

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: INTRODUCTION

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

[The laws governing the interaction of soul with soul, of a God-hungry soul with a God-filled soul, make interesting and inspiring study. Sri Ramakrishna, the God-mad Saint of Dakshineswar, captivated and captured many God-hungry souls, and those 'victims' rejoiced in that spiritual 'captivity', for life. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when he met certain persons for the first time, it made him 'jump up with a start'. There were many reasons for that startled reaction, though only a few he revealed to the disciples. Similarly, many who met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time had soul-stirring reactions. In some cases, it was not apparent on the conscious level. Almost invariably, the first meeting led to subsequent meetings and to far-reaching results.

A study of these 'First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna', based on authentic sources, is being offered to our readers in a serial. We hope it will be found interesting and rewarding. Swami Prabhananda, who has prepared the series for the *Prabuddha Bharata*, is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. —Ed.]

It was late one afternoon.¹ Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room at 55 Shyam-pukur Street, where he had moved from Dakshineswar for systematic treatment of his throat cancer. Many devotees were present including Narendranath Dutta, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, Dr. Dukari, Rakhal Chandra Ghosh, the younger Naren, Mahendranath Gupta, Sarat Chakravarty, and Shyam Basu. The visitors listened with rapt attention to whatever fell from Sri Ramakrishna's lips. Spoken with a slight but attractive stammer, the melodious flow of his words of wisdom, very often couched in parables and seasoned with humour, fell on his listeners, thrilling and purifying their souls. Occasionally he lost consciousness of the outer world, when he plunged into deep *samādhi*. His body became motionless, his eyes fixed, his tongue speechless. He sat like a statue cut in stone. He seemed an altogether different person.

The visitors looked at his face in wonder. It did not show the slightest trace of the agonizing illness.

Full of fun as Sri Ramakrishna was, he allowed his visitors to speak out their minds. Their discussion on this occasion turned on the subject of the Master himself.

Dr. Sarkar to Girish: 'Whatever you may do, please do not worship him as God. You are turning the head of this good man.'

Girish: 'What else can I do? Oh, how else shall I regard a person who has taken me across this ocean of the world, and what is still more, the ocean of doubt?...'

Narendra (to Dr. Sarkar): 'We think of him (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) as a person who is like God....'

Dr. Sarkar: 'One should suppress one's feelings in such a matter.'

Narendra (to Dr. Sarkar): 'We offer worship to him bordering on divine worship.'

At these words Sri Ramakrishna laughed like a child.²

A few hours before Sri Ramakrishna had

¹ October 27, 1885. See M.: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1947), p. 884 ff.

² *ibid.*, pp. 894-5.

shown the avid interest of a child when the nature of electricity was demonstrated to him by the younger Narendra with the help of an instrument. Soon after this he had entertained the barrister Atul Chandra Ghosh with his Munsiff friend, and also the noted painter, Annada Bagchi.

This day was much like many other days in Sri Ramakrishna's later life. Crowds of people, with friends and strangers, flocked to the house from early morning till night, and Sri Ramakrishna made himself available to them all. People came from all strata of society, irrespective of caste, creed, and affluence or lack of it. They came with various expectations. Some came led by open-minded curiosity, others with a desire to earn merit by his holy company, some others to learn what he had to teach, again others to find means of attaining peace of mind. Those who came to him in the hope of material gain or of witnessing miracles were disappointed to find that they had come to the wrong place, for Sri Ramakrishna not only performed no miracles but condemned them.

Some took him to be an ordinary man lacking in good manners; others looked upon him as a crackbrain; while still others thought him a highly unusual human being. Gifted persons like Keshab Chandra Sen discovered in him 'a man with the widest and most catholic spiritual outlook, a man who lived and moved with God, a saint whose thoughts and speech were profoundly original and arresting'.³ Among his admirers, some thought him 'a child of nature',⁴ 'a

God-like man',⁵ 'a man belonging to the class of Chaitanya, Buddha and Christ',⁶ 'a God-man, an Avatāra'.⁷ They could not explain how Sri Ramakrishna could transmit 'spirituality with a touch, with a wish, which makes even the lowest and the most degraded characters saints in one second'.⁸

Most of them, however, had no doubt that Sri Ramakrishna was a man of the highest integrity who, for the sake of realizing the Truth, had renounced everything. Even though many could not understand him properly, they noticed that his life was consistent with his words and that in their eyes gave this unlettered, unknown villager a position of authority in the field of religion. On seeing that he practised what he preached, they were prepared to listen to what he had to say. Any opinion on religion from him was regarded as authoritative.

Lively and humorous, Sri Ramakrishna exhibited the simplicity of a child, the brilliance of an intellectual, the wisdom of a prophet, and the spontaneous love of a saint. He himself had vouchsafed to some the understanding that he was an *avatāra*, a God-man. He revealed God to weary travellers. To help man solve his problems of life he advised, 'Hold on to me.'⁹ Even though he had scaled the highest peaks of spiritual experience he did not hesitate to come down and sympathize with the humblest endeavours of those around him. His love for others knew no bounds. His concern for them was amazing. Those who knew him intimately felt that love was his

³ Nagendranath Gupta: *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, p. 6.

⁴ Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar described Sri Ramakrishna this way, *vide*, *The Gospel*, p. 909.

⁵ Nagendranath held this view (*The Gospel*, p. 904). This was however not his final opinion. Later, as Swami Vivekananda, he described Sri Ramakrishna as *avatāra-varīṣṭha*, 'the greatest among the *avatāras*', etc.

⁶ This was the view of 'M', the author of the *The Gospel*.

⁷ This view was held by the Bhairavi Brahmani, Padmalochan, Girishchandra Ghosh, Ramchandra Dutta and others during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime.

⁸ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas), Vol. IV (1962) p. 29.

⁹ Swami Nityatmananda: *Śrī-Ma Darśana* (in Bengali), Vol. I, p. 39.

very nature. He had directed his love to God for long years, and when he had attained complete oneness with Him, God turned that love towards the whole creation, towards men and women who sought him, and towards those who did not seek him. In this mission of 'reclaiming souls', he poured himself out with the same intensity and abandon with which he formerly sought to realize the Divine.

A master spiritual guide, he tracked down genuine aspirants with the tenacity of a 'bloodhound'. He moved about the streets of Calcutta to bestow love on people. He lamented that his fragile body did not permit him to walk the streets as much as he would like to do. He tearfully prayed to the Divine Mother to bring to him soon those who were to be placed under his immediate charge. He wept for them and sometimes very bitterly, and felt that his heart was being wrung like a wet towel. At the back of his mind, as he moved about or remained seated in his room, there were always missing faces to be watched for, the faces of those whom the Divine Mother had shown him as predestined to come to him for instruction, but who had not yet come. And he served them, in a spiritual sense, for many hours a day. Truly did Sarada Devi—the Holy Mother say, 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) did not come to eat *rosogolla* (sweets) alone.'

Thus there gathered around Sri Ramakrishna men and women who, becoming surcharged with divine love, danced a ballet, as it were, like water particles atop waves in an ocean of love, with Sri Ramakrishna in their midst. To each and everyone of them he was 'the embodiment of sweetness'.¹⁰ He let the wind of joy and freedom blow on all around him. Above all he

was their *suhṛd*, 'a friend who does good to one and all without expecting a return'.¹¹ He was their sincere and trusted friend, their all-time comrade and reliable guide. They found in him, too, the meeting-point of all contradictory forces. Above all, although always a phenomenon extraordinary and mysterious, Sri Ramakrishna was to them a living and lovable fact of experience.

Those who came into intimate contact with Sri Ramakrishna and were fortunate enough to receive his services as their *suhṛd*, may be conveniently divided into several groups:

- A. HIS OWN TEACHERS: Bhairavi Brahmani, Jatadhari, Totapuri, etc.
- B. FUTURE MONKS: Rakhal, Narendra, Jogindra, Baburam, Niranjana, Latu, Tarak, Sashi, Sarat, Gangadhar, Harinath, Subodh, Sarada, etc.
- C. HOUSEHOLDER ASPIRANTS: Ramchandra Dutta, Manomohan Mitra, Balaram Bose, Mahendranath Gupta, Kedar Chatterjee, Durgacharan Nag, Viswanath Upadhyaya, Devendranath Majumdar, Purnachandra Ghosh, etc.
- D. WOMAN-ASPIRANTS: Aghoremani (Gopaler Ma), Jogindramohini, Golapsundari, Lakshmidevi Gaurdasi, etc.
- E. DISTINGUISHED MEN: Devendranath Tagore, Dayananda Saraswati, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bhagavandas Babaji, Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra, Michael Madhusudan, Sivanath Sastri, Sasadhar Tarkachudamani, Mahendralal Sarkar, etc.
- F. 'SINNERS': Girishchandra Ghosh, Surendranath Mitra, Kalipada Ghosh, Binodini, etc.

¹⁰ A letter of Swami Premananda to Swami Virajananda.

¹¹ *Bhagavad-gītā*, V. 29.

G. 'CHANCE' COMERS: Akshaya Kumar Sen, Nilkantha Mukherji, Prof. Nityananda Goswami, Prabhudayal Mishra, Vaikunthanath Sanyal, etc.

We must remember, however, that all the activities of a God-man like Sri Ramakrishna are purposeful. His first meeting with each of those mentioned above was, therefore, attended by interesting and instructive circumstances which foreshadowed the distinct pattern of relationship that Sri Ramakrishna was to develop and maintain with the person concerned. He foresaw the coming of each of his inner circle and at the first meeting he, with his rare insight, could determine that person's nature and from then on work to build up a suitable relationship with him. In this respect he was like an 'expert dyer' who dyes clothes in different shades to meet

the requirements of his customers. As love was the base of the dye he used, his first meetings in particular, present heart-warming instances of his love. First meetings with people are to some extent moments of heightened awareness and greater receptiveness and therefore more is likely to be revealed in them than in subsequent meetings. For the same reason, the first impressions that Sri Ramakrishna made on those whom he met have a value of their own, even though the understanding of those persons may have undergone development later on. Hence the serial, 'First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna', will amount to a series of vivid snapshots of a world teacher and a unique personality. It is hoped that they will help the reader to a better understanding and appreciation of Sri Ramakrishna.



As many warm themselves in the fire kindled by someone else who has taken the trouble of collecting the firewood and other necessary things, similarly, many fix their mind on the Lord by associating with and following the instructions of holy men who have come to know the Lord after many a hard penance.

* * *

If a man sees a pleader, he naturally thinks of lawsuits and courts. In the same way, on seeing a pious devotee one is reminded of God and of the hereafter.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA



nity. The problem was of the entire humanity and he has solved that problem. And he has also established faith in God by his own realization.

The world today is very acquisitive. Men want to get rich even by robbing their neighbours. And when this spirit is at its highest, Sri Ramakrishna's life shows to the world the spirit of renunciation of an exalted kind. He could not touch any metallic thing. If anything metallic was put under his bed, as Swamiji did once, he at once felt as if a scorpion had stung him, felt intense pain, and could not sit on the bed. That shows how extreme was his renunciation of 'gold', of possessions. He synthesized the life of a householder and that of a *sannyāsin* (monk) in one. He did not renounce his wife, but accepted her; and this acceptance was of the highest order, pure and immaculate. Thus he has shown and synthesized the life of a householder and a *sannyāsin* in one. From various standpoints we see that Sri Ramakrishna's life is much more significant to the world than the lives of the previous incarnations. From that standpoint only, it is said that Sri Ramakrishna is *Avatāravariṣṭha*. Otherwise it is the same Lord that comes in various forms. Sri Ramakrishna himself has said, 'He who

was Rāma and He who was Kṛṣṇa, is now Ramakrishna.' Lord Gaurāṅga or Caitanya also showed that the personality is the same by showing the *ṣaḍbhūja* (six-armed) form Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma. Śrī Kṛṣṇa also says, 'I embody Myself from age to age for the good of the world.' There is, however, a difference in the manifestation of power according to the need of the age or the country or the whole world. So from that standpoint it is said that Sri Ramakrishna is *Avatāravariṣṭha*, 'Greatest among the Incarnations'.

We have said above that Sri Ramakrishna came to establish *dharma*, religion. But one can raise an objection, 'We do not see any signs of it, for we see all around only selfishness, worldliness, conflicts, and hatred.' But I should like to say that he has given the message and it is slowly working all over the world, even at unexpected places. People who just hear it, take to it with great eagerness. That shows there is great demand or hankering for his soul-stirring message. The spiritual forces that he has let loose on this world have the power or potentiality to usher in a new age. We are at the end of an old epoch and the beginning of a new one.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : SURENDRANATH MITRA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

One day Surendranath Mitra confided his worries and anxieties to his friends and neighbours, Ramchandra Dutta and Manomohan Mitra. He also narrated an incident. One day after noon-meal he was standing in his parlour when a dark-complexioned *bhairavi* (a nun of the Tāntrik sect) wearing ochre-coloured cloths, with unbound hair, and

a trident in her hand, walked past the house. Looking at Surendranath she remarked, 'O my child, everything else is void, That alone is true.' Though he could not make out its significance, this made him think deeply.¹

¹ Ramchandra Dutta : *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Parama-hanser Jīvan-vṛttānta* (Bengali), p. 115.

The two friends gave a sympathetic hearing to Surendranath but could hardly make out the cause of his worries. Nor could they find any solution. But remembering the efficacy of the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna, who had proved to be a great help to them, Ramchandra suggested, 'There lives a Paramahansa at Dakshineswar. Why don't you visit him, please?'

Manomohan not only supported Ramchandra's views but to convince Surendranath, narrated his personal experiences with the Paramahansa.

Surendranath, who had received an English education and held an important post in a British firm in Calcutta, laughed at this suggestion. 'You hold the Paramahansa in high esteem. Well and good,' he retorted, 'but why do you want me to visit him?' His friends were not dismayed. Anxious as they were about Surendranath, they would not leave the matter there. They continued to persuade him. He finally gave way with the remark, 'I will be like a crane among swans! I have seen enough of quacks. I may see him. But, mind you, if he talks nonsense I shall twist his ears.'² So confident were they about Sri Ramakrishna that they accepted their friend's challenge.

Like many other educated young men of the time, Surendranath boasted of his atheism and led a Bohemian life. He was addicted to drinking. He cherished an exaggerated notion about man's free will. Then

about thirty years old, Surendranath was fair-looking and strongly built. He had a reputation for charity.³ Though somewhat harsh in his dealings with others, he was simple, straightforward, and outspoken.⁴

One day, very likely not later than the middle of 1880,⁵ Surendranath started for Dakshineswar in the company of Ramchandra and Manomohan.⁶ Entering Sri Ramakrishna's room they found him seated on a couch and a few devotees sitting on the floor. Surendra, on hearing from his friends, had formed an idea about the Paramahansa which was quite different from the one he had after meeting him. Nonetheless, it is true that Sri Ramakrishna's appearance could hardly impress him. At first Surendra, like many others, found nothing extraordinary about him. He did not salute Sri Ramakrishna nor did he care to greet him even. Quietly he seated himself in one corner of the room while Ramchandra and Manomohan prostrated themselves before

⁴ Some days after Sri Ramakrishna had met Surendranath, he said of the latter: 'What a nice disposition he has now! He is very outspoken; he isn't afraid to speak the truth. He is unstinting in his liberality. No one that goes to him for help comes away empty-handed.' (*The Gospel*, p. 402).

⁵ Manomohan Mitra, in his 'The Story of My Life', wrote: 'Some months after we began visiting Dakshineswar, our close relation, the staunch believer and outspoken Surendranath Mitra, and his younger brother Girindranath Mitra joined us.' Ramchandra and Manomohan met the Master on 13 November 1879. It was mainly on Surendra's initiative that the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated for the first time in the early part of 1881, and Surendra defrayed the expenses. Again *The Gospel* (p. 1006) mentions Sri Ramakrishna's visit to Surendra's house in (June-July) 1881. It may be presumed therefore that Surendra first met Sri Ramakrishna some time in the middle of 1880.

⁶ According to the reminiscences of Girindranath Mitra, brother of Surendranath, as recorded in the proceedings of the sixth meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission, 30 May, 1897, Surendra first visited Sri Ramakrishna in the company of Amrita Krishna Basu in Jan.-Feb. of 1881.

² *Bhakta Manomohan* (Bengali), p. 70.

