher they were mostly injurious. Whatever may be the cause of dissatisfaction, it prevented his mind from uniting with the feet of his Ideal Deity. And it is only for the sake of constant union with his Ideal Deity that the devotee teacher had forsaken everything to take shelter under Sri *M.* Sri *M.* has become 'the best doctor' today – a guru full of compassion, eager to uproot this dissatisfaction. Outwardly he is hard but inside him he has the selfless love of a thousand mothers. It is with this love that Sri *M.* is going to eradicate the main cause of the dissatisfaction generated by natural ignorance – seeing difference in different works.

Sri *M.*, a most intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the great teacher with the keenest same-sightedness, gave a most deadly blow to the proud mind of the devotee teacher. Though there were so many teachers in the office room, he asked only the devotee teacher to attend to the extra work. He was going to cure him of his predilection of seeing different works differently.

The teacher attended to the work quietly if unwillingly and left for the Maidan for a stroll, his mind full of anger and wounded vanity. The next four hours of solitude made him see his shortcomings. Thought he: "I am here with Sri *M.* to gain devotion and faith in Thakur. There is no other aim but this. I must, therefore, obey Sri *M.* with an unruffled mind, ungrudgingly. Whether it is school work or personal service to Sri *M.* I must take both as one and the same. I must render service to Sri *M.*, please him and by his grace gain constant devotion and knowledge of Thakur, for it is in this hope that I am living with him. Unnecessarily have I filled my mind with vanity, discriminating between one work and another. I shall have to atone for my ignorance." Having so resolved, the teacher returned to the feet of Sri *M.* Though he had done so, there was still a tinge of pride left in him. This had made him stone dumb. He would neither utter a word nor smile.

Like a mother coming down to lower levels, Sri *M.*, talked and joked any amount with the devotees just to bring a smile on the face of the teacher. But a cloud of vanity covered his face. Accepting defeat, Sri *M.* talked to the devotees.

Sri *M.* (to the bhaktas): Perhaps it is not right to smile after work. Babus (educated men) think it is best not to work. Only they do not know that dispassion comes quickly after working long and hard. Every work is Thakur's – the knowledge of this fact leads to dispassion, dispassion for the world and passion for the Lord.

Sri *M.* had noticed the return of the teacher by the lantern light but he

dissimulated and continued to talk.

Sri *M.* (to devotees, with a meaningful smile): Jagabandhu Babu has not returned?

A devotee: He has.

Sri *M.* speaks after a while to the devotees as if joking: ‘Here is a very interesting story. A person had a bullock and a horse. He would keep the bullock yoked throughout the day. The bullock complained to the horse about it. The horse replied, “When you are yoked tomorrow use your hind-legs a bit.” The bullock did so. The result was that the farmer left the bullock alone and yoked the horse instead.’ (General laughter.)

Sri *M.*: But this is not the end of the story. There is another chapter to it. The horse had a hard task pulling the plough. So he said to the bullock: “Look here. Tomorrow they are going to cut you into pieces, cook and eat you up. You have become useless, you see.” The bullock was frightened. He said to the horse, “How can I be saved now?” The horse replied, “Then do not strike your legs any more.” The next day the farmer again put the bullock to the plough. (A burst of laughter).

The teacher is, however, still silent – not a ripple on his face. Sri *M.* looks at him with an eye full of love and curiosity. The teacher’s face is still overcast.

Sri *M.* then tells another moral tale veiling it with mirth.

(To the devotees): There was a man, the husband of a shrew. Finding it, impossible to tame her he left in disgust, in what is, called *markat vairagya*, renunciation without real distaste for worldly pleasures. On his way to another country he had a stream to cross. He sat down on the bank waiting for a boat to take him across, his mind full of sorrow. He loved his children; even the wife was still in his thoughts. While he was gloating over them he saw a flock of hens from a nearby village pecking here and there. The flock consisted of one cock and eight hens. Whenever a hen wanted to go astray the cock would run to it and peck it back to the flock. This happened several times.

Seeing this the man had a brain wave. Said he, “I say, if this cock can manage eight of his wives why can’t I manage my one?” And the man returned home. As soon as he took to the *cock policy* he was able to set everything right. Gentleness had to be combined with harshness. (General laughter).

Sri *M.* himself follows the same policy with his devotees. It is either the horse policy or the cock policy. He puts his devotees to the very task they are disinclined to do. When they show anger born of frustration he strikes but once with the sword of knowledge and eradicates it to the root. Thereafter he applies the healing balm, the cool and gentle *Kathamrita* (the nectar of His words) over the wound. Thus, the devotee begins to march ahead on the path of peace in spite of himself with added joy. Where else can one find such loving forbearance, such affectionate far-sightedness, such selfless grace except in a teacher imbued with the powers of an avatara?

