

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGIN OF THE MOVEMENT

When Sri Ramakrishna had attained perfection in all the sadhanas and had become firmly established in *Bhava mukha*, he came to certain conclusions regarding himself and spiritual matters in general. Regarding himself he had the conviction that he was an Incarnation of God, an *Adhikarika Purusha* all of whose spiritual strivings were for the sake of others; that as long as the work of *Iswara's* doing good to *jivas* continues, he has to reincarnate himself from age to age and carry out that mission; that he knew the time of his passing away long before his *mahasamadhi*. Regarding spiritual matters in general he came to realize both by reason and through his yogic insight that all religions are true and the various faiths are but so many paths to The One Godhead; his advent was to reveal this truth to the world and arrest the decline of religions and the quarrelling among themselves; the doctrines of dualism, qualified monism and monism influenced each one according to his spiritual progress; they are not contradictory, but complimentary to one another, depending on the evolution of the human mind; the non-dual state of Consciousness which is beyond the range of thought and word, is the ultimate goal to be realized; only the state up to qualified non-dualism can be grasped, by the mind and intellect and expressed in words, and in that state both the Absolute and the relative are equally eternal; the Lord Himself, His Name and His Abode are all of pure Consciousness; to the ordinary people attached to worldly enjoyments, the practice of dualism consisting in the disciplines of singing aloud the Lord's name and form, His glory and powers, as presented in *Narada Pancharatra*, one of the devotional scriptures, is commendable; that performing one's duty with a spirit of resignation to the will of and solely depending on God, the constant singing of God's name together with meditation on Him which is Karma Yoga

in practice is befitting the people of this age; that the Mother of the Universe would found through him a new Movement to disseminate these universal doctrines illustrated in his own life; and that She would send dedicated bands of workers who would accept him as their ideal and spread his liberal doctrines and spiritual teachings to the world.¹

Thus, the Ramakrishna Movement in its twin aspects of Math and Mission is the Divine Will of the Mother of the Universe crystallized into an organisation through Sri Ramakrishna and his apostles led by Swami Vivekananda. “Returning to India at the beginning of 1897, the Swami (Vivekananda) had given lavishly of his unlimited spiritual and intellectual powers in an attempt to restore the greatness of his beloved Motherland, a greatness deeply rooted, as he again and again reminded the Indian people, in their ancient and incomparably rich religious heritage.

Through many lectures and innumerable informal talks Swami had outlined his programme for the revival of a strong, spiritually oriented India, vigorous on all levels of thought and activity. Over and over, in a cascade of words, he had exhorted the Hindu people to live by and for the great ideals that had sprung from the very soul of the country itself, and to make them real. ‘By stimulating (the Hindu people) I want to bring life into them’ he had said; ‘to this I have dedicated my life. I will rouse them through the infallible power of Vedic Mantras. I am born to proclaim to them that fearless message - Arise! Awake!!’. He wanted to convert India’s deep-rooted and highly honoured institution of *sannyasa* or monasticism, into an organised force that would, through service, regenerate the country materially, intellectually, culturally, and, above all, spiritually. To this end, he had organised the Ramakrishna Math and Mission setting in motion the “machine” that was to carry on his work forward and from which his Master’s teachings would spread and, as he said, ‘penetrate the world to the very bone’.²

The Movement is thus founded with the sole purpose of preserving and propagating the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna whose “religious activity and experiences were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius in India or elsewhere;”³ whose life “is a story of religion in practice and enables us to see God face to face”;⁴ and “who more fully than any other man not only conceived, but realised in himself the total unity of this river of God, open to all rivers and all streams and who was a rare combination of individuality and universality, personality and impersonality and whose word and example have been echoed in the hearts of Western men and women and whose soul animates modern India”.⁵

None can deny the fact that the Ramakrishna Movement has become a mighty source of power and glory. It has become a living symbol of Truth, Service, Renunciation, Universal Peace and Harmony in a world torn by mutual hatred and discord.

Naturally, then, the question rises, if this Movement is a new shoot of an old tree or a new shoot of a new tree. As in the case of the glacier ‘Gomukh’ giving birth to the mighty Ganga, a tide of noble thoughts with vast mass of spiritual energy flew out of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and manifested as the Ramakrishna Movement.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, many of the disciples had returned home and practicing their spiritual sadhanas. One night Sri Ramakrishna appeared to Surendranath in a dream and asked him, “Well Suren! What are you doing? Don’t you see my children have no home to live together and they are living on biksha from door to door? Why not spend the money you spent on me when I was sick at Cossipore?” At this, Suren ran to Narendra and requested him to hire a house and that he will bear all the expenses. Narendra could get a haunted house located at 125/1, Pramanik Ghat

Road, Baranagar, midway between Dhakshineswar and Kolkata. The rent was fixed at Rs.11/- per month.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna describes the monastery as follows:

‘The southernmost room of the first floor was used for meditation, contemplation, and study..... North of this room was the worship room, and north of that, again, was the room where the offerings for the worship were prepared..... North of the ‘offering room’ was the room of the ‘danas’ (demons), a very long hall where the members of the Math used to assemble..... North of this hall was a small room where the devotees took their meals. East of the worship room....ran a long verandah, at the southwest corner of which was the library of a society of Baranagar. At the back of the house, there was a vegetable garden with drum stick trees, a ‘Vilva’ tree, a few coconut trees and a mango tree. There was also a pond. Greens and vegetables were not grown much in the garden..... The interior of the Math’s ground floor, having been unoccupied for a long time, was full of wild plants and shrubs. It had become a haven for jackals and reptiles, and no one would go there out of fear’.

In this room Narendra used to deliver talks on every religious subject. Under the leadership of Narendra, whom Sri Ramakrishna described as ‘The one endowed with 18 powers’, many devotees gathered at the Baranagar Math. The exact date of founding the Baranagar Math was 19th October 1886. At this math they took the vows of Sannyasa. Narendra reminded his brother disciples of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and he roared; “Let man making be the goal of our lives; let us make this only sadhana; away with the vain learning; realization of the God is the one thing; we may become filled with that spirit. We must attain the true manhood and manifest our real nature and we must realize God.” These teachings of Narendra electrified the hearts of every other. It unified all of them behind the sole purpose of the great ideal of the Ramakrishna Movement “Atmano Mokshartham, Jagad hitaya cha.”

Later on his return from the west, Swamiji organized the movement in the name of ‘The Ramakrishna Mission’ on 1st May 1897 and registered it in 1909 Act XXI of 1860. There were some meek protest by some of his brother disciples, but they also fell in line with the explanations offered by Swamiji. Thus Ramakrishna Movement is a new organization working for the salvation of the humankind by means of ‘Seva Yoga’.

It is a common recurrence in the history of religions that the urge of a race to sustain itself against the ravages of time expresses itself in the advent of a prophet of uncommon spirituality and unlimited possibilities. From time to time the world tends to forget the teachings of the Great Masters. The strange spectacle of the followers of the great teachers of love, harmony and peace wandering away from the spirit and action of the teachings of their Masters is too common. It is at such periods of darkness and confusion that the bounties of Providence flow to humanity in a generous flood by the advent of Supermen. Though every inch divine, they are intensely human. They live among men, in close touch with them, fully alive to the sorrows and joys of life. Though they move in close proximity to peasants and plebeian and among aristocrats and the sophisticated, yet they are ever immersed in the depths of the Spirit and never lose sight of the Transcendental and supramundane. Through stories and parables they impart to seekers the high truths of religion and thus become the fountain-head of inspiration to right behaviour in this slippery aftermath of earthly existence, pointing ever the way to the highest goal in life.

The ordinary run of humanity just happens to inhabit the earth for a while and pass out leaving no footprints on the sands of time. All their words and deeds are as evanescent as a cloud passing into nothingness. Some, not so ordinary, belonging to the mediocre type, having some stuff of permanence in their lives and deeds, make their exit affecting the immediate neighbours for a brief period. Their impress and impact wear out soon. There have been, again, souls of

extraordinary self-perfection and mystics of uncommon spiritual achievement. Such God-men look upon the phenomenon of life and its travails as no more than a passing mist. They merge in the Supreme, indifferent to what happens around them. Silently they come and silently they are one with the Whole. But there are few men of exceptional worth whose words and deeds get indelibly inscribed on the tablets of eternity. The passage of ages does not dim the fire in their message; generation after generation studies their lives, quotes their sayings, and gets inspired by their examples. Such Great Masters, very rare indeed, never feel that their life's work ends with their physical exit. Their mighty spiritual life alchemizes generations to come. Their advent is with a divine purpose: to re-establish righteousness, to open fresh highways to the Goal Supreme, to ensure preservation of spirituality, to save the soul of man from attrition. And to accomplish this, they leave behind them a Mission, whose task it is, to preserve and propagate their teachings. These are the *yuga-avatars* or the incarnations appearing from age to age.

Sri Ramakrishna is such an incarnation, in the line of Rama and Krishna, Buddha and Christ. As noted at the beginning, the purpose of his advent was to inspire a Movement for the regeneration of humanity, to work out in practice his ideals, to spread his teachings and make them penetrate the world to its very bone.

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna were delivered in simple village patois. His language was direct, free from technicalities and jargon of conjectures. They were the illuminating sparks from the glowing fire of his realizations, the soul-stirring outpourings of his love for God. His teachings are recorded in the 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' and other books on his life and teachings by his disciples. These are the faithful records of his *samvada* – conversations - with people in various moods and circumstances. What has come to us is only a fraction of what he taught. The histrionic skill and artistic sense with which he imparts his teachings to his audience, picture him as a charming, superb story-teller. His

teachings have already passed into humanity's religious heritage and have become the constant companions of his countless devotees everywhere.

Sri Ramakrishna is for all men and for all ages: there is an eternity in him, and his gospel is a perennial stream quenching the thirst of every mind that seeks it. His *amritavani* - immortal words - wear not with time; they have an undying charm in them. Through the thousand and odd pages of the Gospel bloom once again the Vedas and the Bible, the Gita and the Dhammapada. It is immensely rich in its suggestiveness to minds in various moods and stages of evolutionary process. His sayings appear simple on the surface, yet their profundity is staggering. Swami Vivekananda once declared that cartloads of books could be written on his teachings. It has enough food in it for the humblest beginner in religion as well as to the loftiest philosopher; to a bereaved soul, it is a sure source of consolation; to a sadhaka, an unfailing guide to the Goal Supreme; to a pundit, it is a handbook of theories; and to a philosopher, a treatise on the highest maxims of philosophical speculations. Thus there is enough to nourish every soul in that great book of life. No wonder, such a book must be infinite in suggestiveness and possibilities and perennial in its inspiration.

These teachings are the very plinth, pivot, pedestal and pillars of the Movement whose task it is to carry forward the Mission of its Inspirer who in his lifetime restored many a man to divine wholeness by demolishing impediments and obstructions by a mere glance, word or touch. The Ramakrishna Mission Association was started by Swami Vivekananda in May, 1897. So, the Movement is yet in its infancy. The evolution of the Movement must be considered co-eval with the spiritual evolution that has set in with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. The real magnitude, immensity and expansiveness of the spiritual experiences of the Great Master can only be registered by generations yet to come. The Movement's fidelity to the teachings of its inspirer and its effectiveness in executing those teachings are

commensurate with the success it registers in its contribution toward the task of stabilizing and actualizing the spiritual, religious, cultural and social traditions of Hindu religion in particular, and in upholding and preaching the sanctity and validity of all faiths of the world in general. The purpose of the Movement is fulfilled to the extent of perfection with which the universal and liberal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are brought to bear on the multifaceted activities of the Order the world over in various spheres of human life. A true evaluation of the impact of the Movement in the affairs of men can be attempted only by future historians.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE INSPIRER OF THE MOVEMENT

I

Lord Gadadhar: Kshudiram, your extraordinary devotion has made me very happy; I bless you and will be born as your son, and will receive your loving care.

Kshudiram: No, no, Lord, I am not worthy of such good fortune. Is it not enough that thou hast blessed me by graciously showing Thyself and wishing to be born? If Thou art really to be born as my son, what service could a poor man like me render?

The Lord: Do not fear, Kshudiram, I will relish whatever you give me to eat. Let My desire be fulfilled.¹

This occurred sometime during the winter of 1835. And, a year later on the 17th February, 1836, Sri Ramakrishna was born. The Descent of the Divinity had taken place once again; the religions of the world got a new lease of life; once again the world witnessed the fulfilment of the assurance of the Lord in His 'Song Celestial' that He would be born from age to age to re-establish religion; and the land of his nativity rejoiced at the glad tidings; for, as Swami Vivekananda, the bearer of the message of the 'Bearer of the Mace' declared at a later date, "Up, up, the long night is passing, the day is approaching, the wave has risen, nothing will be able to resist its tidal fury. Believe, believe, the decree has gone forth, the fiat of the Lord has gone forth, India must rise, the masses and the poor are to be made happy. REJOICE! The flood of spirituality has risen. I see it rolling over the land resistless, boundless, all-absorbing. Every man to the fore, every good will be added to its forces, every hand will smooth its way, and glory be unto the Lord!"

This *divya samvada* - the divine dialogue - between *Bhagavan* and *bhakta* reveals to man the purpose and method of Divine Descent.

And, thus it happened: Kshudiram, a shining specimen of rectitude and righteousness, was on a pilgrimage to Gaya, the holy Abode of Lord Gadadhar (Lord Vishnu as the Bearer of the Mace). From ancient times, Hindus have flocked to this holy centre of pilgrimage to discharge their obligations to the departed ancestors by offering them balls of rice and water at the sacred foot-print of Lord Vishnu. Kshudiram too, at the ripe age of sixty, journeyed to the holy city, and with due rites discharged his obligations to his forefathers. He was filled with joy at the thought that the Lord had made it possible for him to fulfil his ambition. When it was dark, he stretched himself in the holy precincts of the temple for the much needed rest. Scarcely had he fallen asleep when he had a divine dream. He saw the resplendent divine person of the Lord of the Universe surrounded by his ancestors in celestial bodies, beckoning him with benign and affectionate eyes, when the above dialogue took place.

This momentous event of the 'descent' of the Lord as a human being amply demonstrates, in an age of doubt and disbelief, atheism and materialism that an *avatara* is not just an idle guess or belief, but a verifiable fact of history, a real occurrence in the day to day world. And having taken a human birth, an *avatara* behaves like any human being outwardly, though he is not even for a moment removed from his own Power and Glory. It may be, that many do not understand him and his doings while he is in the human garb; many even misunderstand his extraordinary divine life and deeds and pass uncharitable judgements. May be, he is vilified by many as a crank, a self-deluded visionary, a misguided enthusiast. Yet, nothing retards his progress in his mission on earth; nothing diminishes his Power and Glory. Human and divine aspects alternate in him in such a natural way that many get confounded as to who he really is, and wonder, and ask "Is he a man or is he a god?". His ways are simple, yet are divinely sublime; he is as much a creature of time as any other; yet time carries on its head his foot print for eternity. And, an *avatara* does not wait till

the customary age of growth and maturity for commencing his life's mission. The process of carrying out the destined mission starts even from his childhood days. His childish pranks, and boyish waywardness are full of lessons for mankind in many ways.

The favourite pastime with the lad was fashioning out of clay, images of gods and goddesses. His keen sense for things beautiful, grand and mysterious found expression in the images he shaped into divine loveliness. He would sing and dance before the images, imitate the rites and rituals of worship and, often, for long stretches of time, be lost in deep meditation. In all his behaviour an innate reverence for temples, images of gods and goddesses, the singing friars, the *sannyasins*, and the sacred books considered holy by tradition was quite evident. His happiness and joy seemed to depend on nothing outside but appeared to be the result of inner harmony that mellowed underneath. He was not easily moved by pleasure and pain, much less provoked to anger, and he displayed a passion for truth and uprightness. Losing himself in divine rapture was his inborn trait. The charm of an infinite sky, darkened by rain clouds, suddenly lined across by a flying flock of lily white cranes; acting the part of Shiva dressed in all the paraphernalia pertaining to that God; a visit to a temple, or the chanting God's names - any one of these was enough to throw him into divine ecstasy. And, the purport of abstruse scriptural passages over which grey-haired learned pundits wrangled for hours, was all a fully revealed book unto him.

Though his mind was ever attuned to the supermundane, he was all eyes and ears to what was going on around him. Nothing escaped his all-knowing glance which measured things unerringly, probed events deeply and encompassed them widely. His keen observation and insight into the nature of people, had early unmasked the hypocritical and crooked ways of the world, which was too busy with the disturbing trivialities of life to think of anything loftier. The village elders, learned in the shastras, appeared to him like petty reservoirs of gathered drops of knowledge from books without any relationship to actual life. Though his eyes were always half-closed in a profound

withdrawnness, he was a very able judge of men and matters. He saw how pundits equated pedagogy with wisdom; how they discoursed on religion, God, and on topics of lofty philosophical import, without a full and direct knowledge of the subject of their discourses. All their learning was: “to bundle rice and plantain”, as he would often humorously say in his later years.

A spiritual Teacher as he was, often did he compare the superficial pundits to the group of blind men who tried to describe an elephant thus:-

“Once some blind men chanced to come near an animal that someone told them was an elephant. They were asked what the elephant was like. The blind men began to feel its body. One of them said the elephant was like a pillar; he had touched only its leg. Another said it was like a winnowing-fan; he had touched only its ear. In this way the others, having touched its tail or belly, gave their different versions of the elephant. Just so, a man who has seen only an aspect of God, limits God to that alone.”²

Sacred books are indeed to be revered and studied but they are not ends in themselves. They only point out the way to the Supreme, provide guide lines to God-realization. “To explain God”, Sri Ramakrishna would often point out, “after merely reading the Scriptures, is like explaining to a person the city of Benares after seeing it only in a map.” On the utility and futility of scholarship, Sri Ramakrishna says: “Do you know my attitude? Books, scriptures, and things like that only point out the way to reach God. After finding the way, what more need is there of books and scriptures? Then comes the time for action.”

“In the scriptures you will find the way to realize God. But after getting all the information about the path, you must begin to work. Only then can you attain your goal.”

What will it avail a man to have mere scholarship? A pundit may have studied many scriptures, he may recite many sacred texts, but if

he is still attached to the world and if inwardly he loves ‘woman and gold’, then he has not assimilated the contents of the scriptures. For such a man the study of scriptures is futile.

“The pundits talk big, but where is their mind fixed? On ‘woman and god’, on creature-comforts and money. The vulture soars very high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit. It is continually looking for charnel-pits, carcasses, and dead bodies.”³

When Sri Ramakrishna had attained school-going age, his elders got him formally admitted to a school. But he displayed a total indifference to study, particularly arithmetic. His elder brother tried to convince him, by appealing to his reason, of the need to possess a sound knowledge of the scriptures without which even self-maintenance would be difficult. When urged repeatedly to equip himself with learning to face the ‘problems of life’ boldly, he silenced his brother once and for all by a spirited retort: “Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and getting which one is satisfied for ever.” The voice of the Upanishadic sages rang once again through his reply; the spirit of an inspired India articulated yet again; the experience of countless sages and saints found a reassertion. And, he stuck, with tenacity all his own, to his decision and remained innocent throughout his life of all academic sophistries. His dedication to the pursuit of *para vidya* - the Science of the Supreme - was absolute and complete. The only art he cared to practise, the only science he desired to study, was God, God in all His immensity and fullness. He was just not interested in anything other than God. An immediate vision of Reality which would quench all thirst, fulfil all desires and still all doubts, was his goal in life.

When it was time to undergo the *upanayana* ceremony (ceremony of investiture with the Sacred Thread) as is the custom with a boy born into a Brahmin family, Sri Ramakrishna sprang yet another surprise on the entire village by accepting Dhani, a low-caste blacksmith woman, for his *bhiksha mata* (the alms-giving mother). By

long convention, only an elderly Brahmin lady of good reputation could share the privilege. Here we find a bold deed of open rebellion against a time-honoured custom based on the degenerate concept of caste system.

This obduracy on the part of Sri Ramakrishna to accept alms from the hands of Dhani, disregarding convention and defying the wishes of elders, is not just a whimsical act of a wayward boy; Dhani, though born in a low caste, was no less worthy than any other lady of a high caste by reason of her virtues of head and heart. Thus, with a single act, he had dealt a death blow to a social malady, and brought back to light the original significance and meaning of a harmless natural division among the various units forming the body of a community. He restored caste to its true significance and original values.

II

The First Vision of the Mother

In the year 1855, Sri Ramakrishna accompanied Ramkumar, his eldest brother, to Calcutta where he had opened a Sanskrit tol. After sometime he followed him to Dhakshineswar where the latter had been appointed to officiate as the priest of Mother Kali in the newly consecrated temple. Soon Sri Ramakrishna found himself as a priest in the Radhakanta Temple in the same compound. On his brother leaving for his native village Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna became the priest of Mother Kali, the presiding Deity of the Dhakshineswar Temple.

With his ushering in into the presence of the Divine Mother as Her priest, the Ramakrishna-revolution had its first stirring. Experimentation in the field of religions had begun; the making of a god-man was in progress; a great prophet of limitless expanse and extraordinary spiritual ability was being shaped into form by the

inscrutable will of the Divine Mother in the silent groves of Dhakshineswar; a mighty challenge to Western materialism and dogmatism, to theories of pragmatism and doctrines of agnosticism, was being built up. Silently, unobtrusively, a *samsaya rakshasa nasa mahastra* - the mighty weapon to destroy the devil of ignorance and doubt - was growing under the benign grace and tutelage of the Mother of the Universe. Sri Ramakrishna, the man-god, the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Indian sages, was being realized.

As a priest he dutifully and earnestly performed the daily rites and rituals in the temple. A mere intellectual comprehension of the Mother as *Sat-Chit-Ananda Swarupini* - the Embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute - did not satisfy him. He wanted to have an immediate vision of the Mother, to talk to Her and play with Her as tangibly as an earthly child would with its mother. He was a *sadhaka*, a seeker of God. A *sadhaka* is a spiritual knight-errant and Sri Ramakrishna was a knight-errant par excellence whose heroic adventures in the domain of spirituality have already passed into legend. His God-intoxicated soul, mounted on the steed of earnest sincerity, attacked the fortress of religion with the lance of Love-inebriated mind. A vision of the Divine Mother was the one thought that seized him at all hours of the day and night. An intense passion to behold her as a flesh and blood, reality was coursing through every vein. The flood-gate of his heart broke all barriers of restraint; he wept piteously before the image of the Mother pleading for a glimpse of Her. In great agony, he would plead with Her: "O Mother, where art Thou? Reveal Thyself to me. Ramprasad saw Thee and obtained Thy divine grace. Am I a wretch that Thou dost not come to me? I don't want wealth, friends, relatives, enjoyment of pleasures and so on. O Mother, do show Thyself to me."

With his characteristic zeal, he pursued his sadhana; he had no patience with a lukewarm approach; he never believed in stopping at half-way houses: his ideal was *charaiveti* - Be ever on the move till you reach the goal. No sacrifice was too big for him to achieve the object. And, with him, to think was to act. The correspondence

between thought, word, and deed was absolute and perfect in him. Thus days and nights rolled on in fervent prayers and intense meditation; the world had lost its meaning for him. The madness to verify the truth of religion had seized him. And this verification began with the Divine Mother, who remained his first love throughout his life. With each passing day, his longing for a vision gained in intensity but the Mother did not respond to his call.

To quote his own words: "I was then suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the Mother. I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered by a great restlessness, and I feared that it might not be my lot to realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation any longer; life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped up like a madman and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. What happened after that externally, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother; the buildings with their different parts, the temple and all, vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead was a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of consciousness of Spirit. As far as the eyes could reach, its shining billows were madly rushing towards me, from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! In the twinkling of an eye they were on me and engulfed me completely. I was panting for breath. I was caught in the billows and fell down senseless."⁴

Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Mother of the Universe in a stone image at a time when there was much vilification of image worship. It was one of the many poisonous arrows that an assailant critic invariably carried in his quiver of hatred for the orthodox Hindu faith; he never missed an opportunity of the sadistic pleasure of discharging it at unsuspecting loyalists. And, to add to the folly, some ego-centric, self-deluded, westernized and self-proclaimed reformers

from the native soil too joined the band wagon of foreign assailants and ridiculed, through speeches and writings, the very concept of image worship. Condemnation of idol worship, of images of gods and goddesses held holy and dear by the vast majority of natives, was the weapon they made use of for reforming men and society.

Unaware of what was going on around him, Sri Ramakrishna scaled the highest summit of spiritual experiences through image worship, and revealed to the world its real meaning and significance in the life of a *sadhaka*. What he did has thus a tremendous significance to all seekers. He demonstrated a correct perspective of image worship and proved its usefulness for the vast majority of persons as the easiest and natural path to self-perfection. True, the highest form of worship is to perceive the Supreme Godhead in the self, and the Self in all. But, very few have attained that level of wisdom. For the vast majority, an easier path had to be contrived to focus their minds in contemplation of the Supreme. And towards this end image worship is a valid and helpful discipline.

This vision of the Mother was only the beginning of his extraordinary life crowded as it was with visions unheard of in the religious history of the world. He was not satisfied with a partial knowledge. He yearned to drink deep at the Divinity. He wanted to taste the cake of the Blissful Absolute from every side. He had no patience with one-sided knowledge and in later years he used to relate the story of a man who asserted that the chameleon had only one colour, to highlight the folly of preaching with a partial knowledge of Truth.

"Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: 'When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green.' Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last they started

quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied: 'Yes. I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey, and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now has a colour, and now it has none.'

"In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes; then again He has none."⁵

III

Dvaita Sadhana

Sri Ramakrishna now wished to experience the Mother through all these paths within Hinduism. He wanted to know Her through Her various names and forms. Soon, he took to the attitude of Hanuman, the greatest devotee of the Lord in His incarnation as Rama, and was blessed with a vision of Mother Sita.

To quote his own words on the process and result of his *dasya sadhana* (i.e. spiritual striving taking on the attitude of a servant to his Master): "By constant meditation, on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them, they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth round the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, 'Raghuvir!' My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, my coccyx enlarged by

about an inch. It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of the mind had passed on the completion of that course of discipline. In short, everything about me was more like a monkey than a human being. One day I was seated in the place now known as Panchavati in quite a normal state of mind - not at all entranced, when all of a sudden a luminous female figure of exquisite grace appeared before me. The place was illumined by her lustre. I perceived not her alone, but also the trees, the Ganga and everything. I observed that it was a human figure, being without such divine characteristics as three eyes and so on. But such a sublime countenance, expressive of love, sorrow, compassion, and fortitude, is not commonly met with even in goddesses. Slowly she advanced from the north towards me, looking graciously on me all the while. I was amazed and was wondering who she might be, when a monkey with a cry suddenly jumped and sat by her. Then the idea flashed within me that this must be Sita, whose whole life had been centred in Rama and who had only misery as her lot! In an excess of emotion I was about to fall at her feet crying, 'Mother', when she entered into my body, with the significant remark that she bequeathed the smile on her lips unto me. I fell unconscious on the ground, overpowered with emotion."⁶

Now, Sri Ramakrishna came to dwell always in a God-intoxicated state. There was no 'unripe ego' left in him; he had become all spirit and no matter; he was all soul and no flesh; he was all Mother and his 'I' was the ripe 'I', the 'I' of the Mother of the Universe. His behaviour, under the influence of divine moods, appeared abnormal and queer to common people around him. His spiritual ardour was equated with insanity; his spiritual ecstasies were attributed to serious nervous disorder and many thought his mind had become deranged. Soon, the entire village of Kamarpukur knew about it. His mother and elder brother Rameswar were much perturbed at this. They believed that the responsibility of matrimony and the love of a wife might tone down his religious frenzy and moderate his spiritual ardour. When Sri Ramakrishna was at his village home, they began a search for a suitable bride, keeping it a secret from Sri Ramakrishna. But the intelligent Sri Ramakrishna soon sensed it and lightened the burden of

his mother and brother by disclosing to them the house of his would-be wife. "Go and find the bride marked out with a straw, in Ramachandra Mukherji's house at Jayaramvati" - said he. And, in due course his marriage with Sri Sarada Devi was solemnized.

Sri Sarada Devi too chose Sri Ramakrishna for her husband of her own accord, even as he chose her of his own accord. One or two incidents from her life make this abundantly clear. When asked playfully by a woman on whose lap Sri Sarada Devi as a child was seated, as to whom she would like to marry among the group of men attending a *kirtan*, she lifted her tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna who was seated a little away in the group of men-listeners. Like Uma Haimavati of unmatched purity and innocence choosing Mahadeva, the personification of the rigour of penance and unworldliness, Sri Sarada Devi chose Sri Ramakrishna to aid and help him enact His Divine drama.

On his return to Dakshineswar after his marriage, he once again plunged into spiritual practices with his characteristic zeal and determination. This time his field of experimentation was the much-maligned and much-abused system of the esoteric Tantras. He sought and got the consent of the Divine Mother, and practised all the sixty-four Tantras under the guidance of Bhairavi Brahmani, a woman mendicant of remarkable spirituality and great scholarship in Tantric and Vaishnavite scriptures. Her real name was Yogeswari whom Sri Ramakrishna referred to as a part of Sri Yoga Maya (the Mystic Power of the Lord with which He deludes the world).

Tantra emphasizes the worship of God as Shakti, the embodied female Principle of the Ultimate Reality which is known, in Tantra terminology, as Chit or Consciousness, being identical with the Upanishadic Sat-Chit-Ananda, the Existence - Knowledge - Bliss Absolute. Attainment of identity with the Absolute Reality through Shakti *upasana* is the goal. So, Mother-worship claims the prime position in the scheme of Tantra *sadhana*, and unity with Her who is identical with Brahman in Her quiescent aspect is the culminating point of all Tantric disciplines.

Practising all the sixty-four Tantras maintaining complete chastity, and in utmost purity, Sri Ramakrishna saved the Tantra from all perversions and restored it to its original purity. His every Tantric discipline was characterised by a child-like simplicity and innocence. The details of the multiple *sadhanas* under the tutelage of Bhairavi Brahmani, the strange transformations that came over his personality at this period, the many mystic visions and supra-sensuous experiences that crowded all his waking hours, and the unique play of *vatsalya bhava* - the mood of filial affection - in this act of his Divine drama, sound like a fairy tale of bygone ages. Every page in his biography and the Gospel is a story, full of beauty and grace, of heroic exploits in the field of religion, of the old dust-covered pathways renewed and recast to new perfection, of breath-taking performances which throw a flood of enlightenment; on every subject covering religion and philosophy. Any sincere student of his life and teachings cannot but exclaim in wonder and reverence, 'O Ramakrishna, of Immortals, verily, thou art the Immortal bird with the widest wings, loveliest plumage, sharpest vision and farthest reach.'

Of his Tantric *Sadhana* and the many experiences that Sri Ramakrishna has left behind in his fascinating reminiscences, a few are captured here. "The Brahmani would go during the day to places far from Dakshineswar and collect the various rare things mentioned in the Tantric scriptures. At nightfall she would ask me to come to one of the *Asanas*. I would go, and after performing the worship of the Mother Kali I would begin to meditate according to her directions. As soon as I begin to tell my beads, I would be always overwhelmed with divine fervour and fall into a deep trance. I cannot relate now the varieties of wonderful visions I used to have. They followed each other in quick succession, and the effects of those practices I could feel most tangibly. The Brahmani put me through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantra books. Most of these were extremely difficult *Sadhanas* - some of them so dangerous that they cause the devotee to lose his footing and sink into moral degradation. But the infinite grace of the Mother carried me through them unscathed."

Of his remarkable experience of the upward march of the Kundalini Shakti, he says, “Something rises with a tingling sensation from the feet to the head. So long as it does *not* reach the brain I remain conscious, but the moment it does’ so, I am dead to the outside world. Even the functions of the eyes and the ears come to a stop, and speech is out of question. Who should speak? The very distinction between ‘I’ and ‘thou’ vanishes. Sometimes I think I shall tell you everything about what I see and feel when that mysterious power rises up through the spinal column. When it has come up to this, or even this (pointing to the heart and the throat), it is possible to speak, which I do. But the moment it has gone above this (pointing to the throat), somebody stops my mouth, as it were, and I am adrift. I make up my mind to relate to you what I feel when the Kundalini goes beyond the throat, but as I think over it, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end of the matter. When the mind reaches this point (the sixth centre, opposite the junction of the eyebrows), one catches a vision of the Paramatman and falls into Samadhi. Only a thin, transparent veil intervenes between the Jiva and the Paramatman.