³ Compare Sri Ramakrishna's remarks: 'You work in a merchant's office You tell lies at the office. Then why do I eat the food you offer me? Because you give your money in charity; you give away more than you earn. "The seed of the melon is bigger than the fruit," as the saying goes. ... He who gives away in charity achieves great results. He achieves the four fruits: dharma, artha, kama and moksha.' [*'M': The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1947) pp. 670-71]

the Master and took their seats. As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna was, however, the first to greet the visitors with folded palms.

The deep probe of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual insight revealed at the very first glance who the newcomer was. He recognized Surendranath as one of those few commissioned by the Divine Mother to defray a great part of his expenses.⁷ He must have recollected one of his visions which he narrated in a subsequent meeting.⁸

Surendranath, with a casual look, was trying to size up the Paramahansa. But before he could form a definite idea his attention was drawn to the melodious voice of Sri Ramakrishna. Apparently paying no attention to the new-comer, Sri Ramakrishna continued his discourse. He said:

'Well, why does a man choose the role of a young monkey rather than that of a kitten? The young monkey, with great exertion, somehow clings to its mother while the latter jumps from one place to another. But the kitten's nature is different. The kitten, of itself, cannot cling to its mother. It lies on the ground and cries, 'Mew, mew!' It leaves everything to its mother. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes behind a pile of wood. She carries the kitten in her mouth hither and thither. The young monkey sometimes misses its grip, falls on the ground and gets hurt. But the kitten has no such fear, for its mother carries it safely. Here lies the

difference between self-effort and reliance on God.'

The words of Sri Ramakrishna struck Surendra. It seemed that they were meant for him. He began to ponder: 'That is it. I too am behaving like the young monkey. Self-willed as I am, I try to get things done through my personal efforts, and the result is I suffer terribly. Why do I not try to surrender myself to God like the kitten which depends entirely on its mother?'

The words of the Paramahansa were enchanting. Surendranath had never heard the like before. Like one starving he sat down with avidity to the spiritual feast that Sri Ramakrishna spread before him.

After a short pause Sri Ramakrishna continued:

'When the mother takes hold of the hand of her son there is no fear of a fall. A young boy and his father walk along a slippery ridge on a rainy day. Now, if the boy holds his father he may fall, but if the father holds the boy in his grip, there is no fear of a fall. Similarly if someone relies on the Mother and depends entirely on Her he will have nothing to fear, he will have no problem at all.'⁹

Surendranath heaved a sigh of relief. The burden of the anxieties which had seized his mind vanished like a cloud blown away by the wind. He resolved, 'Why not? I too shall depend entirely on the Mother and occasionally call, "*Mā, Mā*". The rest will be looked after by Her.'

After a long discourse, Sri Ramakrishna asked Ramlal, his nephew, to distribute the *prasāda* (consecrated food) of the Mother Kālī to all present. He obeyed.

It was time to leave. Surendranath was by this time a changed man. He saluted Sri Ramakrishna touching the ground with his head. And then the latter gave his

⁷ Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (tr. by Swami Jagadananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 4, 1956), p. 646: 'Surendranath Mitra ... was, he (the Master) said, a "half-supplier".'

⁸ Sri Ramakrishna, addressing Surendra, said, 'You have both—yoga and bhoga. ... The devotee of the Divine Mother attains dharma and moksha. He enjoys artha and kama as well. Once I saw you in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother. You have both—yoga and bhoga; otherwise your countenance would look dry.' (*The Gospel*, p. 308).

⁹ Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-carit* (Bengali), p. 188.

finishing touch. In a sweet, endearing tone, Sri Ramakrishna told him, 'Come again, won't you?' He could never have forgotten Ramakrishna, however much he might have tried. He was in fact caught¹⁰ in the love-net of the adept fisherman that Sri Ramakrishna was.

On the return journey Surendranath confessed jokingly, 'Ah! How he turned the tables on me! I came to twist his ears; now I find my own ears twisted.' Pleased at the happy turn of events, his friends roared with laughter at this witty remark. 'Well, how could I guess that he was such a great man?' mused Surendra. 'How could I know that he could read others' minds? In reply Manomohan and Ramchandra narrated similar experiences of their own. Surendranath confided to his friends that he had in fact been contemplating suicide, so disgusted had he become with worldly life. A victim of mental depression, he suffered terribly at times. However, soon after this first meeting, he was changed noticeably. Even his marked Bohemian habits, includ-

ing the strong addiction to alcohol, were gradually overcome. His warm generous nature easily turned towards spiritual devotion. He used to cry mournfully for the Divine Mother,¹¹ like a child, and wanted to talk of Her only. He would often become absorbed in deep meditation on the Mother.

Surendra was the first to get prepared an oil painting depicting the Master's message of religious harmony. In the picture Sri Ramakrishna was pointing out to Keshab Chandra Sen that followers of different religions proceed to the same goal by different paths. Sri Ramakrishna expressed his appreciation of the picture. He said, 'Yes, it contains everything. This is the ideal of modern times.'¹²

¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna lovingly called him 'Surendar' and sometimes 'Suresh'. He has been described by Swami Saradananda as 'the exceptionally loving devotee of the Master'. (*The Great Master*, p. 876).

¹¹ Surendranath looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as the Divine Mother Herself. He once told Sri Ramakrishna: 'Today is the first day of the year; it is also Tuesday, an auspicious day to worship the Divine Mother. But I didn't go to Kalighat. I said to myself, "It will be enough if I see him who is Kali Herself, and who has rightly understood Kali."' Sri Ramakrishna smiled. ... 'I couldn't come here yesterday. It was the last day of the year. But I decorated your picture with flowers.' Sri Ramakrishna, to M., 'by a sign, Ah, what devotion!' (*The Gospel*, pp. 945-6).

¹² *The Gospel*, p. 800.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: MAHENDRANATH GUPTA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Mahendranath Gupta (1854-1932), better known by the pen-name 'M', happened to meet Sri Ramakrishna by a coincidence. Although the meeting was not exactly planned, it was in fact predestined, as Sri Ramakrishna knew, for he himself told 'M' one day:

'I am shown everything beforehand. Once I saw Gauranga and his devotees singing kirtan in the Panchavati. I think I saw Balaram there and you too... I recognized you on hearing you read the *Chaitanya Bhagavat* [a life of Chaitanya]. You are my own. The same substance, like father and son. All of you are coming here again. When you pull one part of the kalmi creeper, all the branches come toward you... Before you came here, you didn't know who you were. Now you will know.'¹

Born of Madhusudan Gupta and Swarnamayee Devi on 14 July 1854 at Calcutta, Mahendranath grew up in an atmosphere of piety and nobility. Once when he was four years old he went with his mother to the '*ratha-yātrā*' (a Hindu car festival) at Mahesh on the western bank of the Gaṅgā, and on the way back the party stopped at Dakshineswar to see the newly-built temple² of Bhavatārīṇī. In later days 'M' recalled the incident: 'The temple was all white then, new and fresh. While going round the temple I lost sight of my mother and was crying for her, standing on the dais of the temple.'

¹ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras-4, 1947), p. 305.

² The temple of Bhavatārīṇī, that is, the Divine Mother Kālī, was then popularly known as Rasmani's temple after Rani Rasmani, who had constructed it at a cost of 9,00,000 Rupees and had had it consecrated on May 31, 1855.

A young man then came out of one of the buildings and comforted me and began to call out, "Whose child is this? Where has his mother gone?" 'M' came to believe that it was Sri Ramakrishna who stood by him even when he was a child. Another incident of his young days also stuck in his memory. He discovered a special significance when one day Sri Ramakrishna asked him, 'Do you remember the cyclone of the month of Āświn (5 October 1864)?' 'M' replied, 'Yes, sir. Then I was quite young—nine or ten years old. I was praying to God earnestly in one room all alone.'

A bright product of the Calcutta University, 'M' worked for some time in a business firm and then took to teaching. He served as headmaster of several schools and also as lecturer in colleges, thereby earning a fine reputation. When he met Sri Ramakrishna first, he was a teacher in the Metropolitan Institution, established by Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

Soon after his contact with Sri Ramakrishna he introduced to the master dozens of boys who seemed to be spiritually gifted; hence Sri Ramakrishna's devotees used to call 'M' in fun 'the kidnapping teacher'.³

Like all other 'Englishmen'⁴ of the day 'M' acquired a fondness for western philosophy and science. Attracted by the magnetic personality of Keshab, particularly by his powerful speeches, 'M' leaned towards

³ Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Tr. by Swami Jagadananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1956 p. 782). On hearing this Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'It is the right appellation for him.'

⁴ Sri Ramakrishna called Mahendra and other English-educated young men 'Englishmen'. See *The Gospel*, p. 275.

Brahmoism and in that way tried to satisfy his religious craving. It is very likely that in the Brahmo meetings or in parlour talks with Brahmo devotees 'M' first heard of the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. As an admirer of Keshabchundra he must have read about the Paramahansa in the *Indian Mirror*, *Theistic Quarterly Review*, etc. Furthermore, his near relation, Nagendranath Gupta,⁵ had met Sri Ramakrishna in 1881. He had related the charming experience of this meeting to 'M' and pressed him to visit Dakshineswar soon. So this may also have predisposed Mahendra to meet the Paramahansa. Still, this background of the knowledge about the saint of Dakshineswar was not enough to induce the religious-minded school teacher actually to make the visit.⁶

While still in college he had married a girl, Nikunja Sen, who was a cousin of Keshabchundra Sen. Soon after his marriage, Mahendra's domestic life became beset with storm and stress. Adverse circumstances made his life so miserable that the docile and placid Mahendra became utterly disgusted. He went so far as to contemplate suicide. In such a disturbed state of mind he left home one night after ten o'clock. It was a Saturday. Apprehending her husband's intentions, Nikunja Devi accompanied him taking the children with them. While they were going in a hackney carriage, one of its wheels gave way near Shyambazar.

⁵ Nagendranath Gupta, Editor of *The Tribune*, Lahore, wrote in 1947 in his 'Reflections and Reminiscences': 'After seeing and hearing Ramakrishna I went to see Mahendranath Gupta, who was related to me and was my senior by several years, and told him everything and urged him to go to Dakshineswar. This he did the following year....'

⁶ Although Nagendranath Gupta in his book *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, p. 11, has claimed, 'I recall with grateful and humble satisfaction that it was at my instance that Mahendranath first went to Ramakrishna....'

Mahendra decided to spend the night in the house of a friend who lived nearby. However, the cold reception he and his family got there disheartened him so much as to make him leave the house immediately. He went to a stable in the locality and persuaded a coachman to drive them to the northern part of Baranagore where they took shelter in the house of Ishan Kaviraj,⁷ his brother-in-law.⁸

Although 'M's' elder sister received the couple cordially, the bitter experiences of his family life rankled in his memory and made life almost unbearable. Now, to assuage the anguish of his lacerated heart, his friend and distant relation, Siddheswar Majumdar (Sidhu), took him to visit several gardens in Baranagore.

It was Sunday, 26 February 1882.⁹ They walked leisurely through several gardens. (In Baranagore were garden-houses of several Calcutta grandees). As they were walking in Prasanna Banerji's garden, Siddheswar suggested, 'There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges. Would you like to go there? A holy man, a Paramahansa, lives there.' 'M' assented and they started immediately for the Rasmani's temple-garden at Dakshineswar. They arrived at the main gate in the late afternoon.

A soft spring wind was blowing. The smell of jasmine, chameli, and other flowers,

⁷ Ishan Kaviraj, the husband of 'M's' elder sister, had a reputation as a *kavirāj* (physician). He had treated Sri Ramakrishna for some time. It is very likely that 'M' had heard about Sri Ramakrishna from Ishan too.

⁸ This part of 'M's' life-story has been adapted from the Introduction (pp. 23-24) to *Sri-Ma-Darśan* (Bengali) (General Printers and Publishers, Calcutta, Vol. I, 2nd ed.) by Swami Nityatmananda.

⁹ 'M's' first visit to Sri Ramakrishna took place a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, that is, 23 February 1882. Again, 'M' writes that it was a Sunday in February (*The Gospel*, p. 1). The only Sunday between 23rd February and the end of the month fell on the 26th.

and the sight of the garden on the bank of the Gaṅgā appealed to 'M's' poetic disposition. He felt relieved and happy. He found a room crowded with people. 'M' learnt that the Paramahansa lived there and that many people from Calcutta came to listen to the religious talks of the holy man. 'M' became curious to see and hear him.

They went to the Paramahansa's room and found that all the people, seated on the floor, were listening with rapt attention. The Paramahansa was seated facing the east on a small wooden couch by the side of a bigger one. He was talking of God. His voice was soft and melodious. 'M' found that the Paramahansa was rather dark-complexioned with a short beard and introspective eyes. He was of medium height, slender almost to leanness. He was forty-six years of age. He spoke with a very slight stammer in rustic Bengali. 'M' had never heard anyone speak so charmingly as he did. It was an unbroken flow of profound spiritual wisdom.

They did not disturb the gathering but stood quietly in one corner of the room. Though absorbed in religious conversation, Sri Ramakrishna did not fail to notice the new arrivals.

'M' was then twenty-seven years old. A tall man of fair complexion and wearing a long beard, 'M' impressed others by his humility, sweet manners, and placid temperament. His face, with wide-open eyes and a broad forehead, was bright with the light of his intellect. He was verily spiritual tinder waiting for a spark from the Divine Fire to be set ablaze.

Sri Ramakrishna could recognize 'M' at first sight as one of those select few for whom he had prayed to the Divine Mother, crying, 'Mother, if I do not find the devotees I shall surely die. Please bring them to me immediately.' Looking at 'M' Sri Ramakrishna started in surprise. Later he

narrated his experience to M: 'You are my very own, my relative... Once I saw the companions of Chaitanya; not in a trance but with these very eyes... I think I saw you there, and Balaram too. You must have noticed that when I see certain people I jump up with a start. Do you know why? A man feels that way when he sees his own people after a long time.'¹⁰

Adept physiognomist that Sri Ramakrishna was, he immediately studied the features of the new arrival and made an estimate of his spiritual potentiality. Later Sri Ramakrishna gave out his conclusion: 'I can see from the signs of your eyes, brows and face, that you are a Yogi. You look like a Yogi who has just left his seat of meditation.'

'M' was so drawn to the words of Sri Ramakrishna that he did not find time to look at his surroundings much. He stood there speechless. His first impression he recorded in these words:

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

Sri Ramakrishna was saying:

'When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply Om. The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om.'¹¹

'M' looked around him with wonder and

¹⁰ *The Gospel*, pp. 275-6.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 1.

said to himself: 'Ah, what a charming place! What a fascinating man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot.'

It was getting dark. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna's conversation ended his visitors, who had sat all through in rapt silence, prepared to leave for home. Now 'M' thought, 'Let me take a look around first; then I'll come back here and sit down.'

As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum, and cymbals. The music from the *nahabat* (music tower) at the south end of the garden, too, reached him. The sounds travelled over the Gāṅgā, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just risen. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship.

'M' and Sidhu visited the temples of Bhavatārīṇī and of Rādhākānta, and the twelve temples of Śiva, and watched the services before the images. Evening service over, the two friends returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room. They found the door shut. Brinde, the maidservant, was standing outside. 'M' learnt from her that the Paramahansa was in his room and that he had read no books, for, 'They are all on his tongue'.

'M' said, 'Perhaps it is time for his evening worship. May we go into the room? Will you tell him we are anxious to see him?'

Brinde: 'Go right in, children. Go in and sit down.'

Entering the room, 'M' saluted Sri Ramakrishna with folded hands and at the latter's bidding he and Sidhu sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small wooden couch in the midst of the

smoke of incense which had just been burnt. In answer to Sri Ramakrishna's queries 'M' gave details about himself. 'M' noticed, however, that Sri Ramakrishna now and then seemed to become absent-minded. Later he learnt that this mood was called *bhāva*, ecstasy, and that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into it after dusk, sometimes losing outward consciousness totally. 'M' said, 'Perhaps you want to perform evening worship. In that case may we take our leave?' Sri Ramakrishna (still in ecstasy): 'No—evening worship? No, it is not exactly that.'

The conversation continued for a while. 'M' saluted Sri Ramakrishna and took his leave. Sri Ramakrishna said sweetly, 'Come again.'

Sri Ramakrishna had stolen his heart. Ever since he had met the Master he was feeling the pull in his heart. He thought of his blissful form and recollected his enchanting words.