But the teacher would not smile even now. Though inwardly his vanity had been crushed, the outer veil still persisted. Sri *M.*’s mother-like mind melted; he said again to the devotees, “Perhaps one does not smile after work.”

Gadadhar: But sir, you yourself said that it’s good to have *markat vairagya* (renunciation without real distaste for worldly pleasures).

Sri *M.*: Yes, because it leads to genuine *vairagya* (dispassion). Desire leads to

desirelessness. Fall into (any kind of) *vairagya* and it is done. From renunciation to love – this is the right kind of *vairagya*. Simply renouncing the world is not of much avail. One needs to love God.

The meeting ended after 9 p.m. The devotees left. The teacher entered his tin cabin and Sri *M.* went to his.

It was 10 p.m. when Sri *M.* called the teacher to his room and said, “Tomorrow is the birthday of the Holy Mother. You will please buy a bleached *dhoti* with a thin red border.”

This touch of affection tore the superficial veil of the teacher’s vanity. He said with joy, “Yes sir, I shall bring it in the morning. Only then I shall go to the Math.”

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Last year, on the 16th of December, the students and teachers of the Morton Institution had attended a lantern slide lecture in the compound of the school. The subject was: History of the Brahmo Samaj and the speaker was Jnananjan Niyogi. Sri *M.* had taken his seat amongst the students with his devotees. Phani of Dacca who had been a devotee student at Mihijam was also sitting close by.

Seeing Phani, the devotees were reminded of the happy days of Mihijam – the sunrise on the vast expanse of land in the morning, the grave loneliness of the night and the sweet Veda-like intonations from Sri *M.*’s lips: ‘Thakur is that very person the Vedas have praised.’ Oh, such sweet memories!

Morton Institution, Calcutta. 17 December 1924 A.D.

## 44. SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA AND SRI MA DARSHAN

Sailen Ghosh

Sri Sailen Ghosh has read the *Kathamrita* and *Sri Ma Darshan* with reverence and devotion – the *sine qua non* of all spiritual study – if the object is not literary or social curiosity but to imbibe the life-transforming wisdom of seers and saints. In the following article Sri Ghosh touches briefly on the most salient features of the two spiritual documents mentioned above in his own style.

**“...Sri M. merged himself in the personal aspect of Sri Ramakrishna and preached the Gospel by living the Gospel.”**

*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is one of the very few examples in the world of how the divine splendour of a spiritual personality can emanate through a biographical medium and can effectuate casting persons of various mentality into a spiritual mould. In the *Kathamrita*, the original whiteness of Sri Ramakrishna Light has been maintained as a consequence of the writer’s (Sri M.’s) stupendous power of withholding any personal contamination to intervene.

Through the Gospel, the *Kathamrita* the divine felicity incarnate in Sri Ramakrishna pours into the suffering humanity, and this revelation has been able to retain its native luminosity and puissance because of the transparency of the writer’s (Sri M.’s) mental set-up.

While composing the diary records for publication in book form, Sri M., we are given to understand on authentic sources, practised all sorts of ascetic austerities for maintaining physical and mental purity, and thus the chords of the writer’s heart were purified to seize all nuances of the supra-physical subtleties of Thakur’s sayings. Indeed we cannot fail to note, in this connection, the significant work done by Swami Nityatmananda in presenting us with a faithful record of Sri M.’s sayings with reference to the *Kathamrita* and Sri M.’s mode of teaching in *Sri Ma Darshan* (in 15 Vols.)\* wherein we read with a reverential surprise that about 85% of the sadhus of Sri Ramakrishna Math had their initial inspiration from the *Kathamrita* and left their all for the All-in-all. This itself signifies the dimension of the unique achievement rendered in spiritual domain of humanity by this *Gospel*.

Sri M. repeated the actions of Thakur, (like bowing before the temples, churches and mosques etc., lying prostrate before the Radha-Krishna temple of Dakshineswar facing northwards, embracing the same particular pillar of the Natamandir in Dakshineswar Temple compound, in the fashion done formerly by Sri Ramakrishna in a state of trance) in exact imitation, as if playing the same role over again. In a way Sri M. merged himself in the personal aspect of Sri Ramakrishna by such actions and preached the *Gospel* by living the *Gospel*. We note with delight the poignant relevance the memorable saying of Swami Vivekananda has in this perspective: “Keep aside the

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\* Now in 16 volumes [Ed.]

scriptures; be thou a living *Gospel*,” emphasizing thus the most effective way of making the ideal real.