“Well, that which rises to the brain with a tingling sensation does not always follow the same kind of movement. The scriptures speak of its having five kinds of motion. First, the ant-like motion; one feels a slow creeping sensation from the feet upwards, like a row of ants creeping on with food in their mouth. When it reaches the head, the *Sadhaka* falls into Samadhi. Second, the frog-like motion; just as frogs make two or three short jumps in quick succession and then stop for a while to proceed again in the same way, so something is felt advancing from the feet to the brain. When this reaches the brain the man goes into Samadhi. Third, the serpentine motion; as snakes lie quietly, straight or coiled up, but as soon as they find a victim, or are frightened, they run in a zigzag motion, in like manner the ‘coiled up’ power rushes to the head, and this produces Samadhi. Fourth, the bird like motion; just as birds in their flight from one place to another take to their wings and fly, sometimes a little high and sometimes low, but never stop till they reach their destination, so that power reaches the brain and Samadhi ensues. Fifth, and last, the monkey-like motion; as

monkeys going from one tree to another take a leap from one branch to another and thus clear the distance in two or three bounds, so the Yogi feels the Kundalini go to the brain and produce a trance.”⁷

An itinerant Vaisnavite monk named Jatadhari, so known evidently because of his twisted locks of hair, happened to visit Dhakshineswar on his pilgrimage at this time. Ramlala or the Boy Rama was his Chosen Deity and he carried a metal image of the Deity wherever he went. Jatadhari’s devotion to Rama had ripened so much that he had a continuous vision of Ramlala as a living Reality who ate and slept and sported with him. The mystic vision of Sri Ramakrishna soon found out the truth though Jatadhari had not revealed it to any; and then followed yet another fascinating story of the enchanting display of *vatsalya bhava* between Sri Ramakrishna and Ramlala. To recall his reminiscences: “The Babaji was the lifelong devotee of Ramlala, whom he carried wherever he went. He would cook whatever he got by begging, and offer it to him. He actually found that Ramlala took the food; sometimes he would demand something else. Again he would act like a spoilt child. Jatadhari was engaged day and night in the service of the image and was in a state of constant bliss. I could see the actions of Ramlala; so I used to spend the whole day with the Babaji watching him. Days passed in this way, and Ramlala became more and more intimate with me. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala was cheerful, but the moment I left, he followed me to my room I saw Ramlala as vividly as I see you all - now dancing gracefully before me, now springing on my back, or insisting on being taken up in my arms. Sometimes I would hold him on my lap. He would not remain there, but run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from thorny bushes, or jump into the Ganga. I would remonstrate saying, ‘Don’t run in the sun, your feet will get blistered. Don’t remain so long in water, you will catch cold and get fever.’ But Ramlala would turn a deaf ear. He would fix his beautiful eyes on me and smile One day I was going to bathe. Ramlala insisted on accompanying me. I took him with me. But he would not come out of the water, nor did he heed my remonstrance. Then I got angry, and pressing him under the water said, ‘Now play in it as much as you

like.’ Ah, I saw him struggling for breath. Then, repenting of my act I took him up in my arms. There was another incident that pained me greatly, and over which I wept bitterly. He insisted on having something which I could not supply. To divert him, I gave him parched rice not well husked. As he was chewing them I found that his tongue was scratched. The sight was too much for me. I took him on my lap and cried out, ‘Mother Kaushalya used to feed you with cream or butter with the greatest care, and I was so thoughtless as to give you this coarse stuff.’ The Babaji stayed here for a long time, because Ramlala would not go away from me, and the Babaji could not leave behind his dearly beloved Ramlala. One day Jatadhari came to me weeping and said, ‘Ramlala out of his infinite grace has fulfilled my desire. He has revealed himself to me in the form I prefer, but he has told me that he will not go, leaving you behind. But I am not distressed on that account. I am filled with joy to see him live here happily and play with you. I am satisfied when he is happy. I shall gladly leave him with you and go my way. It gladdens my heart to think that he is happy in your company’ ... With these words Jatadhari left Ramlala with me and bade adieu to Dakshineswar. Ever since, Ramlala has been here.”⁸

When he was practising *sakhya bhava*, he constantly meditated on himself as a woman servant of Lord Sri Krishna. Again, considering himself a servant of the Divine Mother, he would engage himself in the service of the Divine Mother, fanning her with chamara etc. He dressed himself in women’s apparel, lived in their midst and became so much identified with that idea that he totally forgot that he had a male body, and talked and behaved just like any woman. This intense thought brought about significant changes in his body too. Even Mathuranath and Hriday, who were his constant companions, mistook him for a female when he was with other women. And to the end of his life his body had retained certain feminine characteristics.⁹ When that *sadhana* was over, he took up the *vatsalya bhava*. His divine sport with Ramlala, his relationship with Bhairavi Brahmani and also with Kali was rooted in this *bhava*. Another striking instance of *vatsalya bhava* in his life can be seen in his relation with Aghoremani Devi (or Gopaler Ma as she came to be known among his

devotees). She was an indigenous child-widow, living in a temple on the Ganges. Gopala or Baby Krishna was her Chosen Deity and she devoted most of her time to telling beads and serving Baby Krishna. The austere discipline and unceasing remembrance of and devotion to Gopala had become so crystallized that Gopala was a flesh and blood reality to her, sporting with her in various ways. The fickle and nimble Gopala engaged her in endless pranks and mischief-making. Of her, Sri Ramakrishna says: “The Brahmani of Kamarhati sees many visions. She lives all by herself in a lonely room in a garden on the bank of the Ganges. She spends her time in *japa*. Gopala sleeps with her. It is not imagination, but fact. She saw that Gopala’s palms were red. He walks with her. She suckles Him at her breast. They talk to each other. When Narendra heard the story he wept.”¹⁰

Sri Ramakrishna’s attitude of filial affection to Gopaler Ma is powerfully reminiscent of Krishna’s days with Mother Yasoda. To quote from his biography: “One morning, at 3 O’clock, in the spring of 1885, Aghoremani, according to her usual routine, sat to tell her beads. After the *japa* she was about to surrender the fruits of it to her chosen Ideal, when she was startled to find that Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on her left, with his right fist clenched. She thought in wonder, what is this! What on earth could bring him here at this hour?” We shall tell of her experience in her own words: “While I looked at him wondering how he came there, he kept on smiling. Picking up courage I caught hold of his left hand; suddenly the figure vanished and in place of it appeared the real Gopala, of this size (indicating it), who crawled towards me and raising one arm, with his eyes fixed on me, (O the beauty of it!) lisped, ‘Mamma, give me butter!’ I was so surprised! I cried aloud with joy. It was a lonely place, or a crowd would have gathered. I said weeping, ‘Alas, I am a poor and helpless widow. Where shall I get cream and butter for you, my child?’ But Gopala would not listen to me. ‘Give me something to eat’ he said again and again. Weeping I got up and brought him some dry coconut candies. ‘Gopala my darling’ I said, ‘I offer you this wretched thing, but don’t give me such a poor thing in return.’ I could not perform *japa* that day. Gopala sat on my lap, snatched my rosary away, jumped

on my shoulders and moved about in the room! As soon as the day broke, I hastened like an insane woman to Dakshineswar. Gopala accompanied me, resting his head on my shoulder. Pressing him against my breast I walked all the way. His tiny ruddy feet I clearly saw hanging over my breast.”

Golap Ma, one of the women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, who was present on the occasion, describes as follows the events that followed Gopaler Ma’s visit to Sri Ramakrishna. “It was seven or half past seven in the morning. I was sweeping the Master’s room, when I heard somebody advancing towards it crying, ‘Gopala, Gopala!’ The voice, which seemed familiar, came nearer and nearer. At last I found it was Aghoremani, almost mad, with dishevelled hair, staring eyes, and the end of her cloth trailing on the ground. Dead to all considerations of the body or the outside world, she entered the room through the eastern door. Sri Ramakrishna was then seated on his smaller bedstead. I was speechless with wonder to see her in that state. The Master, in the meantime, had fallen into a trance. Aghoremani drew near and sat beside him. He, like a child, sat on her lap. Tears were flowing profusely from her eyes. She had brought cream, butter, and other delicacies with her, with which she was feeding the Master. I was extremely surprised, for never before had I seen the Master touching a woman in a state of trance. I only heard that long ago he used to sit on the lap of his teacher, the Bhairavi Brahmani, as her child, when she was inspired with the sentiments of Yashoda, the mother of Krishna. After some time the Master was restored to normal consciousness and returned to his bedstead. But the floodgate of emotions had been opened in the heart of Aghoremani, and she was still on another plane of consciousness. In rapturous ecstasy she danced about the room. Noticing this, the Master said to me with a smile, ‘Look at her. She is steeped in bliss. Her mind has fled to the region of Gopala’. Flooded with emotions, Aghoremani began to talk with Sri Ramakrishna in words which were scarcely intelligible to the outsider. “Here is Gopala, in my arms,” – “Now he enters into you,” “There, he has emerged again,” “Come, my darling, to your afflicted mother.” Thus did she describe the movements of the nimble Gopala.

Thenceforth Aghoremani came to be called Gopala’s Mother. Sri Ramakrishna warmly congratulated her on this unique realization. To quiet her, he began to stroke her chest, and shared with her whatever dainties he had. Even while partaking of them she, still in a state of ecstasy, said, “Gopala, my dear, your mother has led a most unhappy life on earth. She had to earn her livelihood by spinning. Is that why you are so loving today?”¹¹

Next he practised the *madhura bhava* or the ‘sweet mood’ of love between a mistress and her lover which is the highest form of Vaishnava *sadhanas*. To quote Swami Saradananda, his biographer: “Engaged in the *sadhana* of the *madhura bhava*, the Master became anxious to use dress and ornaments proper to a woman. Knowing that desire of his, the greatly devout Mathuranath (the proprietor of the temple) had the pleasure of adorning him now with a precious Varanasi saree, now with a ghagri, a gauze scarf and a bodice. Desirous to make father’s (i.e. Sri Ramakrishna’s) female dress perfect in all respects, Sri Mathur decked him with of artificial hair, and a set of gold ornaments. Adorned in such dress and ornaments, the Master gradually merged so much in the mood of the women of Vraja, desirous to have the love of Sri Hari, that the consciousness that he was a male person disappeared altogether and every thought, word or movement of his became womanly. The Master, we were told by himself, was thus in a woman’s dress for six months under the faith that he was the spiritual wife of God, the Husband.

“Desirous of having the vision of Sri Krishna and of getting Him as his spiritual Husband, the Master now performed the service and worship of the Divine Mother. He then engaged himself in the service of the holy feet of Sri Krishna with an undivided mind, and spent his days in eager prayer and longing. That eager prayer in his heart never ceased at any time - neither during the day nor during the night. That prayer became gradually converted into copious weeping and longing into restlessness, an anxious pining away for the beloved and a sort of madness, and made him give up food, sleep, etc. We have heard from the Master himself that drops of blood oozed out then at times from

every pore of his body under the powerful sense of the separation from Sri Krishna; all the joints of the body looked slackened or almost dislocated, the senses completely desisted from functioning and the body lay motionless and unconscious sometimes like that of a dead man - all because of the extreme anguish of the heart.

“Understanding that the attainment of the vision of Sri Krishna was impossible without Sri Radha’s grace, the Master now applied himself thoroughly to gaining her favour and, lost in the remembrance and reflection of her form, the very embodiment of love, he incessantly offered at her lotus feet the ardent emotions of his heart; consequently, he was very soon blessed with the vision of the holy form of Sri Radha, devoid of the slightest tinge of lust. He now saw that this form also disappeared into his own body like the forms of other *devas* and *devis* when he had had their visions. ‘Is it possible,’ said the Master, ‘to describe the glory and sweetness of that incomparably pure, bright form of Sri Radha, who renounced her all for the love of Sri Krishna? The splendour of her body was bright yellow like the pollens of Nagakesara (*Mesua ferrea*) flowers!’

“From now on, the Master began to realize himself as Srimati in Bhavasamadhi. He completely lost the consciousness of his separate existence on account of his profound contemplation of the holy form and character of Sri Radharani, and through his ceaseless feeling of identification with her. It can, therefore, certainly be said that his love for God born of his *madhura bhava* developed into (and became as profound as) Sri Radharani’s. For, in reality, all the signs of the *Mahabhava*, which is the ultimate state of the *madhura bhava*, were manifested in him since his realization of the above-mentioned vision, even as they were in Sri Radharani and Sri Gauranga. Speaking of the *Mahabhava*, the Master told us on many occasions, ‘It is written in the devotional scriptures that nineteen kinds of emotions manifested in one receptacle are together called the *Mahabhava*. The whole life of a man is required for the *sadhana* of one such emotion before he could attain perfection in it. Nineteen such moods were fully manifested all together, here (showing his own body) in one receptacle.’ As the

Master’s *sadhana* of love with God as husband was now purified and intensified, he experienced in the above-mentioned way the grace of Sri Radharani, the supreme Lady of Vraja and was finally blessed, shortly after, with the holy vision of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, the embodiment of pure Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. This, form of the vision also united with his holy person, like all the other forms seen before.”¹²

While reminiscing about the graceful loveliness of the Form of Sri Krishna to his devotees he would often compare the complexion of the figure of Sri Krishna to the lovely complexion of *ghaspul* (a grass with shining blue flower) and to the tender shoots of *durva* grass. After this vision, he remained absorbed in Krishna-Consciousness continuously for three months. His whole being had become Krishna-centred; he saw everything in the universe Krishna-filled; and he experienced many mystic visions during this period. His life long conviction of the unity of Bhakta, Bhagavan and the Bhagavata in Krishna, and of Krishna in all these three had its inspiration in one of the visions he experienced during this period of Krishna-absorbedness. Once seated in the front porch of the Radhakanta temple, he was listening to a reading of the Bhagavata, when he suddenly went into a *Bhavasamadhi* - a spiritual trance. While in that state he had a vision of the shining Figure of the Lord. Presently he saw a ray emanating from the feet of the Lord touch his heart, and then the Bhagavata, and remained thus for a while before it disappeared. The sublime truth of the Upanishads that God is in all and all are in God was once again verified in this mystic vision of Sri Ramakrishna.

With the completion of the *sadhana* of the *madhura bhava*, Sri Ramakrishna had traversed all the paths in the dualistic Vedanta. In duality the sense of separation between the worshipper and the Worshipped, the knower and the Known, the lover and the Beloved, the meditator and the Meditated, remains. Beginning from image worship, the lowest rung in the ladder of spirituality, he now was established in *Virat upasana* (the stage only one step below the realization of the absolute identity with Truth). The culmination of his

sadhana did not end with just a vision of the Deity; he revelled in constant and unceasing vision of the Deities he worshipped, and he saw the entire universe covered by God. Of the states he passed through during this period, he says:

“God made me pass through the disciplines of various paths. First according to Purana, then according to Tantra. At first I practised *sadhana* in the Panchavati. I made a grove of *Tulsi-plants* and used to sit inside it and meditate. Sometimes I cried with a longing heart, ‘Mother! Mother!’ or again ‘Rama! Rama!’

“Oh, what a state I passed through! I passed some days absorbed in Siva and Durga and some days absorbed in Radha and Krishna. Sometimes when the mind descended to the Leela, I would meditate day and night on Sita and Rama. At those times I would constantly behold the forms of Sita and Rama. Ramlala was my constant companion. Sometimes I would bathe him, and sometimes feed him.

Again, I used to be absorbed in the ideal of Radha and Krishna and would constantly see their forms. Or again, I would be absorbed in Gauranga. He is the harmonization of two ideals: the Purusha and the Prakriti. At such times I would always see the Form of Gauranga.”¹³

His mystic revelations were not limited to visions of the gods and goddesses but expanded and enveloped whatsoever that moved on the earth. As he would say often, “I would see God in meditation, in the state of Samadhi and I would see the same God when my mind came back to the outer world.”

After his first vision of Mother Kali, it was revealed to him that it was She and She alone that had become everything. He saw everything, the image, the altar, the water vessels, the door-sill, the marble floor, in fact everything that his eyes beheld, vibrant, sonant with Consciousness. He found everything inside the room soaking, as it were, in Bliss - the Bliss of Sat-Chit-Ananda. Once, he fed the cat

with the food that was to be offered to the Mother, for he saw in the cat only the Mother. He would salute a woman of bad reputation, for, he saw in her too his 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 everything Krishna-filled; Krishna-conscious. The moving and the unmoving appeared to him only the multi-forms of the One Krishna, the embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Thus from image worship he became the worshipper of the *Virat - God* in universal form. When he was in these moods, in which all was Consciousness, he could not pluck flowers, or bel leaves, or *durva-grass*. The Upanishadic dictum, ‘*Isavasyamidam sarvam,*’ had its latest verification in his life.

But Sri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with the *Leela* aspect of the Lord only. He wanted to taste the *Nitya* aspect too. He now yearned to become one with the Beloved, with the Absolute Truth itself where all sense of difference is obliterated; where there is neither duality nor any form. He prayed to the Divine Mother, “Mother, in these states there is separation. Give me a state where there is no separation.”

And, the Mother fulfilled the prayers of Her Son *by* bringing Totapuri, a great sage of Advaitic Realization, to Dhakshineswar, soon after.

IV

Advaita Sadhana

Sri Tota Puri who was the choice of the Divine Mother to guide Sri Ramakrishna on the *Advaitic* path of God-realization, was such a *Brahmavid*, a Knower of Brahman. A staunch monk belonging to the radical school of Non-dualism, he had scaled the highest summit of spirituality by merging his mind in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* after forty years of intense spiritual practice. Having thus broken the bonds of

Maya, he was wandering on the face of the earth as free as a lark in the air. During the course of his itinerary he happened to visit the Temple-garden of Dhakshineswar. The very first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna startled the stern naked monk. He saw in Sri Ramakrishna an eminently competent disciple to learn of the Vedantic doctrine of *Advaitic* meditation.

Sri Ramakrishna was the very embodiment of the virtues needed in a *dhira*, one of steady intellect, who alone is considered eligible to follow the difficult path of *Advaita sadhana*. Sri Ramakrishna's renunciation of desires was so completely full that even the eight supernormal powers held no charms for him. Once the Mother of the Universe, the bestower of all boons, appeared before him holding a basket full of honours, name and fame, to offer it to Sri Ramakrishna. At this, he, in utter disgust, began spitting on the floor remarking in a very excited voice: "Fie! I spit on it! I don't want it, take it back. Mother! Don't tempt me with this trifle." And his *sadhana* to conquer attachment to wealth and woman was unique. He would take some dust of the earth in one hand and a gold or silver coin in the other and repeat: 'Taka, mati, mati, taka, - gold is dust, dust is gold'; and after realizing the sameness of both he would throw them into the Ganges. Since then nothing of the world appeared valuable to him. Similarly he conquered all his attachment to women by realizing that every woman, young or old, was the earthly symbol of the Divine Mother.

Before taking to *sannyasa ashrama*, one must renounce all '*karmas*', such as obligatory duties, rites and rituals. To Sri Ramakrishna this renunciation came in a natural way on account of his constant God intoxication. He had nothing to renounce voluntarily; *karmas* of themselves dropped off from him. Even the sacred thread, the caste mark of a Brahmin, wouldn't stay on his body. Thus, in Sri Ramakrishna's case, it was not a case of 'avoiding' or 'renouncing'. It was a unique demonstration of 'transcendence' of the lower truth by his establishing himself in the higher truth.

As he says, "With God-realization all *karmas* drop off. It was thus my ceremonial worship came to an end. I used to perform

worship in the Kali Temple. One day it was suddenly revealed that everything was *Chinmaya*, Pure Spirit. Men, beasts, birds, everyone was *Chinmaya*. And like one mad I began to rain flowers all around. Whatever I saw I worshipped. One day in the course of Siva worship I was putting the *Vajra* on the *Sivalingam* when came the revelation that the universe itself is Siva. I did not reason it out, but it came to me in a flash. That day ended my worship of Siva in His images."

Verily, from *vighraha aradhana* (image worship) he had evolved to *Virat upasana* (Worship of the Lord as the All). Sri Tota Puri could not imagine a better *adhikarin* for *sannyasa*. With great expectation and joy, he asked the indrawn, innocent-looking, dhoti-clad young man seated on one of the ghats leading to the Ganges, if he would like to learn of Vedanta. The Mother's child that he was, Sri Ramakrishna wanted first to seek the permission of his Mother. Sri Totapuri hastened him saying that he never tarried at a place for more than three nights. Sri Ramakrishna ran to his Mother Kali in the temple and asked Her if She approved of his learning of Vedanta from the stern, naked monk with austere habits. The Mother responded: "Yes, my boy, go and learn of him. It is for this purpose that he has come here." And, Sri Totapuri duly initiated his gifted disciple into the mysteries of *Advaita* Vedanta and of the highest ordination of *sannyasa*. To quote from his biography:

"Prostrating himself before his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna took his seat to receive his instructions. To make him feel constantly his identity with Brahman, Tota Puri began to teach him the cardinal truths of the *Advaita* Vedanta. 'Brahman', he said, 'is the only Reality, ever-pure, ever-illuminated, ever-free, beyond the limits of time, space, and causation. Though apparently divided by names and forms through the inscrutable agency of *Maya*, that enchantress which makes the impossible possible. Brahman is really one and undivided. When a seeker is merged in the beatitude of *samadhi*, he does not perceive time and space or name and form - the product of *Maya*. Whatever is within the domain of *Maya* is unreal; give it up. Pierce through the maze of name and form and rush out of it like a lion. Dive deep in the

search for Self and be firmly established in it through *samadhi*. You will then find the world of name and form vanishing into nothing, and this puny ego merging in the cosmic consciousness. You will realize your identity with Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.’ Quoting scriptures he said, ‘That knowledge is shallow by which one sees or hears another. What is shallow is worthless and can never give supreme felicity. But the knowledge in which one does not see, hear, or know another, which is beyond duality, is great and helps a man to attain the supreme Bliss. How can the mind and senses grasp That which shines in the heart of all as the Eternal Subject?’

On what happened after the initiation, Sri Ramakrishna says: “After the initiation, ‘the naked one’ began to teach me the various conclusions of the *Advaita* Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from objects and dive into the Atman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing the mind from all other objects except one, the all familiar form of the Blissful Mother - radiant and of the essence of Pure Consciousness - which appeared before me as a living reality preventing me from passing beyond the realm of name and form. Again and again, I tried to concentrate my mind upon the *Advaita* teachings, but every time the Mother’s form stood in my way. In despair I said to the ‘naked one’, ‘It is hopeless, I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman.’ He grew excited and sharply said, ‘What! You can’t do it! But you have to.’ He cast his eyes around, and finding a piece of glass he took it up and pressing the point between my eyebrows said ‘Concentrate the mind on this point’. ‘Then with a stern determination I again sat to meditate, and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it severed it in two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind, which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I lost myself in *Samadhi*’.”¹⁴

Sri Tota Puri was aghast in wonder at this marvellous feat of his disciple; Sri Ramakrishna had achieved in one day what had taken him

forty years of strenuous austerities. He stayed on with his disciple for eleven long months enjoying the company of his disciple and left Dakshineswar as a *samyag jnani*, as a man of full Wisdom by getting his lopsided view corrected. Sri Tota Puri, as a follower of the extreme school of non-dualism, never accepted *Leela* aspect of the *Nitya*. He contemptuously dismissed the view of Sri Ramakrishna that “what is called Brahman in the Vedas is addressed by him as Mother. He who is attributeless also has attributes. He who is Brahman is also Shakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, He is called the Primordial Energy, Kali.

“Brahman and Shakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When we talk of the fire we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again, the fire’s power to burn implies the fire itself. If you accept the one you must accept the other.”¹⁵

“And Brahman is qualified by the universe and its living beings. At the beginning, while following the method of ‘Not this, not this,’ one has to eliminate the universe and its living beings. But as long as ‘I-consciousness’ remains, one cannot but feel that it is God Himself who has become everything. He alone has become the twenty four cosmic principles.”

“When a man speaks of the essential part of the *bel-fruit*, he means its flesh only, and not the seeds and shell. But if he wants to speak of the total weight of the fruit, it will not do for him to weigh only the flesh. He must accept the whole thing; seeds and shell and flesh. Seeds and shell and flesh belong to one and the same fruit.”

“The *Nitya* and the *Leela* belong to the same Reality. Therefore, I accept everything, the relative as well as the Absolute. I don’t explain away the world as *Maya*”.¹⁶

The reformation of Sri Totapuri came about in an inscrutable way. Sri Totapuri who always enjoyed perfect health, fell a victim to the foul climate and water of Bengal, and developed a severe attack of

acute dysentery. No amount of treatment would rid him of the excruciating pain in the stomach, and he found it impossible to merge his mind in *samadhi* and forget the pain. Finally, he determined to throw away the body by drowning himself in the river Ganges. "Fixing his mind on Brahman, he slowly entered the river at dead of night. Tota almost reached the other bank but could not get water, deep enough for drowning himself in. Tota was surprised and thought, 'What strange divine *Maya* is this? Tonight there is not sufficient water in the river even to drown oneself! What strange unheard-of play of God?' And immediately some one as it were from within pulled off the veil over his intellect. Tota's mind was dazzled by a bright light and he saw 'Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, the origin of the universe, Mother, the unthinkable Power; Mother in land and Mother in water; the body is Mother; and mind is Mother; illness is Mother; and health is Mother; knowledge is Mother; and ignorance is Mother; life is Mother; and death is Mother; everything I see hear, think or imagine is Mother!' She makes 'nay' of 'yes' and 'yes' of 'nay'! As long as one is in the body one has no power to be free from Her influence, no, not even to die, till She wills! It is that Mother again, who is also beyond body, mind and intellect - the Mother, the Supreme 'fourth', devoid of all attributes. That One whom Tota has so long been worshipping as Brahman..... was this very Mother! Siva and Shakti in One who was ever existing..... wading his way through the water in the same manner in which he had gone, Tota began to return, with his heart full of devotion directly experiencing at that dead of night the unthinkable, un-manifest and all-pervading form of the Mother of the Universe; all the quarters of the heavens reverberating with the profound cries of 'Mother' having at the same time completely offered himself as an oblation to Her Feet. Though there was pain in the body there was now no feeling of it. His heart was now beside itself with an unprecedented bliss".¹⁷

This strange experience compelled him to modify his view that the existence of the world and its Creator are mere illusions, just because they did not exist in his super-conscious experience of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. When he first came to Dhakshineswar, he was a

Jnani, a man of Wisdom; when he left Sri Ramakrishna, he had become a *Vijnani*, a man of fuller Knowledge. Speaking of *Vijnana*, Sri Ramakrishna says: "You see, in one form He is the Absolute and in another He is the Relative. What does Vedanta teach? Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. Isn't that so? But as long as God keeps the 'ego of a devotee' in a man, the Relative is also real. When He completely effaces the ego, then what is remains. That cannot be described by the tongue. But as long as God keeps the ego, one must accept all. By removing the outer sheaths of the plantain-tree, you reach the inner pith. As long as the tree contains sheaths, it also contains pith. So too, as long as it contains pith, it also contains sheaths. The pith goes with the sheaths and the sheaths go with the pith. In the same way, when you speak of the *Nitya*, it is understood that the *Leela* also exists; and when you speak of the *Leela*, it is understood that the *Nitya* also exists.

"It is He alone who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. When He is actionless, I call Him Brahman; when He creates, preserves, and destroys, I call Him Shakti. Water is water, whether it is still or moving.

"It is not possible to rid oneself of 'I-consciousness', and as long as one is aware of this 'I-consciousness', one cannot speak of the universe and its living beings as unreal. You cannot get the correct weight of the *bel-fruit* if you leave out its shell and piths.

"The brick, lime, and brick-dust of which the stairs are made are the same brick, lime and brick-dust of which the roof is made. The universe and its living beings exist on account of the Reality of Him who is known as Brahman."

"The devotees - I mean the *Vijnanis* - accept both God with form and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Impersonal. In a shore-less ocean - an infinite expanse of water - visible blocks of ice are formed here and there by intense cold. Similarly, under the cooling influence, so to say, of the deep love of Its worshipper, the Infinite

reduces Itself to the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. Again, as on the rising of the sun, the ice melts away, so, on the awakening of Knowledge, God with form melts away into the same Infinite and Formless".¹⁸

V

The Vedamurti

After the departure of Sri Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna remained in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* continuously for six months. Referring to this period of his life, says he, "For six months at a stretch I remained in that state whence ordinary men can never return - the body falling off after three weeks like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do in a dead body; but I did not feel them. The hair became matted with accretions of dust. There was no chance for the body to survive, and it would certainly have perished but for the kind ministrations of a monk who was present at Dakshineswar at the time. He realized the state of my mind and also understood that this body must be kept alive at any cost, as it was meant to be of immense good to the world. He, therefore, busily engaged himself in preserving this body. He would bring food regularly to me and try to bring my mind in various ways down to the consciousness of the relative world, even by beating me with a stick. As soon as he found me to be a little conscious, he would press some food into my mouth, only a bit of which reached the stomach; and there were days in which all his efforts would be in vain. Six months passed in this way. At last I received the Mother's command, 'Remain on the threshold of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity.' Then I was laid up with a terrible attack of dysentery. An excruciating pain in the stomach tortured me day and night. It went on for six months. Thus only did the mind gradually come down to a lower level and the consciousness of the body. I became a normal man. But before that at the slightest opportunity the mind would take a transcendental flight and merge in the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi!*"¹⁹

In the year 1855, Sri Ramakrishna started on his extensive spiritual voyage beginning from the worship of the Mother Kali in the image and ending up in the Ocean of Formless Brahman in the year 1865. Thus, before he was thirty, within the brief period of less than a dozen years, he had become all the Hindu spiritual world by himself. His spiritual expansiveness became conterminous with the very boundaries of the Hindu cultural heritage in its manifold aspects. And what little has been recorded of his life and *sadhana*s reveal to us a personality of superhuman proportions with amazing Soul-perfection attained through all the modes and methods of Hindu religious life. He became, as it were, the condensed Spiritual heritage of the Hindu race itself. Who can really gauge the depth of the unfathomable reservoir of spiritual moods of a Paramahansa of such astounding realizations and stupendous strides in the domain of Soul-culture? Any such attempt would be as preposterous as the sparrow's attempt to measure the mass and strength of an elephant! And, it is not we who are decades behind, feel that way. Even his own contemporaries who had the privilege of knowing him personally felt so. P. C. Mazumdar, a leader of the Brahma Samaj, one of the most eminent men of the time, a gifted orator and a talented preacher of the Brahma Samaj accepts his inability to truly evaluate the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna in the course of an impressive article he wrote after a thrilling audience with him, in the Theistic Quarterly Review of October 1879. Says he:

"My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me ... His face retains a fullness, a childlike tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile that I have seen on no other face that I can remember..... His religion is his only recommendation..... And what is his religion? It is orthodox Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type..... He is not a Saiva, he is not a Sakta, he is not a Vaishnava, and he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these*. He worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed

advocate of Vedanta doctrines. He accepts all the doctrines, all the embodiments, usages and devotional practices of every religious cult. Each in turn is infallible to him. He is an idolater, yet is a faithful, and most devoted meditator of the perceptions of the one formless, infinite Deity. His religion unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu Sadhus, does not mean too much dogma, or controversial proficiency or the outward worship with flowers and sandalwood, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire and lasts long hours... He never writes anything, seldom argues, he never attempts to instruct, he is continually pouring out his soul in a rhapsody of spiritual utterances, he sings wonderfully, and makes observations of singular wisdom. He unconsciously throws a flood of marvellous light upon the obscurest passages of the Pauranic Sastras, and brings out the fundamental principles of the popular Hindu faith with a philosophical clearness which strangely contrasts itself with his simple and illiterate life... A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is this good and holy man.”

Thus having covered the entire gamut of Hindu religion, Sri Ramakrishna became the personified form of *Sanatana Dharma*, a veritable *Veda Murti*. Vedas are an expression of the knowledge of God in His various aspects. There is place in it for all the religious systems of theology and philosophy ranging from the various sects and creeds within the fold of Dualism to the Absolutistic Philosophy of Non-dualism. It seeks to lead man from where he is to the pinnacle of soul-perfection and character-culture. To those who indulge in quarrels saying that their path alone leads to God-realization, Sri Ramakrishna says: “With sincerity and earnestness one can realize God through all religions. The Vaishnavas will realize God, and so will the Saktas, the Vedantists and the Brahmos... Some people indulge in quarrels saying, ‘One cannot attain anything unless one worships our Krishna’, or ‘Nothing can be gained without the worship of Kali, our Divine Mother’, or ‘one cannot be saved without

accepting the christian religion.’ This is pure dogmatism. The dogmatist says, ‘My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.’ This is a bad attitude. God can be reached by different paths”.²⁰

But, unfortunately for the Vedic Dharma, a permanent cleavage had been wrought by a wrong understanding of the relation between *Bhakti* and *Jnana*. Dogmatic dialecticians who refuted other schools of philosophy, pulled in different directions, and lost themselves in the abyss of fanatical assertion affirming that their way of thinking alone was right. A formidable array of intellectuals isolated the *Advaitic* philosophy as having nothing to do with the Bhakti School of thought and practice. The Theistic Dvaita system preaching its doctrine of a transcendental Personal God and the pantheistic system of Visistadvaita upholding the doctrine of Personal-Impersonal Immanent Being were ridiculed by the ultra-radical school of Advaitins as mere conjectures of a fanciful mind. And, with equal vigour and logic, the Dvaita *acharyas* refuted the theories of the Advaitins, thus ever widening the gulf. The understanding that all these represent various stages of experiences forming limbs of One Great Experience of the Transcendental Truth, got entangled in the maze of dialectical skill and vituperative outbursts. Sri Ramakrishna experienced all the stages of the Sanatana Dharma in his own life. Standing on the bedrock of his own realization he declared to a benighted race emphatically and unequivocally, that realization of the non-dual Brahman is the ultimate aim of all systems of *sadhanas*. The *sadhanas*, according to the teachings of the various schools of dualism all of which Sri Ramakrishna himself had practised, lead the aspirants towards the non-dual plane. Therefore, speaking about the mutual relation among the schools of Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita, he would say over and over again, “The non-dual plane is the finale, the acme, which comes of itself in the life of all aspirants as the ultimate development of their love for God. Be it known and for all that all faiths are only the paths (and not the goal).” Thus, Sri Ramakrishna preached, not this or that Vedanta, but the *samanvaya-Vedanta*, in which theism is fully recognized and incorporated, and is transcended

by an affirmation of a higher Reality of which *Ishwara* and *Jiva* form only the limited and conditioned aspects.