During his second visit Sri Ramakrishna advised him:

'Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.'¹²

During his third visit, Sri Ramakrishna, speaking of one who has commitments in the world, told 'M':

'From time to time he should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Furthermore, he should practise discrimination and pray to God, "Give me faith and devotion".'¹³

On that occasion 'M' saw for the first time Sri Ramakrishna in *samādhi*. It left an indelible impression on his mind and he

¹² *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 12.

returned home deeply moved. So intoxicated had he become in the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna, like the 'peacock fed with opium', that he was unable to banish the thought of Sri Ramakrishna for a moment. He wondered how a man could acquire such deep knowledge without being a scholar. The Master explained 'M's' attitude with an apt illustration: 'He ('M') is like a mother with seven or eight children. Day and night she is busy with her worldly duties. But now and then she makes time to serve her husband.' This principle showed him how to harmonize his worldly duties and this new spiritual life.

So filled was he with the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna that he began carefully recording the latter's words. Although he avowedly did so for his own¹⁴ benefit, it is evident from Sri Ramakrishna's actions and

remarks on various occasions that it was not of 'M's' own will that he kept a record. It seems it was part of the divine plan. Subsequently he changed his mind and published his notes in English in pamphlet form. This was well received.¹⁵ But owing to the insistence of some of his friends¹⁶ he switched over to Bengali and published the dialogues in five volumes under the title *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-kathāmṛta*, which has been translated into English and published as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.¹⁷

¹⁵ Swami Vivekananda congratulated 'M' thus: 'C'est bon, mon ami—now you are doing just the thing. Come out, man! No sleeping all life; time is flying. Bravo! That is the way.' (*The Complete Works*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Vol. VI (1963), p. 412.)

¹⁶ Ramchandra Dutta: *Tattwamañjarī*, Vol. I, pp. 184-7.

¹⁷ Aldous Huxley paid his tribute to this memorable work: '.... "M" produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell.' (Foreword to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*).

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 965. 'M' to Girish Ghosh: 'I am writing it for myself, not for others ... You may get it when I die.'

BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ—A PHILOSOPHY OF COSMIC CONSOLIDATION

(LOKASANGRAHA)

DR. K. B. RAMAKRISHNA RAO

I

INTRODUCTION

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* forms a part of the great epic of India, the *Mahābhārata*. In importance it is next only to the Upaniṣads, and presents one of the most authentic expressions of the philosophical and religious perspective of the Hindus. Coming later than the major Upaniṣads, and perhaps after the formulation of the early Buddhism

and Jainism, the text makes a bold attempt at a synthesis of the existing philosophical, religious, ethical, and social speculations and practices of the times, and presents Reality in a new key. It even sets a guideline for the later development of thought on Vedāntic lines.

The contents of the text are brought out in the form of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa, whom the Indian tradition believes to be

vents ; she had to cross a stream ; when she was wading through it and had reached its middle, the water rose steadily, due to rains in the mountains the previous night, and she felt that she might be carried away. In a mood of spiritual pique, she asked God : Is this the way Thou treatest Thy devotee ? She heard God answering : Yes ; I sometimes test My devotees like this. At this, Teresa lovingly retorted : Ah, that is why Thou hast few lovers ! That was a beautiful and straight and intimate retort of a real lover of God. There is no distance between God and His devotee ; nothing to separate them. In this spirit of intimacy, Sri Ramakrishna assures us, we can complain to God, give retorts to Him, pray to Him—they all become the sport of love. This is the height of *bhakti*, where God's majesty disappears and He manifests as the very embodiment of love.

Another Sister : Can we then say : When

we consider God as a stranger, we also become strangers to ourselves and to each other ?

Swami : Quite so : all sense of strangeness is due to a sense of distance, a sense of separateness. Love of God eliminates this distance, this separateness ; and since God is the inner Self of all, intimacy with Him gives one the capacity to feel intimacy with all ; and distance from Him alienates one's ego even from one's own self. It is this inner alienation that makes for alienation from other human beings—wife or husband, parents or children, between citizen and citizen. God is no stranger to any one ; but we treat Him as a stranger. God is in all men, but all men are not in God, therefore man suffers—says Sri Ramakrishna. The ultimate reality of speculative philosophy becomes the intimate reality in religion.

(To be continued)

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna, then a young man of twenty-five, entered his room,¹ called his nephew Hridayram, and said, 'Go to the portico on the bathing ghat. You will find a Bhairavi² seated there. Bring her to this room.'

Hridayram hesitated. He said, 'Look here, she is a stranger. Why should she come at all ?' He was surprised to find his uncle

eager to meet a strange woman, for he had never seen him acting thus before.

Sri Ramakrishna still insisted, 'Please request her in my name and she will come readily.'

* * *

It was in the year 1861, shortly after the death of Rani Rasmani on February 19 of that year. By this time Sri Ramakrishna had attained many spiritual realizations following the promptings of his heart, had gone to his birthplace Kamarpukur for a brief rest, had married a five-year-old girl, Saradamani,³ and soon after his return to

¹ Sri Ramakrishna was then living in one room in the 'kuthi-bari', the old house originally built by Mr. Hastie and later renovated by Rani Rasmani. Sri Ramakrishna lived in this house till the death of Akshay in 1869 or 1870.

² A nun of the Tāntrika sect.

³ As the readers of Sri Ramakrishna's biography know, this marriage was only a kind of betrothal.

Dakshineswar had plunged again headlong into arduous spiritual practices. Now, as Swami Saradananda says:

'The only idea that occupied the whole of his mind was how he could see the Divine Mother in all beings at all times. His chest became reddish again on account of continuous Japa, remembrance of God, and reflection and meditation on Him. The world and all talks thereof appeared to him as deadly poison; that terrible burning sensation came on him again; and sleep vanished as it were into air. . . . Gangaprasad, the reputed Ayurvedic physician of Calcutta, prescribed for the Master medicines. . . . But the disease was on the increase and showed no signs of abatement.⁴

One clear morning, as was his habit, Sri Ramakrishna was plucking flowers in the garden on the embankment of the Ganga and humming devotional songs. He noticed that a boat had touched at the Vakul-ghat.⁵ A Bhairavi got off, climbed the stairs, and slowly proceeded southward to the portico on the main ghat. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw her he became excited as though he had been expecting her visit for a long time. He hurried back to his room.

It may well be that Sri Ramakrishna had some premonition about the Bhairavi's visit. Maybe he came to know of her importance in relation to his life with the help of his subtle yogic insight. Swami Saradananda writes, 'We cannot say how far the Master foresaw at first sight his close future relation with her. But it is true that he felt that great attraction towards her, which people feel when they see one whose life is bound up with their own.'⁶

⁴ *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Tr. by Swami Jagadananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, Second ed.), pp. 179-80.

⁵ A bathing ghat for the use of women at the northern end of the embankment by the side of the Nahabat. There was a big *vakul* tree close to it, which accounts for its name.

⁶ *The Great Master*, p. 185.

* * *

Hriday knew his mad uncle rather well. There was nothing to do but to obey him. He went to the portico mentioned and found seated there a tall and beautiful woman. She was in her late thirties, but looked much younger. She was clad in the ochre robe of a Bhairavi, and her hair fell loosely about her shoulders. She wore a garland of *rudrākṣa*-beads, and carried in one hand a basket of palm leaves containing a couple of saris and worship materials, and a bundle of books in the other.⁷ Her demeanour suggested that she was a lady of a respectable family. Hriday told her, 'My uncle is a devotee of God. He wants you to see him.'

There was much in store for Hriday to be amazed at in the chain of events that followed. He was greatly surprised to see that the Bhairavi unhesitatingly agreed and followed him to Sri Ramakrishna's room.⁸

She was a *brāhmaṇī* of a noble family in the district of Jessore of the present Bangladesh. She was a devotee of Viṣṇu, an aspirant of a high order, and very learned in the Tāntrika and Vaiṣṇava scriptures. Her name was Yogesvari.⁹ None at Dakshine-

⁷ Baikunthanath Sanyal, *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Līlāmṛta*, p. 33.

⁸ Romain Rolland's following remarks reveal the difficulty modern sceptics experience in appreciating such Providence-guided events:

'This encounter with the simple charm of a story from the Arabian Nights, has roused doubts in the minds of European historians. They are inclined to see in this episode, as does Max Muller, a symbol of the psychic evolution of Ramakrishna. But the personality of his instructress during the six years she remained with him contains too many individual traits (and not always to her credit) for there to be any doubt that she was a real woman, with all a woman's weaknesses' (Romain Rolland: *The Life of Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, 1947, p. 51).

⁹ Śrī Rākhāl (Swami Brahmananda) used to refer to her simply as 'Bāmnī' (the Brahmin woman). She is sometimes referred to by biographers as the Bhairavi Brahmani, or simply Brahmani.

swar seemed to have known her family antecedents or under what circumstances she became a wandering nun. None of Sri Ramakrishna's acquaintances came to know 'in the least where she acquired so much learning nor where or when she made so much progress in Sadhana'.¹⁰ The Bhairavi hardly spoke about herself.

As soon as she saw Sri Ramakrishna, she was overcome with joy and astonishment, and shed profuse tears. Her words explain why she was so deeply stirred. When she was able to control herself she said, 'Ah, my son, you are here! I knew you were living somewhere on the bank of the Ganga, and I have been searching for you ever so long; at long last I see you now.'

Sri Ramakrishna said, 'How could you know of me, Mother?'

The Bhairavi answered, 'I knew by the grace of the Divine Mother that I would have to meet three of you. I have already met two¹¹ in the eastern region and I see you here today.'

Sri Ramakrishna welcomed the visitor with much deference. It may be safely presumed that, as was his wont, he bowed low to the lady as an embodiment of the Divine Mother. Clearly, the Bhairavi, at the first sight, felt a strong attraction for Sri Ramakrishna.

She introduced herself briefly. She explained her mission which she had partly fulfilled by imparting necessary instruction to Girija and Chandra of Barisal. Now that she had found Sri Ramakrishna, she could complete her mission. It is obvious that her yogic insight helped her recognize im-

mediately the spiritual aspirant *par excellence* that Sri Ramakrishna was.¹²

She said further that she had already noticed that Sri Ramakrishna, when he moved about to pluck flowers, started off with his left foot. It seemed to her as if Śrī Rādhikā herself was moving about gathering flowers in a golden basket in Vṛndāvana.¹³

By this time Sri Ramakrishna had sat down by her side like a child and begun narrating in the most intimate detail his spiritual experiences and visions, his loss of consciousness of the external world, his continued insomnia, the burning sensation in his body, and so forth. He asked repeatedly, 'Mother, what are these things that keep happening to me? Have I really lost my head? Am I the victim of a serious illness on account of praying heart and soul to the Divine Mother?' At these revelations she was thrilled. Like a delighted and compassionate mother, she comforted him with maternal tenderness. She said, 'My son, who calls you a madman? These are not symptoms of madness. You are passing through the rare spiritual experience known *mahābhāva*, which explains your present state of body and mind. Is it given to ordinary people to comprehend this almost unknown spiritual experience? In their ignorance they call you crazy. The devotional scriptures have recorded two instances of such experience, namely, those of Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Caitanya. I shall read out from the books I have, just to prove that those who pray to God sincerely, experience these bodily symptoms.' Unable to make out why his uncle and the Bhairavi behaved with each other like close relations, Hriday became perplexed. He stood speechless to hear that his uncle was not a victim of

¹⁰ *The Great Master*, p. 467.

¹¹ They were known as 'Chandra' and 'Girija'. Both of them belonged to the district of Barisal in the present Bangladesh. They made some spiritual progress but became ensnared in occult powers. They later met Sri Ramakrishna and were greatly benefited by his guidance.

¹² This paragraph is adapted from Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa-Carit*, p. 54.

¹³ Gurudas Burman, loc. cit. The source is Hridayram.

epilepsy but had earned the very rare spiritual experience of *mahābhāva*, in which are manifest the nineteen physical symptoms like the shedding of tears, tremor of the body, horripilation, perspiration, burning sensation, and the rest. The conversation continued in the same strain¹⁴ for quite a long time till Sri Ramakrishna noticed that the day was far advanced. He felt greatly relieved to hear from the learned Bhairavi that his sufferings were simply a sign of progress in his spiritual pilgrimage.

Sri Ramakrishna gave her the *prasāda* (consecrated food) of the Divine Mother for her meal. Inspired by spiritual motherly love towards Sri Ramakrishna, the Bhairavi felt reluctant to eat anything without first feeding him. He partook of a little of the *prasāda* and then she, after paying her obeisance to the different temples, took her food.

True it is that very little is seen on the surface of the life of most spiritual men ; much more true is this in case of a spiritual giant like Sri Ramakrishna. Dumbstruck to see what was happening before him, Hriday came to conclude that the Bhairavi must have been borne there by the providentially-guided stream of events. Now, at the behest of his uncle he procured from the temple-store some flour, rice, and other items to enable the Bhairavi to offer cooked food to the deity Raghuvīra, the stone symbol of whom used to hang round her neck.

She prepared food in the *pañcavaṭī* (the grove of five trees at Dakshineswar) and offered the dishes to Raghuvīra. As part of the ritual she sat down for her meditation on the Chosen Ideal and soon merged herself in Him. Deep in meditation she was

blessed with a wonderful vision. Tears of love flowed profusely down her cheeks and she completely lost consciousness of the external world. At that time Sri Ramakrishna felt irresistibly drawn towards the *pañcavaṭī*. He appeared there in a state of ecstasy and, as one possessed, fell to taking the food-offering from before the symbol of Raghuvīra. By the time he had eaten a good portion, the Brahmani had regained her consciousness. She opened her eyes and saw to her great delight that the scene before her corresponded closely to her vision. The immediate verification of her vision filled her with divine bliss—her hair standing on end. Soon afterwards Sri Ramakrishna returned to consciousness of his surroundings and, realizing what he had done in a state of ecstasy, felt remorseful. He was afraid that she might regard it as sacrilege. He said to her, 'Who knows why I lose control over myself and act in this way ?' Like a loving mother the Bhairavi consoled him. She reassured him, 'Well done, my son. It is not you but the One within you that has done it. From what was revealed to me in my meditation today I am certain who has done it and also why he has done so. And now I know that I need not perform ritual worship any more. At long last my worship has attained its goal.'

The Bhairavi meant what she said. She reverently partook, as the *prasāda* of the Deity, what was left over of the dishes. Next, shedding tears of love, she consigned the stone symbol of Raghuvīra, which she had worshipped endearingly for many long years, to the holy waters of the Ganga. She felt that there was no need of worshipping the stone symbol any further, for she had been blessed with the vision of the living Raghuvīra in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Hridayram, the only witness perhaps of all these extraordinary happenings, felt flabbergasted and could hardly make out what was going on.

¹⁴ According to Gurudas Burman, op. cit., p. 55, the Bhairavi on this occasion quoted from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* in support of her declaration that Sri Ramakrishna, like Śrī Caitanya, was an Incarnation of God.

A parent-son relationship was thus established between the Bhairavi and Sri Ramakrishna. She looked upon him as the Baby Kṛṣṇa and herself as Yaśodā, the foster mother of Kṛṣṇa. He regarded her as his mother who was also a spiritual guide. Thus she simultaneously became his devotee and trusted mentor.

Following the promptings of his heart Sri Ramakrishna had already attained a high state of realization, but he was not satisfied, since he had not become truly the master of it yet. Now help reached him through this learned woman whom he accepted as his guru, his spiritual guide. An adept in Tāntrika and Vaiṣṇava methods of worship, the Bhairavi guided this unique disciple through the traditional roads of religious exercises methodically for more than three years, and helped open new vistas of spiritual unfoldment to him.

Again the Bhairavi, being conversant with the scriptures, studied minutely the behaviour of Sri Ramakrishna and compared it with that recorded in the scriptures. This knowledge, fortified by her own visions, led her to proclaim that only an Incarnation of God was capable of such spiritual manifestations. In fact, she was the first to declare on the basis of full scriptural authority, that Sri Ramakrishna was, like Śrī Caitanya, an Incarnation of God.

During her stay with Sri Ramakrishna for twelve long years she on her part came to realize her shortcomings and was enlightened by the loving care and masterly guidance of her spiritual son, Sri Ramakrishna. Thus the meeting between Sri Ramakrishna and Bhairavi was not only an important landmark in the spiritual pilgrimage of both of them but gives us a vision of spiritual life in which all makes for fulfilment.