In *Sri Ma Darshan* we come across some references made by *Sri M.* regarding the *Kathamrita* which bear great significance, such as –

1) ‘The sayings of the *Kathamrita* were heard directly by *Sri M.* from Thakur; they were not collections of a historian or an antiquarian’, asserts *Sri M.* with emphasis in answer to a question.\*

2) *Sri M.* predicts elsewhere that the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna will spread far and wide as the country rises higher gradually and ultimately reaches its zenith.\*

It is not worthwhile burdening the present writing with quotations; the point that deserves attention is that (1) the teachings of the *Kathamrita*, and (2) *Sri M.*’s practice of living the ideals of those teachings are the two aspects of the spiritual personality of Sri Ramakrishna and one can hardly isolate the one from the other without causing a painful mutilation in the plenitude of this spiritual phenomenon that came into manifestation recently in world history.

The fusion of the three in one, (1) the *Kathamrita* (2) the practical life of *Sri M.* and (3) Sri Ramakrishna around whom orbit the first two appear to an aspirant’s mind as justification of the supreme mystic truth of “unity in triplicity” that endures for ever in the heart of creation – devotion, devotee and the devoted – three faces of the One and the Sole. *Om Tat Sat!*

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\* *Sri Ma Darshan*, Bengali, Vol. VI, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., pp. 104 – III.

# EPILOGUE

## Ishwar Devi Gupta

Srimati Ishwar Devi Gupta while wishing to thank all those who have been associated with the production of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial* talks briefly in the following lines about the genesis of SRI MA TRUST (*Sri Ramakrishna Sri Ma Prakashan Trust*) and its founder Swami Nityatmananda. In January 1960, when she was lying gravely ill in the Government Medical College Hospital, Amritsar, it occurred to her that if Thakur spared her life it should only be devoted to help publish Swami Nityatmananda's work – Sri Ma Darshan, now in 16 volumes. By Thakur's grace her wishes have been fulfilled.

Srimati Ishwar Devi Gupta is the President of Sri Ma Trust.

### “... in Sri Ramakrishna's service”

*“By this unselfish work, by this labour of love may we realize your real nature, Ramakrishna, God-incarnate on earth. May we have peace and happiness! May all beings of the universe be peaceful and happy! May the entire universe be the abode of peace and happiness real and eternal!”*

With these last words of his prayer, Swami Nityatmananda created *Sri Ma Trust* in December 1967 in memory of his first Guru, Sri M. It is a charitable institution dedicated in particular to the service of humanity by propagating Sri Ramakrishna's teachings as enunciated by Sri M.

Swami Nityatmananda had the privilege of living with Sri M. from his green youth. Under his guidance and inspiration Swami Nityatmananda, then Jagabandhu Roy, studied for his B.L. degree – and joined the Belur Math. Revered Swami Shivananda Maharaj, the second President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna gave him the *gerua* and admitted him to the great Order as a sannyasin of Sri Ramakrishna. Later, after the demise of Sri M. and the passing away of other intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Nityatmananda came to Rishikesh. There he found the first joy and peace, never tasted before, of the life of holy begging. There also he began to read through his diaries – the collection of the immortal words of the Master and Sri M. which he had preserved in a bundle for a long time like Yaksha's treasure. At the request, nay demand, of the all renouncing tapasvi sadhus and bhaktas of Rishikesh, he began to make fair copies of the materials with him. As if by Thakur's will, this flowered into one of the great religious works – *Sri Ma Darshan* in Bengali and Hindi and 'M., *the Apostle and the Evangelist*' in English. Sri Ma Trust has published these works for the benefit of community without distinction of caste, creed or colour, in Sri Ramakrishna's service.

Sri Ma Trust has recently been able to construct a block of rooms in Sector 19-D, Chandigarh. This small building, the foundation of which was laid by Swami Nityatmananda himself, has been named *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Peeth*. It is from here that the Trust hopes ultimately to continue its activities.

By Thakur's will, it occurred to a *sevak-santan* of Swami Nityatmananda, in the summer of 1979, that the Trust should celebrate the Centenary of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* suitably. A decision was then taken by the Trust to bring out a



commemorative volume in February 1982 and name it *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial*.

With the blessings of the revered President Maharaj of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math and the other sadhus of Ramakrishna and the help of devotees and friends it has been possible to bring out this publication as a token of our great reverence for the *Kathamrita* and its blessed recorder Sri *M.*

We offer gratefully our pranams to all sadhus and mahatmas and all our brothers and sisters who have helped us so lovingly. Recalling the words of Sri *M.* – ‘I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean...’ – we pledge ourselves anew to selfless service at the feet of our Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

*Om Satya Brahman Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita nishchaya!*