When one views dispassionately without getting involved in the confused thoughts of dialecticians, one will be convinced that the Advaita System does recognize and indeed require that *Ishwara*, who presides over the threefold function of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the entire phenomena of name and form, be worshipped in all humility and devotion, since it is only through His *anugraha* or grace that the *Brahmanubhava* can be experienced. This is more a matter of realization than a subject for argumentation. As the *Srutis* assert, “This our innermost self cannot be known by much learning, or scholarship nor by sharp intelligence, nor by strong memory. It can only be known or intuited by the person to whom it reveals its own nature.” Religion with all its schools of philosophy, is not intellectual dilettantism, but it is *knowing* and *becoming*. Sri Ramakrishna harmonised all these three apparently distinct realizations in his own life. He began with theism which is the *upasana* of a personal God. He transcended through pantheism which involves the constant awareness of an immanent Personal-Impersonal God of Visistadvaita; he soared to the *Advaitic* realm of the *Paramarthika Satya*, the Transcendental Reality, lost himself in the supreme *Turiya* state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* which is beyond the realm of time, space and causality and thus established himself in the fullest finality of realization of *solipsistic* Bliss in absolute *Tadatmya* or Identity. It is here he received the command of the Divine Mother to dwell in *Bhavamukha* the threshold of relative existence, from where he could view both the *Nitya* and the *Leela*. He never contradicted the position of the *Srutis* that *Ishwara* is only a penultimate Reality in a *vyavaharika prapancha* - the phenomenal world of space, time and causality, and *Ishwara's* relation to the *Jivas* as the bestower of *anugraha*. As he says frequently, when one comes down from *Samadhi* one perceives the whole universe with its living beings etc., as evolved from Brahman.

Thus, as long as a certain amount of reality has to be postulated with regard to this universe, *Ishwara* has to be postulated and

recognized as Real; and worship of such an *Ishwara* and His Incarnations is indispensable in bringing about the grace of the Lord. So, Advaita fully recognizes Bhakti, incorporates it in its fabric of spiritual life and transcends it by affirming the Transcendental Reality which as delimited by individual adjunct is *Jiva* and which as delimited by the cosmic adjunct is *Ishwara*.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say often, “The *jnanis* who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta say that acts of creation, preservation and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestation of *Shakti* the Divine Power. If you reason it out, you will realize that all these are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the Reality and all else is unreal. Even this *Shakti* (or *Maya*) is unsubstantial, like a dream.

“But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in *Samadhi* you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of *Shakti*. Even when you say, ‘I am meditating,’ or, ‘I am contemplating,’ still you are moving in the realm of *Shakti*, within Its power”.²¹

Thus, as long as the sense of ‘I’ remains, *Ishwara* remains true, creation remains true, His *anugraha* for the *Jivas* remains true. Sri Ramakrishna used to quote Hanuman as an example of the harmony of all these moods: “Once Rama asked Hanuman, ‘How do you look on me?’ and Hanuman replied: ‘O Rama, as long as I have the feeling ‘I’, I see that Thou art the whole and I am a part; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. But when, O Rama, I have knowledge of Truth, then I realize that Thou art I and I am Thou’.”²²

Again, when one comes out of *Samadhi*, one perceives the whole universe with its living beings, as evolved from God. To the question: Is the world unreal?, his typical answer would be “Yes, the world is unreal as long as one has not realized God, but on God-realization one perceives the universe as evolved out of God”, and his own life is an example of this. His God-centricity was so profound at all times that at the slightest hint his mind would swing rapidly into the mystic realm

of the Impersonal from the relative plane. But this absorption never meant for him a denial of the phenomenon of nature. He repeatedly asserts that all this universe with its living beings is evolved from the Absolute. And, he spoke of his own experience of the all-ness of God: “Do you know what I see right now? I see that it is God Himself who has become all this. It seems to me that men and other living beings are made of leather, and that it is God Himself who, dwelling inside these leather cases, moves the hands, the feet, the heads. I had a similar vision once before, when I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle - all made of one Substance; it was as if they were all made of wax. I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice”.²³

It is this expression of the Vedantic Monotheism that cosmic manifestation is but a spontaneous self-expression of God, that has influenced the whole range of Indian outlook and has provided a metaphysical basis for its universal humanistic ethics and a religion of mysticism which rises above all differences of castes and creeds, sectarianism and religious affiliations.

Thus it is, that the Indian tradition and philosophy reinforce the truth that every soul is potentially divine; it elevates work to worship, harmonizes the secular and the sacred, adds meaning and charm to the simple incidents of daily customs; its spirit pervades the many exploits of gods and heroes and heroines in the *Puranas* and folk tales. The very same wisdom manifests itself in the ethos and pathos of the two great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. It is the awareness of this fundamental Truth again that expresses itself in the simple faith of devotees as they wend their way up to the temple with hurrying feet and vivid faces, carrying devotional offerings of flowers and fruits. It is the divinity of the soul that rings triumphantly in the song of Savitri who strove with Yama, the relentless God of death, for her lover's life and conquered him with the divine subtlety of her love, and in the poignant anguish of Sita's cry, ‘Rama, Rama’ which she uttered as she was being carried off by the ten-headed Ravana. It is this soul-enrapturing songs of divine infinity and immanence that echo and re-

echo in the love-soaked and wisdom-dripping poems of the Bhagavata, in the Celestial Precepts of Bhagavan Sri Krishna on the battlefield and in the serene-message of *Karuna* and *Nirvana* of Lord Buddha.

And Sri Ramakrishna lived to re-reveal the Revelations of the ancient Mystics of the Science of the Soul. He had merged his own existence with that of the Absolute in Supreme Identity; he had experienced this, that all this universe with its living beings is evolved from the Absolute; and he had realized his oneness with the universe. His identity with the existence of all living creation was so complete and full that physical injury inflicted on the body of any being was reflected on his body too and its agony found an echo in his own heart as the following incidents from his biography will show:

“At one time a particular spot of the garden of the Kali temple was covered with newly grown *Durva* grass and was beautiful to look at. While he was looking on it, the Master transcended the normal consciousness and was feeling identified with that spot when a man just happened to walk across that field, at which he became very restless feeling unbearable pain in his chest. Mentioning that event, he said to us later, ‘I then felt just that kind of pain which is felt when anybody tramples on one's chest. That state of *Bhavasamadhi* is very painful. Although I had it for six hours only, it became quite unbearable.’

“One day while the Master in *Bhavasamadhi* was looking on the Ganga, standing at the spacious ghat with the open portico, two boats were at anchor at the ghat and the boatmen were quarrelling over some matter. The quarrel became gradually bitter and the stronger man gave a severe slap on the back of the weaker. At that, the Master cried out suddenly with pain. Hriday heard it from the Kali temple, went there quickly and saw that the Master's back had become red and swollen. Impatient with anger, Hriday said repeatedly, ‘Uncle, show me the man who has beaten you; ‘I will tear off his head.’ When afterwards the Master quietened down a little, Hriday was astonished to hear the

event and thought, 'Is it ever possible?' Sri Girish Chandra Ghose heard the event from the Master's lips and narrated it to us".³⁵

VI

The Priest becomes the Prophet

Compassion has always been adored as a noble virtue. Only a universal man who identifies himself with all living beings can be compassionate to those who are afflicted. Buddha is called the Compassionate One because his love and loving kindness flowed freely to all, to all humanity, to all fauna and flora. This loving kindness to all is a cardinal virtue to be cultivated by all pilgrims in the path of spiritual progress. A great revolutionary that Sri Ramakrishna was, he raised this concept of *karuna* and *daya* to the lofty heights of *seva*, - service to all beings by seeing God in them. Sri Ramakrishna's realization of the Absolute which he had experienced directly in the super-conscious state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* was so vivid that any idea of showing mercy or sympathy to any being, particularly to man in whom there is an especial manifestation of God, was anathema to him. Worship is communion with the Lord through love. God is the one object of love, nay, GOD IS LOVE. Serving the *jiva* with the idea that one is serving a *jiva is daya*, compassion; but this is not in keeping with the true spirit of the Vedantic realization. Failing to comprehend the true implications of the Vedantic concept of monotheism, our contemporary generation has increasingly tended to form itself into isolated groups from the rest of human world. The incapacity of the then society to appreciate in its true perspective the declaration of the Lord that "He who, ignoring Me who resideth in all beings as God and Self, worships only images through foolishness, is like the man who pours oblation on the ashes alone" resulted in Vedanta being misunderstood to be a dull, colourless, austere philosophy, having nothing to do with the sufferings of fellow beings.

Sri Ramakrishna re-appraised the true worth and significance of the Vedantic concept of monotheism by throwing a flood of light on

the concept of 'sympathy'. An event that occurred in his life as he was explaining the cardinal tenets of the *Vaishnava* doctrine to his devotees, restored the Vedantic attitude to the sufferings of humanity to its original purity and significance. "The Master said: 'That doctrine teaches that one should always be careful to observe three things, namely, a taste for God's name, kindness to all beings and the worship of *Vaishnavas*. *God* is what His name is; knowing the non-difference between the name and the possessor of the name, one should always take His name with love and devotion; knowing the identity between the devotee and the Divine and between Krishna and the *Vaishnava*, one should always respect, worship, and salute holy men, the devotees, and one should have the conviction in one's heart that the whole universe belongs to Krishna; therefore, compassion, for all beings (was what one should practise). No sooner had he uttered these words, 'compassion for all beings,' than he suddenly went into *samadhi*. Regaining partial external consciousness in a short time, he continued, 'Talk of compassion for beings? Will you, all animal-cule, bestow compassion on beings? You wretch, who are you to bestow it? No, no; not compassion to *Jivas* but service to them as Siva".²⁵

Thus Sri Ramakrishna not only synthesized the Vedantic knowledge with the sweet devotion to the Lord, but also placed the Vedantic concept of Brahman-as-all on its true pedestal. Charity and philanthropy thus became metamorphosed into *seva* and worship of the One Brahman in His multiform. Thus every help, every form of humanitarian gesture becomes an effective means of God-realization if the attitude of *seva* is brought to bear on it. It is the glorious spiritual path in which all the yogas are harmoniously combined to produce universal salvation. *Karma* when elevated to *seva*, becomes love in practice, divinity in motion, *prema* in its dynamic expression. Thus, a faithful adherence to *seva dharma* brings about the two-fold result of conferring *Atmanubhava*, the Knowledge of Self, on the *sadhaka* and at the same time it alleviates the miseries of suffering humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna's god-centricity was not confined only to his identity with all the living beings; but his mind at times would also

swing back into His True Original Source, and, get lost in God's immensity and fullness. Whenever Krishna uses 'I' in the Gita, the reference is not to the Krishna, the son of Vasudeva and Devaki, but to the Universal Lord, the *Purushottama*, who immanent in all the souls, sustains them by His Energy. He is supreme as compared with other selves set up by *avidya*; and again, He is the Self as constituting the unfailing Inner Consciousness of all beings. He, as *Ishwara*, the Inner Controller, dwells in the hearts of all beings, whirling them by His own *Maya*, as if mounted on a machine.

An Incarnation plays His part quite dexterously on the human side to fulfil His mission on earth, revealing, at regular intervals, the other side too. The true greatness of *avatars* can be known and understood better through what they say of themselves to devotees and disciples. When the Saviour proclaimed, "I and my Father in heaven are one," he did not canvass for renown and honour. He only affirmed his identity with the Father. Even so it is with Krishna, when he said, "The foolish disregard Me, clad in human form, not knowing My higher being as the Great Lord of beings." Sri Ramakrishna too, now and then, gave hints of his identity with his higher being as 'the Great Lord of all beings' through his conversations with his disciples. Though he was enwrapped in the robes of naiveté and enshrouded in the innocence of a babe, his God-filled mind was ever in identity with the Absolute. This affirmation is revealed in a conversation he had with Narendra and other devotees:

“Master: (smiling, to Narendra) ‘Well, what do you think of me?’

Narendra: ‘You are a hero, a handmaid of God and everything else.’

These words fill Sri Ramakrishna with divine emotion. He places his hand on his heart and is out to say something.

He says to Narendra and other devotees: ‘I see that all things - everything that exists - have come from this’.

He asks Narendra by a sign: ‘What did you understand?’

Narendra: ‘All created objects have come from you’.”²⁶

Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from cancer in his throat and was unable to swallow any food. At the earnest request of his disciples he prayed to the Divine Mother Kali to heal the wound in his throat. And, the Mother of the Universe, revealing to him in a flash, showed all his devotees and said: “Why, you are eating through all these mouths.” Verily, Sri Ramakrishna had become the *Bhuma*, the all. And in this event we find a demonstration on the empirical plane of the Vedic declaration that the “Lord sees through all the eyes, hears through all the ears; everywhere his hands and feet; his eyes, heads and mouths everywhere.”

And yet in another act of his self-revelation, he gave humanity an ocular demonstration of his all-encompassing Presence. To quote from his biography: “It was the 1st of January, 1886. Sri Ramakrishna felt much better and wished to take a walk in the garden. It was about three in the afternoon. As it was a holiday, about thirty lay disciples were present, some in the hall and others under trees. When Sri Ramakrishna came down, those in the hall saluted him and followed him at a distance as he walked slowly towards the gate. Girish, Ram, Atul, and some others, who were chatting under a tree, came and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly said to Girish, ‘Well Girish, what have you found in me that you proclaim me before all as an Incarnation? ‘Girish, not at all taken aback by the question, knelt before him with folded hands and said in a voice shaken with emotion, ‘What can an insignificant creature like me say about One whose glory sages like Vyasa and Valmiki could not measure?’ Hearing these words, spoken with the greatest intensity, Sri Ramakrishna was deeply moved and said, what more shall I say? I bless you all! Be illumined!’ Saying this he fell into a state of semi-consciousness, and, in that divine mood, he touched each of the devotees as they fell at his feet and saluted him. Vaikunthanath Sannyal whom the Master had touched only for a moment in an ordinary way, said: ‘As the result of it, a great revolution took place in my mind. I saw the figure of the Master, brightened with a gracious smile in the sky, houses, trees, plants, men and whatever else I saw. I did not know how to contain my delight within myself and, that mental attitude and vision of mine

continued for some days throughout my waking state. I became amazed and charmed to have the holy image of the Master in all things. It continued to be so wherever I went, to office or elsewhere on any business".²⁷

Thus, we find Sri Ramakrishna not merely as a God-centred and God-suffused devotee, but also as the very stuff of God Himself. As a devotee, he saw with his *divya chaksu*, the divine eye, the *Iswara-yoga* - the *Leela* of the Lord on the canvas of time and space. Again, as one who has identified himself with the Self of all selves, he suffered the pain of the slappings given on the face of a fisherman; the agony of the grass as hard stones were thrown over it; the anguish of the bullocks as they were severely beaten by the coachman. He saw himself enjoying food through all the mouths; he revealed to his devotees that it was He and He alone who pervaded the sky and the firmament, the trees and the shrubs, and whatsoever existed on the earth. An avatara that he is, in whom dwelt both Rama and Krishna, he revealed himself again and again to his inner circle of disciples, he is also a symphony of both the aspects of the Lord and His devotee in one body. He revealed himself to his devotees in the course of a conversation:

“Master (to Narendra and the others): ‘There are two persons in this. One, the divine Mother.....’ He pauses. The devotees eagerly look at him to hear what he will say next.

Master: ‘Yes, One is She. And the other is Her Devotee. It is the devotee who broke his arm. And it is the devotee who is now ill. Do you understand?’”²⁸

Thus an *avatara* is an extraordinary entity. An ordinary *sadhaka* becomes Brahman on knowing Brahman. But in the case of an *avatara*, it is different. His identity with Iswara as endowed with the six-resplendent glories is constant. His splendour proves too much even for great souls. Suka rapturously sang the glory of Krishna. Arjuna stood in awe and amazement at the sight of the Universal Form of the Lord on the battlefield. The immensity of their Divinity and the

unconditional flow of their grace to humanity is a marvel even to great sages. It was this super-human dimension and all-round perfection of Sri Ramakrishna who with the gentlest touch and a wholesome effect could ring out the old and usher in the new, and could restore old values and ideas to a fresh lease of life by refashioning and re-interpreting them, that awed Swami Vivekananda, his most intimate disciple and chief apostle, and prompted him 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 *Shastras*. He showed by his life what the Rishis and Avatars really wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realization..... The Vedas can only be explained and the *Shastras* reconciled by his theory of *avasthas* or stages, - that we must not only tolerate others, but positively embrace them, and that Truth is the basis of all religions..... And what was Ramakrishna Paramahansa? The practical demonstration of the ancient principle, (*viz*, Vedanta, the one principle of which all religions are only applications), the embodiment of the India that is past, and a foreshadowing of the India that is to be; the bearer of spiritual light unto nations. Either he must be the Avatara as he himself used to say, or else the ever-perfected divine man, whom the Vedanta speaks of as the free one who assumes a body for the good of humanity. This is my conviction sure and certain..... Whatever the Vedas, the Vedanta, and all other Incarnations have done in the past, Sri Ramakrishna lived to practise in the course of a single life. One cannot understand the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Incarnations and so forth, without understanding *his* life. For, he was the explanation..... A single word of his is to me far weightier than the Vedas and the Vedanta..... Without studying Ramakrishna Paramahansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the Bhagavata and the other Puranas. He was the commentary of the Vedas and to their aim.”

Many indeed are the differences between a *Paramahansa* and a pious pilgrim. A *Paramahansa*'s attitude towards life, his relationship

with others, his manner of viewing objects, are all excellent instances that convey high spiritual truths. His uniqueness lies in the fact that each one of his approaches is spiritual. He gets right into the inner core of what he says or does without getting lost in external superficialities.

The doors to eternity are always open to all. The soul's march through the slippery terrain of *samsara* is a highly adventurous one, and quite a negligible number that make the start draw nigh the goal Supreme. Quite a big number get side-tracked and fall by the way side. The greatest obstacle on the soul's march to its destined goal is temptation. Hence, as a precaution, monasticism avoids the company of the opposite sex in any manner. In the case of an ordinary pilgrim who is on his life's mission, avoidance of opposite sex at all levels is necessary to ensure success in his onward march. Certain norms and codes of conduct sanctified by tradition are therefore very useful to ordinary aspirants to guide them safe on the spiritual path.

But it is vastly different with Avatars; particularly so in the case of Sri Ramakrishna. His wisdom was so God-saturated and so comprehensive that not only *sadhakas* but even very highly evolved spiritual geniuses who come into contact with him get enlightened on subtle points of spiritual discipline and knotty philosophical interpretations.

The marriage of Sri Ramakrishna and the worship of his wife as the Divine Mother were such events in his life. These cleared the misunderstanding and confusion that existed regarding true ideals and the functions of marriage and the place of woman in society. Marriage had long ceased to be a path to God-realization. It was regarded as merely an institution, a legal sanction for worldly pleasures, for propagating the species and safeguarding property rights. Even the Hindu race steeped as it was in Shakti worship had increasingly tended to look upon woman as lowly. She was shut out of all avenues of progress and considered unholy and unworthy of spiritual striving. Marriage and motherhood became the one and only goal and function of Indian womanhood. Women were denied rights to take the vow of celibacy, and live a holy life of the *Brahmavadinis* of yore.

Sri Ramakrishna revolutionised the entire concept of marriage. He did not have the slightest trace of body consciousness and there was no question of his regarding his wife as any other than the symbol of the Divine Mother. A perusal of the life of Sri Sarada Devi will convince one that she too was no less than her Divine spouse in the purity of her thought, word and deed. By living with her not only did he test his body-transcendence but also became an ocular evidence to householders that marriage is not a barrier to rise higher in spiritual status if only one could look upon woman as the manifestation of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna lived what he preached in his own life time. He worshipped Sri Sarada as the Divine Mother according to the tantric *Shodashi Puja* (the worship of the Woman). He dedicated his all at the feet of Sri Sarada as the living symbol of Shakti, the Primal Power in feminine aspect.

To quote from his biography: "It was the new moon of May, 1872, an auspicious night for the worship of Kali, and Sri Ramakrishna made special arrangements for it in his own room, instructing the Holy Mother to be present. She went there at 9 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna took the seat of the priest. After the preliminaries were over he beckoned the Holy Mother to the seat which was reserved for the Goddess. Sarada Devi was in a semiconscious state as she reverently watched proceedings, and like one under a hypnotic spell, took the seat as she was told. Sri Ramakrishna with the help of an assistant, went through the regular form of worship, in which the Holy Mother took the place of the Deity. During the ceremony she went into *samadhi*. The Master, too, when he had finished the *mantras* went into the super-conscious state. Priest and Goddess were joined in a transcendental union in the Self. Hours passed. At dead of night the Master partially recovered consciousness; then with the appropriate *mantras* he surrendered himself and the fruits of his lifelong *sadhana*, together with his rosary, at the feet of the Holy Mother and saluted her".²⁹

To *sannyasins* he advocated complete renunciation of woman both in mind and body. To householders he prescribed discrimination,

and mental detachment. From both *sannyasin* and householder disciples he expected an unswerving adherence to Truth and complete detachment from 'lust and greed' which alone would lead to God experience. Woman is not to be hated or shunned. She is to be deified as the symbol of the Mother of the Universe.

Living a householder's life Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated to the world that married life too can become a path to God-realization if one practises self-control by spiritualizing one's outlook on life. He became as much an ideal to householders as to the monks. He never ran away from his wife but kept her near him, conferring on her his precious love and soulful reverence. An *avatara* does not run against the grain of his nature. He moves with it and builds. He adds new dimensions, he lends clarity to obscure ideas, he reveals the true significance of life by spiritualizing every approach to life and its problems.

He also sought to correct the extreme practices of monasticism which abhorred woman and condemned her as a gate way to hell and soul-perdition. It is a fact of human life that passionate attachment to the opposite sex with base motives leads to utter ruin and destruction. It is the unregenerate mind of man that is the root of all evil. The senses are dangerous; they forcibly sway and carry away the mind of even a wise man, even while he is striving hard to subdue them. Restraining the turbulent senses from the objects of the world and remaining steadfast in God, inter on Him, is the first step in *Atma-sadhana*. With every thought of a sensate object, attachment to it grows, which in turn produces desire. Intensified desire deludes the *sadhaka* causing his ultimate ruin. So, a wise man should keep away from sights and scenes that disturb the mind and distract thoughts. Till one reaches the state of perfection where he is blissful with the knowledge of the True Innermost Self, he has to keep away from objects which rouse the passions. The universal principles of non-possession, perfect chastity, humility, firm adherence to truth are some of the cardinal virtues that monasticism emphasizes. Therefore, renunciation of everything that militates against these virtues is vigorously practised by every seeker after truth.

Misconceived efforts at self-control gradually took the form of abhorrence for womankind in general. This is certainly not a healthy approach to preserve the purity of body or mind. It is essential to keep away from any object that is likely to cloud one's understandings; but to be obsessed with its evil influence does good to none; rather it becomes an obstacle that is difficult to root out. Young Hari, later Swami Turiyananda, in whom Sri Ramakrishna saw a living example of the *jivanmukta* ideal of the Bhagavad Gita, abhorred the very sight of woman. He did not allow even girls to come near him. He would talk disparagingly of women. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this aberration in him and sought to correct him by sternly rebuking him: "You talk like a fool! Look down upon women! What for? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them as to your mother and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into their snare". He spiritualized a misconceived notion long harboured by the overzealous and the credulous. The determining factor in observing continence is not avoiding the opposite sex; it is filling the mind with the thought of Brahman and moving about with a spiritually charged mind. Discrimination is an affirmation of God everywhere. Thus did Sri Ramakrishna retrieve Hari from his misconception about the method of practising purity of body and mind. He pointed out the positive discipline of mastering the senses and rising above temptations by means of transcendence and not by mere running away from objects of the senses.

He elevated womanhood to high status of Divine Motherhood and aroused the Mother-consciousness in the Hindu race which was sinking more and more in the mire of a sensate culture. He accepted Sri Yogeswari as his first spiritual teacher; Mother Kali was the object of his whole-souled adoration and love; and to crown all these, he worshipped his own wife as the Mother in a living human form. He trained her to be his first and foremost disciple; fashioned and presented her to humanity as the acme, the point of perfection of womankind; he commissioned her to be a redeemer of souls and anointed her heir to his spiritual ministration after his passing away.

The following incident that occurred a few months before his passing away is very moving, in that it shows the great hopes that Sri Ramakrishna reposed on the Holy Mother, and the Holy Mother's singular pre-eminence in thus being commissioned by Sri Ramakrishna to the great task of a 'Redeemer of souls'.

“Sri Ramakrishna was seriously ill with cancer and was staying at the Cossipore Garden House. The Holy Mother used to cook his meals and serve his food. Once as she was serving his food, she beheld him looking at her for long. It appeared as though he wished to speak to her something. So, she asked him: ‘Why don’t you tell me what you wish to say?’ Sri Ramakrishna, like an aggrieved person, asked her, ‘Well, my dear, won’t you do anything? Should this (pointing to his person) do everything single handed?’ Sri Sarada Devi understood, and answered, ‘I am a woman. What can I do?’ He told her emphatically, ‘No, no, you will have to do a lot’.”³⁰

And, true to Sri Ramakrishna's expectations, she did a lot to redeem the fallen, as history proves.

VII

Islamic and Christian Sadhanas

Whether man is conscious of it or not, religion is his deepest need. He may busy himself in catering to the senses, or bury himself in the lure of the flesh, yet a time positively comes in his life when he feels the need for religion. Man is a soul, whether he acknowledges it or not. Religion is the nurture that nourishes it; it is the science of the soul; it is the realization of the Divinity within man. When man becomes aggressively materialistic and predatory, the true spirit of religion takes leave of him. It is then that the world witnesses the unique phenomenon of a revolution taking place in the field of religion, affecting the lives and thoughts of many millions all over. It suddenly breaks on society in the form of a Saviour; its impact on

people is tremendous. It is like a tidal wave that bursts all of a sudden washing away the fen of stagnant waters. Religious revolution changes the old order yielding place to new, revealing the beauty and glory of true spiritual life. A Krishna, a Buddha, a Jesus, a Shankara, are prophets, appearing from time to time in different climes bringing about a religious revolution forming the basis of a social revolution.

Sri Ramakrishna is one such prophet, with a difference. Prophets before him had played their roles as Saviours. But every one of them differed in stressing his way of religion which each had experienced in his life, as the only pathway to God. Sri Ramakrishna's experimentation with all the faiths extant in the domain of religion marks him out as a Prophet of prophets, a World Prophet. No wonder, Swami Vivekananda called him an *avatara varishtha*, the most excellent of all the incarnations.

It is to his eternal glory that Sri Ramakrishna experimented with every aspect of the Hindu faith from image worship to identity with the Absolute. And, if he had stopped at that, he would not be the unique Prophet that he is today. It is his unique glory that he crossed the bounds of the Hindu faith and began experimenting with other faiths as well. He never took any theory just on trust, nor did he cynically dismiss it as mere nothing. His conformity to traditional modes was very faithful and whenever he took a discipline, he was an orthodox follower of it. When experimenting with other faiths, he thoroughly acquainted himself with them.

At that time, one Govinda Rai, a convert to the Sufi Sect was living at Dhakshineswar. He had taken up his temporary residence in the Temple garden as he found it congenial to practise his spiritual *sadhana*. Sri Ramakrishna noticed his devotion to Islam and wished to be initiated into that faith. Govinda Rai was too glad to initiate Sri Ramakrishna to Sufism. His whole soul was aflame with the one thought of Allah and his entire being was restless to know God through that faith. To quote his reminiscences: “Then I used to repeat the name of Allah, wear my cloth in the fashion of the Mohammedans

and recite the Namaz regularly. All Hindu ideas being wholly banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu Gods, but I had no inclination even to visit them. After three days I realized the goal of that form of devotion.”³¹ First of all he had the vision of a radiant person with a long beard and of grave appearance; then his mind passing through the realization of Brahman with attributes, was finally absorbed in Brahman without attributes. This was in the year 1886. Some eight years later, he sought to experience the Truth through the Christian faith. The catholicity of his spirit and the scientific approach to matters of supra-sensual perception urged him on to experience the Truth through yet another religion. And, in all his experiments, his main instruments were his divine inspiration and an outright pouring out of his love for the Ideal. In minutest details he observed all the disciplines appropriate to that faith, and realized God. To quote his biographers: “So, when the desire to realize the Christian ideal arose in his mind, the Divine Mother fulfilled it in a strange way, without any struggle on his part.” One day the Master was in the parlour of the garden house of Jadu Mallik at Dhakshineswar, on the walls of which were many beautiful portraits, one of them being Christ’s. Sri Ramakrishna was looking attentively at the picture of the Madonna with the Divine Child and reflecting on the wonderful life of Christ, when he felt as though the picture had become animated, and that rays of light were emanating from the figures of Mary and Christ, and entering into him, altogether changing his mental outlook. When he realized that his Hindu ideas were being pushed into a corner by this onrush of new ones, he tried his best to stop it and eagerly prayed to the Divine Mother, “What is it that Thou art doing to me, Mother?” But in vain His love and regard for the Hindu gods were swept away by this tidal wave, and in their stead a deep regard for Christ and the Christian Church filled his heart, and opened to his eyes the vision of Christian devotees burning incense and candles before the figure of Jesus in the churches and offering unto him the eager outpourings of their hearts. Returning to the Dhakshineswar Temple he was so engrossed in those thoughts that he forgot to visit the Divine Mother in the Temple. For three days those ideas held sway in his mind. On the fourth day, as he was walking in the Panchavati, he saw an

extraordinary looking person of serene aspect approaching him with his gaze intently fixed on him. He knew him at once to be a man of foreign extraction. He had beautiful large eyes, and, though the nose was a little flat, it in no way marred the comeliness of his face. Sri Ramakrishna was charmed and wondered who he might be. Presently the figure drew near, and from the innermost recesses of Sri Ramakrishna’s heart there went up the note, “There is the Christ who poured out his heart’s blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for its sake. It is none else but that Master - Yogin Jesus, embodiment of Love!

“Then the Son of Man embraced Sri Ramakrishna and became merged in him. The Master lost outward consciousness in *samadhi*, realizing his union with Brahman with attributes. After some time he came back to the normal plane. Thus was Sri Ramakrishna convinced that Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of the Lord”.³²

He regarded Buddha as an incarnation of God. He often used to say that there was no difference between Buddha’s doctrine and the Vedic doctrine of the Absolute Brahman. “I have heard,” said Sri Ramakrishna, “a great deal about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God. Brahman is immovable, immutable, inactive, and is of the nature of Consciousness. When a man merges his *buddhi*, his intelligence, in *bodha*, consciousness, then he attains the knowledge of Brahman; he becomes *buddha*, enlightened”.³³

VIII

The Prophet of prophets

Thus Sri Ramakrishna became the first Prophet to have traversed all the provinces of the Divine Empire. And, to his great exultation he found that the Veda, the Bible and the Koran were all tuned to one song, the song of an Eternal Truth, to the melody of One God. Thus, he declared on the basis of his personal experience and actual

realization, the healing, soothing, saving message to a purblind humanity: “One should not think, ‘my religion alone is the right path, and other religions are false.’ God can be realized by means of all paths. It is enough to have sincere yearning for God. Infinite are the paths and infinite the opinions”.³⁴

“It is like water, called in different languages by different names, such as ‘jal’, ‘pani’, and so forth. There are three or four ghats on a lake. The Hindus, who drink water at one place call it ‘jal’. The Mussalmans at another place call it ‘pani’. And, the English at a third place call it ‘water’. All three denote one and the same thing, the difference being in name only. In the same way, some address the Reality as ‘Allah’, some as ‘God’, some as ‘Brahman’, some as ‘Kali’ and others by such names as ‘Rama’, ‘Jesus’, ‘Durga’, ‘Hari’.”³⁵

“Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Saktas, Saivas, Vaishnavas, the *Brahmajnanis* of the time of the *Rishis* and you, the *Brahmajnanis* of modern times, all seek the same object..... Do you know what the truth is? God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion.....

But dogmatism is not good. You have no doubt, heard the story of the chameleon. A man entered a wood and saw a chameleon on a tree. He reported to his friends, ‘I have seen a red lizard.’ He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but red. Another person, after visiting the tree said, ‘I have seen a green lizard.’ He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but green. But the man who lived under the tree said: ‘What both of you have said is true. But the fact is that the creature is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, and sometimes has no colour at all’.”³⁶

Thus Sri Ramakrishna preached the doctrine of harmony of various faiths and sects and religious opinions. They are not mutually exclusive, much less do they militate against each other. Followers of various faiths are brothers of the same family seeking a common goal.

This understanding of the basic harmony of all faiths will usher in a new era when rancour will quieten and disputes disappear.

Sri Ramakrishna became a federation of all faiths, of all beliefs. He was an ocean of spirituality into which flowed all rivers of religion, forming the grandest yet spiritual symphony. Truly, he is the Prophet of prophets who is a living demonstration of harmony of all ideals and philosophy, of all faiths and beliefs. His life is the portrayal of the concept of a universal religion becoming a practical reality. He did not preach that all faiths are the same, but that all faiths, when sincerely followed, lead to the same goal.