THE SODO (OR SOTO) SECT OF ZEN BUDDHISM

PROF. D. C. GUPTA

A great teacher came from India. In spite of the legends which have grown round the name of Bodhidharma in China, it seems impossible to doubt that he arrived at Canton and preached a doctrine which was called Buddhism, though in the form in which it is reported in Chinese literature it seems more like Vedāntism expressed in Buddhist terminology. Bodhidharma, the reputed founder of Zen in the Far East, seems to have been a native of the Dravidian provinces. He arrived in China about A.D. 520. He there became the first Chinese Patriarch but only in the sense of being the head of his special sect. His teaching is summed up in four well-known lines :

A special tradition outside the scriptures :

Not to depend on books or letters :

To point direct to the heart of man :

To see (one's own) nature and become Buddha.

Study of the scriptures, prayer, and even good works are all equally vain. All that man need do is to turn his gaze inward and see the Buddha in his own heart.

Zen in Japan has three divisions often reckoned as separate sects, the Rinzai, Soto, and Obaku. The Soto is the largest Buddhist denomination in the country. It was introduced from China some time after the beginning of the thirteenth century. There is, however, a slight difference of method and teaching between

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: DURGA CHARAN NAG (NAG MAHASAYA)

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

It was evening. In his dwelling in Calcutta Durga Charan was having a heated argument about religion with his neighbour and friend Suresh Chandra Dutta. Neither seemed to be able to win over the other to his belief. This was not a solitary occasion when they differed from each other. They indulged in such debates often. Though their religious views were as poles asunder, strangely enough they were fast friends, deeply attached to each other.

The only child of Dindayal Nag and Tripurasundari, Durga Charan (1846-1899) was brought up in a small village called Deobhog in the district of Dacca. He lost his mother when he was eight years old and was brought up by his aunt. Born of a poor family, he had to struggle hard for his school education. He had married at an early age, and after his wife's death had married a second time at the stubborn insistence of his father. He studied allopathic medicine at Calcutta for a year and a half but could not continue. Next he studied homoeopathy and soon made a reputation as a doctor. He might easily have become wealthy if his code of ethics had not been strict. Service of others seemed to be the great mission of his life. Not content with his philanthropic activities, Durga Charan received his initiation from his family preceptor, Kailash Chandra Bhattacharya, and earnestly began spiritual practices. While studying medicine he published 'Lessons for Youths', pertaining to moral and religious instruction and distributed them free of charge. One of his favourite hobbies was composing religious songs.¹

¹ Sarat Chandra Chakravarty published Durga Charan's five beautiful songs on Mother Durga and Mother Kali (*Pratibāsi*, Vol. II, No. 9, pp. 145-7).

The second son of Madhav Chandra Dutta and Trailokyamohini, Suresh had his school education at the Church Mission Society. He joined medical college but could not continue long. Jogesh, his elder brother, not long after his conversion to Christianity, had to live separately. In the meanwhile, Suresh developed a fascination for the Brahmo movement. In fact, he had great faith in Brahmoism. Though Durga Charan also visited the Brahmo Samaj several times in the company of Suresh and admired the activities of Keshab Chandra Sen, he was an out and out orthodox Hindu at heart.

Durga Charan was then living alone in a small cottage at Kumartuli.² His father was living at Deobhog and his second wife, Sarat Kamini, whom Durga Charan had married about five years previously, had been sent to Deobhog to nurse the old father.³ One day when the two friends were discussing a religious topic, Durga Charan observed, 'Days are flying fast in futile discussion. Human life is useless unless one realizes the truth.' In reply Suresh⁴ said that he had heard in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj

² He had hired a two-storeyed house close to Suresh Chandra's at Hathkhola in 1880. When his father and wife left for Deobhog he went back to his earlier residence, obviously a cheaper one, at Kumartuli.

³ Gurupada Bhowmick: *Śrī-Śrī-Mahāvīrat Jugal Līlā* (Biography of Durga Charan Nag in Bengali), Introduction, p. 4. Also *The Saint Durgacharan Nag* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1928), p. 42.

⁴ Suresh Chandra Dutta (1850-1912) was the first among Sri Ramakrishna's devotees to publish a book on the Master. *The Sayings of Paramahansa Ramakrishna* was first published on December 23, 1884. A later edition comprising a short biography of Sri Ramakrishna and his 950 teachings became very popular. Being junior to Durga Charan, he used to call the latter *Māmā* (maternal uncle).

of a great saint living at the Dakshineswar temple. For some reason or other he had forgotten to inform Durga Charan for two months or so. Now he communicated to Durga Charan what he had heard of the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. The narrative fascinated Durga Charan. He grew impatient to visit the saint that very day. He persuaded Suresh to accompany him.

It was some time in April, 1882 (Bengali era 1289, month of *Caitra*).⁵ Finishing their morning meal in a hurry they left for the temple of Dakshineswar, the location of which was unfamiliar to them. After walking a long distance, they inquired of a passer-by who told them they had left the village of Dakshineswar behind them. They retraced their path and finally arrived at the Dakshineswar temple at about two o'clock. Walking more than nine miles in the hot sun had been tiring, but the prospect of meeting the holy man made them ignore the strain. They moved about and came upon Pratap Chandra Hazra, sitting in front of Sri Ramakrishna's room, who gave them the wrong information that Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Chandannagar. He advised them to come on some other day. Greatly disappointed, they were about to go away when they observed somebody⁶ within that room smilingly motioning to them to enter. They stepped into the room and found a middle-aged man seated facing north on a small couch with his legs stretched out.

They soon fell under his spell. The man was of medium height and very frail-looking.

⁵ Gurupada Bhowmick : op. cit., p. 34. Also *The Saint Durga Charan Nag*, p. 43. According to Binodini Mitra's *Śrī Śrī Durgācaran Nāg* (Bengali) p. 34, Durga Charan was 35 when he met Sri Ramakrishna. In fact his age was 35 years 7 months some odd days when he met Sri Ramakrishna.

⁶ cf. : *The Saint Durga Charan Nag*, pp. 44-5. According to Akshay Kumar Sen's *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Punthi*, 2nd ed., p. 298, Sri Ramakrishna was chatting with Pratap Chandra Hazra that time.

He was wearing a short beard. His face, with a divine smile and introspective eyes, had an attraction all its own. He spoke with a slight but charming stammer, in rustic Bengali. He was a little over forty-six. It struck the visitors that he must be Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna saluted them first. Suresh Chandra, like other Brahmos, made obeisance to him with folded palms. Durga Charan prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna and wanted to take the dust of his feet, but Sri Ramakrishna withdrew his feet to prevent him. This hurt Durga Charan. Greatly aggrieved, he thought that perhaps he was not pure enough to touch the feet of the holy man.⁷

They seated themselves on the mat spread on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna took no time to size up the visitors. Durga Charan was in his thirtysixth year and Suresh younger than him by four years. Of dark complexion, Durga Charan was very lean and thin, careless about his dress and hair. His face, with untrimmed beard, was remarkable for the pair of lustrous eyes. An embodiment of humility, as he was, he would walk slowly with head bent down. 'Mercy', 'I am nothing', 'What do I know?' were the words often heard from his lips. He would always present himself with

⁷ Suresh Chandra gives a different version. He records in the words of his friend, Durga Charan, 'The day I visited Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) for the first time, I wanted to take the dust of his feet at the time of taking leave of him. When Thakur withdrew his legs I realized the wickedness of my heart.' (Suresh Chandra Dutta : *Śrīmat Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahansa Dever Samkṣipta Jīvanī* (Bengali), p. 52). A similar narration of the incident may be found in Gurudas Burman : *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Carita* (Bengali), p. 208. To reconcile these two views it may be concluded that Durga Charan simply prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna on meeting him and tried to take the dust of his feet before taking leave of him,

folded palms before holy men.⁸ Later Sri Ramakrishna spoke of him as a 'blazing fire'.

Sri Ramakrishna made some preliminary inquiries about them. He then plunged into religious discourse. He said 'Live in the world as the mudfish lives in the mud. One develops love of God by going away from the world into solitude now and then, and meditating on God. After that one can live in the world unattached. The mud is there, and the fish has to live in it, but its body is not stained by the mud. Such a man can lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment.' And again: 'Live in the world unattached. Be in the world, but not of it. Just see that the dirt of the world does not touch you.'

These words of Sri Ramakrishna became indelibly impressed on his mind. He was amazed to find that Sri Ramakrishna had touched the deeper strings of his heart. His words hit their mark. Durga Charan had not been finding joy in worldly life. In the past, he had often been seized with the idea of renouncing the householder's life. Now Sri Ramakrishna's words solved his problems once for all.⁹

In the meantime Durga Charan was trying to appraise the Paramahansa with a clinical eye, noting carefully his special features. He was looking attentively at Sri Ramakrishna's face when the latter asked, 'What are you looking at?' Durga Charan replied, 'I have come to see you, that is why

I am looking at you.' Following some questions and answers, Sri Ramakrishna asked him, 'Have you grasped the idea of this place (meaning himself)?' Durga Charan made a frank reply, 'Such I have never seen before. You are perhaps that very one, for whom my soul hankered ever since my birth.'¹⁰

Next, Sri Ramakrishna asked them to go to the Panchavati and meditate a little there. They obeyed him. After about half an hour, Sri Ramakrishna took them with him to show them round the temples. Sri Ramakrishna went ahead and they followed. After visiting the other temples Sri Ramakrishna finally entered the Kali temple. There he underwent a strange transformation. He behaved just like a child before its mother. He went round and round Mother Kālī several times. He bowed down to touch the feet of Śiva and Kālī with his head. The ecstatic behaviour of Sri Ramakrishna moved the visitors, especially Durga Charan, deeply.

They partook of the *prasāda* (consecrated food) of Mother Kālī given them. Finally Durga Charan and his friend took leave of Sri Ramakrishna just before dusk. Sri Ramakrishna bade them farewell with the parting words, 'Do come again. Repeat the visit; then only can the acquaintance deepen.' It seems they returned on foot to Hathkhola where they lived in Calcutta.

Durga Charan could hardly judge that day whether Sri Ramakrishna was a holy man, a saint or an incarnation of God. But the visit inflamed him with a keen desire for the realization of God. From that day he carried constantly in his bosom that burning flame. He lived the Master's ideal of life in the world, unstained by worldliness. Sri Ramakrishna compared him to the legendary king Janaka. Comparing him

⁸ Once Sri Ramakrishna told Narendranath, pointing to Durga Charan: 'He has genuine humility. There is no hypocrisy behind it.' cf.: *The Saint Durgacharan Nag*, p. 53.

⁹ True to the words of the Master, Durga Charan attained the highest perfection in the householder's life. Swami Vivekananda told of him, 'A few men, one or two, may be seen to attain the highest freedom by the true fulfilment of the householder's Dharma, as we have amongst us Nag Mahasaya, for instance'. (*The Complete Works*, Vol. VI (1963), p. 507).

¹⁰ Sarat Chandra Chakravarty: 'Nāg Mahāśaya', *Udbodhan*, Vol. VIII, No. 9, p. 270.

with Swami Vivekananda, Girish Chandra Ghosh observed that Swamiji's sense of 'I' grew so big that Mahāmāyā (Power of Cosmic Illusion) could not bind him and Nag Mahasaya's so small that he escaped Her noose. He was 'a real saint of the Golden Legend'.

He did not visit Sri Ramakrishna many times, much less than many others did. However, the latter's divine power ignited

in Durga Charan a flame of spirituality which, when it blazed fully later on, attracted even monks to seek his holy company. Very justifiably it has been told of him : 'He was a living illustration of the saying in the *Imitation of Christ*, "Dying to self and living eternally to me."' ¹¹

¹¹ *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1900, p. 69.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

Questions and answers are from: Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1956. References: Questions 1 and 2, p. 375 ; Question 3, p. 397 ; Question 4, p. 376 ; Question 5, p. 377.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever !' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. VII (1958), pp. 135-6.

Mokṣa or liberation should not be understood to represent a post-mortem achievement of the human soul. The *advaitic* or non-dualistic thinkers have really done a great service to humanity by properly emphasizing the fact of *jīvanmukti* or liberation-in-life. The tendency on the part of some thinkers to judge a *jīvanmukta* from the worldly-man's point of view needs to be corrected. The *jīvanmukta's* Himalayan stature defies measurement by the worldly man's footrule of namby-pamby welfarism. The *Editorial* of the month, while clarifying these points, reflects on the wider implications of the *mokṣa*-concept.

Progress in spiritual life is sure in the case of all sincere aspirants, but it can be painfully slow in many. In some cases the journey may be balked by avoidable inner obstacles.

It is to one's advantage to know what these obstacles are likely to be. Show and empty noise have nothing to do with spirituality. Even if one gets thrilling spiritual experiences, there is no reason to make any noise about them ; there is even less reason when one has grave inner deficiencies. Yearning directed to the chosen ideal, and whole-hearted prayer are unfailing in their effects. In this month's Essay on Applied Religion, Swami Budhananda discusses three important aspects of spiritual progress in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

This is the second part of the three-part libretto on Swami Vivekananda, dealing with his years of studentship in college, discipleship under his Guru at Dakshineswar, and finally the taking of monastic vows by him and other brother-disciples at Antpur. The first part—Days of Childhood—was published in our January issue. Both Erik Johns and John Schlenck are members of the Vedanta Society of New York. For more details we refer our readers to the prefatory note published with the first part.

This is the sixth instalment of the 'Excursions'. In this part of his remarks, Swami Yatiswarananda strikes an unpromising note in favour of the monastic

one, namely, the individual is but the tool that exists to protect and promote the species. The maternal instinct is well developed at the stage of animal life and Schopenhauer cites many remarkable examples where the mother sacrifices herself to save the life of her progeny. However, no sooner we reach the stage of human life than intellect and reason meddle in the spontaneous and pure operation of this noble life-preserving instinct. Indeed, the human depravity sometimes assumes such revolting forms as to totally vitiate the maternal love, even transform it into criminal cruelties. It is beyond doubt that Schopenhauer's misanthropism has at least one of its roots in this falsification of the maternal love among human females. No animal female is capable of wilful cruelty towards its offspring; at the level of human life, however, mothers guilty of wanton cruelty towards their own children are not so rare as one would believe it.¹²

¹² *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. II, pp. 658-60. Schopen-

These are the outstanding facets of Schopenhauer's philosophy of nature, an aspect of his thought that has not yet received the attention that it merits. It is undoubtedly one of the earliest philosophical appraisals of nature, animate and inanimate. He has anticipated some doctrines of Darwin and is the unquestionable forerunner of Spencer and Bergson. All that Nietzsche, von Hartmann and Freud owe to him is too well known to be adumbrated here. It is, therefore, essential to focus the attention of all admirers of the German thinker to this neglected facet of his philosophy. And herein lies also the justification of the present article.

hauer was a great protector of animals, an active member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Nietzsche: *Werke* (Carl Hanser, Munich, 1954), Vol. I, p. 322, provides us a profound interpretation of Schopenhauer's sympathy for animal life.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: MANOMOHAN MITRA AND RAMCHANDRA DUTTA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

A great deluge had engulfed the earth, sweeping everything away with it. He was drifting in the current with a plank fastened to his breast. He rested for a while under the arches of a bridge. He was suddenly seized with fear. He blurted out: 'Is no one alive in this world?'

'None is alive,' came the answer.

'My wife, mother, daughters—are they all dead?' he shouted.

'All dead,' was the prompt reply.

'Are there none living?'

'None except those who believe in God.'

He was about to be choked with grief.

Suddenly he screamed and screamed so loudly as to awake his wife and mother who inquired what the matter was. He could only utter, 'Who are you? Look, my mother and wife are dead.' They were struck dumb at this utterance.

He had been dreaming a strange dream, and so vivid was the dream that he not only took it for reality but was overwhelmed by

the strangeness and shock of it.¹ Though a dream, an inner voice told him that the whole thing had some meaning for him. It was the early hours of a Sunday morning. The person dreaming was Manomohan Mitra (1851-1903), son of Bhuban Mohan Mitra of Konnagar. A Referencer at the Bengal Secretariat, Manomohan kept himself abreast of contemporary criticism of the Hindu religion. He leaned towards the Brahmo Samaj; and more so when he was overwhelmed by the death of his seven-month-old daughter.² He tried to find consolation in the prayers then used by the Brahmos, but he could hardly cling to the Brahmo faith for long, as his cousin, Ramchandra Dutta (1851-99), medical practitioner and chemist, was openly an agnostic who refuted Manomohan's choicest arguments in support of his belief. As a result the latter was caught in the crosscurrents of faith and reason. However, the intellectual curiosity of both helped them get beyond the faithlessness from which they were suffering.

Ramchandra Dutta's father, Nrisimhaprasad Dutta was a devout Vaiṣṇava and worshipped Kṛṣṇa daily at home. He had married a second time when Ram was young. The father and the stepmother lived with Ram. But Ram was never happy with his stepmother, and this sometimes created

a misunderstanding between himself and his father. Ram was, as already mentioned, very sceptical about God and religion, and never had peace of mind.

About this time a mishap in the family which seemed to have knocked out the very bottom of Ramchandra's unorthodox and scientific outlook proved to be the turning point in his life. One of his beloved daughters died and the old question, 'Does the human soul outlive physical death?', haunted him. His materialistic reasoning did not take him far. When in the late afternoon of the following Kālī-pūjā day his mind was struggling with this baffling question, the grandeur of the autumn sky suddenly swept away, as it were, the mist of worries from his mind. He asked himself, 'What am I doing? Whither am I moving? What have I known about the vast universe? Is not human life comparable to a speck of cloud drifting in a vast unknown sky?' He began afresh his search for a worthwhile philosophy of life. Such quest brought him to the writings and speeches of Keshabchandra Sen, and from these, among other things, he came to know of Sri Ramakrishna, the Saint of Dakshineswar.

Subsequently one Sunday morning Ram was strolling on the road when he came across an old acquaintance who was practising yoga. Ram explained his problem to the yogī, who gravely remarked that he might be cured of his agony only if God should appear to him in the form of a 'physician'. Soon an idea crossed Ram's mind: 'Why should I not lay bare my heart to the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar?' This gave rise to a hope which warmed up his heart. He proceeded towards the house of his cousin, Manomohan.³

¹ This is the account given by Sri Manomohan Mitra at the Fourth Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission held on 16.5.1897.

² Later Manomohan narrated the transformation of his consciousness that was brought about under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. He said: 'After my seven-month-old daughter died and was buried, I tried to locate the spot with the idea of disintering her body. Somehow I was seized with that idea that she may re-live if the body could be restored. Such delusion had covered up my mind. Now you can hardly recognize the then mental condition of mine.... It is through Sri Ramakrishna's blessings that the cloud of delusion has been dispelled.' *Tattwamañjari*, Vol. IX, No. 6, p. 134.

³ *Mahātma Rāmcandrer Bakṛtābali* (Bengali), Pub. by Sri Sri Ramakrishna Samadhi Mahapith, Yogodyana, Kankurgachi, Calcutta-54, 3rd ed. Vol. I, pp. 36-8.

In the meantime, Manomohan Mitra had also come to know of Ramakrishna Paramahansa from reports that appeared in Keshab's newspaper *Sulabh Samācār*. He heard more about the Paramahansa from his friend Prankrishna Dutta, who had visited the latter several times.

Now, Ramchandra, on hearing the story of Manomohan's dream remarked, 'All that you have seen is but true. In fact all men are laid under the spell of *māyā*. None is alive in the true sense. Everyone is living unconsciously.' Manomohan suggested, 'We have been hearing about the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar for quite a long time. But, alas, we have not found time to see him !'

'Then let's go today itself', replied Ramchandra. 'Today is a holiday. We can go.' Manomohan agreed.

The day was Sunday, the 13th November, 1879. The cousins decided to go to Dakshineswar and to see for themselves what the Paramahansa was like. They went in a hired boat in the company of their mutual friend, Gopal Mitra of Antpur, Hooghly. On reaching the Dakshineswar temple, they walked about the garden expecting to see a *sādhu* (holy man) with matted locks, besmeared with ashes, etc. They found none. Finally they were directed to a room, but they found the door closed and a few policemen sitting on the veranda. As the door was closed and it was against etiquette to open a closed door, they returned to the embankment of the Gaṅgā. However, they were told to knock at the door. They followed the advice and tapped on the door. It opened and an ordinary-looking man bowed low and greeted them with the words 'Nārāyaṇa'.⁴ They responded by nodding their heads. Welcoming them to the room, he asked them to sit on the bed he was

occupying. He inquired, 'Where do you come from?' They introduced themselves. A guileless serene-looking man, he was wearing a dhoti, clumsily tied, one end of which was resting on his shoulders. They found another man, tall and hefty, lying on some bedding on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna, the man who had received them, said to the man lying down, 'You see, Hriday, how calm and quiet they are. They are not members of the Brahmo Samaj.' Manomohan protested, declaring that he had been visiting the Brahmo Samaj since his young days and that he hated idolatry. Mild came the reply, 'But you do not belong to any party or group—that is what I was pointing out.' Sri Ramakrishna further said, 'As a custard apple made of pith inspires the thought of a true custard apple, similarly the images of gods and goddesses stimulate thought of the real sports of God. God is omnipotent, everything is possible for Him.'

Ramchandra, nonetheless, at the sight of Sri Ramakrishna instinctively felt that the latter was his very own. He looked intently at Sri Ramakrishna and the longer he watched him the greater joy he found in his heart. Sri Ramakrishna, too, with his power of infallible judgment took no time to recognize in the visitors two of his chosen devotees.

Looking at Ramchandra he suddenly remarked, 'Are you not a doctor? (Pointing to Hriday) Will you please examine him? He is suffering from fever.' Ramchandra was astounded by this disclosure about himself, for he had not told Sri Ramakrishna that he was a physician. However, Ramchandra examined the patient and declared that Hriday's temperature was normal. Sri Ramakrishna then inquired of Ramchandra, 'Well whatever I partake of, where does it go?' Ramchandra pointed to the stomach. Sri Ramakrishna, pointing to the right lower part of his abdomen, said, 'But in my case, the foodstuff comes down here.' They were

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 39: *Bhakta Manomohan* (Bengali), Udbodhan, 1 Udbodhan Lane, Calcutta-3, p. 27.

amazed to hear this, but could not appreciate the truth of it. However, later on, Ramchandra assured himself, by physical examination, that Sri Ramakrishna was correct: food and drink come down straight to the right lower region of the abdomen.⁵

After a while one of them asked, 'Does God really exist? If so, can He be perceived? Again, if He is perceivable, can he be perceived in this life?'

There came forth a flow of sweet words:

'God really exists. You don't see the stars in the daytime, but that does not mean that they do not exist. Look, there is butter in milk; but can anybody find it by merely looking at the milk? To get butter you must churn the milk in a quiet and cool place before the sun rises. If you want to catch fish in a tank, you should find out from those who have already caught fish in that tank, what variety of fish is available and what kind of bait should be used. Similarly you have to inquire about God. A man angling in a pond has to wait patiently for a long time till he finds the float moving. This shows him that there are fish in the pond. Gradually the float sinks under water and with one pull of the rod he lands the fish. Similarly you cannot realize God by mere wish; you must go through some mental disciplines. Believing the words of a *sādhū*, you have to hold the mind as the angler holds his rod. Hang from it the hook of *prāṇa*. Fasten on this devotion to the Lord's name as bait, and then wait patiently till you find thoughts of God stirring on the surface of the mind-lake. Subsequently you will be blessed by the vision of Him.'⁶

Ramchandra was a rank agnostic. Manomohan, for his part, firmly held that if there was a God, he could not have a form. Such arguments he had heard from the Brahmo

leaders. Intuiting what was in their minds, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Who really wants God—who wants to realize Him? Everyone is moving about with the idea that God cannot be comprehended. If a man who sincerely craves for God, cries with the prayer, "Please bless me with Your vision", God will surely appear before him. God can be realized. Can God, whose glory is so beautiful, be unperceivable? Let anyone verify whether this is true or not. If God is not perceivable; then the scriptures lose their worth. Would you say that the words of the scriptures are all fantasies—that they have been composed like fictions and dramas to mesmerize men of the *Kali-yuga*?'⁷ Manomohan suggested, 'Admitting all that you say to be true, can one realize God in this life?' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain; And faith is the root of all.' Saying these words he began singing in his melodious voice:

As is a man's meditation, so is his
feeling of love;

As is a man's feeling of love, so is his
gain;

And faith is the root of all.

If in the Nectar Lake of Mother Kali's
feet,

My mind remains immersed,

Of little use are worship, oblations or
sacrifice.

Sri Ramakrishna continued: 'The further one advances in one direction, the more the opposite recedes. That is to say, as soon as you walk ten feet towards the east, you leave behind your past position by the same distance.'

They, however, persisted in their argument: 'Till we find some direct proof of the existence of God, our faithless minds can hardly put trust in God.'

Sri Ramakrishna smilingly said:

'A man ailing from typhoid fever desires

⁵ *Bhakta Manomohan*, p. 29.

⁶ Ramchandra Dutta: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvanbr̥tānta* (Bengali), Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana. Calcutta-54, 7th ed. p. 120.

⁷ *Bakṛtībali*, pp. 39-40.

to drink a pondul of water and to eat a potul of rice but does the physician pay heed to his words? Does the physician prescribe quinine as soon as a patient runs a high temperature? He observes the patient and prescribes quinine at the proper moment, when the temperature becomes somewhat stable. He does not listen to the patient's pleadings.' ⁸

Sri Ramakrishna's simple but convincing words touched their hearts. His melodious voice sank deep into their spirit. In fact his words began to be echoed in their hearts. Sri Ramakrishna had given voice and form to the intangible flashes of thought that till then had eluded their grasp. Never before had they heard such a convincing discourse on religious topics. He accepted them so cordially that they felt they were known to him for long, that they were his own, as it were. Spending the whole day in his company the three friends left Dakshineswar before dusk.

The visit opened a new chapter in the lives of Ramchandra and Manomohan. Sri Ramakrishna's spirit flowed through and through their lives and, in flowing through, swept away all the bitter past. Ramchandra has told in his book *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvanbr̥ttānta*, and Manomohan in his unfinished book *Āmār Jīvan Kathā*, what a great revolution gradually took place in their lives as a result of coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna.

Describing the striking change in their life, Ram has written: 'While we had been moving hither and thither in search of God, occasionally visiting the Brahmo temple, Christian churches, temples of Hindu gods and goddesses, none cared to look at us, none came to our help. Rather we were drowning day by day in the swamp of despair, as it were. However, we did not have to suffer long. The day we met Sri Rama-

krishna we received a new lease of life. The moment we saw him, the burning of our heart, the despair of the past disappeared... Atheists, as we were, we were transformed into staunch believers in God through his grace... We sincerely believe that Sri Ramakrishna was our saviour; that is why we are convinced that he is verily the all-powerful God.' ⁹ Regarding Sri Ramakrishna at first as his Guru, and later as his Chosen Ideal, Ramchandra invited him and his devotees again and again to his house at Simla and spent money lavishly. Commenting on this change in his disciple Sri Ramakrishna observed: 'You now see Ram so splendidly generous. But his miserliness when he first came beggars description. I asked him to bring some cardamom, and one day he brought a pice worth of it, and placed it before me and bowed down. Guess from it what a great change has come over Ram's nature.' ¹⁰

Sri Ramakrishna's divine grace kindled in Ram the flame of devotion, which burnt all the dross; and the gold in him shone forth. The entering of the Master's spirit into his life and its working were imperceptible, but the result was notable. It altered his whole existence as well as the words he spoke and the influence he exerted on others. So great was the change, that the devotees were not much surprised to hear the Master say one day, 'I was saying to the Mother today, "Give a little power to these few—Vijay, Girish, Kedar, Ram, and Master (Mahendranath Gupta) so that the new people may come here after their angularities have been somewhat rounded by them."' ¹¹ Ram was chosen a vehicle for

⁹ *Tattwamañjari*, Vol. II, pp. 84-5.

¹⁰ Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Tr. by Swami Jagadananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 2nd ed.), p. 710

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 833.

⁸ *Jīvanbr̥ttānta*, p. 121.

the dissemination of the Master's message. While he himself dived deeply into spiritual practices in the newly purchased garden house, named Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyan, he began to spread the Master's message through the Bengali monthly journal *Tattwamañjari*, through books like *Tattwa-sāra* (1885), *Tattwaprakāśikā* (in three volumes, June 1886 to July 1887), *Saṅkīrtana*, and lectures and discourses. He was one of those who held that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God. One day he told Girishchandra Ghosh : 'Do you realize that this time Gaurāṅga, Nityānanda, and Advaita have reappeared in the form of Paramahamsadeva ? He is the synthesis of *prema* (ecstatic love), *bhakti* (devotion), and *jñāna* (knowledge). When God incarnated as Gaurāṅga these qualities had manifested themselves in three persons.'¹²

Similar changes were noticed in Manomohan too. Although in the beginning his egotism stood as a channel-blocker, Sri Ramakrishna's divine grace broke it down gradually and Manomohan became a notable conduit of devotion. Referring to this, Sri Ramakrishna remarked, when he visited

Manomohan's house on the 19th November, 1882:

'God very much relishes the bhakti of the poor and the lowly, just as the cow relishes fodder mixed with oil-cake. King Duryodhana showed Krishna the splendour of his wealth and riches, but Krishna accepted the hospitality of the poor Vidura. God is fond of His devotees. He runs after the devotee as the cow after the calf.'¹³

Such a loyal and steadfast devotee was Manomohan that people would often hear him say, 'I do not want to hear that which is not included in the "Ramakrishna Grammar".'¹⁴

Manomohan's wholehearted acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna as his Guru resulted in a complete transformation in him. For him life was not immunity from difficulties but peace and tranquillity in all situations however difficult. His life like a sprouting seed sent a root down so that it might be firmly grounded, while at the same time it sent a shoot up to become the plant with its flowers to gladden the devotees.

¹³ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1947), pp. 86-7.

¹⁴ Bijoy Nath Majumdar, 'Mahātmā Manomohan Mitra', *Tattwamañjari*, Vol. IX. No. 6, p. 134.

¹² Girishchandra Ghosh, 'Rāmdādā', *Tattwamañjari*, Vol. VIII, No. 9, p. 203.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: BABURAM GHOSH

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Baburam Ghosh, later known as Swami Premananda, belonged to the select group of half a dozen disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, whom the latter referred to as *īśvarakotis*, Godlike souls. Born on 10 December 1861 in the village of Antpur, Hooghly district, Baburam was brought up in a noble and pious family. Devotion to God was a family trait, which Baburam inherited and cultivated notably.

After completing his elementary studies at the village school, Baburam came to Calcutta for higher studies. He joined the Aryan School for some time and then entered the Metropolitan Institution near Shyampukur, where Mahendranath Gupta—later the celebrated author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* served as headmaster. It was there that Baburam made the acquaintance of Rakhal (later Swami Brahmananda) who happened to read in the same class. Soon they became fast friends. About this time Rakhal had come under the benign influence of Sri Ramakrishna and had begun visiting the Dakshineswar temple.

Baburam's sister Krishnabhavini's marriage to Balaram Bose of Calcutta brought the family under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. It is probable that it was through Balaram Bose that Baburam first heard about Ramakrishna. Balaram's elder brother Tulsiram had visited Sri Ramakrishna in the company of Balaram and, knowing of the religious temperament of Baburam, had suggested that the latter visit the saint of Dakshineswar. The saint, Tulsiram said, would lose physical consciousness on hearing the name of God, as was the case with Caitanyadeva. Soon after this conversation Baburam, by sheer chance, happened to see Sri Ramakrishna

for the first time in a 'Hari sabhā' (a Vaiṣṇava assembly for hearing scripture-readings) at Jorasanko.¹ Baburam had gone there to hear the reading from the holy *Bhāgavata*. Probably he had gone there in the company of his friend Ramdayal Chakraborty, who lived in Balaram Bose's house.

It was an afternoon probably in spring. Baburam saw Sri Ramakrishna in the audience. Baburam noticed that a group of devotees, who were sitting very close to Sri Ramakrishna, were listening with rapt attention to whatever occasionally came from his lips. Ramakrishna's brief commentaries on what the scholar was reading were illuminating. At one stage Baburam was struck with wonder—for Sri Ramakrishna sat motionless. He seemed to be oblivious of the outer world. He seemed not even to breathe. His face was brightened by a bewitching smile. It seemed he was beholding a wonderful vision. His companion told Baburam that Sri Ramakrishna was in *samādhi*. He continued in that state for a long time.² The sight of the *samādhi* of the holy man, and his sweet words, left an indelible impression on Baburam's mind. He returned home that evening curious to know more about Sri

¹ According to Vaikunthanath Sanyal (*Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Līlāmṛta*, p. 308), Baburam saw the Master first at Balaram Bose's residence. Among other sources however, consult *The Disciples of Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1943), p. 198; and Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Carita* (Pub. by Kalinath Sinha, 13 Nikasipara Lane, Calcutta), Vol. I, pp. 264-5, where Baburam's meeting the Master at Jorasanko Hari-sabhā has been beautifully described.