Narrowness of outlook, parochialism, and lop-sided vision have marked the march of most of the people of the world. It is as if they resist broadening themselves out to the fullest extent, resent breaking down barriers of limitations and circumscriptions and seeking expansiveness to the farthest limit. This spirit of restricting oneself within certain bounds is to be found in almost all human minds in varying degrees, pious and religious men not excepted. It is only an exceptionally blessed soul that rises to sublime heights of perfection, expands to its fullest and drinks deep of the fountain of Divinity that is above all manner of circumscription, fanaticism and bellicose attitudes.

Such souls are spoken of as Saviours of humanity endowed with cosmic minds, *Viswamanas*. Their individuality is as expansive as the sky, their mind is as broad as liberality itself. Freed from all sense of pettiness, meanness and narrowness, and spurred by spontaneity of supreme Divine will, they embrace all humanity, bless every soul, and wrap every one in a tender hug of motherly concern and affection. Nothing escapes the visions of such cosmic minds. They lend light to brighten the path of every soul, correcting the flaws in conduct, setting right misconceived notions, redeeming souls by gentle admonitions and wise sayings.

As Sri Ramakrishna would often say, when a flower blooms, bees by themselves hasten to the flower; no invitations need be sent to

them. Sri Ramakrishna was the most perfectly blossomed flower, the lotus blooming in the lake of spirituality. As commented earlier, he practised numerous and seemingly conflicting systems, and methods, and reached the goal with extreme felicity and in unbelievable rapidity. The fullness of his wisdom, the extent of his realization, the variety of his ecstasies, the depth of his love for devotees, the vastness of his vision which accepted and revered all the faiths, drew the following remarks from Swami Vivekananda, his most gifted and talented disciple: “Sri Ramakrishna was the purest of all lives that you have ever seen, or let me tell you distinctly, that you have ever read of. And before you is the fact that it is the most marvellous manifestation of Soul-powers that you can read of, much less expect to see... His character was so great that if I, or any other of his disciples spent hundreds of lives, we could not, do justice to a millionth part of what he really was.”

Having thus established himself on the unassailable foundation of direct realization, the Paramahansa Deva, began working on the great revolution to usher which the Mother of the Universe had projected him on the world scene. He had become a paragon of spiritual majesty scanning the farthest reach of religious domain of all climes and times. He was such a blend of so many graces and excellences that his influence on those who came in contact with him was irresistible. The Ramakrishna-centre became a mighty powerhouse of abundant charm and fascination. The Master’s love, candour and spirituality captivated and held spellbound not only the many widely differing pilgrims on the high road to the Supreme but also the finest intellects of the academic world. The sublime joyfulness of his countenance, the ethereal smile that radiated peace and purity all around, the half-closed eyes through which peered out the brilliance of the Soul, his volitions and feelings that uplifted all souls to a region of spiritual bliss and awareness, the indefinable mystic element that he incessantly poured out in his words of consolation and instruction, engulfed all who went to him.

Persons in various stages of spiritual progress flocked to him. With a smooth deftness found only in Saviours, he not only rounded

off the imperfect to perfection, but rendered the perfect more profoundly perfect. The vain and the petty-minded came to him; the humble in spirit and low in social status came to him. Many a mighty and arrogant personality had crossed swords with him. Cynics challenged the validity of his words; the rich came, the poor came, all and sundry came to the Paramahansa with various motives, with divergent views and varied interests. And he, from his inexhaustible storehouse of Love and Knowledge, filled all the souls that flocked to him. Whether they knew it or not, whether they acknowledged it or not, each soul was richer and fuller by his contact with the Paramahansa Deva, who was like the ‘tub of dye’ of his parable: “A man kept a solution of dye in a tub. Many people came to him to have their clothes dyed. He would ask a customer, ‘What colour should you like to have your cloth dyed?’ If the customer wanted red, then the man would dip the cloth in the tub and say, ‘here is your cloth dyed red.’ If another customer wanted his cloth dyed yellow, the man would dip his cloth in the same tub and say, ‘here is your cloth dyed in yellow.’ If a customer wanted his cloth dyed blue, the man would dip it in the same tub and say, ‘here is your cloth dyed blue.’ Thus he would dye the clothes, of his customers, different colours, dipping them all in the same solution. One of the customers watched all this with amazement. The man asked him, ‘well, what colour do you want for your cloth?’ The customer said, ‘brother, dye my cloth the colour of the dye in your tub’.”³⁷

The Paramahansa’s universal mind gauged the depth of each soul in one vast sweep of his vision and helped each in his own way by his perfecting prescriptions of advice, encouragement and, when necessary, mild rebuke. His love for the fallen was as profound as it was for his chosen apostles, nay, even more. He retrieved many a soul caught in the grip of the lure of the flesh; and awakening in their hearts the fire of discrimination and the urge for renunciation, guided them to the goal Supreme by engulfing them in his God-love. The unique Divine manifestation in Sri Ramakrishna which flowed freely to humanity in torrents of love and blessedness, restored all who came in touch with it to Atman-awareness. He never indulged in and always

discouraged logical subtleties, philosophical quibblings, fanatical assertions, and hair-splitting dialectics to convince another of the spiritual truths he preached. His life was his teachings. He never put on the air of a Guru or a preacher. His spiritual potency was such that it made its way straight into others' hearts, which even great leaders of religious movements of his day could not resist. It was this immeasurability and profundity of his life that drew the following remark from Swami Vivekananda when he was requested by Girish Babu to write the life-story of the Paramahansa Deva: "Well, Girish Babu, please never make a request like this of me. I shall very gladly do whatever you ask me other than this. I would not even hesitate to revolutionise the world at your request; but I shall not be able to do the work you have suggested. He (the Master) was so profound, so great, that I have not understood him at all. I have not been able to know even a fraction of his life. Do you advise me to fashion a monkey while trying to mould an image of Shiva? 'I cannot do it!'"

Redemption of humanity, *loka-kalyana*, is the sole mission of the incarnations. And, this they do, adapting themselves to persons and places. While the humble and uncrafty, innocent and unsophisticated receive the warmest corner in their hearts, the crafty pundit and the arrogant sophist may miss the warmth of their concern and love, and not benefit at all by them. And, they teach more by example than by precept, by practising than by prattling. Like a good teacher, an incarnation condescendingly stoops to the humble level of its devotees, comes down to the plane of apperception and understanding of its disciples and thus, becoming one with them in a warm embrace of love and affability, it elevates them to the higher perception of truth, points out unerringly the goal of religion and slowly but surely, effects a rapid transformation of the soul.

One of the captivating graces of Sri Ramakrishna as Spiritual Teacher is his deep concern for the *jivas*. He was ever willing to enlighten those who sought it, with his perfecting prescriptions easy enough for any mortal to absorb and carry out. An expert physician takes into account both the nature of the disease and the capacity of

his patient to stand the potency of his drugs, before he prescribes medicine, and unfailingly cures the patient of his ills. Even so it was with Sri Ramakrishna. While his generous arms spread out to all, his falcon eyes unerringly probed into the spiritual maturity of aspirants who sought shelter at his feet, and, like an expert physician, coming down the ladder from his high abode, he filled each soul according to its capacity. And his method of teaching was simple, direct, easy of assimilation even by a rustic, and towards this end he used the commonest incidents in life, familiar sights and scenes as excellent instances to convey high spiritual truths. These he imparted in such a way as to overwhelm and conquer. He was a Guru non-pareil, a shining specimen of the declaration of the scriptures: 'He is a real and worthy Guru who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, unsmitten by desire, and a knower of Brahman par excellence, who has withdrawn himself into Brahman, is calm like the fire that has consumed its fuel, who is a boundless reservoir of mercy that knows no reason, and a friend of all good people who prostrate themselves before him.'

In his own inimitable way, he would recount a scene he had witnessed at Panchavati to highlight the true greatness of a genuine Guru:

"One day as I was passing the Panchavati on my way to the pine-grove, I heard a bullfrog croaking. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After some time, as I was coming back, I could still hear its terrified croaking. I looked to see what was the matter, and found that a water-snake had seized it. The snake could neither swallow it nor give it up. So there was no end to the frog's suffering. I thought that had it been seized by a cobra it would have been silenced after three croaks at the most. As it was only a water-snake, both of them had to go through this agony. A man's ego is destroyed after three croaks, as it were, if he gets into the clutches of a real teacher. But if the teacher is an 'unripe' one, then both the teacher and the disciple undergo endless suffering. The disciple cannot get rid either of his ego or of the shackles of the world. If a disciple falls into the clutches of an incompetent teacher, he doesn't attain liberation."³⁸

Sri Ramakrishna was a king cobra with a difference. He did not sting all with the same vehemence and inject into them the same dose of spirituality. He measured the competency of his disciples and devotees to assimilate his teachings before he injected into their system his passionate love for God and his glowing fire of renunciation.

If the situation warranted, Sri Ramakrishna-Vaidyanatha, the Lord of spiritual healers, as he was, hesitated not to thrust the surgical knife deep into the festering sore. Men of rank materialism and social status came to him and exultingly spoke of their creed. Bankim Chandra, a gifted writer and an eminent social reformer, a 'product of contact of India with England', came to Sri Ramakrishna and in the course of a conversation, paraded his muddle-headed thinking on 'man's duties in the world'. In return Bankim got a sharp rebuke from the mild and suave Paramahansa Deva as the following dialogue would prove:

“Master (to Bankim): “Well, what do you say about man's duties?”

Bankim (smiling): “If you ask me about them, I should say they are eating, sleeping, and sex-life.”

Master (sharply): “Eh? You are very saucy! What you do day and night comes out through your mouth. A man belches what he eats. If he eats radish, he belches radish; if he eats green coconut, he belches green coconut. Day and night you live in the midst of 'woman and gold'; so your mouth utters words about that alone. By constantly thinking of worldly things a man becomes calculating and deceitful. On the other hand he becomes guileless by thinking of God. A man who has seen God will never say what you have just said. What will a pundit's scholarship profit him if he does not think of God and has no discrimination and renunciation? Of what use is erudition if the mind dwells on 'woman and gold?'.”

“Kites and vultures soar very high indeed, but their gaze is fixed only on the charnel-pit. The pundit has no doubt studied many books and scriptures; he may rattle off their texts, or he may have written books. But if he is attached to women, if he thinks of money and honour as the essential things, will you call him a pundit? How can a man be a pundit if his mind does not dwell on God?”

“Some may say about the devotees: ‘Day and night these people speak of God. They are crazy; they have lost their heads. But how clever we are! How we enjoy pleasure - money, honour, the senses!’ The crow, too, thinks he is a clever bird, but the first thing he does when he wakes up in the early morning is to fill his stomach with nothing but others filth. Haven't you noticed how he struts about? Very clever indeed!”

There was dead silence.

Sri Ramakrishna continued: “But like the swan are those who think of God, who pray day and night to get rid of their attachment to the worldly things and their love for 'woman and gold', who do not enjoy anything except the nectar of the Lotus Feet of the Lord, and to whom worldly pleasures taste bitter. If you put a mixture of milk and water before the swan, it will leave the water and drink only the milk. And haven't you noticed the gait of a swan? It goes straight ahead in one direction. So it is with genuine devotees; they go toward God alone; they seek nothing else, they enjoy nothing else.”

“Love of 'woman and wealth' alone is the world; that alone is *maya*. Because of it you cannot see or think of God. After the birth of one or two children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister and talk only of God. Then both their minds will be drawn to God, and the wife will be a help to the husband on the path of spirituality. None can taste divine bliss without giving up his animal feeling. A devotee should pray to God to help him get

rid of this feeling. It must be a sincere one. God is our Inner Controller; He will certainly listen to our prayer if it is sincere.”³⁹

When an honest unbeliever assails Sri Ramakrishna with his firm avowal of atheism, his reaction is not of an ordinary teacher. He would indulgently smile at him and by gentle but firm words put him on the path of conviction. Kaliprasad, as a young man, once visited the Master. The Master asked him, “Do you believe in God?” “No,” replied the young man. “Then do you believe in religion?” asked the Master again. “No,” replied the young man with some vehemence, “Nor in the Vedas, nor in any scripture. I do not believe in anything spiritual.” The Master coolly said, “My son, if you had said that to any other Guru, what would have happened to you? But go in peace! Your doubts will be enlightened. You will believe.”

And, Kaliprasad became one of his holy Apostles as Swami Abhedananda.

One day, the Master was emphasizing the fact that God dwells in every being. A listener promptly challenged his assertion: “If God dwells in every being, then why is there so much misery in this world?” Pat came the reply: “To be sure, God dwells in man, but man does not dwell in God; that is why he suffers.”

“What prevents man from living in God?”

“Egotism of the embodied soul; this egotism covers everything like a veil. All troubles cease when the ego dies. God is the nearest of all, the *Jiva* is nothing but the embodiment of *Satchidananda*. But, since *Maya* or ego has created various *upadhis*, he has forgotten his real Self. All our suffering is due to this ‘I’. The cow cries: ‘Hamba!’ which means ‘I’. That is why it suffers so much. It is yoked to the plough and made to work in rain and sun. Then it may be killed by the butcher. From its hide shoes are made and also drums, which are mercilessly beaten. Still it does not escape suffering. At last strings are made out of its entrails for the bows used in carding cotton. Then it no longer says, ‘Hamba! Hamba!’, ‘I’, ‘I’, but ‘Tuhu!, Tuhu!’, ‘Thou!,

Thou!’ Only then are its troubles over. Lord, I am the servant. Thou art the Master. I am the child. Thou art the Mother. This is the proper attitude.”

“Then what is the way to know God?”

“One must have faith and love. Faith and devotion! One realizes God easily through devotion. He is grasped through ecstasy of Love. Through selfless work, Love of God grows in the heart. Then, through His grace, one realizes Him in course of time. One cannot see God without purity of heart. Through attachment to ‘woman and wealth’ the mind has become stained - covered with dirt, as it were, a magnet cannot attract a needle if the needle is covered with mud. Wash away the mud. One must weep for God. Shedding tears washes away all dirt from the mind. People shed jugful of tears for wife and children, for wealth and property. But who weeps for God? God cannot be realized if there is the slightest desire in the mind. An impure mind does not become steady in Yoga. ‘Lust and greed’ alone is the obstacle to Yoga. Always analyse what you see. What is there in the body of a woman? Only such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails and the like. Why should one love such a body?”

“How to perform one’s duties in the world?”

“Always try to perform your duties without desiring any result. Do your work, but surrender the result to God.” “Is it permissible to earn more money?”

“It is permissible to do so to maintain a religious family. You may try to increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not the earning of money, but the service to God. Money is not harmful if it is devoted to the service of God.”

“How long should one feel obliged to do his duty towards his wife and children?”

“As long as they feel pinched for food and clothing. But one need not take the responsibility of a son when he is able to support himself.”

“How to live in the world?”

“Like a mud fish. It lives in the mud, yet no dirt taints it, or like a ship. The proper place for the ship is to remain on the water, and not for the water in the ship. Live in the world, but let not worldliness enter your heart.”

“The world and God - how is it possible to harmonise these two?”

“Look at the carpenter’s wife, how diversely busy she is. With one hand she strikes the flattened rice in the mortar of a *Dhenki*, with the other hand she is nursing her child, and at the very same time bargaining with a customer about the flattened rice. Thus, though her occupations are many, her mind is fixed on the idea that the pestle of the *Dhenki* does not fall on her hand and bruise it. So be in the world, but always remember Him and never go astray from His path.”

“How should a householder conduct himself?”

“Be like a maid servant. The maid servant says with reference to her master’s house, ‘This is our house.’ All the while she knows the house is not her own, and that her own house is far away in a distant village. Her thoughts are really directed to her village home. Again, referring to her Master’s child in her arm, she says, ‘My Hari has grown very naughty’ or, ‘My Hari likes to eat this or that’, and so on; but all the while she knows for certain that Hari is not her own. Always consider that your family concern is not yours; they are God’s and you are like His servant come here to obey His commands.”

“Who is a real Sadhu?”

“He is truly a pious holy man whose heart and soul are wholly dedicated to God, who has renounced ‘woman and gold’. The true *sannyasin* never views women in the ordinary worldly light. He always remains at a distance from them, and if they happen to come near, he looks on them as his mother and shows respect to them. He

thinks constantly of God and serves all creatures knowing that He resides in all.”

“Why is it that worldly people do not give up everything to find God who is the ocean of Bliss?”

“Can an actor coming on the stage throw off his mask at once? The worldly man is like the alligator. As the body of the alligator is impervious to the strokes of any weapon, and as it cannot be put to death except by striking at the belly, so no matter how much good advice you give to the worldly man, and no matter how much self-disgust you arouse in him, he will never realize his situation fully unless you wean him from the objects of his attachments.”

“Why can’t worldly man be weaned away from his attachment to worldly objects?”

“Because of the force of habit. Long habit becomes a second nature. It is not easy to change one’s nature; it needs vigorous practice of discrimination and detachment for a long period of time. Once a fish-wife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn’t get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said ‘Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?’ The wife said: ‘I don’t know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep.’ The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water in it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.’ The world is like the fish-basket. Without the basket near his nose the worldly man finds no joy in life. The heart of the sinful man is like curly hair. You will never succeed in straightening it, however you may try. So also the heart of the wicked and worldly cannot be easily made upright and pure.”

IX

Training of the Apostles

Thus for nearly two decades, through wise sayings, through gentle admonitions and through sharp rebukes did Sri Ramakrishna continue his mission of soul-redemption. Many were retrieved from worldly pleasures, and their bound souls made free. Sri Ramakrishna was a born teacher. He knew what to give, when to give, how to give, how much to give and whom to give. Explaining the parable of the fishes and the fisherman's net, he classifies people into three categories.

“A fisherman threw his net into the river and had a large haul. Some fish lay in the net, calm and motionless, not exerting in the least to go out of it. Others struggled and jumped out, but could not extricate themselves, while a third class of fish somehow managed to free a way out of the net.”

“In the world men too are, thus, of three kinds - those who are bound and never strive to be free, those who are bound but struggle for freedom, and those who have already attained freedom. ‘Though all souls are one and the same in their ultimate nature, they are of four classes according to their respective conditions. They are *baddha* (the bound), *mumukshu* (the one who is struggling for liberation), *mukta* (emancipated), and *nitya mukta* (ever free).”

Of the four groups, *baddha jivas* (bound souls) form the majority. To a bound soul who is not awake in the world of Spirit, religion makes no sense. He is a mere creature of instinct. Sri Ramakrishna would compare him to a stone ball which, despite its remaining in water for long, does not allow water to get in. Only the second class of *mumukshu jivas* who struggle for freedom make much use of the *Avataras*. Many came, but only the few belonging to *mumukshu*, *mukta* and *nitya mukta* classes were transformed by their attachment to Sri Ramakrishna. The *mumukshus*, who in the course of their struggle for emancipation, oscillated between their house-hold

duties and a life of complete renunciation, were his householder disciples forming the outer circle. But the few *mumukshus*, who like persons caught in a house on fire dashed out to save themselves at any cost and who dedicated themselves heart and soul to the pursuit of spiritual life, became his monastic disciples; they formed his inner circle. Of the monastic disciples, only a few were *nitya muktas* and *nitya siddhas* (eternally free and eternally perfect). Out of them, Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) - were the most luminous.

Sri Ramakrishna was verily like a joyous *Paramahansa* (Supreme swan) in the midst of these all-renouncing disciples of his inner circle. A born teacher and an all-knowing psychologist as Sri Ramakrishna was, he diagnosed easily the chronic and general diseases of the minds existing at that time in Calcutta. He had to prescribe a panacea for these diseases, having their roots in oriental orthodoxy and occidental materialism. He had necessarily to fight hard his spiritual battle and continue it down the generations. Therefore, he yearned for pure souls to carry on his mission and hold aloft his banner. In his prayers to the Mother he asked: “Bring here. Mother, your all-renouncing devotees with whom I am to have the joy of talking about these without any reserve.”

The Mother granted what he wanted. One by one, his devotees came. Of this period before the devotees began to come, Sri Ramakrishna's biographers record: “At this time there arose a tremendous longing in his mind to meet his devotees - the pure souls whom the Mother had already shown him in spiritual forms during his transcendental visions. The time had come to train his disciples that were to give his message to the world, and he was burning with desire to pass on his realizations to the favoured children of the Mother. About this he said later, ‘There was no limit to the yearning I had then. During the day-time I managed somehow to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look forward wistfully to the day that my beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and unburdening my mind by

telling them of my realization. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed my mind. I was already arranging in my mind as to what I would say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day came to a close, I could not curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone and that they had not come, oppressed me! When during the evening service the temple rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the building in the garden, and writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice, "Come my boys! Oh, where, are you? I cannot bear to live without you!" A mother never longs so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companion, nor a lover for his sweet-heart, as I did for them! It was indescribable. Shortly after this yearning the devotees began to come in."⁴⁰

As a child and youth, Sri Ramakrishna was a cynosure frisking about in God's Way in his native village of Kamarpukur. At Dakshineswar where he did his *sadhanas* of unprecedented dimensions, he transformed himself into an Oracle spelling out solutions to the various human problems. Shyampukur and Cossipore were the training-grounds where his chosen disciples were trained to carry over his spiritual message to posterity. It was in these places that his last days were spent. Here he took treatment for cancer in his throat. And this was a divine scheme to settle him down. This period was the golden period of his life. Here he taught and trained his chosen disciples through whom posterity listens to him.

The greatest influence on a human soul is the influence of another soul. Study of scriptures, ritual and mental worship, austerity and penance - all have their effect on man, but far more nobler and transforming is the contact with a Divine Soul. Sri Ramakrishna was literally burning with the great Divine Fire. Every one of his words revealed the Divine Glory. The spirit of Holy renunciation glowed through his words and deeds. The young boys drank deep, day after day, of the Divine elixir as it flowed from the Master incessantly. The sick chamber had veritably become a forest retreat where the young novices fired with the spirit of renunciation and determined to realize the Highest Truth, clustered round the Sage who blazed forth as a

veritable Sun of Knowledge, illumining and energizing them and unburdening his wisdom of unequalled brilliance.

In working out his mission on earth he needed an inspired apostle whose genius would be highly synthetic and whose outlook will be all-inclusive, and for this, before he passed away on 16th August, 1886, he anointed Naren, the leader of the group of apostles and commissioned him the bearer of his message. He transmitted his spirituality to his chosen one. It is through him that Sri Ramakrishna's call is heard today.

Naren was not a blind follower. The rationalist that he was at the beginning, he confronted his Master thus: "Have you seen God, Sir?" And the Master answered in a quiet, firm, affirmative voice: "Yes, I see Him. God can be realized; one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you, but who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wives, and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself." And, the story of Naren's transformation into a prophet of modern India is a fact of history. The mystic episode surrounding the relationship of the disciple and Master reveals to us the utmost identity, the extreme closeness of the two. The Master's vision clearly points out that each came at the call of the other, jointly to effect the renaissance of human spirit. And the vision, narrated by Paramahansa Deva leaves no one in doubt that though to external appearances they seemed to be directly antithetical, the disciple was fundamentally identical with the Master, one in essence; and the two were harmoniously combined in a joint phenomenon. To quote the Master's vision which has all the beauty and charm of a great epic scene, about the advent of his lieutenant in the mission of soul-redemption: "One day I saw that through *samadhi* my mind was soaring high by a luminous path? Going beyond the gross world studded with sun, moon, and stars, it entered into the subtle world of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of gods and goddesses. It came gradually to the extremity of that region. There, a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Leaping over

that fence, the mind entered by degrees the realm of the Absolute. I saw that there was no person or thing having a form. As if afraid to enter there, even the gods and goddesses possessing heavenly bodies, exercised their authority over realms far below. But the very next moment I saw wise *Rishis*, having bodies of divine light, seated there in *samadhi*. I felt that, in virtue and knowledge, love and renunciation, they had excelled even the gods and goddesses, what to speak of human beings! Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine Child. Coming down to one of those *Rishis* and throwing Its soft and delicate arms round his neck, It embraced him and, afterwards calling him with Its ambrosial words, sweeter than the music of the *vina*, made great efforts to wake him up from *samadhi*. The *Rishi* woke from *samadhi* at the delicate and loving touch and looked on at that wonderful Child with half-shut eyes, free from winking. Seeing his bright face, full of delight, I thought that the Child was the treasure of his heart - their familiarity was of eternity. The extraordinary divine Child then expressed infinite joy and said to him: 'I am going; you, too, must come with me.' The *Rishi* said nothing at that request, but his loving eyes expressed his hearty assent. Afterwards, looking on the Child with loving eyes for some time, he entered again into *samadhi*. Astonished, then, I saw a fragment of his body and mind come down to the earth along the reverse path. Hardly had I seen Narendra for the first time, when I knew that he was that *Rishi*. Asked about the Child in the vision, Sri Ramakrishna replied that he himself assumed the form of that Child."⁴¹

X

The Movement Takes Shape

The bearer of the Master's message and the leader of the Movement is in nowise less unique among the prophets of the world. Swami Vivekananda was the voice and the hands of the Master. The grasp of the magnitude, the importance of his Master's message for

contemporary society and its eloquent expression in every passage he wrote and on every platform he graced, is in itself the greatest *vibhuti* - excellence incomparable - of the disciple. His profound scholarship; his clear vision, his words pregnant with meaning, his prophetic utterances, his infuse patriotism, his all-embracing love and concern for entire humanity, his utmost religious respect and regard for tradition, his enormous urge for social reform, his indomitable courage, his self-assertive yet self-effacing tendency: these and other similar noble qualities too many to be recounted here form the cardinal traits of the multifaceted personality that Vivekananda is.

With the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda unerringly deciphered the very *alpha* and *omega* of human existence. "This is the theme of India's life-work, the burden of her eternal songs, the backbone of her existence, the foundation of her being, the *raison d'etre* of her very existence - the spiritualization of the human race." And, in the message of Sri Ramakrishna, he found an effective panacea for all human ills, cultural and social. Behind his scheme for the spiritualization of the human race, one, therefore, finds the illumination on all points of the personality of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and the second President of the Movement, outlines the salient points that inspired Swami Vivekananda to organize the Movement:

"After the passing away of the Master, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) formulated a unique scheme of thought to shape the future of his countrymen for the revivification of the world culture - a scheme which was the outcome of his strange personal experiences. The chief formative influences that went to determine his vision may be classified under the following headings: his Master's great prophecies regarding his own training and realization; his knowledge of Western philosophy, history and Sanskrit scriptures; the constant study of the divine life of his Guru before him in which he found the key to life and the verification of the *shastras*; his travel all over his motherland in the course of which he availed himself of the

opportunities of comparing her as she then was with what she had been, of studying the life and thought of the people, their needs and possibilities and diversities of their customs and faiths. Mixing with princes and peasants, with saints and scholars, he grasped in its comprehensiveness that vast whole of which his Master's life and personality was but an intense epitome. These then the *shastras*, the Guru and the Motherland - are the three notes that mingle themselves to form the symphony of Swamiji's life and works. These were the treasures which he wanted to offer to the world at large."

His extensive travels and keen insight into the working of religion at various levels soon revealed to him the prevailing bigotry among the different religions of the world and a very parochial conception regarding the ideal of religion itself. The different creeds which were thought of by the ancient seers as but different paths for the realization of one and the same Truth, maintained a bellicose attitude towards one another. And, religion itself, working on a narrow basis and with distorted vision, subjected itself to self-condemnation by ostracising the various schemes of life from its scope. Religion was conceived as having nothing to do with the actualities of our everyday life and therefore was left aside as an exclusive ideal to be pursued by the recluses in the forest or by men outside the pale of society. The highest maxim of Vedanta was considered as utterly incompatible with work. A permanent cleavage was made between work and worship, renunciation and service, - an unfortunate factor which contributed most to our national deterioration. At this juncture the world sorely needed a man who would formulate a religion that would be scientific and a science that would be religious.... Swami Vivekananda found in his Master such a man.

To give concrete shape to his scheme of spiritual regeneration of the entire human race, he founded the Ramakrishna Movement with the motto "*Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya ca* - for the attainment of one's own liberation and to get oneself equipped for the amelioration of the world" in all possible ways by following the path laid down by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Deva. Him he considered an

ideal monk of the Math who knowing the Truth, feels its presence in the innermost recess of his own heart and realizes its expression all around, and who will further the cause of the Movement by revitalizing the ancient Hindu tradition in the light of the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna through its multifarious religious, cultural and social activities. And to accomplish this noble aspiration he laid great stress on a character-moulding, man-making, all-round education.

The aims & objectives of the Movement can better be understood by a study of the Memorandum of Association of the Ramakrishna Mission:

- (a) To impart and promote the study of Vedanta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of comparative theology in its widest form.
- (b) To impart and promote the study of the arts, sciences, and industries.
- (c) To train teachers in all branches of knowledge above-mentioned and enable them to reach the masses.
- (d) To carry on educational work among the masses.
- (e) To establish, maintain, carry on, and assist schools, colleges, orphan-ages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid, and the afflicted, famine relief work, and other educational and charitable works and institutions of a like nature.
- (f) To print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or other-wise, journals, periodicals, books, or leaflets that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.

- (g) To carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on in connection with and calculated directly or indirectly to promote any of the above-mentioned objects.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT IN SRI LANKA

To have an idea as to how the Movement gained momentum from year to year till it was officially incorporated by an Ordinance issued by His Excellency the Governor on 17th July, 1929, we must trace the foot-prints of the bearers of the message of Sri Ramakrishna, beginning with Swami Vivekananda's visits to the Island.

I

Swami Vivekananda's First Landing in Colombo

Swami Vivekananda first landed at Colombo in May, 1893, while he was on his way to the West, representing India and her spiritual ideals and culture at the World's Parliament of Religions. His ship set sail from Bombay on 31st May, 1893. The steamer had to stop at Colombo for a day. We have not been able to locate the actual date of his landing at Colombo, but it can be presumed to be approximately six or seven days after leaving Bombay, considering the slow pace of movement of ships in those days. The event is recorded as follows: "It was not long before the steamer reached Colombo where a halt for almost a whole day was made. The Swami made use of this opportunity to visit the City. He drove through the streets, visited a temple rich with Buddhistic imagery, and was fascinated at seeing the image of Lord Buddha, in a reclining posture entering Nirvana."¹ Probably, the Swami spent the day sight-seeing in the company of his ship-mates, and the temple referred to must be the famous temple at Kelaniya. No Hindu appears to have taken note of a personality who, about four years later, was to quicken the pulse and stir the blood of the Hindu Community of Sri Lanka.

II

Swami Vivekananda's Second Visit

The Movement can be said to have really come to Sri Lanka when its founder-leader Swami Vivekananda, landed in Colombo in January, 1897 on his way back to India from the West. He was no more an unknown monk. This time, he landed on the soil of Sri Lanka as a world celebrity and as a prophet of a new order of things. The Hindu Community of Sri Lanka had all along noted with keen interest and pride the signal success achieved by the Swami in spreading the message of the Hindu faith in the West at the World's Parliament of Religions held in the City of Chicago in September, 1893. Some of the more popular local dailies had carried the news of the 'arrival of the Hindu sage' in Colombo by the 'Prinz Regent Luitpold' on the 15th of January, 1897. This was enough to rouse the enthusiasm of the local Hindu Community to instant activity. A large number of Hindus assembled at the Tambyah Chatram to consider the steps to be taken for the purpose. To meet the expenses a subscription list was started and a sum of about Rs. 800/- was collected on the spot.²

The entire Hindu Community of Colombo headed by its most prominent leaders was at the jetty to welcome the Swami. The Prabuddha Bharata of India, of February, 1897, chronicles the event thus:

"The Swami landed at Colombo on the 15th instant at 06:00 p.m. He was met on board the steamer by Messrs. Maharajah, Sokanathan, Saminathan and others. At the jetty a very large crowd assembled to welcome him. The jetty itself and the approach road from the Grand Oriental Hotel were literally blocked up by the crowd. On landing, the Swami was received by the Hon. Mr. Coomaraswamy, member of the Legislative Council of Ceylon and Chairman of the Reception Committee, Mr. Arunachalam, Mr. Tambyah and others. He was driven in a gorgeous carriage and pair through Barnes Street to the newly built house belonging to Mr. Ratnasabapathy, broker of Messrs. Bosanquet and Company, specially engaged for the visitors and which

will henceforth bear the name of "Vivekananda Lodge." The Swami's carriage drove on slowly followed by a large number of coaches and thousands of people running after them. The procession stopped at the entrance chosen for his stay where a great pandal had been put up, and no sooner did the Swami and his party alight and enter the pandal than an artificial 'lotus' hanging under the rafts of the gate over their heads just burst and roses began to shower upon them from within the petals of the 'lotus'. Thence the Swami was taken with native music played chiefly upon different instruments under an open umbrella and flags to the second gate or entrance gate to the garden along the street covered by white cloth. He was received in the house by Coomaraswamy and others. A Tamil poet sang an ancient song with the help of a violin and an address was presented to the Swami amidst loud acclamation."

Some local newspapers took note of the great event and announced his landing and programme. 'Overland Ceylon Observer' of 14th January, 1897 carried the following reference on his arrival:

"A Hindu Sage to arrive in Colombo"- Srimat Swami Vivekananda, a well-known leader of Hindu religious thought, a sage and ascetic, is expected to arrive in Colombo tomorrow. Swami Vivekananda, who is a M.A. of London University* has been touring in America, England, in Germany and in other countries on the continent of Europe propa-gating and expounding the tenets of Hinduism. He is accompanied by three European converts to Hinduism. In America Swami Vivekananda's meetings were largely attended and attracted a good deal of Public attention. Special arrangements are being made by the Hindu Community in Colombo to accord him a suitable reception. He will lecture in Colombo and Kandy before proceeding to Madras."

A glowing description of his arrival was published in the local paper, 'The Ceylon Independent' as follows:

* Apparently the Observer was erroneous. The Swami was a graduate in Law of the University of Calcutta. His first trip abroad was to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions.

The Arrival of Srimat Swami Vivekananda (The Hindu Sage) - The 15th of January will be a memorable day in the annals of the Hindu Community of Colombo, being the day on which a teacher of the most wonderful abilities and attainments, a teacher who belonged to the most sacred order of the Hindu spiritual lights, the Sannyasies of India, had been welcomed by them. His visit, it is hoped, will prove an epoch, marking the dawn of an unprecedented spiritual activity.

As the day was closing and the night approached, the auspicious and sacred hour of “Sandhya” noted by the Hindu Shastras as the best suited for devotion, pushed itself forward as the harbinger of the coming great events of the day, when the sage whose august personage and large and bright eyes, shed forth a very powerful current of magnetism, whose noble figure and sedate countenance indicated how easily he controlled the vigorous passions working restlessly in a frame of the most robust nature, arrived dressed in the orange garb of a Sannyasin, accompanied by Swami Niranjanananda (a fellow disciple of the Swami deputed by the Madras Reception Committee to receive the sage when he lands in Colombo), T. Sokanathan, A. Naganathan (son-in-law of Mr. Selliah of Imperial Bank) and others.

The whole Hindu community, a very large crowd of over a thousand people, headed by the Hon’ble P. Coomaraswamy and Mr. Arunachalam, awaited at the jetty with many others.

Every eye in the whole crowd was raised towards s.s. “Prinz Regent Luitpold” to have the earliest opportunity of having a glimpse at least of the great centre of spirituality that drew this vast concourse towards itself by its centripetal force. Can words describe the feelings of the warm crowd, the highest expression of love, when they saw the steam-boat with the sage steaming towards the jetty. Nearer and nearer the boat came, louder and louder beat the heart of each Hindu, yearning to have the first look at the sacred person. In came the steam-boat, the din and clamour of the shouts caused by the clapping of hands roused by the strong wave of spirituality drowned even the

roaring of the waves of the sea. The Hon’ble P. Coomaraswamy stepped forward followed by his brother and received the sage and entwined a sweet jessamine garland round the Swami’s neck. Then there came a rush, the whole crowd shoving everything that came in its way. No amount of physical force could hold back the yearning souls. The hats of many were thrown away, and the handkerchiefs of many more were lost, but the beautiful pair of horses that awaited in front of the G.O.H. carried away the sage to the pandal at Barnes Street. Every available carriage was in motion, and hundreds of pedestrians wended their way to the triumphal arched pandal at Barnes Street, which was decorated to the best of taste in a most elegant style, with evergreens, &c.

There the sage, dismounting from the carriage, walked in procession with all Hindu martial honour, such as the flag, the sacred umbrella, the spreading of the white cloth, &c. The native music played select airs. Messrs. T. Shanmugam, N. Tyagarajah, N. Ratnasabapathy, R. Rajendra, K. Sittampalam and host of others, too numerous to mention, joined the procession at Barnes Street. The large crowd with the sage then marched on to another beautiful and artistic pandal in front of the house prepared for the temporary residence of the sage. The sides of the road leading from the first pandal to the second were lined with beautiful arches festooned with palm leaves, &c. As soon as the sage entered the second pandal a beautiful artificial lotus flower unfolded its petals and out came a few birds from inside, moving their wings, and flitting about as they liked. But none of the charming decorations & other thamashas were to give any attraction to the crowd; for each individual was struggling to have a view of at least a portion of the Swami’s person, some of them amidst overwhelming numbers breaking down the very decorations in their march.

At last the entrance into the garden, where a circular row of chairs was placed, was effected. The sage and his disciples took their seat amidst a shower of flowers. After a little silence the musician took his violin in hand and played a very charming tune, and the sacred Tamil hymns of “Thevaram” of 2,000 years old was sung with

music, which greatly added to the effect. The Hon'ble Mr. Coomaraswamy, stepping forward, bowed to the Swami in the Oriental fashion and read the following address on behalf of the Hindus."

'The Overland Ceylon Observer' also reported vividly the warm reception accorded to the Swami thus:

"**Arrival of a Hindu sage** - Swami Vivekananda, the Hindu delegate who proceeded to Chicago to represent the Hindus at the Parliament of Religions, and who has spent his time in America and Europe arrived here last evening by the "Prinz Regent Luitpold." He was accompanied by three American and European converts. The Hindus of Colombo mustered in strong numbers at the jetty to give him a welcome. Several leading Hindus went on board and brought him ashore in a Steam Launch and on landing at the jetty; he was received by the Hindus headed by the Hon. P. Coomaraswamy and Mr. P. Arunachalam. The Swami and his companions were driven then to the Cinnamon Gardens, the Hindus following in carriages. At the turn to Barnes Street a pandal had been put up. Here the Swami alighted down and was taken in procession with Hindu flags, music and torch lights along Barnes Street to the residence of Mr. Ratnasabapathy which has been placed at his disposal, during his stay there. On arrival here, after singing of a Hindu song said to be 3000 years old, the Hon. P. Coomaraswamy read and presented the address from the Hindu Community according him a hearty welcome. The Swami replied at length extolling the principles of their religion and how it had flourished from days immemorial, etc."

'The Independent' published in full the address of welcome to the Swami as follows:

To, SRIMAT VIVEKANANDA SWAMI

Revered Sir,

In pursuance of a resolution passed at a public meeting of the Hindus of the city of Colombo, we beg to offer you a hearty welcome to this Island. We deem it a privilege to be the first to welcome you on your return home from your great mission in the West.

We have watched with joy and thankfulness the success with which the mission has, under God's blessing, been crowned. You have proclaimed to the nations of Europe and America the Hindu ideal of a universal religion harmonising all creeds, providing spiritual food for each soul according to its needs and lovingly drawing it unto God. You have preached the Truth and the Way taught from remote ages by a succession of Masters whose blessed feet have walked and sanctified the soil of India, and whose gracious presence and inspiration have made her, through all her vicissitudes, the Light of the World.

To the inspiration of such a Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva, and to your self-sacrificing zeal Western nations owe the priceless boon of being placed in living contact with the spiritual genius of India, while to many of our own countrymen, delivered from the glamour of Western civilization, the value of our glorious heritage has been brought home.

By your noble work and example you have laid Humanity under an obligation difficult to repay, and you have shed fresh lustre upon our Motherland. We pray that the grace of God may continue to prosper you and your work.

We remain, Revered Sir,

Yours faithfully,

For and on behalf of the Hindus of Colombo,

P. COOMARASWAMY

Member of the Legislative Council of Ceylon,

Chairman of the Meeting

Colombo, 15th Jan. 1897

"Then rose the Swami, amidst deafening cheers, and responded to the address in the simplest, lucid, most eloquent, and impressive style peculiar to himself. The words, - simple and plain though they were, - that proceeded out of his mouth, carried the feelings of those who heard the holy man to such an extent that they inspired awe and respect and almost struck them mute and motionless like a statue."

“He impressed upon the audience that in spite of the weaknesses or frailties and the short-comings of a material civilisation attributable to Hindus, their greatness and strength in spiritual advancement is unparalleled. They were the most ancient of the ancient spiritual teachers. The highest expression of the spirituality of the Hindus, he said, was demonstrated by the princely reception accorded to a begging Sannyasi. He said that it was not a general, not a prince, not a wealthy man, that had drawn the honours of the thousands he saw before him, but a poor Sannyasi. This, he said, practically indicated the strength of the spiritual side of his countrymen. At the conclusion of the Swami’s powerful speech there was a shower of flowers, and a magic voice shouted out, ‘Jaya, Jaya, Maha Deva’, which was echoed with cheers and enthusiasm from all sides. Each one in the crowd vied with the other in taking up the chorus, and shouted out, ‘Jaya, Jaya, Maha Deva (Victory, Victory, Maha Deva)’. Then the sage offered a prayer, and this was followed by sprinkling of rose water etc.”

The sage then walked into the house, well lit up and excellently furnished. Here another fragrant garland was thrown round the sage’s neck, and he took his seat. Finding that the crowd was still unwilling to disperse, he came out and saluted all and bade the people good-bye. After this the people one by one began to wend their way to their respective houses with the greatest satisfaction at having enjoyed one of the highest blessings destined to man.”

On the following day, 16th evening, the Swami delivered his first lecture in the East, the subject of the lecture being “India, the *Punya Bhumi*” The Overland Ceylon Observer of 18th January, 1897 commented on the talks as follows:

“Swami Vivekananda at the Floral Hall: Swami Vivekananda, the representative of Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions, delivered an address at the Floral Hall on Saturday night. He was accompanied to the platform by, among others, the Hon. P. Coomaraswamy and Hon. P. Ramanathan, the Solicitor-General. The Swami is an orator of high order, and is of commanding

presence and dignified mien. In the course of a powerful address, he spoke on the: influence of the mild Hindu on the religious thought of the world unceasing, passive and powerful withal. As the great German sage Schopenhauer had foretold, he predicted that the world was yet to see a revolution in thought more expansive and powerful than that which it witnessed at the renaissance of Greek Literature. He spoke of the tolerance of Hinduism and contrasted the religious feelings of adherents to that faith with the religions of the West, which he said was to the occidental one of the many occupations of life. He traced in outline the different religions of the world, arguing, in favour of a universal religion and spoke of the great part India, the Mother of Nations, was to take in bringing about this glorious consummation. At the close, the Swami was, on the motion of the Hon. Mr. Ramanathan, warmly thanked for his address.”

III

First Public Lecture in the East

The Swami gave a brief reply, expressing his appreciation of the kind welcome he had received. He took advantage of the opportunity to point out that the demonstration had not been made in honour of a great politician, or a great soldier, or a millionaire, but of a begging Sannyasin, showing the tendency of the Hindu mind towards religion. He urged the necessity of keeping religion as the backbone of the national life, if the nation were to live, and disclaimed any personal character for the welcome he had received, but insisted upon its being the recognition of a principle.

On the evening of the 16th the Swami gave the following public lecture in the Floral Hall (where now stands the ‘Chalmers’ Granaries’):

“What little work has been done by me has not been from any inherent power that resides in me, but from the cheers, the good-will,

the blessings, that have followed my path in the West from this our very beloved, most sacred, dear Motherland. Some good has been done, no doubt, in the West, but especially to myself, for what before was the result of an emotional nature perhaps, has gained the certainty of conviction, and attained the power and strength of demonstration. Formerly, I thought as every Hindu thinks, and as the Hon. President has just pointed out to you, that this is the *Punya Bhumi*, the land of Karma. Today I stand here and say, with the conviction of truth, that it is so. If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all the land of introspection and of spirituality, - it is India. Hence have started the founders of religions from the most ancient times, deluging the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth; hence have proceeded the tidal waves of philosophy that have covered the earth. East or West, North or South, and hence again must start the wave which is going to spiritualise the material civilisation of the world. Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the hearts of millions, in other lands. Believe me, my friends, this is going to be.

So much I have seen, and so far those of you who are students of the history of races are already aware of this fact. The debt which the world owes to our Motherland is immense. Taking country with country, there is not one race on this earth to which the world owes so much as to the patient Hindu, the mild Hindu. 'The mild Hindu' sometimes is used as an expression of reproach, but if ever a reproach concealed a wonderful truth it is in the term, 'the mild Hindu', who has always been the blessed child of God. Civilisations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient times and in modern times, great ideas have emanated from strong and great races. In ancient and in

modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another. In ancient and in modern times, seeds of great truth and power have been cast abroad by the advancing tides of national life, but mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets, and with the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood; each idea had to wade through the blood of millions of our fellow-beings; each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, in the main, other nations have taught but India has for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist, when Rome was not thought of, when the very fathers of the modern Europeans lived in the forests and painted themselves blue. Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it, and peace before it. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live. There was a time when at the sound of the march of the big Greek battalions, the earth trembled. Vanished off from the face of the earth, with not even a tale left behind to tell, gone is that ancient land of the Greeks. There was a time when the Roman Eagle floated over everything worth having in this world; everywhere Rome's power was felt and pressed on the head of humanity; the earth trembled at the name of Rome. But the Capitoline Hill is a mass of ruins, the spider weaves its web where the Caesars ruled. There have been other nations equally glorious that have come and gone, living a few hours of exultant and of exuberant dominance, and of a wicked national life, and then vanishing like ripples on the face of the waters. Thus have these nations made their mark on the face of humanity. But we live, and if *Manu* came back today he would not be bewildered, and would not find himself in a foreign land. The same laws are here, laws adjusted and thought out through thousands and thousands of years; customs, the outcome of the acumen of ages and the experience of centuries, that seem to be eternal; and as the days go by, as blow after

blow of misfortune has been delivered upon them, they seem to have served one purpose only, that of making them stronger and more constant. And to find the centre of all this, the heart from which the blood flows, the main-spring of the national life, believe me when I say after my experience of the world, that it is here. To the other nations of the world, religion is one among the many occupations of life. There is politics, there are the enjoyments of social life, there is all that wealth can buy or power can bring, there is all that the senses can enjoy; and among all these various occupations of life, and all this searching after something which can give yet a little more whetting to the cloyed senses - among all these, there is perhaps a little bit of religion. But here, in India, religion is the one and the only occupation of life. How many of you know that there has been a Chino - Japanese war? Very few of you, if any. That there are tremendous political movements and socialistic movements trying to transform Western society, how many of you know? Very few indeed, if any. But that there was a Parliament of Religions in America, and that there was a Hindu Sannyasin sent over there, I am astonished to find that even the *coolie* knows of it. That shows the way the wind blows, where the national life is. I used to read books written by globe-trotting travellers, especially foreigners, who deplored the ignorance of the Eastern masses, but I found out that it was partly true and at the same time partly untrue. If you ask a ploughman in England, or in America, or France, or in Germany to what party he belongs, he can tell you whether he belongs to the Radicals or the Conservatives, and for whom he is going to vote. In America he will say whether he is Republican or Democrat, and even knows something about the silver question. But if you ask him about his religion, he will tell you that he goes to church, and belongs to a certain denomination. That is all he knows, and he thinks it is sufficient.

Now, when we come to India, if you ask one of our ploughmen, "Do you know anything about politics?", he will reply, "What is that?" He does not understand the socialistic movements, the relation between capital and labour, and all that, he has never heard of such

things in his life; he works hard and earns his bread. But you ask, "What is your religion?" He replies, "Look here, my friend, I have marked it on my forehead." He can give you a good hint or two on questions of religion. That has been my experience. That is our nation's life. Individuals have each their own peculiarities, and each man has his own method of growth, his own life marked out for him, by the infinite past life, by all his past Karma as we Hindus say; into this world he comes with all the past on him, the infinite past ushers the present, and the way in which we use the present is going to make the future. Thus, everyone born into this world has a bent, a direction towards which he must go, through which he must live, and what is true of the individual is equally true of the race. Each race, similarly, has a peculiar bent, each race has a peculiar *raison d'être*, each race has a peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world. Each race has to make its own result, to fulfil its own mission. Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world, whenever circumstances are propitious. Let the Persian or the Greek, the Roman, the Arab, or the Englishman march his battalions, conquer the world, and link the different nations together, and the philosophy and spirituality of India is ever ready to flow along the new-made channels into the veins of the nations of the world. The Hindu's calm brain must pour out its own quota to give to the sum total of human progress. India's gift to the world is the light spiritual.

Thus, in the past, we read in history, that whenever there arose a great conquering nation uniting the different races of the world, binding India with the other races, taking her out, as it were, from her loneliness, and from her aloofness from the rest of the world, into which she again and again cast herself, that whenever such function has been brought about, the result has been the flooding of the world with Indian spiritual ideas. At the beginning of this century,

Schopenhauer, the great German philosopher, studying, from a not very clear translation of the Vedas made from an old translation into Persian, and thence by a young Frenchman into Latin, says, "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death." This great German sage foretold, that "The world is about to see a revolution in thought more extensive and more powerful than that which was witnessed by the Renaissance of Greek Literature," and to-day his predictions are coming to pass. Those who keep their eyes open, those who understand the workings in the minds of the different nations of the West, those who are thinkers and study the different nations, will find the immense change that has been produced in the tone, the procedure, in the methods, and in the literature of the world by this slow, never-ceasing permeation of Indian thought. But there is another peculiarity, as I have already hinted to you. We never preached our thoughts with fire and sword. If there is one word in the English language to represent the gift of India to the world, if there is one word in the English language to express the effect which the literature of India produces upon mankind, it is this one word, 'fascination'. It is the opposite of anything that takes you suddenly; it throws on you, as it were, a charm imperceptibly. To many, Indian thought, Indian manners, Indian customs, Indian philosophy, Indian literature, are repulsive at the first sight, but let them persevere, let them read, let them become familiar with the great principles underlying these ideas, and it is ninety-nine to one that the charm will come over them, and fascination will be the result. Slow and silent, as the gentle dew that falls in the morning, unseen and unheard, yet producing a most tremendous result, has been the work of this calm, patient, all suffering, spiritual race upon the world of thought.

Once more history is going to repeat itself. For, today, under the blasting light of modern science when old, and apparently strong and invulnerable beliefs have been shattered to their very foundations, when special claims laid to the allegiance of mankind by different

sects have been all blown into atoms and have vanished into air - when the sledge hammer blows of modern antiquarian researches are pulverising like masses of porcelain all sorts of antiquated orthodoxies - when religion in the West is only in the hands of the ignorant, and the knowing ones look down with scorn upon anything belonging to religion, here comes to the fore the philosophy of India, which displays the highest religious aspirations of the Indian mind, where the grandest philosophical facts have been the practical spirituality of the people. This naturally is coming to the rescue, the idea of the oneness of all, the Infinite, the idea of the Impersonal, the wonderful idea of the eternal soul of man, of the unbroken continuity in the march of beings, and the infinity of the universe. The old sects looked upon the world as a little mud-puddle, and thought that time began but the other day. It was there in our old books, and only there that the grand idea of the infinite range of time, space and causation, and above all the infinite glory of the spirit of man governed all the search for religion. When the modern tremendous theories of evolution and conservation of energy and so forth, are dealing death blows to all sorts of crude theologies, what can hold any more the allegiance of cultured humanity but the most wonderful, convincing, broadening, and ennobling ideas, that can only be found in that most marvellous product of the soul of man, the wonderful voice of God, the Vedanta.

At the same time, I must remark, that what I mean by our religion working upon the nations outside of India, comprises only the principles, the background, the foundation upon which that religion is built. The detailed workings, the minute points which have been worked out through centuries of social necessity, little ratiocinations about manners and customs and social well-being, do not rightly find a place in the category of religion. We know, that in our books, a clear distinction is made between two sets of truths. The one set is that which abides for ever, being built upon the nature of man, the nature of the soul, the soul's relation to God, the nature of God, perfection, and so on; there are also the principles of cosmology,

of the infinitude of creation, or more correctly speaking - projection, the wonderful law of cyclical procession, and so on - these are the eternal principles founded upon the universal laws in nature. The other set comprises the minor laws, which guides the working of our everyday life. They belong more properly to the Puranas, to the Smritis, and not to the Srutis. These have nothing to do with the other principles. Even in our own nation these minor laws have been changing all the time. Customs of one age, of one Yuga, have not been the customs of another, and as Yuga comes after Yuga, they will still have to change. Great Rishis will appear and lead us to customs and manners that are suited to new environments.

The great principles underlying all this wonderful, infinite, “ennobling, expansive view of man and God and the world, have been produced in India. In India alone, man has not stood up to fight for a little tribe God, saying “My God is true and yours is not true; let us have a good fight over it.” It was only here that such ideas did not occur, as fighting for little gods. These great underlying principles being based upon the eternal nature of man, are as potent today for working for the good of the human race, as they were thousands of years ago, and they will remain so, so long as this earth remains, so long as the law of Karma remains, so long as we are born as individuals and have to work out our own destiny by our individual power.

And above all, what India has to give to the world, is this. If we watch the growth and development of religions in different races, we shall always find this, that each tribe at the beginning has a god of its own. If the tribes are allied to each other, these gods will have a generic name, as for example, all the Babylonian gods had. When the Babylonians were divided into many races, they had the generic name of Baal, just as the Jewish races had different gods with the common name of Moloch; and at the same time you will find, that one of these tribes becomes superior to the rest, and Tays claim to its own king as the king over all. There from, it naturally follows that it also wants to preserve its own god as the god of all races. Baal-Merodach, said the

Babylonians, was the greatest god; all the other were inferior. Moloch Yavah was the superior over all other Molochs; and these questions had to be decided by the fortunes of battle. The same struggle was here also. In India the same competing gods had been struggling with each other for supremacy, but the great good fortune of this country and of the world was, that there came out in the midst of the din and confusion, a voice which declared *Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti* – “That which exists is One; sages call It by various names.” It is not that Siva is superior to Vishnu, not that Vishnu is everything and Siva is nothing, but it is the same one whom you call either Siva or Vishnu, or by a hundred other names. The names are different, but it is the same one. The whole history of India you may read in these few words. The whole history has been a repetition in massive language, with tremendous power, of that one central doctrine. It was repeated in the land, till it had entered into the blood of the nation, till it began to tingle with every drop of blood that flowed in their veins, till it became one with the life, part and parcel of the material of which they were composed, and thus the land was transmuted into the most wonderful land of toleration, giving the right to welcome the various religions - as well as all sects, into the old mother-country.

And herein is the explanation of the most remarkable phenomenon that is only witnessed here, all the various sects, apparently hopelessly contradictory, yet living in such harmony. You may be a dualist, and I may be a monist. You may believe that you are the eternal servant of God, and I may declare that I am one with God Himself; yet both of us are good Hindus. How is that possible? Read then “*Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti*” – “That which exists is **One**; sages call It by various names.” Above all others, my countrymen, this is the one grand truth that we have to teach to the world. Even the most educated people of other countries turn up their noses at an angle of forty-five degrees and call our religion, idolatry. I have seen that, and they never stopped to think what a mass of superstition there was in their own heads. It is so still everywhere, this tremendous sectarianism, the low narrowness of the mind. The thing

which a man has is the only thing worth having; the only life worth living is his own little life of dollar-worship and mammon-worship; the only little possession worth having is his own property, and nothing else. If he can manufacture a little clay nonsense or invent a machine, that is to be admired beyond the greatest possessions. That is the case over the whole world, in spite of education and learning. But education has yet to be in the world, and civilisation - civilisation has begun nowhere yet, ninety-nine decimal nine per cent of the human race are more or less savages, even now. We may read of these things in books, and we hear of toleration in religion and all that, but very little of it is there yet in the world; take my experience for that; ninety-nine per cent do not even think of it. There is tremendous religious persecution yet, in every country in which I have been, and the same old objections are raised against learning anything new. The little toleration that is in the world, the little sympathy that is yet in the world, for religious thought, is practically here, in the land of the Aryas, and nowhere else. It is here that Indians build temples for Moham-medans and Christians; nowhere else. If you go to other countries and ask Mohammedans, or people of other religions to build a temple for you, see how they will help. They will instead try to break down your temple and you too, if they can. The one great lesson therefore that the world wants most, that the world has yet to learn from India, is the idea, not only of toleration, but of sympathy. Well has it been said in the Mahimna Stotra – “As the different rivers, taking their start from different mountains, running straight or crooked, at last come unto the ocean, so, O Siva, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead unto Thee.” Though they may take various roads, all are on the way. Some may run a little crooked, others may run straight, but at last, they will all come unto the Lord, the One, Then and then alone, is your Bhakti of Siva complete, when you not only see Him in the Lingam, but you see Him everywhere. He is the sage, he is the lover of Hari, who sees Hari in everything and in everyone. If you are a real lover of Siva, you must see Him in everything, and in everyone. You must see that every worship is given unto Him, whatever may be the name or the form; that all knees

bending towards the Kaaba, or kneeling in a Christian Church, or in a Buddhist Temple, are kneeling to Him, whether they know it or not, whether they are conscious of it or not; that in whatever name or form they are offered, all these flowers are laid at His feet, for He is the one Lord of all, the one Soul of all souls. He knows infinitely better what this world wants, than you or I. It is impossible that all difference can cease; it must exist; without variation life must cease. It is this clash, the differentiation of thought that makes for light, for motion, for everything. Differentiation, infinitely contradictory, must remain, but it is not necessary that we should hate each other therefore. It is not necessary therefore, that we should fight each other.

Therefore, we have again to learn the one central truth that was only preached here, in our Motherland, and that once more has to be preached from India. Why?

Because, not only it is in our books, but it runs through every phase of our national literature, and is in the national life. Here and here alone is it practised every day, and any man whose eyes are open can see that it is practised here and here alone. Thus we have to teach religion. There are other and higher lessons that India can teach, but they are only for the learned. The lessons of mildness, gentleness, forbearance, toleration, sympathy, and brotherhood, everyone may learn, whether man, woman or child, learned or unlearned, without respect of race, caste or creed. “They call Thee by various names; Thou art One.”³

IV

The Swami's Visit to Sivan Kovil

The Swami spent the following day in granting interviews to innumerable visitors. He also visited the Ponnambalavaneshwar temple, a temple of Siva, at Kochchikadai, Colombo on the 17th January 1897 (Sunday). On the next day the Swami paid a visit to Mr.

Chelliah, one of the distinguished Hindus of Ceylon. 'The Ceylon Independent' provides a detailed account of the Swami's visit as follows: "The Swami's visit to Sivan Kovil on Sunday evening was another occasion of public demonstration. The streets of the Hindu Quarters were all cleaned and lit up. The Temple was crowded on his arrival with both sexes who had repaired thither only to have a glimpse of the holy person.

At about 04:00 p.m. on Monday, the 18th January, Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to Mr. Chelliah, whose house had been decorated in a most tasteful and artistic fashion to accord the revered visitor a reception suitable to his dignity. A throng of eager spectators had already assembled in and outside the house, and when the carriage which conveyed the Swami drew at Mr. Chelliah's, the assembly seemed to be filled with an exuberance of joy as might have been seen from the manner in which they deported themselves. Garlands after garlands, and flowers after flowers were showered upon him almost interminably. This done, he was seated on a Thetpasanam* spread over a velvet sofa which was placed upon a platform fitted out for the occasion. He was then sprinkled with the sacred water of the Ganges and rosewater. After this, the Swami partook of light refreshments, consisting of fruits and milk, by way of conferring blessing on Mr. Chelliah.

He then distributed sacred ashes to the crowd which must have in the least exceeded a thousand. A photo of his Guru suspended against a wall opposite to him, and a likeness of himself well and faithfully drawn in oil painting, attracted the Swami's attention. Making obeisance to his Guru's figure, he approached towards his own likeness and expressed his admiration for the artist who produced it. Opposite to that of his own, was the photo of His Highness Bhaskara Sethu Pathi Maharajah of Ramnad. While the Swami's eyes were turned towards this, the editor of the Nagai

* Seat made of holy grass, used for meditation.

Neelalochani, Mr. G. Sathasivampillai, who happened to be there then, stepped forward and observed that the Rajah was expected in Colombo to receive the Swami on his arrival, and though disappointed in that way, he was not less fortunate, as he had the pleasure to see, side by side with the Swami, his Guru and his earnest devotee the Rajah (in their likenesses). He highly extolled the residence of Mr. Chelliah as the happy resort for Mahatmas. Alakiya Sundari, a child of Mr. Chelliah, happening to pass by at that time, was taken up by the Swami and warmly embraced. Then native music commenced and this interesting function was brought to a close with the recital of the sacred songs of Thevaram."⁴

V

The Swami's Second Public Lecture

The same evening the Swami delivered his second lecture on "The Vedanta Philosophy". 'The Overland Ceylon Observer' commented as follows in its 'Social News' column on the 19th January, 1897:

"Swami Vivekananda at the Public Hall - In the Public Hall last night Swami Vivekananda delivered an address to a large audience principally of the Tamil Community though a few Europeans were present. The central theme of the address was the advocacy of a universal religion based on the Vedas. In the course of his remarks the Swami cautioned the Hindus against slavish imitation of Europeans which he saw on some of his countrymen, did not fit, it did not harmonise with the colours with which Ceylon earth and skies were so richly endowed, it was unaesthetic and clumsy on a man with a black skin and he counselled the use of certain shades of red and orange as more becoming to the complexion of the wearers. The Hindus, he said, were instinctively an artistic race, while as for the Anglo-Saxons, except in the matter of poetry and literature, generally, which was the most marvellous literature of Europe, they did not

come within a hundred miles of art. Instead of taking up every little thing from any one who seemed their superior, let them copy the independence, the steadiness and the adventurousness of the Englishman, who if need be, was ready to go to the sun, the moon or the dog-star if something was to be found there. He proceeded to discuss Hindu Philosophy as based on the Vedas in effect declaring himself a Monist. The Swami left Colombo today going to Kandy, then to Anuradhapuram, to inspect the ruins, on to Jaffna, thence to the shrine of Rameshvaram and thence to Southern India to be the guest of the Rajah of Ramnad and next to Madras and Calcutta. 'The Ceylon Independent' published the entire proceedings in much greater detail as follows:

Swami Vivekananda at the Public Hall – On Monday night Swami Vivekananda delivered an address on the Vedanta Philosophy of the Hindus to a crowded audience at the Public Hall, Colombo. He was introduced to the audience by Mr. P. Arunachalam, the Registrar General, and standing on the platform in the yellow robe of an ascetic, with an orange coloured turban, a tall, powerful well set figure and a face full of vigour and spirituality, he made a most striking personality. Mr. Arunachalam in introducing him said, the lecturer whom he had the honour to introduce that night hardly needed an introduction. His fame had covered both hemispheres, like that of another distinguished son of India, Ranjitsinhji, distinguished on another plane which naturally appealed more powerfully to the public mind. But the work of Swami Vivekananda would in lasting fruit outgrow all other work and was too high for rivalry. The warmth of respect, affection and gratitude entertained for him in the West and East had been publicly manifested by numerous addresses from many of the best spirits of Western and Eastern Nations, and not least of all by the magnificent reception accorded to him last Friday in the City of Colombo, a reception unique in character and which for its enthusiasm had not been equalled within living memory. The Swami was early brought under the influence of one of those Masters with whose gracious presence and inspiration the ancient Wisdom Land, Jnana Bhumi, now known as India, had always been blessed. Under that influence he renounced the world and devoted himself to

philosophic study and meditation, and, to those methods of spiritual culture of which India had been the repository. Four years ago he proceeded to America to expound Indian religion and philosophy at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and was received by the people of America with the respect due to the representative of the oldest religion and philosophy of the world. That sentiment was kindled into enthusiasm by his power of exposition and his fascinating personality, which made such an impression that he was obliged to stay and continue his instruction by means of classes which were formed for the purpose and attended with marked success. During the last two years the sphere of his activity had been mainly in England, where his teaching had met with even greater success. Unlike Brother Jonathan, John Bull was not attracted by novelties, but rather viewed them with distrust and even scouted them with contempt; it took a long time to convince him with regard to a new thing, yet when he was convinced, he would stick to it and give his life for it if necessary. Such had been the Swami's experience of Englishmen at home, and Mr. Arunachalam trusted the Englishmen in Ceylon and the Ceylonese generally would make a similar response to his message. This was not the first mission which had started forth from India to the World. The mission with which the people of Ceylon were most familiar was the mission of Gautama Buddha, the influence of whose Gospel once dominated nearly the whole of Asia and still dominates no inconsiderable portion of it. Indeed, all the religions and philosophies of the world had had their fountain-head in India. In former times ideas travelled slowly, but now thanks mainly to the energy of Englishmen who by their commerce, their language and their inventions had girdled the earth, they spread rapidly, and the message which Swami Vivekananda brought anew from India to a world sunk and almost expiring of materialism, seemed destined at no distant date to an almost world wide acceptance. Not so very long ago they (men of Colombo) had the opportunity of hearing in that very hall that noble Englishwoman, Annie Besant, who, after a chequered and stormy life spent in the pursuit of truth, found truth and peace in the philosophy of India. That same philosophy, in which the great German philosopher,

Schopenhauer, found truth and peace; and for which eighty years ago he prophesied a more enduring, a more glorious influence upon Western civilisation than was exercised on it by the Renaissance. The dawn of that looked-for day had already touched with rosy light the Western skies, and those of their children would see its noon-day splendour. It was of this philosophy, they (the audience) were to have an exposition that night taught from the lips of a Master; of the philosophy of the Upanishads which was the basis of the religions of India and which was known in India as the Vedanta or the end of the Vedas, or, as it might be called in biblical language, the goal of the law. Mr. Arunachalam fervently hoped that the lecturer that night would sow in Ceylon the seeds of a rich harvest; and concluded by calling upon the Swami for his address.