² Swami Nityatmananda: *Śrī-Ma Darśana* (General Printers and Publishers, 119 Dharmatolla Street, Calcutta 13), Vol. IV, p. 118.

Ramakrishna. Baburam was then living in a hired house at Combulitola, Calcutta.

Next day Baburam when he met Rakhal in the school broached the subject. He said, 'Well, is there a holy man living at Dakshineswar?'

Rakhal: 'Yes, would you like to pay him a visit?'

Baburam: 'Oh, yes. Have you seen him? What kind of a man is he?'

Rakhal: 'Yes, I have met him. Why do you not go there one day and see for yourself?'

Baburam: 'Well, is he the same person who yesterday attended the reading from the *Bhāgavata* at Pal's residence in Jorasanko?'

Rakhal: 'Quite probably. He visits any place where a discourse on God is held. Would you like to visit him next Saturday?'

Baburam was willing.

The two of them left for Dakshineswar the following Saturday after school hours. It was probably April 8, 1882.³ It was a chance coincidence that Ramdayal Chakra-

borty, who used to visit Sri Ramakrishna, joined them at Ahiritola where they took a boat for Dakshineswar. Ramdayal was carrying with him food for Sri Ramakrishna.

On the way Rakhal inquired of Baburam if he would like to spend the night at Dakshineswar. Baburam, thinking that the holy man lived in a small hut, said apprehensively, 'Will there be accommodation for us?'

'There might be,' answered Rakhal.

'What shall we eat at night? Is there an eating-house?' asked Baburam.

Smilingly Rakhal said, 'We shall manage somehow.'

It was sunset when the party arrived at Dakshineswar. The crimson sky was reflected in the blue water of the river. The tall steeple of the Kālī temple, fenced, as it were, by a dozen Śiva temples on the bank of the Gaṅgā, was an impressive sight. The newcomer was fascinated by the beauty and serene atmosphere of the place.

Instead of going round the temples first they went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room, but he was not to be found there. Rakhal at once sensed where he might be. He excused himself and went in search of the Master. In a few minutes he returned, leading by the hand Sri Ramakrishna, who was in a state of God-intoxication. Rakhal was directing his footsteps, warning him of the high and low places. Entering the room, Sri Ramakrishna, still in an abstracted mood, took his seat on the small couch and gradually returned to consciousness of the outer world.

The new arrival regarded the saint for a few moments in silence. Sri Ramakrishna was then about fortysix, a man of medium height, somewhat thin; he appeared to be

³ Gurudas Burman (ibid., p. 268) states that this visit was in the month of Caitra (March-April). Swami Saradananda in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras-4, 1956, p. 744) says, 'Swami Premananda came for the first time to the Master shortly after Narendra had come to be with him.' Narendra first came in November 1881 (ibid., p. 715).

Again, 'M' in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1947), p. 55, says, 'Baburam had seen him [the Master] only once or twice.' (Dated Oct. 22, 1882)

According to Manadasankar Dasgupta: *Yugābatār Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa*, p. 373, it was the month of Bhādra-Aśvin (September); and several well-known recent authors have given conflicting dates: e.g., *Swami Premananda—Teachings and Reminiscences* (Ed. & Tr. by Swami Prabhavananda, Pub. by Advaita Ashrama, 1970), p. 5, 'November 1882'; *Swami Premananda*, by Swami Ashokananda, (Vedanta Society of Northern California, 1970) p. 4, 'autumn of 1882'. However, weighing the available evidence, with due preference for the earlier and authorita-

tive manuscripts listed first, we conclude that this visit occurred one Saturday in the month of Caitra 1882. The date was probably April 8th.

very simple and unassuming. The most impressive thing about him was his face which always beamed with the radiance of inner joy.

Sri Ramakrishna inquired about the new arrival and Ramdayal introduced him. This gladdened the Master, as it appeared from his expression. He said, 'Ah, so you are a relative of Balaram ! Then you are related to us also. Very good. Where is your home ?'

Baburam : 'Tara Antpur, sir.'

Sri Ramakrishna : 'Is that so ? Then I have visited your village once. Do Kalu and Bhulu of Jhamapukur belong to that village ?'

Surprised at hearing the names of his two maternal uncles, Baburam said, 'Yes, sir ; but how do you know them ?'

Sri Ramakrishna : 'They are the two sons of Ramprasad Mitra. When I lived at Jhamapukur I used to visit the house of Digambar Mitra and also theirs.'

Though Baburam was a little over twenty, he looked not more than fifteen years of age. Nevertheless his calm nature and gentle conduct made him very appealing to all.⁴

Sri Ramakrishna then caught hold of Baburam's hand and said, 'Come closer to the light. Let me see your face.' He took him near the earthen lamp and in its dim light carefully scrutinized his features. It seemed that Sri Ramakrishna was satisfied with the examination, for he exclaimed in approbation, 'Good, good!' Next he said,

'Let me see your hand.' He weighed the young man's forearm by placing it on his palm. Satisfied with these physical tests, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Good, that's all right.' As physical characteristics can be a strong indication of a man's mental propensities and spiritual potentialities, Sri Ramakrishna used to employ such tests to find out the strong past impressions of a newcomer.⁵ The examinee years later wrote in a letter :

'Thakur (Ramakrishna) used to accept disciples after testing them in many ways: . . . He was versed in physiognomy and so he used to examine the shape of his disciple's eyes, hands, feet and so forth. He knew different ways to judge if one were truly a spiritual aspirant.'

No doubt Sri Ramakrishna had had previous knowledge of Baburam's coming as well as of his spiritual stature. Once the Master remarked that Śrī Rādhā, the Goddess of Love, Herself was partially incarnated in him. Sri Ramakrishna later said also : '....In a vision I saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace around her neck and with woman companions about her. He has received something in a dream. His body is pure. Only a very little effort will awaken his spiritual consciousness.'⁶

⁵ Saradananda : op. cit., pp. 768-9 : 'As soon as someone came to him, the Master, we saw, looked at him in a peculiar way. If ... [he were favourably impressed, then during future] visits to him, he engaged himself in coming to a sure conclusion regarding the dormant spiritual tendencies in him by observing minutely, without his knowledge, the form of the limbs of his body, his mental tendencies, the intensity of his desire for enjoyment, especially his attachment to lust and gold, as also how far his mind had been ... attracted towards him. He gathered his data by observing how he talked, worked and behaved.... Afterwards if it were at all necessary to know anything deeply hidden in his mind, the Master knew it with the help of his subtle Yogic insight.'

⁶ *Gospel*, p. 411.

⁴ Swami Ashokananda (op. cit., p. 3) thus describes the mature Premananda : 'He was very straight—straight as an arrow. He was not very tall ... probably he was about five feet eight—and he was rather slim.... His complexion was pure gold—you have never seen such a complexion. When he was in an ecstatic mood, which was most of the time, his face and the upper part of his body had a sheen of fire through this gold ; it was the most wonderful thing to see.'

About the young man's moral character Sri Ramakrishna affirmed, 'Baburam is pure to his very marrow. No impure thought can ever cross his mind.'⁷ Thus on ascertaining the new arrival's spiritual nature, Sri Ramakrishna, as was his wont, developed a special relation of love with him from the very beginning and he always maintained that relation intact.

Next turning to Ramdayal Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Do you know how Naren is? I heard he was not keeping well.'

Ramdayal: 'He is all right now, I hear.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Look, he has not come here for a long time. I feel a great longing to see him. Please ask him to come here one day. You will remember, won't you?'

Ramdayal: 'Surely, I shall remember. I shall ask him positively.'

Then as Baburam later recounted, 'a few hours were delightfully spent in religious talks', the details of which are not available. It was about ten o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna ate a very little of the large quantity of food which Ramdayal had brought. The rest was distributed among the three visitors. Supper over, Sri Ramakrishna asked them whether they would like to sleep in his room or outside.

Rakhal chose the room; Ramdayal wanted his bed to be spread on the veranda. Baburam chose to join Ramdayal, for he

thought that his presence inside the room might disturb Sri Ramakrishna. The latter again requested them to sleep inside his room but they declined. Baburam and Ramdayal lay down on the eastern veranda. As it was almost summer, the night was neither cold nor warm. They soon fell asleep.

After about an hour the exchange of messages between the night guards woke Baburam up. Presently he saw a most unusual thing. Sri Ramakrishna approached them reeling like a drunkard with his cloth under his arm. Addressing Ramdayal he said, 'Hullo, are you asleep?'

Ramdayal: 'No, sir.'

Sri Ramakrishna said, his voice trembling with anguish: 'Please tell him to come once. I feel as though someone were wringing my heart like this.' And he twisted the cloth (taking it from under his arm) as though wringing water from it. His every gesture expressed the agony of his heart for Narendranath. Ramdayal, familiar with the childlike simplicity of the Master, consoled him in various ways and assured him saying: 'I shall see him tomorrow morning and request him see you. I shall let him know that you are extremely anxious for him.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Oh, yes! My mind is quite disurbed for his sake. Meet him and ask him to come.'

Ramdayal assured him: 'As soon as morning comes, I shall call on him. Please don't worry. He is all right. He will surely come as soon as he hears of your anxiety.'

'What love, what anguish this holy man bears for Narendra!' Baburam thought to himself. 'But how queer it is that Narendra does not respond.'⁸

⁷ Part of a conversation between 'M' and the Master (*Gospel*, p. 443) will further illustrate the Master's opinion:

'Yesterday I came to know Baburam's inner nature. That is why I have been trying so hard to persuade him to live with me. The mother bird hatches the egg in proper time. Boys like Baburam are pure in heart. They have not yet fallen into the clutches of "women and gold". Isn't that so? ...

'They are like a new pot. Milk kept in it will not turn sour.

'I need Baburam here. I pass through certain spiritual states when I need someone like him.'

⁸ Later Swami Premananda used to say: 'What love can I give you? Not one-hundredth part of the love that we received from Sri Ramakrishna.'

Sri Ramakrishna moved a few steps towards his room but only to return to Ramdayal and say, 'Then tell him, ask him to come one day.' He repeated these words and went back to his bed with staggering steps. After about an hour he reappeared; this time he seemed to be even more intoxicated, and said: 'Look, Naren is as pure as Nārāyaṇa Himself. I cannot bear life without him. The pain of his separation is so excruciating that I feel as if my heart were being squeezed like this.' He again demonstrated the anguish of his heart by twisting his cloth. He could hardly control himself. Again, he said, 'I am being put on the rack as it were, for his sake. Let him come here just once.' This episode was repeated at almost hourly intervals throughout the night.⁹ Of course Baburam and Ramdayal could not sleep while they saw this drama going on.

Early next morning Baburam found Sri Ramakrishna a different man. He was seated in his room, his face peaceful and serene, a marked contrast to what had been seen the night before. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to go round the Panchavati. As he walked towards the spot, he was amazed to find that the Panchavati closely tallied with the day-dreams of his boyhood.¹⁰ The sight of the grove along with the hut seemed quite familiar to him. He, however, kept this to himself and returned to Sri Rama-

Oh, how he loved us!' (Swami Premananda—*Teachings and Reminiscences*, p. 139)

Again he said: 'I have been made a bond servant by the love of Sri Ramakrishna; by his love he made all of us bond servants. He was love inside and outside. Even his rebukes stemmed from his love.' (ibid., p. 51)

⁹ This is according to the account of the episode given by Gurudas Burman: op. cit., pp. 268-70.

¹⁰ vide *The Disciples of Ramakrishna*, p. 197: At eight years his ideal was to lead a life of renunciation with a fellow monk in a hut shut out from the public view by a thick wall of trees.' See also, p. 201.

krishna. In answer to the latter's queries he only said that it was nice. The Master then bade him visit the Kālī temple. He did so and came back to take leave. He took the dust of the Master's feet and was about to leave when Sri Ramakrishna with his characteristic bewitching smile, said, 'Will you not come again?' Baburam agreed and started for Calcutta leaving behind Rakhal, who was to stay with the Master. The visit had been memorable. Sri Ramakrishna had said something, done something, the details of which Baburam could not explain, but it had made an indelible impression on him, like the shining full moon that you never forget, once seen. Sri Ramakrishna appeared to him as the embodiment of sweetness itself.¹¹

The story continues that Baburam came to Dakshineswar the next Sunday and found that Narendra, Rakhal and others were having a picnic under the Panchavati. Baburam was introduced to Narendra. Narendra's versatile talents and lovable disposition quickly won Baburam's admiration.

Visits followed visits to Dakshineswar and, soon after, Baburam, despite all remonstrances, began finding school and family life insipid and uninteresting. Sri Ramakrishna's parental affection loomed large on the mental horizon of the young man. He was overwhelmed by the saint's affectionate treatment. Later he said, 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) was the embodiment of kindness. I fail to measure the bound of his grace.' No less impressed was he by the self-surrender of the saint; for he said later, 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) had given the

¹¹ Swami Premananda's letter of 23/6/1914 (*Teachings and Reminiscences*, pp. 221-2): 'Our Lord, from the very beginning of his life until its end, manifested only sweetness in his divine play. He never displayed any supernatural powers.... Thakur's divine play, from the first to the last, is a play in which was manifest only sweetness; he was the embodiment of sweetness.'

Divine Mother the power of attorney just as Girish Babu gave him his power of attorney.¹² Slowly the idea began to dawn on him that his relation with Sri Ramakrishna was not of this life alone, but dated from a remote existence. He felt in his heart of hearts that he belonged to the Master.¹³ He longed to live with him. At

¹² Swami Premananda: *Śrī-Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇadeva* (Bengali), 3rd Edition.

¹³ He wrote to Swami Abhedananda on 15/8/1915 (*Teachings and Reminiscences*, p. 194): 'Do you remember when you and I were together at the Cossipore garden house, and the Master remarked, "Your relationship is between Self and Self." ... Brother, always remember we are monkeys and he is holding us in his palm. In his divine incarnation as Rama, we had tails; this time the only difference is that we are bereft of tails.'

last an opportune episode settled things for him. One day when his mother, who herself was greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, came to see the latter, he requested her to leave her son with him. The devoted mother happily gave her ungrudging consent. From this time onward Baburam began to live with the Master constantly. Some years later, on taking monastic vows, he came to be known as Swami Premananda, the name meaning literally, 'the bliss of ecstatic love'. Still later on, when Swami Premananda became known to a wide circle of devotees, they did find this bliss manifest in him. The devotees discovered that the Swami possessed nothing, wanted nothing for himself, for he was full of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

Our readers will find a little change in the caption of the first-page matter, but a great change in its contents. 'Sri Ramakrishna Answers', which appeared for exactly four years from July 1970, has helped many a spiritual seeker in finding a way out of the welter of spiritual doubts. Judging from the readers' appreciative reactions, we confidently feel that the column has more than amply served its purpose.

But spiritual life passes through many stages, one of the earliest being the stage of doubts and questionings. As the aspirant's purity and power of subtle perception increase, as his love and yearning for God grow, an altogether new and different order of reality than the physical and sensual—or for that matter the merely

psychological—begins to unfold. Visions and voices, ecstasies and luminous perceptions may begin to be experienced; and to such sincere seekers these invariably mark advanced stages in the spiritual journey. That such supersensuous experiences occur in the lives of those who have devotedly followed their disciplines over a long enough period, is attested by the mystical literature—the sayings and life-accounts of the saints—both in the East and the West. Such records hold a twofold benefit for the spiritual seeker: they inspire his flagging spirits with fresh hopes and zeal; they also validate and confirm his own experiences. A qualitative and quantitative distinction, however, has to be made between the spiritual perceptions, experiences, and realizations of those who are hailed as avatars or incarna-

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : SUBODH CHANDRA GHOSH

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Born on 8 November 1867 in Calcutta, Subodh Chandra Ghosh was brought up in an atmosphere of religious piety. He belonged to the family of Sankar Ghosh who owned the famous temple of Siddheswari at Thanthania, Calcutta. His parents, Krishnadas and Nayantara, contributed greatly to the growth of his religious life. He began regularly practising meditation on the gods and goddesses at home.

As was the custom, Subodh Chandra was pressed by his parents to get married, but he stubbornly refused. His parents finally declared that soon after he passed the school-leaving examination he was to be married. The simple-minded Subodh prayed fervently to God that his examination result might be unsatisfactory. It seems that his prayer was granted, for he did not pass the examination. However, his career took a decisive turn at this stage.