The Swami then proceeded to deliver an eloquent and interesting address which extended over an hour and a half. The central theme of his address was the advocacy of a Universal Religion based on the Vedas. The sombre dress of the Europeans in which some of his countrymen appeared seems to have attracted the Swami's attention, and, in the course of his remarks, he felt it his duty to caution them against such slavish imitation of European dress and manners. This dress, he said, did not suit them, and did not harmonise with the colours with which their country is so richly endowed. He further added that it was unaesthetic and clumsy on a man with a black skin, and he counselled the use of certain shades of red and orange as more becoming to the complexion of the wearers. It was the spirit, he observed, in his countrymen in thus foolishly admiring and aping all what a European does, that called forth such remarks. In cautioning against the dress, he cautioned against other and more serious vices which, he perceived, they are likely to imitate. Instead of taking up every little thing, he said, from John Bull or Brother Jonathan, let them copy his virtues, such as independence, steadiness and adventurousness. The meeting; then closed with a vote of thanks to the lecturer.*

* Unfortunately a transcript of the Swami's speech is not available.

VI

The Swami's Visit to Kandy and Anuradhapuram

On the morning of Tuesday the 19th January, 1897, at 7:30 a.m. the Swami left Colombo for Kandy by train in a special saloon owned by Mr. Tambyah and accompanied by Sir P. Arunachalam, arriving at 11:20 a.m. At the railway station at Kandy, a large crowd awaited him with an Indian band and the temple insignia to convey him in a procession to a bungalow in which he was to take rest. Then, an elaborately got-up address was read to him by Tillyampalam Muhandiram, as the representative of the Hindus in Kandy.

The Swami listened with great attention throughout, and his face was often seen to light up with gladness at the many warm and respectful greetings extended to him. The address of welcome and the Swami's reply were reported by The Ceylon Independent as follows:

To, SRIMAT VIVEKANANDA SWAMI

Revered Sir,

On behalf of the Hindu Community we beg to offer you a very hearty welcome to Kandy, and to express our sincere hope that your visit to our Mountain Capital will be as pleasant to you as it is bound to be profitable to us. We cannot allow this occasion to pass without giving expression to the sentiments of esteem and admiration which your single-hearted devotion to the cause of Truth and the brilliant ability with which you have expounded its principles in lands other than India, have made us entertain towards you. Since your first visit to America as the Representative of our Faith at the Parliament of Religions, we have watched your missionary career with the keenest interest, and it is with feelings of deep thankfulness that we hear of the unexpectedly large measure of success that has attended it in the Western World. The seeds of Eternal Truth which you and your fellow workers are sowing with such self-denying perseverance are destined to yield a rich harvest of spiritual progress in the near future. That you

may be long spared in health and strength to continue and consummate the Labour of Love you have undertaken is the fervent prayer.

Of your humble
Co-Religionists

Replying to this address in fitting terms, the Swami comforted the anxious visitors who were unwilling to part with him, by promising that he meant to pay, ere long, another visit to that beautiful town.

After a few hours rest and visiting some interesting spots of the beautiful town he left for Matalai, reaching the place the same evening. Next day, on Wednesday, the 20th, the Swami began a coach-ride of 200 miles through a country, the beauty of whose natural scenery has placed it among the most beautiful and charming spots in the world - to Jaffna (Yālppānam). On his way to Anuradhapuram from Matalai, there was a mishap to the coach in which Swamiji was travelling. 'The Overland Ceylon Observer' of 21st of January, 1897, reported as follows on the incident: "A coach has collapsed at Kekirawa with Srimat Swami Vivekananda and party. The hind and front wheels have broken down. The party has proceeded to Anuradhapuram by bullock carts and fresh wheels have been forwarded from Matalai." The "Life of Swami Vivekananda" gives a full detail of the journey to Jaffna as follows:

A few miles beyond Dambullai, a mishap occurred. One of the front wheels of the coach was smashed in descending a hill, necessitating a stoppage of three hours on the roadside. Fortunately, the wheel did not come entirely off, or the carriage would have been overturned. After a long wait, only one bullock-cart was secured from a distant village, and in it was put Mrs. Sevier with all the luggage. Then progress was made but slowly, as the Swami and his companions had to walk several miles before they got other bullock-carts. They passed the night in the carts and reached Anuradhapuram passing through Kanahari, and Tinpani, about eight hours late.

Under the shade of the sacred Bo-tree the Swami gave a short address, to a crowd of two to three thousand people, interpreters

translating, as he proceeded, into Tamil and Sinhalese. The subject was "Worship", and he exhorted his hearers to give practical effect to the teachings of the Vedas, rather than pay attention to mere empty worship. When the Swami had proceeded so far, a huge crowd of fanatic Buddhists, Bhikshus and householders - men, women and children - gathered round him and created such a horrid noise by beating drums, gongs, cans, etc., in order to stop the lecture, that he was obliged to conclude abruptly. It would have ended in a serious riot between the Hindus and the Buddhists, had it not been for the persuasive appeal from the Swami to Hindus urging them to practise restraint and patience under such provocation. This led the Swami to speak of the universality of religion, and, in the stronghold of Buddhism, he urged that the God worshipped either as Shiva, as Vishnu, as Buddha, or under any other name was one and the same, thus showing the necessity not only for tolerance, but also for sympathy between followers of different creeds.

From Anuradhapuram to Jaffna (Yālppānam) is a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, and as the road and the horses were equally bad, the journey was troublesome, saved from tediousness only by the exceeding beauty of the surroundings. Indeed, on two successive nights, sleep was lost. On the way, however, a welcome break was the reception of the Swami with all honour at Vavuniyā and the presentation of an address. The Swami replied briefly and the journey was resumed through the beautiful Ceylon jungles (i.e. thick forests) to Jaffna."⁵

VII

The Swami's Visit to Jaffna (Yālppānam)

On his visit to Jaffna the following account appeared in the "Hindu Organ" of 3rd February, 1897: "Sunday, the 24th January, will be ever remembered by the Hindus of Jaffna as the day of Swami Vivekananda's arrival here from Colombo by land. It was arranged by the Reception Committee that the Swami was to be received privately

at Upar on Sunday morning by a deputation of seven members and taken to the residence prepared for him in the Town, and that the public demonstration in his honour should be reserved for the evening. But it was found that about one hundred persons composed of the elite of the Hindu Society were collected at Upar anxiously awaiting the arrival of Swami Vivekananda on Sunday morning. Till 09:00 a.m. the coach with the Swami and party did not make its appearance. It was then resolved to go ahead another five miles and wait at Chavakachcheri. No sooner had that place been reached than the Swami and party consisting of Swami Niranjanananda, Captain and Mrs. Sevier, Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Harrison, arrived by the Mail Coach. A procession was formed there to go to the town with Swami Vivekananda, Swami Niranjanananda, and Mr. Advocate Nagalingam in the first carriage - a landau - drawn by a pair and the rest following in twenty carriages. There were among those who received the Swami at Chavakachcheri and escorted him to the town, Advocates Nagalingam and Kanagasabai, Proctors Casipillai, Kathiravelu, Messrs. A. Mailvaganam, Illanganayaka, Mudaliyar Tillainadar, T. Kulasinghampillai, A. Sabapathipillai, Mudaliyar K. Navaratnam, K. Sellappa Chettiar, S. Naganathar Am. Muttiah, R. M. A. R. A. R. Subramanian Chettiar, L. P. Ramaswamy Chetty and M. C. Chinnappa. It was 11:30 a.m. when the procession reached the Town by the Central Road. The Swami and the party were accommodated in a decent house which is the residence of Proctor Ponnampalam but which was lent by him for the occasion.

In spite of the short time at the disposal of the Committee, grand preparations were made to accord the Swami a fitting reception in Hindu College. A magnificent pandal was put up in front of it and tastefully decorated. The whole way from the town to the Hindu College - a distance of about two miles - as decorated and illuminated - more specially the part of the route from the Grand Bazaar. Hundreds of plantain trees were planted on both sides of the road, and buntings and flags adorned the whole route. The scene was picturesque in the extreme and great enthusiasm prevailed among the people. Thousands of them from all parts of the Peninsula assembled

along the route to get a glimpse of the renowned Swami. From 06:00 p.m. to midnight the Jaffna - Kankasanturai road as far as the Hindu College was impossible for carts and carriages, which had to find their way by other roads.

The torchlight procession with native music from the Town to the Hindu College, which was started at 8:30 p.m., was unprecedentedly imposing. It is estimated that more than fifteen thousand persons took part in it - all on foot except the Swami and party who went in two carriages, one of which with the Swami was drawn by a pair. The whole distance of two miles appeared like a sea of heads, and it speaks well of the Hindu crowd that no mishap did take place, and that perfect order prevailed from start to finish. At the gate of almost every house on both sides of the road from the Grand Bazaar to the Hindu College - a distance of about one mile and a half - there were placed Niraikudam and lamps - the highest honour which could be done according to the Hindu idea. It should be remarked in this connection that along the whole route there is but one Christian house which is the station of the Wesleyan Mission at Vannarpannai, all the rest being Hindu ones. The Swami alighted from the carriage and worshipped at the Sivan and Kathiresan Temples and was garlanded at the gates of some houses on the way; and when he reached the College at 10:00 p.m. he had on his neck more than half a dozen beautiful garlands. Four hours before the arrival of the Swami the pandal was crammed to its utmost capacity. There was also a large number of Christians who had come to hear the Swami speak, his reputation as an eloquent speaker and preacher having preceded him. He was received at the entrance by Mr. S. Sellappa Pillai, retired Chief Justice of Travancore, who conducted him to the raised dais and garlanded the Swami." The following address was then read by Mr. A. Sabapathy, Secretary of the Reception Committee:

To, SRIMAT VIVEKANANDA SWAMI

Revered Sir,

We, the inhabitants of Jaffna professing the Hindu religion, desire to offer you a most hearty welcome to our land, the chief centre

of Hinduism in Ceylon, and to express our thankfulness for your kind acceptance of our invitation to visit this part of Lanka.

Our ancestors settled here from South India, more than two thousand years ago, and brought with them their religion, which was patronised by the Tamil Kings of Jaffna, but when their Government was displaced by that of the and the Dutch, the observance of our religious rites was interfered with, public religious worship was prohibited, and the sacred Temples, including two of the most far-famed Shrines, were razed to the ground by the cruel hand of persecution. In spite of the persistent attempts of these nations to force upon our forefathers the Christian religion, they clung to their old faith firmly, and have transmitted it to us as the noblest of our heritages. Now, under the rule of Great Britain, not only has there been a great and intellectual revival, but the sacred edifices have been, and are being, restored.

We take this opportunity to express our deep-felt gratitude for your noble and disinterested labours in the cause of our religion in carrying the light of truth, as revealed in the Vedas, to the Parliament of Religions, in disseminating the truths of the Divine Philosophy of India in America and England, and in making the Western world acquainted with the truths of Hinduism, and thereby bringing the West in closer touch with the East. We also express our thankfulness to you for initiating a movement for the revival of our ancient religion in this materialistic age, when there is a decadence of faith and a disregard for search after spiritual truth.

We cannot adequately express our indebtedness to you for making the people of the West know the catholicity of our religion, and for impressing upon the minds of the savants of the West the truth that there are more things in the Philosophy of the Hindus than are dreamt of in the Philosophy of the West.

We need hardly assure you that we have been carefully watching the progress of your Mission in the West, and always heartily

rejoicing at your devotedness and successful labours in the field of religion. The appreciative references made by the Press, in the great centres of intellectual activity," moral growth, and religious inquiry in the West, to you and to your valuable contributions to our religious literature, bear eloquent testimony to your noble and magnificent efforts.

We beg to express our heart-felt gratification at your visit to our land, and to hope that we, who in common with you, look to the Vedas as the fountain of all true spiritual knowledge, may have more occasion of seeing you in our midst.

May God, who has hitherto crowned your noble work with conspicuous success, spare you long, giving you vigour' and strength to continue your noble Mission.

We remain. Revered Sir,

Yours faithfully,

(For and on behalf of the Hindus of Jaffna)

S. NAGALINGAM

Chairman of the Reception Meeting

‘The Hindu Organ’ commented on the Swami’s speech as follows: “The Swami made a stirring and eloquent reply which lasted about an hour. The audience was electrified by the Swami’s address. Mr. Advocate Kanagasabai then moved a vote of thanks to the Swami for his visit to Jaffna and for the address which he delivered, and Mr. A. Mailvaganam seconding, the motion was carried with great applause. This brought the proceedings of that night to a close.

The Swami lectured again at the Hindu College the next day at 7:00 p.m. on Religion, before a large and appreciative audience. Mr. Chellappah Pillai presided and introduced the lecturer in appropriate words. There were present about four thousand persons composed of the elite of the Jaffna society, Hindu and Christian. Among the

Christians we noted the following-gentlemen. Advocate Allagakoon, Proctors Shangarapillai, Santiagopillai, Satkurusingham, S.P. Lawton, Carpenter, Arnold and Cook. Dr. Paul, Rev. Mr. Appapillai, Messrs. Karalasingham, M.S. Rajakariar, Mr. Kingsbury of Jaffna College. P. Cook and others too numerous. To mention, As regards the Hindus present it may be said that everybody who is anybody in the District was there. The Swami commenced his lecture at 7:00 p.m. and spoke for one hour and 40 minutes. Although the uproar and noise was very great owing to hundreds of persons having to stand on alt sides for want of accommodation within the pandal. Yet dead silence prevailed when the Swami began to speak, and his words were distinctly heard even at the remotest part of the large and commodious pandal. We hope to publish a full report of this lecture in our next issue.

Captain Sevier - who, with his wife, had accompanied the Swami, followed him in an interesting little speech and explained the reason of his wife and himself being there in the company of the Swami. He said that having found no consolation in their own religion they had been searching after truth in other religions for several years, but without success. About nine months ago, having heard that Swami Vivekananda was preaching on the Hindu Religion in London they came under the influence of his teaching and being convinced of the truths preached by him they have accompanied him to the land of the Vedas and do all they could practically in furtherance of their belief.

VIII

The Swami's Lecture at the Hindu College, Jaffna on the 25th January 1897, on Religion

The subject is very large and the time is short; a full analysis of the religion of the Hindus is impossible in one lecture. I will, therefore, present before you the salient points of our religion in as simple language as I can. The word Hindu, by which it is the fashion now-a-

days to give ourselves, has lost all its meaning for this word merely means those who lived on the other side of the river Indus. This name Sindhu was murdered into Hindu by the ancient Persians, and all people living on the other side of the river Sindhu were called by them Hindus. Thus this word has come down to us; during the Mohammedans rule we took up the word ourselves. There may not be any harm in using the word, of course, but, as I have said, it has lost its significance, for all the people who live on this side of the Indus, you may mark in modern times, do not follow the same religion as they did in ancient times. The word, therefore, covers not only Hindus proper, but Mohammedans, Christians, Jains and all the others who live in India. I, therefore, would not use the word Hindu. What word should we use then? The other words which alone we can use are either the Vedics, followers of the Vedas, or better still the Vedantists, followers of the Vedanta. Most of the great religions of the world owe allegiance to certain books which they believe are the words of God, or some other supernatural beings, and which are the basis of their religion. Now, of all these books, according to the modern Savants of the West, the oldest are the Vedas of the Hindus. A little idea, therefore, is necessary about the Vedas.

This mass of writing called the Vedas is not the utterance of persons. Its date has never been fixed, can never be fixed, and, according to us, the Vedas are eternal. There is one salient point which I want you to remember, that all the other religions of the world claim their authority as being delivered by a personal God or a number of personal beings, angels, or special messengers of God unto certain persons, while the claim of the Hindu is that the Vedas do not owe their authority to anybody else; they are themselves the authority, being eternal - the knowledge of God. They were never written, never created, they have been throughout time; just as creation is infinite and eternal, without beginning and without end, so is knowledge of God without beginning and without end. And this knowledge is what is meant by the Vedas (**Vid**, to know). The mass of knowledge called the Vedanta was discovered by personages called Rishis, and the

Rishi is defined as a Mantra Drashta, a seer of thought; not that the thought was his own. Whenever you hear that a certain passage of the Vedas came from a certain Rishi, never think he wrote it, or created it out of his mind; he was the seer of the thought which already existed, it existed in the universe eternally. This sage was the discoverer; for Rishis were spiritual discoverers.

This mass of writing, the Vedas, is divided principally into two parts, the Karma Kanda and the Jnana Kanda - the work portion and the knowledge portion, the ceremonial and the spiritual. The work portion consists of various sacrifices; most of them of late have been given up as not practicable under present circumstances; but others remain to the present day in some shape or other. The main ideas of the Karma Kanda, which consists of the duties of man, the duties of the student, of the householder, of the recluse, and the various duties of the different stations of life are followed; more or less, down to the present day. But the spiritual portion of our religion is in the second part, the Jnana Kanda, the Vedanta, the end of the Vedas, the gist, the goal of the Vedas. The essence of the knowledge of the Vedas was called by the name of Vedanta, which comprises the Upanishads; and all the sects of India, Dualists, qualified Monists, Monists, or the Saivites, Vaishnavites, Saktas, Sauras, Ganapatyas - each one that dares to come within the fold of Hinduism, must acknowledge the Upanishads of the Vedas. They can have their own interpretations, and can interpret them in their own way, but they must obey the authority. That is why we want to use the word Vedantists instead of Hindu. All the philosophers of India who are orthodox have to acknowledge the authority of the Vedanta, and all our present day religions, however crude some of them may appear to be, however inexplicable some of their purposes may seem. One who understands them, and studies them, can trace them back to the ideas of the Upanishads. So deeply have these Upanishads sunk into our race that those of you who study the symbology of the crudest religion of the Hindus, will be astonished to find sometimes figurative expressions of the Upanishads - the Upanishads become symbolized after a time

into figures and so forth. Great spiritual and philosophical ideas in the Upanishads are today with us, converted into household worship in the form of symbols. Thus the various symbols now used by us, all come from the Vedanta, because in the Vedanta they are used as figures, and these ideas spread among the nation and permeated it throughout, until they became part of their everyday life, as symbols.

Next to the Vedanta come the Smritis. These also are books written by sages, but the authority of the Smritis is subordinate to that of the Vedanta, because they stand in the same relation with us, as the Scriptures of the other religions stand with regard to them. We admit that the Smritis have been written by particular sages; in that sense they are the same as the Scriptures of other religions, but these Smritis are not final authority. If there is anything in a Smriti which contradicts the Vedanta, the Smriti is to be rejected; its authority is gone. These Smritis, we see again, have varied from time to time. We read that such and such Smriti should have authority in the Satya Yuga, such and such in the Treta Yuga, some in the Dwapara Yuga, and some in the Kali Yuga, and so on. As essential conditions changed, as various circumstances came to have their influence on the race, manners and customs had to be chafed, and these Smritis, as mainly regulating the manners and customs of the nation, had also to be changed from time to time. This is a point I specially ask you to remember. The principles of religion that are in the Vedanta are unchangeable. Why? Because they are all built upon the eternal principles that are in man and nature; they can never change. Ideas about the soul, going to heaven and so on, can never change; they were the same thousands of years ago, they are the same today, they will be the same millions of years hence. But those religious practices which are based entirely upon our social position and co-relation must change with the changes in society. Such an order, therefore, would be good and true at a certain period and not at another. We find accordingly, that certain food is allowed at one time and not at another, because the food was suitable for that time; but climatic and other things changed, various other circumstances required to be met,

so the Smriti changed the food and other things. Thus it naturally follows that if in modern times our society requires changes to be made, they must be met, and sages will come and show us the way how to meet them; not one jot of the principles of our religion will be changed; they will remain intact.

Then there are the Puranas. 'Puranam panchalakshanam' which means, the Puranas are of five characteristics - that which treats of history, of cosmology, with various symbological illustrations, of philosophical principles and so forth. These were written to popularise the religion of the Vedas. The language in which the Vedas are written is very ancient, and even among scholars very few can trace the date of these books. The Puranas were written in the language of the people of that time, what we call modern Sanskrit. Then they were meant, not for scholars, but for the ordinary people; and ordinary people cannot understand philosophy. Such things were given unto them in concrete form, by means of the lives of saints and kings and great men, and historical events that happened to the race and so on. The sages made use of these things, to illustrate the eternal principles of religion.

There are still other books, the Tantras. These are very much like the Puranas in some respects, and in some of them there is an attempt to revive the old sacrificial ideas of the Karma Kanda.

All these books constitute the Scriptures of the Hindus. When there is such a mass of sacred books in a nation and in a race, which has devoted the greatest part of its energies to the thought of philosophy and spirituality, (nobody knows for how many thousands of years), it is quite natural that there should be so many sects; indeed, it is a wonder that there are not thousands more. These sects differ very much from each other in certain points. We should not have time to understand the differences between these sects, and all the spiritual details about them; therefore, I shall take up the common grounds, the essential principles of all these sects, which every Hindu must believe.

The first is the question of creation, that this Nature, Prakriti, Maya, is infinite, without beginning. It is not that this world was created the other day, not that a God came and created the world, and since that time has been sleeping; for that cannot be. The creative energy is still going on. God is eternally creating, is never at rest. Remember the passage in the Gita where Krishna says:- "If I remain at rest for one moment this universe will be destroyed." If that creative energy which is working all around us, day and night, stops for a second, the whole thing falls to the ground. There never was a time when that energy did not work throughout the universe, but there is the law of cycles, Pralaya. Our Sanskrit word for creation, properly translated, should be projection and not creation. For the word creation in the English language has unhappily got that fearful, that most crude idea of something coming out of nothing, creation out of non-entity, non-existence becoming existence, which, of course, I would not insult you by asking you to believe. Our word, therefore, is projection.

The whole of this Nature exists, it becomes finer, sub-sides and then after a period of rest, as it were, the whole thing is again projected forward, and the same combination, the same evolution, the same manifestations appear, and remain playing, as it were, for a certain time, only again to break into pieces, to become finer and finer, until the whole thing subsides, and again comes out. Thus it goes on backwards and forwards, with a wave-like motion throughout eternity. Time, space and causation are all within this Nature. To say, therefore, that it had a beginning, is utter nonsense. No such question can occur as to its beginning, or its end. Therefore, wherever in our Scriptures the words 'beginning' and 'end' are used, you must remember that it means the beginning and the end of one particular cycle no more than that.

What makes this creation? God. What do I mean? by the use of the English word God? Certainly not the word as ordinarily used in English; a good deal of difference. There is no other suitable word in

English. I would rather confine myself to the Sanskrit word Brahman. He is the general cause of all these manifestations. What is this Brahman? He is eternal, eternally pure, eternally awake, the almighty, the all-knowing, the all-merciful, the omnipresent, the formless, the partless. He creates this universe. If he is always creating and holding up this universe, two difficulties arise. We see that there is partiality in the universe. One is born happy, and another unhappy; one is rich and another is poor; this shows partiality. Then, there is cruelty also, for here the very condition of life is death. One animal tears another to pieces, and every man tries to get the better of his own brother. This competition, cruelty, horror, sighs rending hearts day and night, is the state of things in this world of ours. If this be the creation of a God, that God is worse than cruel, worse than any devil that man ever imagined. Ay! says the Vedanta, it is not the fault of God that this partiality exists, that this competition exists. Who makes it? We, ourselves. There is a cloud throwing its rain on all fields alike. But it is only the field that is well cultivated which gets the advantage of the shower; another field, which has: not been tilled or taken care of, cannot get that advantage. It is not the fault of the cloud. The mercy of God is eternal and unchangeable; it is we that make the differentiation. But how can this difference of some being born happy, and some unhappy be explained? They do nothing to make that difference! Not in this life. But they did in their last birth, and the difference is explained by this action in the previous life.

We now come to the second principle on which we all agree, not only all Hindus, but all Buddhists, and all Jains. We all agree that life is eternal. It is not that it has sprung out of nothing, for that cannot be. Such a life would not be worth having. Everything that has a beginning in time must end in time. If life began but yesterday, it must end tomorrow, and annihilation is the result. Life must have been existing. It does not now require much acumen to see that, for all the sciences of modern times have been coming round to our help, illustrating from the material world the principles embodied in our Scriptures. You know it already, that each one of us is the effect of the

infinite past; the child is ushered into the world, not as something flashing from the hands of nature, as poets delight so much to depict, but he has the burden of an infinite past; for good or evil, he comes to work out his own past deeds. That makes the differentiation. This is the law of Karma. Each one of us is the maker of his own fate. This law knocks on the head at once all doctrines of predestination and fate, and gives us the only means of reconciliation between God and man. We, we, and none else, are responsible for what we suffer. We are the effects and we are the causes. We are free therefore. If I am unhappy, it has been my own making, and that very thing shows that I can be happy if I will. If I am impure, that is also of my own making, and that very thing shows that I can be pure if I will. The human will stands beyond all circumstances. Before it, the strong, gigantic, infinite will and freedom in man, all the powers, even of Nature, must bow down, succumb, and become its servants. This is the result of the law of Karma.

The next question, of course, naturally would be, What is the Soul? We cannot understand God in our Scriptures without knowing the soul. There have been attempts in India, and outside of India too, to catch a glimpse of the beyond by studying the external nature, and we all know what an awful failure has been the result. Instead of giving us a glimpse of the beyond, the more we study the material world the more we tend to become materialised. The more we handle the material world even that little spirituality which we possessed before, vanishes. Therefore, that is not the way to spirituality, to knowledge of the Highest; but it must come through the heart, the human soul. The external workings do not teach us anything about the beyond, about the Infinite, it is only the internal that can do so. Through soul, therefore, the analysis of the human soul alone, can we understand God. There are differences of opinion as to the nature of the human soul among the various sects in India, but there are certain points of agreement. We all agree, that souls are without beginning and without end, and immortal by their very nature; also, that all powers, blessing, purity, omnipresence, omniscience are buried in

each soul. That is a grand idea we ought to remember. In every man and in every animal, however weak or wicked, great or small, resides the same omnipresent, omniscient soul. The difference is not in the soul, but in the manifestation. Between me and the smallest animal, the difference is only in manifestation, but as a principle he is the same as I am, he is my brother, he has the same soul as I have. This is the greatest principle that India has preached. The talk of the brotherhood of man becomes in India, the brotherhood of universal life, of animals, and of all life down to the little ants, all these are our bodies. Even as our Scripture says, "Thus the sage, knowing that the same Lord inhabits all bodies, will worship everybody as such". That is why in India there have been such merciful ideas about the poor, about animals, about everybody and everything else. This is one of the common grounds about our ideas of the soul.

Naturally we come to the idea of God. One thing more about the soul; those who study the English language are often deluded by the words soul and mind. Our Atman and soul are entirely different things. What we call Manas - the mind, the Western people call soul. The West never had the idea of soul until they got it through Sanskrit philosophy, some twenty years ago. The body is here, beyond that is the mind, yet the mind is not the Atman; it is that fine body, Sukshma Sarira, made of fine particles, which goes from birth to death, and so on; but behind the mind is the Atman, the Soul, the Self of man. It cannot be translated by the word Soul or Mind, so we have to use the word Atman, or as Western Philosophers have designated it by the word, Self. Whatever word you use, you must keep clear in your mind that the Atman is separate from the mind, as well as from the body, and that this Atman goes through birth and death, accompanied by the mind - the Sukshma Sarira. And when the time comes that it has attained to all knowledge and manifested itself to perfection, then this going from birth to death ceases for it. Then it is at liberty either to keep that mind, or the Sukshma Sarira, or to let it go for ever, and remain independent and free throughout all eternity. The goal of the soul is freedom. That is no peculiarity of our religion. We also have heavens, and hells too, but these are not infinite for in the very nature

of things they cannot be. If there were any heavens, they would be only repetitions of this world of ours on a bigger scale, with a little more happiness, and a little more enjoyment, but that is all the worse for the soul. There are many of these heavens. Persons who do good works here with the thought of reward, when they die are born again as gods in one of these heavens, as Indra, and others. These gods are the names of certain states. They also had been men, and by good work they have become gods, and those different names that you read of, as Indra, and so on, are not the names of the same person. There will be thousands of Indras. Nahusha was a great king, and when he died he became Indra. It is a position; one soul becomes high and takes the Indra position, and remains in it only a certain time; he then dies and is born again as man. But the human body is the highest of all. Some of the gods may try to go higher and give up all ideas of enjoyment in heavens, but, as in this world, wealth and position, and enjoyment delude the vast majority, so do most of the gods become deluded also, and after working out their good Karma they fall down and become human beings again. This earth, therefore, is the Karma Bhumi; it is this earth from which we attain to liberation. So, even these heavens are not worth attaining to.

What is then worth having? Mukti, freedom. Even in the highest of heavens, says our Scripture, you are a slave; what matters it if you are a king for twenty thousand years? So long as you have a body, so long as you are a slave to happiness, so long as time works on you, space works on you, you are a slave. The idea, therefore, is to be free of external and internal nature. Nature must fall at your feet, and you must trample on it, and be free and glorious, by going beyond. No more is there life, therefore, no more is there death; no more enjoyment, therefore, no more misery. It is bliss, unspeakable, indestructible, beyond everything. What we call happiness and good here, are but particles of that eternal Bliss, And this eternal Bliss is our goal.

The soul is also sexless; we cannot say of the Atman that it is a man or a woman. Sex belongs to the body alone. All such ideas,

therefore, as man or woman, are a delusion when spoken with regard, to the Self, and are only proper when spoken of the body. So are the ideas of age. It never ages; the ancient One is always the same.

How did I come down to earth? There is but one answer to that in our Scriptures. Ignorance is the cause of all this bondage. It is through ignorance that we have become bound; knowledge will cure it, by taking us to the other side. How will that knowledge come? Through love, Bhakti. By the worship of God, by loving all beings as the temples of God; He resides within them. Thus, with that intense love comes knowledge, and ignorance will disappear, the bonds will break, and the soul will be free. There are two ideas of God in our Scriptures; the one, the personal, and the other, the impersonal. The idea of the Personal God is, that He is the omnipresent creator, preserver, and destroyer of every thing, the eternal Father and Mother of the universe, but One who is eternally separate from us and from all souls; and liberation consists in coming near to Him and living in Him. Then there is the other idea of the Impersonal, where all those adjectives are taken away as superfluous, as illogical, and there remains an impersonal omnipresent Being who cannot be called a knowing being because knowledge only belongs to the human mind. He cannot be called a thinking being, because that is a process of the weak only. He cannot be called a reasoning being, because reasoning is a sign of weakness. He cannot be called a creating being, because none creates except in bondage. What bondage has He? None works except for the fulfilment of desires; what desires has He? None works except it be to supply some wants; what wants has He? In the Vedas it is not the word "He" that is used, but "It" for "He" would make an invidious distinction, as if God were a man. "It", the impersonal, is used, and this Impersonal "It" is preached. This system is called the Advaita.

And what are our relations with this Impersonal Being? That we are He. We and He are one. Every one is but a manifestation of that Impersonal, the basis of all being, and misery consists in thinking of

ourselves as different from this Infinite, Impersonal Being; and liberation consists in knowing our unity with this wonderful Impersonality. These, in short, are the two ideas of God that we find in our Scriptures. Some remarks ought to be made here. It is only through the idea of the Impersonal God that you can have any system of ethics. In every nation the truth has been preached from the most ancient times - love your fellow-beings as yourselves - I mean love human beings as yourselves. In India it has been preached, 'Love all beings as yourselves'; we make no distinction between men and animals. But no reason was forthcoming; no one knew why it would be good to love other beings as ourselves. And the reason is there in the idea of the Impersonal God; you understand it when you learn that the whole world is one - the oneness of the universe - the solidarity of all life, - that in hurting any one I am hurting myself, in loving any one I am loving myself. Hence we understand why it is that we ought not to hurt others. The reason for ethics, therefore, can only be had from this ideal of the Impersonal God. Then there is the question of the position of the Personal God in it. I understand the wonderful flow of love that comes from the idea of a Personal God, I thoroughly appreciate the power and potency of Bhakti on men to suit the needs of different times. What we now want in our country, however, is not so much of weeping, but a little strength. What a mine of strength is in this Impersonal God, when all superstitions have been thrown overboard, and man stands on his feet with the knowledge - I am the Impersonal Being of the world! What can make me afraid? I care not even for nature's laws. Death is a joke unto me. Man stands on the glory of his own Soul, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Deathless - that soul which no instruments can pierce, which no heat can dry, or fire burn, no water melt, the Infinite, the Birthless, the Deathless, without beginning and without end, before whose magnitude the suns and moons and all their systems appear like drops in the ocean, before whose glory space melts away into nothingness, and time vanishes into non-existence. This glorious soul we must believe in. Out of that will come power. Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong,

strong you will be; if you think yourselves impure, impure you will be; if you think yourselves pure, pure you will be. This teaches us not to think of ourselves as weak, but as strong, omnipotent, and omniscient. No matter that I have not expressed it yet; it is in me. All knowledge is in me, all power, all purity, and all freedom. Why cannot I express this knowledge? Because I do not believe in it. Let me believe in it and it must and will come out. This is what the idea of the Impersonal teaches. Make your children strong from their very childhood, teach them not weakness, nor forms, but make them strong, let them stand on their feet, bold, all conquering, all suffering, and first of all, let them learn of the glory of the Soul. That, you get alone in the Vedanta, and there alone. It has ideas of love and worship and other things which we have in other religions, and more besides; but this idea of the Soul is the life-giving thought, the most wonderful. There and there alone, is the great thought that is going to revolutionize the world and reconcile the knowledge of the material world with religion.