Subodh was seventeen when he came across a copy of the Bengali book *Śrīmat Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamser Ukti* ('The Sayings of Paramahansa Ramakrishna') compiled by Suresh Chandra Dutta. Though he had heard of Sri Ramakrishna from his father, the reading of this book made him impatient to see the holy man as soon as possible. His father promised to take him to the Paramahansa on some holiday when it would be convenient; but Subodh could not wait so long. He persuaded his class-friend and neighbour Kshirode Chandra Mitra to accompany him and visit the Paramahansa.

Accordingly Subodh and Kshirode started on foot one early morning¹ for Dakshin-

eswar. As the road was not familiar to either of them they simply walked northwards. Arriving at Ariadaha they learnt that they had left Dakshineswar behind. They retraced their path. Subodh was somewhat anxious. Afraid of his parents, he said, 'Kshirode, let's go back home. It is already noon. We must return home before dusk.' Kshirode, however, persuaded him to make

day of the Car Festival in 1884. However according to *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* (Bengali) (by 'M', Pub. by Pravasa Chandra Gupta, Calcutta, 10th ed.) Vol. I, p. 6, the visit took place in 1885, and ('M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1947, p. 824), some day shortly before Aug. 31, 1885. The Car Festival that year came off on Tuesday, July 14, and Sri Ramakrishna spent that day at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. Subodh was not present there. Since, as we shall see, on the very first visit, Sri Ramakrishna urged that Subodh visit him on Tuesdays and Saturdays, it is probable that the first meeting was not on either of those days. So it is almost certain that the first visit was not on the day of the Car Festival, and definitely not in 1884, since the book *Śrīmat Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamser Ukti* (Part I) was first published on December 23, 1884. 'M' (Mahendranath Gupta, author of the *Gospel*) was not present when Subodh first met Sri Ramakrishna. Subodh is first mentioned in the *Gospel* on Monday, Aug. 31, 1885. 'Two boys came here [the other day]. One of them was Subodh. He is Sankar Ghosh's great grandson. The other, Kshirode, is his neighbour.' 'M's' previous visit to Dakshineswar had been on Thursday and Friday, Aug. 27th and 28th, 1885. It may thus be presumed, and with reason, that Subodh's visit took place on Sunday, Aug. 30, 1885.

In contrast with this view, Gurudas Burman says in *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-carit* (Pub. by Kalinath Sinha, 13 Nikasipara Lane, Calcutta, 1st ed.), p. 332, that on some week-day when the school classes were dissolved early, Subodh and Kshirode left for Dakshineswar. Very likely the reference is to some visit other than the first.

¹ According to *Śrī-Śrī-Swāmī Subodhānander Jivan O Patrāvali* (Bengali), it was the auspicious

for Dakshineswar. They went along the ridges of the cultivated land to lessen the distance. Subodh was apprehensive about meeting the holy man. He had not had occasion to talk to a holy man before. He urged that Kshirode should take the lead and should do all the talking; he himself would keep silent. Kshirode agreed.

At last they arrived at Dakshineswar. Very probably it was early afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room. He was perhaps sitting on the small couch, after his short rest following the noon meal. It is not known whether Subodh and his friend had to forgo their midday meal. If they had, it can safely be presumed that they were fed by Sri Ramakrishna. Kshirode was first to enter the room. He saluted Sri Ramakrishna while Subodh stood in the further corner.² Sri Ramakrishna received them affectionately and asked, 'Where do you come from?'

'From Calcutta,' replied Kshirode.

'Why does the other Bābu (gentleman) stand so far off?' asked Sri Ramakrishna, smiling. 'Oh Bābu, why do you remain so far away? Do come nearer.'

Subodh came forward a few steps. Looking at his face Sri Ramakrishna said, 'You belong to Sankar Ghosh's family, don't you?'³

Surprised at this, Subodh asked, 'Yes, but how do you know, sir?'

'When I was living at Jhamapukur, I visited the temple of Siddheswari and your house many a time. You had not been born then. I knew that you would come here. The Mother sends here those who have a bright future in spiritual life. Why do you stand so far away? Come close to me, please.'

Subodh came still nearer. Sri Rama-

krishna made him sit on his bed. Subodh protested saying that he had come into contact with many people on the way in that dress; that it was no longer clean; and that therefore he should not sit on the bed of a holy man. Sri Ramakrishna, putting his hand round Subodh's waist, said affectionately, 'Look, you belong to this place. What is there in the clothes one wears?'⁴ Taking Subodh's wrist in his hand Sri Ramakrishna sat quietly with his eyes shut and then lost outward consciousness. After a while regaining consciousness, he began to laugh within himself. Afterwards he said, 'Look you will succeed. [The Divine] Mother says so.'⁵

By this time Subodh had summoned enough courage to ask, 'If I really belong to this place, why did the Mother not bring me here before?'

Sri Ramakrishna smilingly replied, 'Look here, nothing happens until the time is ripe.'

Subodh's first impression of Sri Ramakrishna was like that of many who had come in contact with him—that the holy man's simplicity and spirituality were astoundingly attractive. Quite unnoticeably Sri Ramakrishna was already entering into Subodh's heart, infusing into him a warm and firm faith.

⁴ Swami Subodhananda (Subodh) narrated his experience of this visit in a letter dated 23.6.25. There he explained, 'That Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] told, "You belong to this", means, I belong to him only.... Though I had gone to Thakur with another person, I know for certain now, other persons are but aids. He attracts his own men, his own belongings.'

⁵ During Subodh's second visit, Sri Ramakrishna wrote something on his tongue, stroked his body from the navel to the throat, and said, 'Awake, Mother, awake!' He asked Subodh to meditate and at once Subodh's latent spirituality was awakened. Joy filled his heart. His body trembled. He felt a current rushing along the spinal column to the brain. (*The Disciples of Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1943, p. 278).

² According to Gurudas Burman they greeted Sri Ramakrishna with folded hands as was the custom of the day.

³ Burman, op. cit., p. 333.

After a while Subodh moved a little away and sat on the floor in front of Sri Ramakrishna. At the latter's bidding Ramlal [Sri Ramakrishna's nephew] gave Subodh a small carpet to sit on. Subodh made himself comfortable, while his friend Kshirode sat on the mat nearby.

Sri Ramakrishna inquired, 'How have you come this distance?'

'Why, on foot,' was Subodh's prompt reply.

'What do you mean? You have come such a long distance on foot? But how did you come to know of this place?'

'I read your sayings. I was charmed. You are a well-known man, a holy man. That's why we have come to meet you.'

At these words Sri Ramakrishna's mood changed. He fell into ecstasy. He said: 'Humble am I, humbler than a night-soil worm; what can be my name and fame? I am very humble.' The humility of the holy man and his words made a deep impression on Subodh's mind. Keeping quiet for a while, Sri Ramakrishna then said: 'Those whom the Mother sends here will certainly attain spirituality. You visit the place on Saturdays and Tuesdays. It is good to visit on those days. A number of people living in your locality visit on those days. You too come.'⁶

Subodh felt like accepting the invitation, but he was apprehensive of his parents' reaction. He said: 'If I come away on Saturdays and Tuesdays my parents will come to know. Please tell me just now what you have to say. It is not possible to come here on Saturdays, for on Saturdays my father returns from his office early.'

Sri Ramakrishna insisted: 'No, since these words came out of my lips I cannot take them back. When I say I shall visit a place on such and such a day I have to go in spite of hindrances like rain or storm.

Even if I do not want to, the Mother takes me there. There is no escape. Please come here on Saturdays and Tuesdays.'⁷

Sri Ramakrishna was not keeping good health. For at least four months he had been suffering from pain in his throat—a symptom of his cancer of the throat. He asked the two young men to meet Mahendranath Gupta, who was living in the same locality as theirs.⁸

As it was getting rather late, Subodh and Kshirode got up to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna. The latter offered them some food which Subodh at first declined to accept.

'Take a few sweetmeats and drink a little water before you go,' said Sri Ramakrishna. At his bidding Latu gave them some *prasāda* (offered food). They partook of it and prepared to leave for Calcutta, when Sri Ramakrishna said: 'It is a long distance and you are too young. You had better travel by boat or hackney-carriage. I shall give you the fare.'

'I don't know how to swim. We can't go by boat,' said Subodh.

'Then hire a carriage,' Sri Ramakrishna urged.

'No, we shall go on foot,' Subodh insisted. Endearingly Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Look here, it will be difficult for you youngsters; it is quite difficult to walk such a long distance.'

Subodh was emphatic. He repeated that as they were quite energetic it would not be hard for them to walk this distance. Outspoken as he was, he argued further, 'Where will you get the money from?'

Sri Ramakrishna replied smilingly, 'You need not worry. There are many people to offer me money. I am asking Ramlal to

⁷ *ibid.*, loc. cit.

⁸ *Gospel*, p. 824: Sri Ramakrishna to 'M': 'I told them I was ill and asked them to go to you for instruction. Please look after them a little.' 'M': 'Yes, sir. They are our neighbours.'

⁶ Burman, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

give you some; hire a carriage.' As Subodh still did not agree, Sri Ramakrishna offered Kshirode the money. At Subodh's request Kshirode also declined to accept the offer. They saluted the Paramahansa who, in his sweet voice, reminded Subodh, 'Visit here; visit on Tuesdays and Saturdays.'⁹

Though there is no mention in available records, it can be safely presumed that the visitors went round the temples before they left hurriedly for Calcutta.

Despite all his apprehensions, however, Subodh ran away from school to Dakshine-

swar with his friend the next Saturday. Visit followed visit, and Subodh was drawn into the new world of spirituality so steadily yet imperceptibly that he hardly understood what was happening. Most of his deep-rooted attitudes were collapsing. A new life dawned on him. Subodh surrendered himself to his Master's loving care. The latter, too, like an affectionate mother watched the sprouting seeds of spirituality in Subodh, whom Swami Vivekananda and others affectionately called 'Khoka' (child).

Subsequently he renounced the worldly life and joined the Ramakrishna Order under the name of Swami Subodhananda.

⁹ Burman, op. cit., p. 336.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

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Reminiscences are taken from: 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947; Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Madras, 1952; and *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1964. References: *Gospel*: No. 1, p. 816; No. 2, p. 358; No. 3, p. 924; No. 4, p. 1005; No. 5, p. 511; No. 6, p. 305. *Great Master*: No. 7, p. 130; No. 9, p. 143. *Life*: No. 8, p. 69.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. VIII (1959), pp. 135-6.

Some of the most insightful statements that were ever uttered regarding the significance of the life, mission, and message of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, fell from the lips of Swami Vivekananda. A lion alone, not a fox, can grasp the strength of another lion. Swami Viveka-

nanda was a man of God, the anointed disciple of Sri Ramakrishna—the divine incarnation of his age—and so could reveal so well the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa had become a fact of experience both for his Guru and for himself. So he exhorted the youth of the country to worship the heroic Kṛṣṇa 'uttering forth the Lion-roar of the *Gītā*'. 'Let Pārthasārathi be our Sārathi (charioteer)', he declared at another time. The *Editorial* of the month is an attempt to study Śrī Kṛṣṇa as a spiritual phenomenon of profound power and significance. Incidentally we may remind our readers that Śrī Kṛṣṇa's birthday will be observed this month in and outside of this country.

In nature, no forward movement is seen to occur in a straight line and at a regular speed. Progress invariably is through undulating motions and at irregular speeds. This law seems to hold good also in the psychological and spiritual realms. No

scientific outlook becomes apparent from his rejection in his *Gurbani* of the myth that the earth was carried on the horns of a bull, and by his telling mankind that there were innumerable such earths, and solar systems, beyond our own. Guru Nanak's *Bani* is full of sermons which strike at the very root of conjectural myths, superstitions, and certain other aspects of mythology. He preferred the true and common-sense view of life which is compatible with the scientific findings and hypotheses of recent times. His religion is modern in outlook, is full of

optimism, based on equality, fraternity, and the ideal of freedom for mankind.

The relevance of Guru Nanak's teaching today lies in these ideals, with their universal approach and practical application. Let us endeavour to practise and follow them in order to reshape not only our own destinies and lives, but also those of everyone around us in this world of hypocrisy, strife, and self-aggrandizement. By thus following in his footsteps, let us reduce as far as possible the ever-increasing gap between what we profess and what we practise.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : TOTA PURI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

In his thirtieth year, Sri Ramakrishna, the 'mad priest' of Dakshineswar, had been having a respite in his arduous struggles for the conquest of the mysteries of the spiritual world, when one winter morning (January 1865)¹ he seated himself on the

steps of the bathing ghat which led to the roofed terrace, on either side of which stood in a row six temples of Śiva. East of the terrace was a large court, in the centre of which stood two temples, the larger dedicated to Kālī and the smaller to Rādhākānta. The Gaṅgā at his feet stretched north and south, offering to his view a rich scene with its adornments of villas, gardens, porticos, and brick terraces. Sri Ramakrishna sat there letting his gaze wander over the beautiful panorama, but not for long, for his mind—indrawn as it was—soon lost itself in the experience of bliss in which he found himself almost constantly in those days. Of medium height, slender almost to leanness, he wore a short untrimmed beard. His eyes were remarkably bright, but often half-closed in inwardness. In those days he was called

¹ About this date, Swami Saradananda gives the following hints (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1952):

(a) 'Tota Puri, the Paramahansa, came two or three months after the Master had had that vision [of Kṛṣṇa who merged in his person]—p. 242.

(b) 'Tota came to Dakshineswar probably by the end of 1865. A few months after it, Haladhari retired from his service ... and Akshay ... was appointed in his place.'—p. 249.

(c) 'Akshay ... was appointed in the Vishnu temple in A.D. 1865, a short time after the revered Acharya Tota Puri came there [Dakshineswar].—p. 282. And in his Bengali version, *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Līlāprasaṅga*, Vol. II, Appendix, p. 446: Bengali year 1271 (A.D. 1864-65), Totapuri's coming to Dakshineswar and Thākūr's [Sri Ramakrishna's] initiation into *sannyāsa*.'

Another authority Sashibhushan Ghosh has suggested Bengali year 1273 (A.D. 1866-67) as the year of Tota Puri's visit. (*Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-deva*, Udbodhan Office, 1917, p. 260)

The auspicious day for bathing at the estuary of the Gaṅgā was 'Pauṣ Saṅkrānti', which in Bengali year 1271, came in the middle of January 1865. Considering the circumstantial evidence we may conclude that the visit took place sometime in January 1865.

simply the 'mad priest' by most outsiders, 'junior Bhattacharya' by the employees of the temple, 'Gadadhar' by his elder relations and 'Ramakrishna' by a few.² He was not there long when his eyes fell on a new arrival, a wandering monk. The priest looked closely up at him.

The monk 'was very tall and robust with magnificent physique, resolute and indestructible—a rock with the profile of a lion'.³ Tota Puri,⁴ as he was called, was probably in his fifties. Against the background of his matted hair and long untrimmed beard, his impressive countenance was lit with the serene glow born of spiritual knowledge. Typical *paramahansa* (the highest order of monks) that he was, his only possessions were a pair of tongs, a brass water-pot, and a piece of skin to sit on.

As soon as Tota Puri's eyes fell on Sri Ramakrishna, he started with an expression of surprise and delight. He at once recognized in the latter a highly qualified spiritual aspirant. He felt drawn to this young priest. He went to him and said with abrupt directness, 'Ah, you seem to be well-qualified. Would you like to practise Vedāntic disciplines?' The other stood up, greeted him politely, and said, 'I know

nothing of what I should do or not; my Mother knows everything; I shall do as She commands.' The innocent simplicity of the young man charmed the ascetic, though a fleeting smile must have crossed his face. However, he readily said, 'All right, go and ask your mother. But come back quickly for I'll not stay here long.'

As Tota was soon to learn, Sri Ramakrishna depended entirely on Kālī, the Divine Mother, as a kitten on its mother. As his biographer aptly puts it:

'... the Master was not capable of taking the initiative in doing anything. The child of the divine Mother as the Master was, he now depended entirely and placed full reliance upon Her and felt highly delighted in being moved about and guided by Her any way at any time. The divine Mother, for Her part, took upon Herself all his responsibility and, with a view to accomplishing a particular purpose of Hers, cast him, without his knowledge, into quite a new mould.'⁵

He therefore went to the temple of Kālī to seek permission of the Mother.