Thus I have tried to bring before you the salient points of our religion - the principles. I have only to say a few words about the practice and the application. As we have seen, under the circumstances existing in India, naturally many sects must appear. As a fact, we find that there are so many sects in India and at the same time we know this mysterious fact that these sects do not quarrel with each other. The Saivite does not say that every Vaishnavite is going to be damned, nor the Vaishnavite that every Saivite will be damned. The Saivite says, this is my path, and you have yours; at the end we must come together. They all know that in India. This is the theory of *Ishtam*. It has been recognised in the most ancient times that there are various forms of worshipping God. It is also recognised that different natures require different methods. Your method of coming to God may not be my method, possibly it might hurt me. Such an idea as that there is but one way for everybody is injurious, meaningless, and entirely to be avoided. Woe unto the world when everyone is of the same religious opinion and takes to the same path. Then all religions

and all thought will be destroyed. Variety is the very soul of life. When it dies out entirely creation will die. When this variation in thought is kept up, we must exist; and we need not quarrel because of that variety. Your way is very good for you, but not for me. My way is good for me but not for you. My way is called in Sanskrit, my *Ishtam*. Mind you, we have no quarrel with any religion in the world. We have each our *Ishtam*. But when we see men coming and saying, "This is the only way," and trying to force it on us in India we have a word to say; we laugh at them. For such people who want to destroy their brothers because they seem to follow a different path towards God, for them to talk of love is absurd. Their love does not count for much. How can they preach of love who cannot bear another man to follow a different path from their own? If that is love, what is hatred? We have no quarrel with any religion in the world, whether it teaches men to worship Christ, Buddha, or Mohamed, or any other prophet in the world. "Welcome, my brother," the Hindu says, "I am going to help you; but you allow me to follow my way too. That is my *Ishtam*. Your way is very good, no doubt, but it may be dangerous for me. My own experience tells me what food is good for me, and no army of doctors can tell me that. So, I know from my own experience what path is the best for me." That is the goal, the *Ishtam*, and therefore we say that if a temple, or a symbol, or an image, helps you to realise the Divinity within, you are welcome to it. Have two hundred images if you like. If certain forms and formulas help you to realize the Divine, God speed you; have, by all means, whatever forms, and whatever temples, and whatever ceremonies you want to bring you nearer to God. But do not quarrel about them; the moment you quarrel, you are not going Godward, you are going backward, towards the brutes.

These are a few ideas in our religion. It is one of inclusion of every one, exclusion of none. Though our castes and our institutions, are apparently linked with our religion, they are not so. These institutions have been necessary to protect us as a nation, and when this necessity for self-preservation will no more exist, they will die a natural death.; But the older I grow, the better I seem to think of these

time honoured institutions of India. There was a time when I used to think that many of them were useless and worthless, but the older I grow, the more I seem to feel a diffidence in cursing any one of them, for each one of them is the embodiment of the experience of centuries. A child of but yesterday, destined to die the day after tomorrow, comes to me and asks me to change all my plans and if I hear the advices of that baby and change all my surroundings according to his ideas I myself should be the fool, and no one else. Much of the advice that is coming to us from different countries is similar to this. Tell these wiseacres: I will hear you when you have made a stable society yourselves. You cannot hold on to one idea for two days, you quarrel and fail, you are born like moths in the spring and die like them in five minutes. You come up like bubbles and burst like bubbles too. First form a stable society like ours. First make laws and institutions that remain undiminished in their power through scores of centuries. Then will be the time to talk on the subject with you, but till then, my friend, you are only a giddy child.

I have finished what I had to say about our religion. I will end by reminding you of the one pressing necessity of the day. Praise be to Vyasa, the great author of the Mahabharata, that in this Kali Yuga there is one great work. The Tapas and the other hard Yogas that were practised in other Yugas do not work now. What is needed in this Yuga is giving, helping others. What is meant by Dānam? The highest of gifts is the giving of spiritual knowledge, the next is the giving of secular knowledge, and the next is the saving of life; the last is giving food and drink. He who gives spiritual knowledge, saves the soul from many and many a birth. He who gives secular knowledge opens the eyes of human beings towards spiritual knowledge, and far below these, rank all other gifts, even the saving of life. Therefore, it is necessary that you learn this, and note that all other kinds of works are of much less value than that of imparting spiritual knowledge. The highest and greatest help is that given in the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. There is an eternal fountain of spirituality in our Scriptures, and nowhere on earth except in this land of renunciation

do we find such noble examples of practical spirituality. I have had a little experience of the world. Believe me, there is much talking in other lands, but the practical man of religion, who has carried it into his life, is here and here alone. Talking is not religion; parrots may talk, machines may talk nowadays. But show me the life of renunciation, of spirituality, of all suffering, of love infinite. This kind of life indicates a spiritual man. With such ideas and such noble practical examples in our country, it would be a great pity if the treasures in the brains and hearts of all these great Yogins were not brought out to become the property of every one, rich and poor, high and low; not only in India, but they must be thrown broadcast all over the world. This is one of our greatest duties, and you will find that the more you work to help others, the more you help yourselves.

The one vital duty incumbent on you if you really love your religion, if you really love your country, is that you must struggle hard to be up and doing, with this one great idea of bringing out the treasures from your closed books, and delivering them over to their rightful heirs. And above all, one thing is necessary. Aye, for ages we have been saturated with awful jealousy; we are always getting jealous of each other. Why has this man a little precedence and not I? Even in the worship of God we want precedence, to such a state of slavery have we come. This is to be avoided. If there is any crying sin in India at this lime, it is this slavery. Every one wants to command and no one wants to obey; and this is owing to the absence of that wonderful Brahmacharya system of yore; First, learn to obey. The command will come by itself. Always first learn to be a servant, and then you will be fit to be a master. Avoid this jealousy, and you will do great works that have yet to be done. Our ancestors did most wonderful works, and we look back upon their work with veneration and with pride. But we also are going to do great deeds, and let others look back with blessings and pride upon us, as their ancestors. With the blessing of the Lord every one here will yet do such deeds that will eclipse those of our ancestors, great and glorious as they may have been.”⁶

IX

Swami Vivekananda Concludes the Second Visit

Captain Sevier followed Swami Vivekananda in an interesting little speech, and explained the reason of his wife and himself being there in the company of the Swami. He said that having found no consolation in their own religion they had been searching after truth in other religions for several years, but without success. About nine months ago, having heard that Swami Vivekananda was preaching on the Hindu Religion in London, they came under the influence of his teachings, and being convinced of the truths preached by him they have accompanied him to the land of the Vedas to do all they could practically in furtherance of their belief.

Mr. Chellappah Filial spoke feelingly on the great mission of the Swami, and on the necessity of Vedanta schools being established in all important centres in India and Ceylon under the control and direction of the Swami.

Mr. Advocate Nagalingam, in an eloquent speech, moved a vote of thanks to the Swami for his very learned and interesting lecture. Mr. Advocate Kanagasabai, who was visibly moved, spoke also eloquently in seconding the motion.

The Swami and party left here the same night for Pamban by a sailing vessel en route to Ramnad. The Swami will then travel to Madras and thence to Calcutta, his native place, which may justly be proud of him. He means to spend some time in seclusion in the Himalayas in order to recoup his health, on which his preaching tour has greatly told.

It is a pity that it is not possible to have the Swami in our midst for a longer time, but we have the satisfaction of knowing that he intends shortly to pay another visit to the Island.

These visits of Swamiji to the important towns of Sri Lanka made a deep and lasting impression. He was an orator by divine right.

His inspiring mien and the picturesque setting of yellow and orange robes was hardly less interesting than the burning words that fell from his lips. The worshipful reverence of the devotees for the Swami can be judged by the remarks of one of his companions: "He would have been killed with kindness if he had stayed longer in Ceylon."⁷ With his address at the Hindu College in Jaffna, the Swami's second visit ended in a triumphal note. The steamer conveying the Swami and the group left the shores of Ceylon and arrived in Pamban Road on Tuesday, January, 26, 1897, at about 3 p.m.

'The Ceylon Review' gave a general account of the Swami's visit to the Island when the dust raised by his visit had subsided. Though the 'Review' tried to be factual in its reportage, yet its '**not-so-happy**' attitude about the tumultuous ovation accorded to the Swami is implicit in the report:

SRIMAT SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN CEYLON:

"Great interest has been aroused in the Island this month, by the arrival from Europe of Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu Scholar of note, belonging to the order of the Sannyasies, a leader of Hindu religious thought, and the representative of Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, U.S.A. The interesting personality of the Sage, coupled with his great gifts of speech, has attracted the attention of all classes of the community, and he was accorded on his landing in Colombo a most enthusiastic reception by thousands of native devotees.

In stepping on shore his neck was entwined with a sweet jessamine garland, and he made a triumphal entrance into the city, being conducted with much state and enthusiasm to the residence of Mr. Rajaratnam* in Barnes Street, where, after the "Thevaram," a Tamil hymn possessing the respectable antiquity of two thousand years, had been sung, an address couched in the most flattering terms

* Mr. Ratnasabapathy whose house was named 'Vivekananda Lodge' after the name of the Swami, he being the first occupant of the new house.

was read by the Hon. P. Coomaraswamy, the Tamil representative in the Legislative Council. The Swami, in eloquent and impressive terms, replied. After lecturing twice in Colombo, the Swami proceeded upon a short tour up-country. In America the Hindu missionary attracted a good deal of public notice, his lectures being attended by leading lawyers, scientists, and other public men in America. His class lectures were eagerly attended by those desirous of gaining an insight into the Vedanta Philosophy of India. From fragmentary information appearing in current periodicals and literature, the Swami appears to have been a well-connected Hindu who, achieving high scholastic distinction in an Indian University was fairly on the path of worldly advancement when his life's course was suddenly diverted into quite a different channel. About this time a noted Hindu Sage, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, was at the very height of his fame. This sage, although not remarkable for wide erudition, was yet renowned for his great piety; and the wonderful tranquillity of his philosophy captivated all his hearers. An appreciative article upon this personage was given some time ago by Prof. Max Muller in the Nineteenth Century. Swami Vivekananda formed one among twenty young men who were attracted by Ramakrishna's teaching, and all gave up considerable prospects to live a life of self-renunciation and retirement. The Swami's attitude towards other religions is one of reverence and his references to the Founder of Christianity are always respectful.

His lectures, which have been reprinted, have an extensive circulation in India and Ceylon. The people of Madras, who were instrumental in sending him to America, are making great preparations to accord him a fitting welcome on his arrival from Ceylon. Another of the twenty disciples of Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda by name, is still prosecuting a propagating mission in America, based on the lines of Swami Vivekananda's teaching. Reduced to a sentence the Swami's theology may be said to be this:- *Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*, which being interpreted mean the "That which exists is one; the Sages call Him by various names."

X

The Swami's Third Visit to Ceylon

"According to Swamiji's Memoirs, the S.S. Golconda took four days to sail from Madras to Colombo, going the far way around Ceylon. Yet, according to the calendar of events as we know it, the trip took three nights and two days - long enough even so. The seas were wild; The rising and heaving of waves which had commenced, from the mouth of the Ganges began to increase as we advanced, and after we had left Madras it increased still more, Swamiji wrote."⁸

Swamiji sailed for the West for the second time on 20th June, 1899, reaching Chennai (Madras) on the 24th. We have no record of when it reached Colombo; but considering the information found above we may safely guess that the ship must have touched the Colombo Harbour on the 27th. In his Memoirs, Swamiji himself tells a little of his day in Colombo & of the old friends he met once again:

"Our Colombo friends had procured a permit for our landing, so we landed and met our friends there. Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy is the foremost man among the Hindus: his wife is an English lady and his son (Ananda Coomaraswamy) is barefooted and wears the sacred ashes on his forehead. Mr. Arunachalam and other friends came to meet me. After a long time I partook of Mulagutanni and the king-coconut. They put some green coconuts into my cabin. I met Mrs. Higgins and visited the boarding school for Buddhist girls. I also visited the monastery and school of our old acquaintance, the Countess of Canovara. The Countess house is more spacious & furnished than Mrs. Higgins! The Countess has invested her own money, whereas Mrs. Higgins has collected the money by begging. The Countess herself wears a Gerua cloth after the mode of the Bengali sari. The Ceylonese Buddhists have taken a great fancy to this fashion, I found. I noticed carriage after carriage of women, all wearing the same Bengali Sari."⁹

The gala farewell reception given to Swamiji at the last house he visited on his way back to the Golconda is described by Sister Nivedita as follows:

“Last of all, driving down to the quay, we had to enter a house where we were met outside by drums, fifes and tom toms. Inside, a dense crowd and fruits on a table. Oh, what a crowd! And how devotedly they looked at Swamiji! He pointed to his European clothes, but it made no difference. He was their Avatar just the same. Then he took a small fruit and sipped milk . . . and then, as he turned to go, you should have heard the shout. ‘Praise be to Siva, the Lord of Parbutty! Hail’, it was deafening, and you should have seen the crowd in the street when we got out, and the crowd on the landing-stage. Then came our first host and hostess to see us off with endless presents. The hostess was an Englishwoman, and promised me that if I found the person and made the plans, I could come to them for help in starting a school in Ceylon for Hindu girls.”¹⁰ On Wednesday, June 28th, the Golconda steamed off the coast of Ceylon, thus bringing to a close the third visit of the Swami.

XI

Arrival of Swami Shivananda

In the early part of July, 1897, a middle-aged ochre-clad sannyasin from far-off Calcutta, India, landed at the Colombo Port. Many prominent Hindus of Colombo were ready at hand with flowers and garlands, expecting eagerly the arrival of the Swami. The Swami was received, on landing, with oriental greetings and respects due to a sage, and was conducted to Thambyah Chatram where he was to stay for the next seven or eight months, spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Shivananda, for that was the name of the apostle, was one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and brother-disciple of Swami Vivekananda at whose behest he had come to the Island to continue the work of propagating the Master’s Message. He carried with him a letter of introduction from Swami Vivekananda to Mr. T.

Sokanathan of Colombo who had the unique privilege of hosting the great Swami when he had earlier visited the Island on his triumphal return to his Motherland from the West. The letter read as follows: ...

ALMORA,
30th June, 1897.

To,

T. SOKANATHAN, Esqr,

My dear friend,

The bearer of this note, Swami Shivananda, is sent to Ceylon as promised by me during my sojourn. He is quite fit for the work entrusted to his care, of course with your kind help.

I hope you will introduce him to other Ceylon Friends.

Yours ever in the Lord
Vivekananda

The earlier visit of Swami Vivekananda had roused immense enthusiasm in the religious-minded section of the local Hindu Community. They were eager to have his work continued. Devotees at every place requested the Swami to send urgently teachers of the Order to preach the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in the Island. Seeing their earnestness he had promised them that he, on reaching Calcutta, would consider their request. Swamiji reached Almora at the end of his triumphal march across India sometime in May, 1897.

Soon after, he sent Swami Shivananda to Ceylon with the above letter of introduction, Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Movement, in his letter to Miss Noble (later Sister Nivedita) to her London address from the Math at Baranagore, Calcutta, on 04-08-1897, writes as follows on the deputation of Swami Shivananda to Ceylon and his work:

“Recently Swami Shivananda has been deputed to start a centre of work in Ceylon. He has interviewed some of the influential

members of the native society of Colombo, who have received him favourably. In a meeting called by the Hon. Coomaraswamy, member of the Legislative Council of Ceylon, it was resolved to help Swami Shivananda in his work. The report of the progress of his work will be communicated to you in due course.”¹¹

Swami Shivananda amply fulfilled the confidence the Leader had reposed in him in his capacity to reveal to the people of Ceylon a great message of crucial importance to humanity and to impress on the Hindu public in particular the moral and spiritual grandeur of India's hoary culture. He greatly succeeded in keeping the flame lit by Swami Vivekananda during his earlier visit to the Island, burning bright. He kept alive the public interest in the work of Swamiji by renewing contact with his friends and admirers through his classes on the scriptures, and personal interviews. Till his departure to India he continued to teach the basic ideals and practices of the Vedanta philosophy and religion interpreting them in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

Later, at the Belur Math, Calcutta, reminiscing on his brief stay in the Island some three decades earlier, he spoke thus to one of his disciples: “Yes, I have been to Ceylon. A few months after Swamiji's return to India, he sent me there to preach Vedanta. I was in Colombo for seven or eight months, living at a Charity house, where I held religious discourses and regular classes on the Gita. Several people attended these. I was quite happy there, and visited the local temples etc. They have a tooth temple, where it is claimed that Buddha's tooth is preserved. What a grand structure they have raised there! One is struck with wonder at the magnificence of the temple.”¹²

By the early part of 1898, Swami Shivananda was back at the Head-quarters at Belur, India. He was followed to Colombo by Swami Trigunatitananda in 1903, when he was on his way to America to take charge of the centre in San Francisco. On his way, he landed in Colombo to meet the devotees & admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and

Swamiji. He was followed, in 1906, by two other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda & Swami Ramakrishnananda. Swami Abhedananda, who was on a lecture tour of South India, paid a brief visit to Ceylon and delivered highly inspiring lectures in Colombo & suburbs. Thus, besides Swami Vivekananda, seven other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had visited the Island, Swami Turiyananda having visited Ceylon when he accompanied Swami Vivekananda to the States during the latter's second visit to the West.

These visits by the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna helped to keep bright the flame lit by Swami Vivekananda during his earlier visit to the Island. The Hindu population of the Island inspired by the life-giving message of the Swami, resolved to give a practical shape to the urgent task of the regeneration of Hindu culture and formed Vivekananda Societies at various places in the Island. The Vivekananda Society, Colombo, had been formally declared open on the 13th of July 1902, exactly on the 10th day of the Maha Samadhi of the Swami Vivekananda. By the year 1906, Jaffna, Manipay, Matalai, Trincomalee and Batticaloa too had formed Vivekananda Societies.

The Colombo Vivekananda Society had been hosting the many Swamis of the Mission visiting the Island till the Mission had its own premises in Colombo in 1930, while it continued to initiate the various activities including the publication of a Tamil monthly in furtherance of its ideals.

XII

The Mission Activities in Jaffna

The Swami's visit to Jaffna and his inspiring perorations at the Hindu College had put fire into the hearts of many a lover of the age-old Hindu Culture and set the souls of many a seeker on a higher pursuit of life. Swamiji, through his discourses and interviews, had impressed on them that he cared nothing short of bringing about a

total regeneration of the masses. To achieve this goal, he vigorously advocated the spread of the 'right-type' of education, based on the ancient Guru-kula system, as the panacea of all evils. Defining education as the "manifestation of the perfection already in man", Swamiji continues: "We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. What we need is to study different branches of the knowledge that is our own and with it the English language and Western Science. We need technical education and all else which may develop the industries, so that men instead of seeking for service, may' earn enough to provide for themselves and save something against a rainy day. It is knowledge alone that will save us in every department of life; in knowledge is worship. The more we know the better. "This spirit of Swamiji was caught on by one Mr. Nagamuttu who was a teacher and warden at the Jaffna Hindu College where Swamiji had delivered his last lecture in the Island. In the year 1913 (April - May), Mr. Nagamuttu founded the Vaideeshwara Vidyalayam and got the services of Mr. Casipillai, Crown Proctor of Jaffna as its first manager. Mr. Casipillai was one of the leading figures of Jaffna, one of the founders of the Jaffna Hindu College, and had taken active part in welcoming Swami Vivekananda to Jaffna.

Swami Sharvananda, then the Head of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, visited the Island frequently, on invitations by various Organisations, delivered a number of illuminating talks on various topics such as 'education', 'cultural heritage of India', 'the message of Gita' etc. This roused immense enthusiasm among the populace and, under the blessing and guidance of Swami Sharvananda, the Vivekananda Societies in the Island organised study-groups where the lectures of Swami Vivekananda were discussed. These Societies had their own libraries & reading rooms. In addition, they published and distributed the writings and speeches of the Swamis of the Mission, thus disseminating among the people the lofty ideals of the Movement.

Mr. Nagamuttu was in close contact with all the visiting Swamis, and with the Mission's activities in India and else where. He strongly felt that the school would be put on a sound footing if it was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission. His brother who was in India at the time had closely observed the functioning of the Mission in India and noticed its unique success in running the various institutions under its aegis. He too began pressurising Mr. Nagamuttu to take a quick decision in the matter. When, at the invitation of the Vivekananda Society, Colombo, Swami Sharvananda visited the Island in 1915, he sought his guidance in the matter and urged him to take over the management of the School. Finally, in the year 1917, the Vaideeswara Vidyalayam was formally handed over to the Mission. With the take-over of this School, the Mission formally launched its activities, mainly in the field of education, in Jaffna.

As there was no branch of the Mission in Ceylon then, Swami Sharvananda transferred the responsibility of managing the School to a local committee. The Swami paid frequent visits to Jaffna, to supervise & advise the local committee. The 'Prabuddha Bharata' of November 1918 speaks thus of the visit of Swami Sharvananda to Ceylon:

"A correspondent writes: The presence of Srimat Swami Sharvananda in Ceylon greatly awakened the religious spirit among the Hindus of the Island. He delivered several lectures on religion and education at Colombo and various parts of Jaffna. He delivered two lectures on "The Education that we need", and, "Religion as a factor of Civilisation" at the Ridgeway Memorial Hall, on the 27th and 29th September, 1918, under the auspices of the Pettah Y.M.H.A. Two other lectures on "the Work before us" and "The Hindu Ideal of Life" were delivered at the Nallur Hindu School and Manipay Hindu College respectively. His presence in Jaffna was the occasion of the opening of vernacular schools in the villages. It is the intention of the Swamiji to start an ideal National College at Jaffna to impart higher education to the Hindus. His work is progressing satisfactorily and he is holding daily classes."

It was during these early visits of Swami Sharvananda that Pandit Mailvaganam came in contact with the Swami. Pandit Mailvaganam was a teacher at St. Patricks College. Inspired by Swami Sharvananda he started a Vivekananda Society at his residence at Anaipanthy, Jaffna. By now it had become known that Pandit Mailvaganam had decided to take up the life of Sannyasin. Referring to this, the Golden Jubilee Number of "The Vaideeswara" 1963, says:

"Swami Sharvananda was accorded a hearty and grand reception. He was tall and fair and of a magnificent presence. His discourse was solemn and stately and he was clad immaculate in the robes of the Ramakrishna Order. And yet, the talk of the day centred on Pandit Mailvaganam who had decided to resign his post of principal, Manipay Hindu College, and renounce the world, with deliberate intent, in favour of a Sannyasin's."

Pandit Mailvaganam joined the Math at Chennai in 1922 as a novice and was initiated into Sannyasa under the name of Swami Vipulananda on Chitra-Pournami Day of 1924 (19th April 1924). Even after the local committee took over the management of Vaideeshwara Vidyalayam, the school was not registered till 1921. However, differences seem to have arisen between the Mission authorities and the local Committee over the management of the school. The local committee, taking advantage of the absence of a representative of the Mission in the Island, wanted to usurp the power of the Mission. Mr. Nagamuttu, the founder, was unhappy at these developments and made repeated representations to the Mission authorities in India to intervene. Swami Sharvananda visited Jaffna again in 1926, dissolved the Committee, and took over the management directly under the control of the Mission, and Swami Vipulananda who by now had returned to Ceylon, was made the Manager of the school. Swami Vipulananda soon got the assistance of another fellow monk, Swami Avinashananda, and the Vidyalayam became a hive of Mission activities under the inspiration and guidance of these Swamis. The Swami lived at an Ashrama at Pirappankulam Road, Vannarpannai, Jaffna. A Students' Home was opened at this Madam on 6th June, 1926.

XIII

Cultural and Educational Activities at Batticaloa

While these developments were taking place in Jaffna, the Hindus of Batticaloa were not slow to follow their brethren in other provinces. A Society bearing the name of Swami Vivekananda was established by the admirers and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and a few schools were run by this Society for the benefit of the local students. On 28th May, 1925, five schools were handed over to Swami Vipulananda by Mr. Chinniah, President of the Batticaloa Vivekananda Society. On October 25th, 1925, Mudaliyar K. V. Marcandu gifted the building known as "Vivekananda Hall", Batticaloa, for opening a Hindu School in the Town. Foundation stones were laid for the Karaitivu Sarada Vidyalayam Girls' School and the Kallady-Uppodai Shivananda Vidyalayam English School on 28th October, 1925 and 6th November, 1925 respectively. In the year 1928, His Excellency Sir Herbert Stanley, the then Governor of Ceylon, declared open the Vivekananda Hall in the presence of Swamis Yatiswarananda & Ananthananda. On January 15th, 1929 the Mission started the Karaitivu Sarada Vidyalayam Buildings for girls. In February 1929, the Shivananda Vidyalayam Buildings, 15 acres of land and two Tamil Schools at Kallady, Uppodai and Morokkottan-chenai, were handed over to the Mission by the heirs and descendants of Messrs. Kathirgamathamby Udayar and Sabapathipillai Udayar of Kalladi-Uppodai.

It goes to the credit of the public of Batticaloa that the Mission activities were spreading very fast in their province and the public ungrudgingly and devotedly helped the Mission authorities in establishing and running successfully various institutions.

In November 1929, the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home (Orphanage) which was at Jaffna from the day of its founding on 6th June, 1926, was transferred to Batticaloa as more favourable conditions found in Batticaloa could be Utilised for the growth and stability of the Home.

XIV

The Mission Activities in Trincomalee

The Vivekananda Society, established in Trincomalee around 1906, was making steady progress. They had a library containing many volumes of the published speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda. They held regular religious classes to study Hindu Scriptures as interpreted by Swami Vivekananda. In 1924, the Hindu public of Trincomalee had the unique privilege of hearing the inspiring lectures of Swami Sharvananda, who had visited the province accompanied by Swami Vipulananda. The visit gave a big boost to the various activities the Vivekananda Society was conducting. This resulted in the opening of a Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Trincomalee on 9th May, 1925. The Monastic members visited the centre now and then, and carried on the preaching and educational work. On 1st June 1925, the management of the Trincomalee Hindu Boys English School and the Hindu Boys Tamil Schools were transferred to the Mission. On 30th November 1925, the foundation stone for the new building of the English School at Trincomalee was laid. On 5th July 1928, His Excellency Sir Herbert Stanley the then Governor of Ceylon, ceremoniously opened the Trincomalee School Buildings.

The Mission activities were making steady progress from year to year in various provinces of the Island. By 1930, a number of educational institutions with a teaching staff of nearly 65 teachers and an orphanage were functioning under the aegis of the Mission. The fast growing activities of the Mission necessitated a constitution to give the Mission a legal status that was essential to consolidate and spread the Mission's activities in the Island.

Swami Ayinashananda, who had come to Sri Lanka on 3rd November, 1926 took step to give legal, status to the Mission in Sri Lanka. His Excellency Sir Herbert Stanley, the then Governor of Ceylon, gave his assent to the Ordinance, incorporating the Mission on 17th July, 1929.

XV

The Mission Centre in Colombo

Meanwhile, some leading residents of Colombo were urging the Mission authorities in India to open a centre in Colombo, the premier City of the Island. In a reply to a letter from Mr. M. Mootatamby, Swami Virajananda, the officiating Secretary of the Mission, wrote as follows:

Ramakrishna Mission,
Belur Math,
P.O. Howrah Dt.,
Dated: 08-10-1930

Dear Sir,

In continuation of my letter of the 20th ult, I have the pleasure to inform you that the Governing Body has approved of your proposal of opening a centre at Colombo. Swami Sharvananda has already left for Ceylon.

Wishing you all success.

Yours Sincerely,
Sgd. Virajananda,
Offg. Secretary

To:

M. Mootatamby, Esqr.
Colombo.

As mentioned in the letter, Swami Sharvanandaji arrived at the Island, accompanied by Swami Pranaveshananda. They were received by Swami Vipulananda, Mr. Mootatamby and others. The first meeting of the Mission centre in Colombo took place in the house of Mr. Mootatamby, at 119, Rosemead Place, Colombo 7, and a decision was taken to rent out a house to function as the Ramakrishna Mission, (Ceylon Branch).

The “Vedanta Kesari” of December 1930 gives the following report on the opening of the centre at Colombo:

“Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Wellawatta, Colombo: At the request of some leading Hindu residents of Colombo, Srimat Swami Sharvananda, President, Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*), arrived at Colombo on 10.10.1930 accompanied by Swami Pranaveshananda, with a view to open a new centre in the premier City of Colombo. In pursuance of a resolution passed by the Board of Management of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*) on 20.10.1930, it was decided that a new Ashrama should be opened at Colombo and accordingly a house named ‘Kamalyn’ at Harmer’s Avenue, Wellawatta, was rented for the purpose.

The inauguration ceremony was performed by Swami Sharvananda on 22-10-1930, and photos of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda were installed and worshipped. More than 100 members, friends and sympathisers of the Mission attended the opening ceremony on 23-10-1930. Swami Vipulananda, Secretary, submitted an account of the work done by the Mission in the Island. After suitable speeches delivered by Swami Sharvananda, Proctors Messrs. C. Perumal Pillai and S. Somasundaram, the function came to a close with the distribution of Prasadam. Swami Ghanananda, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*) has been placed in charge of the new Ashrama.”

The Ashrama at No. 48, Harmer’s Avenue, Wellawatta, functioned as the Headquarters of the Mission in the Island. Owing to financial difficulties, the Ashrama was shifted to a house of lower rental at No. 49, Sri Wickrama Road (now, known as International Buddhist Centre Road), Wellawatta, in January 1932. Swami Vipulananda was overseeing the multifarious activities of the Movement in the Island till a Mission Centre was established in Colombo. Once the Colombo Centre came into existence, it was made the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*) and the Swami-in-Charge of the Colombo Centre was invested with the responsibility of overseeing the activities of the Movement in the Island. The President of the

Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur, Calcutta, India, is the Patron and he appoints the President and the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna, Mission (*Ceylon Branch*). The Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur, Calcutta, India, is the President of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*). Any monastic member of the Mission nominated by the President of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur, Calcutta, India, as the Vice-President of the Colombo Centre, functions as the Swami-in-Charge of all activities of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*).

Swami Ghanananda was the first Swami-in-Charge of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*). He took charge of the Colombo Centre in 1931 and continued till he left for India in 1932. He was succeeded by Swami Asangananda in the year 1933. In the year 1941 he handed over the charge to Swami Siddhatmananda and left for India. Swami Siddhatmananda continued till he was succeeded by Swami Asangananda in the year 1951. Swami Asangananda did not continue long on his second assignment in the Island. He left for India in the year 1953 for reasons of health. In September 1954, Swami Prematmananda took charge of the Centre from him. In July 1987, Swami Samprajnananda succeeded Swami Prematmananda and continued till he was passed away in May 1990. Swami Jivanananda looked after the Mission activities from July 1990 till Swami Atmaghanananda took charge of the Ramakrishna Mission (*Ceylon Branch*) in June 1991. Swami Atmaghanananda has been continuing since then to this day.

Visit of Swami Vijnanananda:

Swami Vijnanananda, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna paid a brief visit to the Island in the year 1934. On the Swami’s visit, the ‘Vedanta Kesari’ of April 1934 carried the following report:

“After nearly three decades, Ceylon had again the privilege of a visit from one of the few surviving direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Srimat Swami Vijnananandaji and party reached Colombo on Wednesday the 27th December 1933 and were given a grand reception

by the members, devotees and admirers of the Mission. During his brief stay in Colombo His Holiness visited all the important Buddhist temples like the Kelaniya, which according to traditions, has been sanctified by the visit of Lord Buddha himself. Among the other places seen by Swamiji may be mentioned the Vivekananda Society and the Harbour where a boating trip was kindly arranged by the Assistant Port Surgeon. The Swamiji gave religious discourses at the Ashrama and various other places, and these were very largely attended. At Batticaloa the Swamiji performed Puja in the shrine of the Students' Home and gave practical religious instruction to the inmates. An Address of Welcome was presented to him by the Hindu public of the place at the Vivekananda Hall, to which a suitable reply was given. Similar functions characterised the visit of the Swamiji to Trincomalee, Anuradhapuram & other places in the Island. Although His Holiness's stay lasted barely eleven days, his discourses, personal talks, nay, his very presence, have left an indelible impression on the mind of many a struggling soul in Ceylon."

Swami Vijnanananda made the following remarks in the Visitor's Book of the Mission centre in Batticaloa when he visited the Home on 03.01.1934: "I have visited Shri Shivananda Vidyalayam, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Orphanage, Batticaloa, and have found it full of poor boys, orphans, and needy ones, who are receiving, education, practical and theoretical, with clothing, books, and lodging, etc., being provided under the protection of Shri Shri Paramahansa Ramakrishna Deva. May He be kind and beneficent to them. I wish it expand more and more and become a success in this land of Ceylon."

Shifting of the Mission at Colombo to its Present Site:

The activities of the Mission were increasing and it became necessary to find more spacious premises to provide a shrine room, office facilities and living quarters for the resident Swamis at Colombo. In February 1935, a small piece of land was purchased at 44th Lane, Wellawatta, and the construction of a suitable building was

commenced in March 1935. Swami Asangananda laid the foundation stone for the present Headquarters of the Mission on Wednesday, the 6th March, 1935, which also marked the first day of the inauguration of the Birth Centenary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Deva. The construction of the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Centenary Temple was completed in the year 1936, the entire expenditure for which was met by Messrs. Premjee Devjee, M. K. Kapadia and M. J. Patel. The prayer hall was soon added to the Shrine with the generous donation made by Dr. G. Wignaraja in memory of his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Gnanasekaram. The munificence of Mr. Dosabhoy Hormasji Marker of Colombo enabled the Mission to put up the Jerbai Memorial Hall which is utilised to hold religious classes and discourses and public meetings etc.

The frightening events of Second World War forced the Mission authorities to shift the Headquarters temporarily to Lunugala in April 1942, thence to Batticaloa in July 1942, and again to Colombo at 60th Lane (off Hampden Lane) Wellawatta, in November 1942, till it was once again established at its present site in July 1944.

XVI

The Growth of the Mission Centre at Batticaloa

The Batticaloa centre maintained its steady growth through the decades. With the take-over of the schools by the Government, the Mission diverted its attention to cultural and humanitarian activities. Now, the Mission centre at Batticaloa conducts regular pujas in the Shrine, weekly religious classes for ladies, and Sunday school for children. Bhajans and religious meetings to celebrate the birth anniversaries of the great prophets of the world are held in the premises of the Ashrama and in many schools within the Batticaloa Municipal limits.

The Centre runs three orphanages, - a Home for Boys at Kalladi-Uppodai, and two Girls' Homes, one at Anaipanthy, Batticaloa and

the other at Karaitivu. The monastic inmates of the centre visit on special occasions the Mantivu Leper Asylum and look after the Shrine at the Asylum apart from distributing religious and cultural magazines and pamphlets. With a view to provide scientific training to the inmates of the orphanages, and make the Home self-supporting, an Agricultural Farm at Rugam, Batticaloa District, is run by the Mission.

XVII

Expansion of Mission Activities in the Island

The Educational Activities of the Mission in the Island:

The educational activities of the Mission in the Island were making steady progress. The Mission managed the following twenty-six schools in the Island before the Government of Sri Lanka took possession of all the 26 schools by an Ordinance in 1960.

01. J / Vaideeshwara Vidyalayam Mixed Senior Secondary English School.
02. J / Kokuvil Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
03. T / Trincomalee Hindu School.
04. T / Primary Tamil Boys' School.
05. T / Tambalagamam Tamil Mixed School.
06. V / Thandikulam Tamil Mixed School.
07. Bd / Lunugalai Junior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
08. Bt / Akkaraipattu Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
09. Bt / Karaitivu Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School for Boys.
10. Bt / Karaitivu Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School for Girls.
11. Bt / Kalmunai Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
12. Bt / Mandur Senior Secondary Tamil Boys' School.
13. Bt / Mandur Girls' Tamil School.
14. Bt / Kaluthawalai Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
15. Bt / Palugamam Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
16. Bt / Kokkotichcholai Junior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.

17. Bt / Araipattai Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
18. Bt / Eachanthivu Junior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
19. Bt / Kallady-Uppodai Senior Secondary Tamil Girls' School.
20. Bt / Shivananda Vidyalayam Senior Secondary Boys' English School.
21. Bt / Anaipanthi Residential Senior Secondary Girls' English School.
22. Bt / Anaipanthi Junior Secondary Boys' Tamil School.
23. Bt / Sittandy Senior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
24. Bt / Morokkottanchenai Junior Secondary Tamil Mixed School.
25. Bt / Karadithottam Tamil Mixed School.
26. Bt / Veeramunai Tamil Mixed School.

With the take-over of these schools, the Mission's concentrated activities in the field of education in the Island came to an end. However, the Mission's educational service did not stop there and continues in various forms.

The Mission runs two Sunday Religious Schools, one at Colombo Mission Centre (from 1952) and one at Batticaloa Mission Centre (from 1963).

The Mission provides guidance and training to the teachers of various Sunday Religious Schools throughout the Island. The Mission gave complete support in starting one Saturday Religious School for the inmates of Colombo Hindu College Hostel at Ratmalanai in 1998, and another Saturday Religious School for students of Nugegoda Tamil Maha Vidyalayam in 2001.

In addition to frequent seminars and lectures at schools, the Mission conducts occasional residential camps for school children and youth to inculcate ethical, moral and leadership qualities and to induce an overall personality development in them.

The Mission annually grants financial assistance to the needy students to continue their education in schools and in Universities, and provides books, exercise books, etc. to the students of backward schools. In 2000s, annual spending on this exceeds Rs. One Million.

The Madam at Kathirgamam:

Thousands of pilgrims flock to the Holy Shrine at Kathirgamam all the year round, particularly during festival seasons. As no facilities for food and shelter were available at Kathirgamam, the Mission authorities, at the earnest request of the devotees, started, in a humble way, its humanitarian activities in the year 1943.

Soon, buildings were put up and the Ramakrishna Mission Madam was formally opened on 12th July, 1953, where pilgrims, irrespective of denominations, were provided with free food and accommodation. The annual festival in July-August used to attract large crowds of pilgrims to the sylvan Shrine at Kathirgamam and the Mission served free meals to over 10,000 pilgrims per day, continuously for 17 days. Religious lectures, discourses and Bhajans at the Madam constituted the regular features during the festival and other seasons. The Mission continued its noble services under the supervision of a Resident Swami till it was taken over by the Government on 10th November, 1976.

Expansion of Mission Activities at Colombo:

The Library and the reading room: The need to put up a library and reading room was long being felt by the Mission. Mr. C. B. Mody, the Treasurer of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch) and Mrs. Kamala Mody came forward to bear the entire expenditure for the construction of the building, and the Library and the Reading Room was opened to the public in the year 1948. Mr. & Mrs. Mody continued their humanitarian work by undertaking the conversion of the lawn in front of the Library and the reading room into a children's park at a considerable cost. The park was formally opened to the public in the year 1964.

The International Cultural Centre: In the year 1959, the Colombo Centre undertook the construction of an International Cultural Centre to provide accommodation to guests and tourists from abroad and a Students' Home for students from outstations. The foundation stone for the building was laid on 17.06.1959 by Dr.

Rajendra Prasad, the then President of the Republic of India. With the generous grants from the Governments of India and Ceylon and from the public, the erection of the Centre was completed at a cost of nearly Rs. 8 lakhs and was declared opened on 15.10.1962 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India.

The Swami Vivekananda Memorial Hall: Soon after, to commemorate the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda in 1963 - 64, the Board of Management of the Mission decided to erect a magnificent Hall adjacent to the International Cultural Centre. Soon the work began and the Hall was completed in 1969, at a cost of nearly Rs. 15 lakhs, with a substantial grant coming from the Government of India. The Hall, fully furnished and equipped, is one of the biggest and magnificent halls in the Island.

Sunday Religious School: Sunday Religious School was formally inaugurated on Sunday the 17th August 1952, on Sri Krishna Jayanti Day, with just 15 students on the roll, to provide the Hindu children of the Metropolis with the general background of their religion. The curriculum comprised the study of the tenets of Hindu Dharma, rendition of Thevarams and Thiruvagasams, Gita Chanting, the study of the lives of saints, singing of devotional songs, and directing the children towards character building. Yogasanam is taught to the students from 1997. These classes have been proved immensely popular among the public and has now on the roll more than 700 children; classes were conducted by a band of more than fifty honorary teachers.

Home for the Disabled Labourers, Ampitiya, Kandy: In the year 1968, on the request of the Indian High Commission, the Mission Authorities took over the management of the Home for the disabled labourers, Ampitiya, Kandy. The Mission has run the Home till it was closed.

Free Medical Clinic: Monthly free medical clinic was formally inaugurated at the Colombo Mission in October 1995. In addition, the Mission also conducts occasional free medical camps in remote areas.

Since 1995, the Mission has conducted more than one hundred and forty free medical camps which provided basic medical tests, diagnosis & essential medicines for more than twenty thousand patients.

Monk's Quarters: Adjoining property of extent 15.25 perches with a house at No. 9, Vivekananda Avenue was purchased and annexed to the Ashrama premises on 14.03.2002. It was ceremonially inaugurated on 16.03.2002, the Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti Day.

Relief and Rehabilitation Activities of the Mission:

Relief and Rehabilitation work is one of the major social welfare activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. Since its inception, the Colombo Mission has carried out several relief and rehabilitation work, including housing projects, for several thousands of people affected by natural and other calamities in the Island. A few of such work are briefed below:

Flood havoc in Batticaloa in December 1957: The Mission distributed provisions to 4668 families comprising 9983 members in 35 villages; financial assistances were provided to 200 families to repair and renovate their houses.

Civil Disturbances in 1958: On request by the Government Agent, Batticaloa, the Mission undertook the responsibility of running a Refugee Camp at the Ramakrishna Mission Shivananda Vidyalayam Campus, Batticaloa. 120 families affected by the civil unrest in Padiyatalawa, Maha Oya, Polannaruwai, Hingurakgoda, Panadura, Moratuwa and Kathirgamam are maintained at the camp for more than two weeks.

Cyclone in Batticaloa in November 1978: The Batticaloa district was severely shattered by the cyclone of 23-11-1978. The Batticaloa Mission Centre, including its Boys' Home and Ashrama, Girls' Homes at Karaitivu and Anaipanthi, Vipulananda Memorial Hall, coconut garden, cashew garden and Farm at Rugam suffered the biggest calamity ever since their inception. Some of the buildings belonging to the Centre were completely razed to the ground. Despite

this devastation, the Colombo and Batticaloa Mission Centres launched relief work in ten villages with the backing of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai. Foodstuff, clothes and household articles were distributed among the affected people in these villages.

Draught in Hambantota in September 2001: The Mission distributed provisions to more than two hundred families living in the affected areas in Hambantota district.

Flood havoc in Ratnapura in June 2003: The Mission distributed provisions worth of Rs. one hundred and ten thousand to more than one hundred families in three villages.

Destructive Tsunami in December 2004: In the wake of the devastating Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the Ramakrishna Mission started, from the very first day of the calamity, massive relief and rehabilitation operations for thousands of affected people in the Island. The tsunami destroyed nearly 70% of the coastal areas of the Island [starting from Valvettithurai (north) to Colombo (west), running through the eastern and southern coastal boundaries] in its half-an-hour reign on the 26th December 2004. Tsunami rendered more than 35000 people killed, more than 21000 people injured, 552641 persons displaced, 65349 houses fully destroyed and 48276 houses partly destroyed. (In short, more than 234083 families were affected by the Tsunami). The Mission served several thousands of victims with water, cooked food, dry food, clothing, medical aids, mats, mosquito nets, kitchen utensils, etc. to the tune of Rs. 12 million, during its three-month long primary relief work. The Mission (i) distributed Rs. 2.5 million worth of exercise books, study materials, uniforms, shoes, bags, photocopying facilities, bicycles, etc. among several thousand affected students; (ii) Rs. 2 million worth of boats & fishing nets to the affected fishermen; (iii) provided sewing machines, milk powder, etc. to the affected families; and (iv) provided the affected persons, particularly the children, with the services of counsellors to cope up with the traumatic experiences; all during its two-month long first stage tsunami rehabilitation work, starting from March 2005. Since May 2005, the Mission has been

building 114 permanent houses in Batticaloa; each unit is of about 700 sq. ft. floor area which costs about Rs. 525,000/=. At the time of printing of this book, the Mission was taking efforts to build 200 more houses in the Batticaloa district.

Other Social and Welfare Activities of the Mission:

The Mission also extensively engages in rendering service to the people in need. Housing projects for the needy people are one among them. A few projects carried out by the Mission are briefed below:

Akkaraipattu Housing Project in 1992/93: The Mission completed a ten-house project and handed over the houses to ten needy families by Swami Atmaghanananda on Friday the 22nd January 1993.

Vivekanandapuram Housing Project in 1996/97: To commemorate the hundredth year of the visit of Swami Vivekananda to the Island, after his world famous series of Lectures at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, the Mission decided to construct a model village with 27 houses for the sanitary labourers displaced by ethnic violence. Rupees 3.4 million project, partly funded by the Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters, NORAD and NHTDA, was completed and handed over to twenty seven families by Swami Atmaghanananda on Sunday the 4th May 1997. Each house unit of this village - named Vivekanandapuram - is complete with a well and a toilet. The village is enriched with a nursery school, a community hall, a children's park, a network of gravel roads and a temple.

Other Cultural and Spiritual Activities:

In addition to the above activities, the Mission conducts regular Puja in the Ashrama shrine and Bhajans programmes on Fridays and on special occasions. Annual Maha Shivaratri observance with Pujas in the four Yamas and Homa draws very large numbers of devotees who keep the traditional vigil throughout the night. On every *ekadashi* day Ramanam sankirtan is held in the evening. The birthday anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other prophets of major world religions are celebrated and special lectures on their lives and teachings by eminent persons are held.

Scriptural classes on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavata & the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna are conducted regularly. On Full-Moon (Poya) days a retreat is conducted. On invitations, the Swamis visit various institutions to deliver talks on Hinduism, Vedanta and on the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

The Movement with its Mission and Math centres all over the world has been in existence for more than a hundred years now. From humble beginnings it has grown into a world-wide organisation influencing world thought in various spheres of life. The Movement, true to the spirit of Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna, does not believe in proselytization, nor does it represent any sect or creed within Hinduism.

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

- (a) I look upon Sri Ramakrishna as an illustration and embodiment of the Religion Eternal, whose life and teachings help one to understand the plan & purpose of all the religions of the world and their underlying truth and harmony.
- (b) I look upon all religions as paths to God, and shall try to live in peace and fellowship with the followers of all religions.
- (c) I have full sympathy with all the objects of the Ramakrishna Mission as set forth in the Memorandum of Association, and I will actively co-operate with the work of the Mission.

To young men who desire to lead a life of renunciation and purity, the Movement provides opportunities for spiritual unfoldment. Spiritually inclined, healthy, educated, and bachelor men of the age group of 18 to 30 with a firm resolve to dedicate their lives to realise and practise the twin ideals of God-realisation and good of the world through the twin - paths of *tyaga* (i.e., renunciation of lust and gold and all other worldly ties) and *seva* (service of man looking upon him as an embodiment of the Lord), are admitted into the Order of monks

as novices. To lay devotees, the Movement provides several avenues for their spiritual development by facilitating their active participation in the various activities of the Math and Mission.

The Movement is growing. By the spiritual fire lit by Sri Ramakrishna, tended by His Apostles, and nourished by the successive generations of the sannyasins of the Monastic Order, it is continuing to grow in strength, and is making its own distinct contribution towards ushering in an era of peace & happiness all around.

The Ideal : “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.”

The Motto : “For one’s own liberation and for the good of the world.”

The Symbol: “Amidst the tumultuous waves of Intense Activity, yet alone and unattached, in serene absorption within the coils of yoga, bathed in the effulgent rays of the Sun of Knowledge and enjoying the unmixed fragrance of the lotus of Divine Love, in full bloom, the Paramahansa, pure and spotless as the swan, swims happily over the waters of mundane existence - this union of Karma, Yoga, Jnana and Bhakti, as a means to self-realisation, is the burthen of our symbol.”

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ADDENDUM - I

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ADDENDUM - II

SWAMIS WHO SERVED IN SRI LANKA

Presidents of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch)

	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
1. Swami Sharvananda	1929	1936
2. Swami Asangananda	1936	1939
3. Swami Vireshwarananda	1939	1963
4. Swami Gambhirananda	1964	1987
5. Swami Ranganathananda	1988	1998
6. Swami Gahanananda	1998	To this date

Vice-Presidents [Swami-in-Charge] of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch)

	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
1. Swami Ghanananda	1931	1932
2. Swami Asangananda	1933	1936
3. Swami Vipulananda	1936	1941
4. Swami Siddhatmananda	1941	1951 Nov.
5. Swami Asangananda	1951 Nov.	1954 Sept.
6. Swami Prematmananda	1954 Sept.	1987 July
7. Swami Samprajnananda	1987 July	1990 July
8. Swami Atmaghanananda	1991 June	To this date

Other Swamis Served at the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch)

1. Swami Vipulananda	1926 – 31, 1933 – 39 & 1942 – 46
2. Swami Anantananda	1926 – 1929
3. Swami Avinashananda	1926 – 1930 & 1939 – 1945
4. Swami Parameshananda	1929 – 1930

5. Swami Kutasthananda	1930 – 1932 and 1953 – 1954
6. Swami Pranaveshananda	1931 – 1936
7. Swami Paripurnananda	1932 – 1933
8. Swami Jegatheeswarananda	1932 – 1933
9. Swami Sundarananda	1932 – 1933
10. Swami Kethareswarananda	1933 – 1939
11. Swami Nishkamananda	1939 – 1942
12. Swami Ritajananda	1942 – 1945
13. Swami Hrishikeshananda	1945 – 1946
14. Swami Natarajananda	1946 – 1967
15. Swami Sarvatitananda	1952 – 1956
16. Swami Varananda	1952 – 1960
17. Swami Avyayananda	1956 – 1963
18. Swami Aghorananda	1961 – 1969
19. Swami Srirangananda	1963 – 1970
20. Swami Jivanananda	1967 – to this date
21. Swami Virupakshananda	1971 – 1978
22. Swami Mukhyiananda	1975 – 1978
23. Swami Chidghanananda	1978 – 1988
24. Swami Samagrananda	1979 – 1990
25. Swami Rajeswarananda	1988 – to this date
26. Swami Ajaratmananda	1988 – to this date
27. Swami Ritamayananda	1992 – to this date
28. Swami Tadbhasananda	1999 – to this date
29. Swami Jnanamayananda	2005 – to this date

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ADDENDUM - III

Historical Sequences of Some Important Events

- June 1893 : First visit of Swami Vivekananda on his way to the West to attend the Parliament of Religions.
- Jan. 1897 : Visit of Swami Niranjanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna - to receive Swami Vivekananda.
- 15.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda landed at Colombo at about 6:00 p.m. and thousands of Hindus assembled at the Jetty to welcome him. Swami Vivekananda visited several places, including Kandy, Matalai, Anuradhapuram and Yälppānam (Jaffna), during his ten days stay in the Island.
- 16.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda delivered his first Lecture in the East, at Floral Hall, Colombo.
- 17.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda visited the Ponambalavaneshwar Sivan Temple. 17th Jan, being a Sunday, very large crowd assembled at the temple as well as along the road side to have a glimpse of the holy person.
- 18.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda delivered his second lecture at the Public Hall, Colombo. The central theme of lecture was the advocacy of universal religion based on the Vedas.
- 19.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda left Colombo at 7:30 a.m. by a train and reached Kandy at 11:20 a.m. After a brief welcome ceremony, Swami arrived at the neighbouring Matalai.
- 20.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda left Matalai for Yälppānam (Jaffna) by a coach. On his way to Yälppānam, Swami reached Anuradhapuram on the 21.01.1897 and delivered a short address to a crowd of more than two thousand people, amidst disturbances caused by the fanatic Buddhists.
- 22.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda passed through Vavuniya, where he was duly welcomed by the local Hindus.
- 24.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda was received by the Hindus of Jaffna Peninsula at Chavakachcheri at about 9:30 a.m., and Swami was escorted to the town in a coach procession. In the evening Swami was taken through a 3 km long beautifully decorated route to the Jaffna Hindu College where he was accorded with a mammoth reception in the presence of several thousand people. Swami delivered his first Lecture in Yälppānam (Jaffna), from 10:30 p.m. to midnight.

- 25.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda delivered his 2nd Lecture in Yälppānam (Jaffna), at the same venue - the Jaffna Hindu College - from 7:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.
- 26.01.1897 : Swami Vivekananda left Yälppānam in a steamer, and arrived at Pamban Road (Tamil Nadu) at about 3:00 p.m.
- July 1897 : Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, visited the Island on the direction of Swami Vivekananda and lived in Thambyah Chatram (a Charity House) for about eight months, conducting spiritual discourses.
- 27.06.1899 : Swami Vivekananda visited the Island for the third time on his second visit to west. Swami Turiyananda a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna accompanied him. On the next day, the 28th June 1899 (Wednesday), the steamer carrying the Swami left the shores of Colombo for west.
- 04.07.1902 : Swami Vivekananda attained Maha Samadhi.
- 13.07.1902 : The local Hindus, inspired by Swami Vivekananda, formally establishes the Vivekananda Society in Colombo, just after ten days of the Maha Samadhi of Swami Vivekananda.
- 1903 : Swami Trigunatitananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, on his way to America visited the Island.
- 16.06.1906 : Visit of Swami Abhedananda and Swami Ramakrishnanda direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna with Swami Paramananda - on a 12-day lecture tour.
- 1912 : Visit of Sister Avabhamia a western disciple of Swami Vivekananda.
- Dec. 1915 : Swami Sharvananda, head of Chennai Ramakrishna Math, visited the Island at the invitation of the Colombo Vivekananda Society. Subsequently he visited the Island frequently (in 1917, 1918, 1919, 1921, 1924, 1926, 1930 & 1932) and delivered a number of illuminating talks.
- 1917 : On the request of Mr. Nagamuttu, the founder of the Jaffna Vaideeshwara Vidyalayam, Ramakrishna Mission formally took charge of management of the Vaideeshwara Vidyalayam. Thus the Mission has formally launched its educational activities in Yälppānam.
- Sept 1918 : Swami Sharvananda visited the Island delivered a series of Lectures. During these visits Pandit Mylwaganam, a teacher at Jaffna St. Patrick College, came in contact with Swami.
- 1922 : Pandit Mylwaganam resigned his Principal post at Manipay Hindu College, Yälppānam and joined the Ramakrishna Order. He was subsequently initiated into Sannyasa, in April 1924, under the name Swami Vipulananda.
- 1924 : Swami Sharvananda visited Thirukonamalai (Trincomalee) and delivered a series of lectures at the invitation of Thirukonamalai Vivekananda Society, which was established in 1906.

- 09.05.1925 : First Ramakrishna Ashrama in Ceylon was opened at Thirukonamalai (Trincomalee).
- 28.05.1925 : Five schools run by the Batticaloa Vivekananda Society were handed over to the Mission.
- 01.06.1925 : The Ramakrishna Mission formally took charge of the management of Trincomalee Hindu Boys English School and Trincomalee Hindu Boys Tamil School.
- 1926 : Jaffna Vaideeshwara Vidyalayam was brought directly under the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission; Swami Vipulananda along with Swami Avinashananda steered the school to great heights.
- 06.06.1926 : Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home was started with 6 students in Vellikilamai Madam at Vannarpannai, Jaffna, by Swami Vipulananda.
- 03.11.1926 : Swami Avinashananda visited the Island and took steps to obtain formal legal registration with the government.
- 17.07.1929 : The Governor of Ceylon, gave his assent to incorporating the Mission under the Ordinance No. 8 of 1929.
- 26.11.1929 : Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home functioned in Jaffna was shifted to Kallady – Uppodai.
- 10.10.1930 : Swami Sharvananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch), arrived at Colombo along with Swami Pranaveshananda.
- 22.10.1930 : Colombo Ramakrishna Ashrama was formally opened at 48, Harmer's Avenue, Wellawatta, by Swami Sharvananda, as per the resolution passed by the Board of Management of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch) at its fifth meeting on 20-10-1930.
- 1931 : Swami Ghanananda took charge as the Vice President of the Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch). Swami Vipulananda left for Annamalai Nagar, Tamil Nadu, India.
- Jan. 1932 : Colombo Ramakrishna Ashrama was shifted to 49, Sri Wickrama Road (Present International Buddhist Centre Road), Wellawattai.
- 12.05.1932 : The Students' Home of Kallady-Uppodai moved to its own building with 12 inmates.
- 1933 : Swami Asangananda succeeded Swami Ghanananda as the Vice-President of Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 1933 : Swami Vipulananda assumed duties as Manger of the Batticaloa Students' Home in the latter part of 1933.

27. 12.1933 : Swami Vijnanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math & Mission, arrived at Colombo. Swami visited the Batticaloa Ashrama on 03.01.1934. During his 11-day stay in the island, Swami visited Trincomalee & Anuradhapuram as well.
- Feb. 1935 : A piece of Land was purchased at 44th Lane (present No. 40, Ramakrishna Road), Wellawattai, to erect a permanent building for the Head Quarters (Ceylon Branch).
- 06.03.1935 : Swami Asangananda laid the foundation for a Temple and a building in the newly acquired land, on the inauguration day of the Birth Centenary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The project was completed in 1936.
- 1935 : Residential section for paying-students was started at Shivananada Vidyalaya.
- 31.01.1937 : A Home for Girls was opened at Karaitivu.
- Sep. 1939 : Swami Vipulananda went to Mayavati as Editor of 'Prabuddha Bharatha' journal.
- May 1940 : Swami Madhavananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, visited Colombo and Batticaloa.
- July 1941 : Swami Siddhatmananda succeeded Swami Asangananda as Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 1941 : 'Acharya Mandir' - (residence of the Principal of Shivananda Vidyalayam) was built.
- 1942 /1944 : Sacred Relic of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna & Colombo Ashrama were temporarily shifted, initially to Lunugalai in April 1942; then to Batticaloa in July 1942; and again to 60th Lane (off Hampden Lane), Wellawattai in November 1942 due to World War - II. It was again re-established at the present site in July 1944.
- 1943 : Ramakrishna Mission expands its service to the thousands of pilgrims flock to the Holy Skantha (Kathirgama Kanthan) Temple at Kathirgamam.
- Feb. 1947 : Swami Ranganathananda visited the Island to participate in the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's visit to the Island after Swamiji's famous lecture series at Chicago.
- 19.07.1947 : Swami Vipulananda passed away in Colombo.
- 1948 : Library and Reading Room at the Head Quarters premises was opened to the Public.
- 18.09.1948 : Foundation for Vipulananda Memorial Hall, Batticaloa was laid by Sri T.S. Avinasilingam, the Minister of Education, Government of Madras.

- 16.11.1950 : Swami Gambhirananda and four other Swamis visited the Centre.
- 09.05.1951 : Sarada Girls' Home, Anaipanthi was opened by Swami Natarajananda.
- 05.07.1951 : Swami Vireshwarananda, Asst. General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission visited Batticaloa.
- 12.11.1951 : Swami Asangananda succeeded Swami Siddhatmananda as Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 1951 : Sir (Dr.) C. V. Raman, a world renowned scientist who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930, visited the Ashrama in 1951.
- 17.08.1952 : Sunday Religious School was started at the Colombo Ashrama to impart Hindu Dharma to school-going children.
- 1952 : 43rd Lane and 44th Lane of Wellawattai were renamed Vivekananda Road and Ramakrishna Road respectively.
- 12.07.1953 : Ramakrishna Mission Madam at Kathirgamam was formally opened. Madam provided the pilgrims with free food and accommodation. Religious lectures, discourses and bhajans were among the regular activities of the Madam.
- Dec. 1953 : Pandit Vijayaluxmi of the United Nations inaugurated the year long Birth Centenary celebrations of Holy Mother (Dec 1953 to Dec 1954).
- 05.09.1954 : Swami Prematmananda succeeded Swami Asangananda as Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- Dec. 1957 : Flood havoc in Batticaloa District. Mission undertook primary relief work in the worst affected areas. Later, financial assistance was given to 200 families to repair their houses.
- 17.06.1959 : Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of India, laid the foundation stone for an International Cultural Centre to provide accommodation to guests and students.
- Oct. 1960 : Twenty-six (26) Ramakrishna Mission Schools were taken-over by the State. With the take over, Mission's 43 years long intensive service in the field of education in the island was brought to an abrupt halt.
- 15.10.1962 : International Cultural Centre at headquarters premises was opened by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India.
- Sep. 1962 : Shivananda Vidyalayam Hostel was taken over by the State.
- June 1963 : Birth Centenary year of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Ranganathananda was the Chief Guest at the celebrations.
- 06.09.1963 : Vipulananda Memorial Hall (Bat.) was opened by Swami Prematmananda.

- Sep. 1963 : A Sunday Religious School was started in Batticaloa to impart Hinduism to school-going children.
- 1964 : A children's park in the headquarters premises, just in front of the Library, was formally opened to the Public.
- 1964 : Foundation stone was laid for the Swami Vivekananda Memorial Hall.
- May 1967 : Rugam Farm Land was handed over to the Mission.
- 1967 : Indian Prime Minister Indra Gandhi visited the Mission.
- 10.05.1968 : Swami Vireshwarananda, President of Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math laid the foundation for a new building for the Boys' Home and Ashrama, in Kallady-Uppodai.
- 1968 : Pravrajika Athmaprana and Pravrajika Mukthiprana of the Sri Sarada Math, Kolkata visited the Island to participate in the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Sister Nivedita.
- 1969 : Swami Vivekananda Memorial Hall - a fully furnished hall and one of the biggest halls in the Island - was opened to the public to stage cultural and religious programmes.
- 09.03.1970 : Sri Ramakrishna Sarada Samiti was established.
- 27.05.1972 : New building of the Boys' Home and Ashrama at Kallady-Uppodai was opened by Swami Prematmananda.
- 10.11.1976 : The noble service of the Mission to the thousands of pilgrims, irrespective of denominations, flock to the Kathirgamam, was brought to an abrupt halt by the take over of the Mission premises by the Government.
- 07.08.1977 : A Souvenir was released, in Colombo, by Swami Tapasyananda, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Boy's Home at Kallady-Uppodai.
- 14.01.1978 : A health unit was opened at the Boys' Home at Kallady-Uppodai.
- 23.11.1978 : Fury of the cyclone.
- 21.09.1980 : Golden Jubilee Commemoration of the Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo.
- Sept 1980 : Swami Bhuteshananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math & Mission, visited the Island.
- 02.06.1982 : Foundation for a new building for the Sri Sarada Girls' Home at Kallady-Uppodai was laid by Swami Prematmananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 03.06.1985 : New building of the Sri Sarada Girls' Home was opened by Swami Prematmananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).

- 1986 : Swami Ranganathananda visited the Island.
- July 1987 : Swami Samprajnananda succeeded Swami Prematmananda as Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 01.07.1990 : Swami Jivanananda succeeded Swami Samprajnananda as Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 01.06.1991 : Swami Atmaghanananda succeeded Swami Jivanananda as Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch) and serving at that capacity to this date.
- 22.08.1991 : Foundation for a new building for the Karaitivu Girls' Home was laid by Swami Atmaghanananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- Jan. 1992 : Swami Gahanananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited the Island.
- Mar. 1992 : Swami Smaranananda, Trustee, Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, visited the Island. Swami laid foundation for a ten-house project designed for the people affected by the ethnic violence.
- April 1992 : Administration of Sri Sarada Nursery School, Batticaloa has come directly under Mission.
- 22.01.1993 : A ten-house project was completed at Akkaraipattu, and handed over to ten families by Swami Atmaghanananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- Dec. 1993 : Swami Prabhananda, Trustee, Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, visited the Island
- 03.12.1993 : Cultural Centre at Sarada Girls' Home at Kallady-Uppodai was opened by Swami Prabhananda.
- 27.05.1994 : New building of the Karaitivu Girls' Home was opened by Swami Atmaghanananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Mission.
- 01.10.1995 : Monthly Free Medical Clinic was inaugurated at the Colombo Centre.
- 01.11.1996 : Foundation for the Vivekananadapuram Housing Scheme was laid by Swami Jivanananda.
- 15.01.1997 : A postage stamp of Swami Vivekananda and a first day postal cover was released by the Government to mark the Centenary year of Swamiji's visit to the Island after his world famous address at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. A statue of Swami Vivekananda, erected in the premises of the Vivekananda Society, Colombo, was declared open by Srimat Swami Ranganathananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission and Math.

- 01.05.1997 : Centenary celebrations of the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission.
- 04.05.1997 : Vivekanandapuram Housing scheme - a twenty seven houses project was completed and handed over to twenty seven families by Swami Atmaghanananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch).
- 23.05.1997 : Pe.Su.Mani's Tamil Book on "Ilankaiyil Ramakrishna Iyakkam" was released.
- 01.10.1997 : A regular, Monthly, Free Medical Clinic was started at the Colombo Ramakrishna Mission.
- 2000 - 2001 : Platinum Jubilee Commemoration of Boy's Home, Batticaloa. The year long celebration was marked with several social welfare projects and cultural programmes.
- 19.10.2001 : A postage stamp and a first-day cover was released by the Government to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Batticaloa.
- 07.06.2001 : An informative, platinum jubilee commemoration volume of Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Batticaloa was released.
- 14.03.2002 : Adjoining property of extent 15.25 perches at No. 9, Vivekananda Avenue was purchased and annexed to the Ashrama premises.
- 2002 - 2003 : Golden Jubilee Commemoration of the Ramakrishna Mission Sunday Religious School, Colombo. The year long celebration was marked with more than twenty social welfare projects and with cultural programmes.
- 26.12.2004 : Tsunami devastated the 70% of the coastal belt of the Island, starting from Valvettithurai (north) to Colombo (west), running through the eastern and southern coastal borders; which rendered more than 35000 people killed, more than 21000 people injured, 552641 persons displaced, and several thousands of houses destroyed. More than 234083 families were affected by the Tsunami. Ramakrishna mission carried out massive relief and rehabilitation operations for thousands of affected people. The rehabilitation work and the housing projects launched by the Mission for the tsunami victims are still progressing.
- May 2005 : Ramakrishna Mission started building 114 permanent houses for the Tsunami affected families in Batticaloa District.
- 22.10.2005 : Inauguration of the year long Platinum Jubilee Commemoration of the Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo. Year long (2005 Oct - 2006 Oct) celebration is planned with several welfare projects & cultural programmes.
- 22.10.2005 : Swami Virupakshananda's Book on "Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka - 2nd Edition" (English) was released.

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The Ramakrishna Mission Emblem



The above emblem designed by Swami Vivekananda symbolizes the ideal of the Movement. It represents the spiritual disciplines through which one reaches the Supreme Goal. In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma (work); and lotus, of Bhakti (love), and the rising-sun, of Jnana (knowledge). The encircling serpent is indicative of yoga and the awakened Kundalini Shakti (spiritual energy), while the Swan in the picture stands for the Paramatman (the Supreme Self). Therefore the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained.

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