Soon he reappeared, in a state of divine semi-consciousness, his face beaming with joy. His Mother had told him, 'Yes, learn from him; it was to teach you that the ascetic has come here.' He said to Tota Puri, 'Yes, Mother has asked me to learn Vedānta from you.'⁶ It took little time for the other to discover that his prospective disciple had gone to ask leave not of his human mother but of the Divine Mother enshrined in the temple. Staunch non-dualist that he was, Tota Puri must have felt amused. Though he considered such

² Swami Saradananda feels that Tota Puri gave Gadadhar the famous name of Ramakrishna when he initiated him into *sannyāsa* (*Great Master*, p. 254). Some others hold that Mathurnath Biswas was the first to use that name. Still others think it was the Bhairavi Brahmani. But a specific mention of Ramakrishna Bhattacharya as a priest of the Kālī temple in the trust deed executed by Rani Rasmani on 18 Feb. 1861, sets at rest the first and last of these three, at least. It is quite probable that his parents gave him the name.

³ Romain Rolland: *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1947), p. 62.

⁴ Sri Ramakrishna used to refer to his Guru, Tota Puri, as Nangta, perhaps because he remained naked (*nangta* in Bengali means 'naked'), or because he wanted to avoid referring to his guru by name (*Great Master*, p. 479).

⁵ *ibid.* p. 249. According to some other biographers Sri Ramakrishna himself felt the desire for practising non-dualism some time before Tota Puri appeared.

⁶ Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmākṛṣṇa-Carit* (Bengali) (Pub. by Kalinath Sinha, 13 Nikasipara Lane, Calcutta), p. 74.

faith in any god or goddess as mere superstition, the veteran teacher did not hurt the young man's feelings, for he was confident of ridding him of such odd ideas through the teachings of Advaita.

Before proceeding further in telling how the great spiritual heritage of India was transmitted from guru to disciple, we should take a look into the past of the two extraordinary personalities who met at Dakshineswar temple that day.

Born and brought up in a remote Bengal village, Sri Ramakrishna had been for over a decade already, a priest at this Dakshineswar Kālī Temple. Since childhood his longing for God-realization had grown into an all-consuming passion, leading to the vision of the Divine Mother, and soon complete God-intoxication. To outsiders he appeared a madman, giving up even the priest's duties in his endless search for God. But to a select few, notably his teacher the Bhairavi Brahmani, the young man was none other than an Incarnation of God. Under the Brahmani's tutelage he had successfully practised all the disciplines of the Tantras, then of Vaiṣṇavism, culminating in his resplendent vision of Kṛṣṇa, who merged in his person. He had manifested that great ecstatic love, the *mahābhāva*, and at the peak of his spiritual ascent had lost his own individuality and seen Śrī Kṛṣṇa in himself and in the whole universe. Thus attaining to such fulfilment of the worship of the Personal God, he now had heard the command of his supreme Guide, the Divine Mother, for the final assault on the citadel of the mystery of the Impersonal God.

While Sri Ramakrishna 'was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror turned both out and in'⁷, Tota Puri with his iron constitution, physical and mental, seemed 'void of emotions and

loves'.⁸ Though co-travellers in the pathways to God, the two had more striking dissimilarities than similarities in their personality make-up.

Born of a pious Hindu couple somewhere in the northwestern part of India, Tota (the name given him at birth) was sent to a monastery when he was a mere child. His parents, not having any offspring for some years, seem to have vowed to dedicate their first-born to the life of *sannyāsā*, as was the custom in that part of India.⁹ Accordingly the boy was given to the *mohanta* (abbot) of a large monastery, who was a renowned yogī. So widely had spread the abbot's fame that people used to hold an annual fair in his honour and present tobacco and other gifts to the monastic community.¹⁰

This community belonged to the 'Puri' denomination, one of the ten monastic orders established by *Śaṅkarācārya*. The members used to go absolutely naked and were hence called 'Naṅga' or 'Nāga' sādhus. The monastery, near Ludhiana in the Punjab, had a very austere discipline. Turning their backs on the world, the aspirants observed strict rules, including personal poverty and did hard manual work. From Tota Puri, Sri Ramakrishna learnt of the monastery and the training the aspirants received there:

'There were seven hundred naked spiritual aspirants... Those who were beginning to learn meditation were asked to do so on cushions; for they might feel an ache in their legs if they were to sit and meditate on hard seats, and their unaccustomed minds might come to think of their bodies instead of God. Then afterwards, the deeper their meditation became, the harder were the seats on which they had to sit. And at last they had to sit on pieces of skin only or on

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹ *Great Master*, p. 484.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 483.

⁷ Rolland, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

the bare ground to practise meditation. They were also made to observe strict rules regarding everything, viz., eating, drinking, etc. As regards their dress, the disciples were also made to practise gradually how to remain naked. As man is bound by eight fetters of shame, hatred, fear, egoism regarding one's birth, lineage, custom, pretentiousness and so on, they were taught to give them up one by one. Afterwards when they developed deep concentration of mind they had to go and travel from one place of pilgrimage to another, at first with other monks and later alone and then return. The naked sannyasins had such rules.¹¹

Thus, far from the worldly life, Tota was brought up under the affectionate care of all-renouncing monks. His qualities of head and heart drew the attention of the head of the community who began taking special care of him. His keen intellect¹² too helped him to master the scriptures in a short time. When he was found qualified he was initiated into the practice of non-dualism. Tota Puri, as he was called after formal initiation into monastic life, was submitted to strict rules of discipline having the sanction of age-long experience behind them.

'His mind assimilated his teacher's instruction and used always to carry it out in practice exactly according to his teaching. He does not seem to have suffered much from the deception and hypocrisy of his mind.... His simple mind reposed its trust in God sincerely and was going forward slowly along the path pointed out by his teacher to be trod

by him. While it was going forward it never cast behind a single covetous glance of ungratified wish, toward the sins and temptations of the world. This was why the saint came to the conviction that his individual effort, perseverance, self-reliance and self-confidence were all in all.'¹³

[During his subsequent years of wandering] 'He was merged in spiritual practices on the holy river Narmada, where he lived alone for a very long time and attained the immediate knowledge of Brahman along the path of Nirvikalpa samadhi. The old monks of that place bear witness to this fact even now.'¹⁴

Thus, forty years of hard discipline had brought him to the pinnacle of enlightenment. He however continued his life of rigorous discipline and spiritual practice,¹⁵ and in due course he succeeded his master as the head of the monastery.¹⁶

Nevertheless he still preferred the wandering life of an illumined soul. Free as the wind, he wandered over the country, teaching and encouraging Vedāntic discipline wherever he could find a sincere aspirant. One may think that Swami Vivekananda had such an ideal monk in view when he wrote:

'Have thou no home. What home can
hold thee, friend ?

¹³ *The Great Master*, pp. 484-5.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁵ 'Nangta used to say that a brass pot must be polished every day; otherwise it gets stained. One should constantly live in the company of holy men' (*The Gospel*, p. 670). 'It is the same with the mind [as with the brass pot]. Unless one brightens it daily with meditation, it becomes unclean' (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pub. by Advaita Ashrama, 1964, p. 194).

¹⁶ Recollecting Tota Puri's words, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'That one only who was found amongst the naked sannyasins to have attained the true state of Paramahansa was elected by all to the seat of the Mohanta of the community when it fell vacant. ... They placed that person alone on the Mohanta's seat from whose mind the attraction for gold was found to have really vanished and gave him the charge of money and other valuable property.' (*Great Master*, p. 484).

¹¹ *loc. cit.*

¹² Sri Ramakrishna regarded highly Tota Puri's intellect. Regarding the younger Naren, Sri Ramakrishna one day said, 'What a subtle mind he has! Nangta also could understand things that way, in a flash—the meaning of the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, and other scriptures' ('M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947), p. 717.

The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed,
and food
What chance may bring; well cooked
or ill, judge not.
No food or drink can taint that noble
Self
Which knows Itself. Like rolling
river free
Thou ever be, Sannyasin bold!...¹⁷

Now the itinerant monk in course of a pilgrimage to the estuary of the Gaṅgā for a holy bath as well as visit to the temple of Jagannath at Puri, happened to come to the Dakshineswar temple on his way.¹⁸ No doubt he had come the whole way on foot, and arriving at the Temple garden he went first to the portico of the bathing ghat where he came across the extraordinary young man sitting on its steps.

As was his custom Tota Puri never rested under a roof. He passed the nights always under a tree or the blue canopy of the sky, alike in storm and sunshine, never, during these wandering days, remaining more than three days in any place. He settled himself, quite likely at Sri Ramakrishna's suggestion, under the shade of the Panchavati, and lit the sacred fire (*dhuni*). Sri Ramakrishna's description gives us a glimpse of the daily life of Tota Puri there:

"This is why at Dakshineswar, the "naked one" had his seat under the Panchavati where he resided and kept a Dhuni lighted near him. His Dhuni burnt uniformly in rain or shine. It was near the Dhuni that the "naked one" took his food and rest. When again, forgetting all worries and anxieties the whole of the external world lay happily at the dead of night in the arms of the rest-giving sleep like a child in its mother's lap, the "naked one" would get up and make the Dhuni brighter; he

would then sit down in his posture steady and firm like the mount Sumeru and merge his mind in samadhi, restful like the motionless flame of a lamp in a windless place. In day-time also Sri Tota meditated most of the time; but he did it in a way that people could not know it. This is why he was very often seen to be lying at full length like a corpse with his body covered from head to foot with his wearing wrapper. The people thought he was sleeping."¹⁹

After Tota Puri settled himself under the Panchavati, the two great souls began discursing upon various sacred matters, veiled and mysterious as they are, in that calm and serene atmosphere. Tota Puri initiated preliminary discussions with his new-found disciple. Among other things he discussed the preparations to be made for initiation into the mysteries of Advaita Vedānta. The disciple had to be formally initiated into monastic life. Sri Ramakrishna readily agreed to renounce the world. It was then pointed out that he had to give up his sacred thread and tuft of hair, and to perform the *śrāddha* and other similar ceremonies. Sri Ramakrishna hesitated a little, but finally agreed, with the stipulation that these ceremonies should take place in secret, to spare the worries and anxieties of his old mother, Chandramani Devi, who was living with him at Dakshineswar. The teacher seemed to appreciate this sentiment, for he at once said, 'Very well, I will initiate you in private when the auspicious moment comes.'

All talks between master and disciple were no doubt held in Hindi, the only medium of communication between the two. It is almost certain that in this very first talk, Tota Puri introduced his favourite subject, the fundamental tenets of the Advaita. In later days Sri Ramakrishna would often quote some of these:

'I learnt Vedānta from Nangta:
"Brahman alone is real; the world is

¹⁷ *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama), Vol. IV (1962), p. 395.

¹⁸ According to Gurudas Burman (loc. cit.) Tota Puri visited Dakshineswar on his way to the estuary of the Gaṅgā. But Swami Saradananda (op. cit., p. 250) states that it was on Tota Puri's return journey from that holy place.

¹⁹ *Great Master*, pp. 479-80.

illusory.”’

‘Nangta used to say, “The world exists in mind alone and disappears in mind alone.”’

‘Nangta used to say that the mind merges in the buddhi, and the buddhi in Bodha, consciousness.’

‘Nangta used to instruct me about the nature of Satchidananda Brahman. He would say that It is like an infinite ocean—water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when It becomes active. Its activities are creation, preservation, and destruction. Again he used to say that Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt—not even a trace of ash.’²⁰

Tota Puri sometimes introduced parables to drive home his point of view. He narrated often the story of the tigress and the herd of goats, a parable which later became a favourite with Sri Ramakrishna. One may wonder what was Sri Ramakrishna’s contribution in such dialogues. It can be inferred that his childlike nature prompted him to lay bare his own life and experiences to the teacher whom he had accepted as guru. When he learnt that the disciple was already married, Tota Puri reassured him saying, ‘What does it matter? He only may be regarded as really established in Brahman whose renunciation, detachment, discrimination and knowledge remain intact in all respects in spite of his wife being with him....’²¹ Thus the preceptor prepared the background for the understanding of the Advaitic doctrines.

On the appointed day, long before day-break,²² the disciple observed the preliminary rites and the *virajā-homa* before the

sacred fire and received from the guru the *kaupīna* (loin-cloth) and ochre cloths, the emblems of the life of renunciation. Then they repaired to the thatched cottage beneath the Panchavati. Here, under the direction of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna withdrew his mind from all sense objects and tried to plunge it into contemplation of the Absolute. The only obstacle in the way of reaching the unconditioned state was the radiant figure of the Divine Mother. However, assisted by the guru’s forceful instruction and through firm discrimination his spirit crossed beyond the multiplicity of relative existence and finally lost itself in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. When this *samādhi* continued for three long days, Tota Puri became dumbfounded by the comparison with his own strenuous efforts of forty years to achieve such a state. But there was something more for him to marvel at, as the days passed. As with other gurus of his, Sri Ramakrishna was soon to begin correcting Tota Puri’s deficiencies in spiritual life. And Tota Puri, having come with the announced intention of staying not over three days, actually remained at Dakshineswar for eleven months. During that time he passed through a series of events which helped him right some of his wrong ideas. Sri Ramakrishna later summed up the transformation thus:

‘Nangta had attained *Brahmajnana* through discrimination saying “not this, not this”, in the Vedantic way. Nangta would not however accept *Sakti* (Power) of Brahman as a reality. He would say that *Sakti* of Brahman was an illusion (*maya*), and was unreal (*mithya*), and with this idea he would trifle with *Sakti*. But during his eleven months’ stay here Mother Kali taught him the truth of non-duality, namely that Brahman and *maya-sakti* are identical. Likewise Brahman and *Sakti* are identical.’²³

(Continued on p. 440)

²⁰ *Gospel*: pp. 240; 952; 381; 304 (in that order).

²¹ *Great Master*, p. 270.

²² Swami Saradananda (op. cit., p. 252) strongly implies that Sri Ramakrishna’s initiation into *sannyāsa* (monastic vows) took place very shortly after Tota Puri’s coming to Dakshineswar.

²³ *The Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda* (Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta) Vol. X, p. 640.

qualified refugee teachers supervised by a monastic member of the Order who was a qualified Headmaster. In both Camps, the mission conducted various celebrations and social functions, as well as daily prayer and *kirtana*, etc. Extensive distribution of clothing and blankets was also done.

In the 'Tura sector', similar work was done in one large Camp with 8,790 refugees. A Dispensary was maintained at the camp-site, with two qualified residential doctors, plus a Homoeopathic section; 57,099 cases were treated in all. Milk powder totalling 3,125 kg. was distributed, with 499 kg. sugar, 997 kg. Baby food; 72.6 kg.

Barley, and 6.9 kg. of glucose. Educational activities included supplying 350 textbooks to a primary school in this camp, plus the appropriate celebrations, and daily prayer and *kirtana*, etc. Distribution of clothing and blankets was also on large scale.

This Relief work received extensive help and support from the Ramakrishna Mission of Bombay and the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama in Ranchi. From Ranchi also, twelve trainees of the 'Divyayan' (residential institute under that Ashrama, for training Adivasi youths) served as volunteers in the above-noted Camps.

(Continued from p. 432)

And as to his own role in this lesson:

Once I fell into the clutches of a Jnani (Tota Puri) who made me listen to Vedanta for eleven months. But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Whenever I sang of Her, Nangta would weep and say, "Ah! What is this?" You see, he was such a great janani and still he wept.²⁴

The wisdom of his protégé impressed the

preceptor so much that the latter began addressing him as Paramahansa²⁵ and this name became very popular later on. Thus peace and tranquillity settled on Tota Puri's mind and he finally left Dakshineswar to complete his pilgrimage. Sri Ramakrishna never heard further news of him; but later on, some of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples wandering in north-west India, learned many details in connection with Tota Puri's greatness.

²⁴ Gospel, p. 760.

²⁵ Gurudas Burman : op. cit., p. 76.

Bergson'.

Born a Jew, Bergson later on came to see in the Catholic Church the most authentic expression of the Semitic tradition. Since he was resolved to remain faithful to his Jewish brethren menaced by Hitlerism, Bergson did not formally convert himself to the Catholic tradition. Perhaps his philosophy of nature aimed at a reconciliation of the theory of evolution with the Catholic theology. It is true that his understanding of evolution lays stress upon the immutability of the species and makes room for the theory of special creation. As it is, Bergson, not unlike Teilhard de Chardin, remained suspect in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy and his writings came near to being placed on the Index. Thoroughly steeped in the Scholastic tradition as

he was, J. Maritain, *La philosophie bergsonienne* (M. Rivière, Paris, 1930) is scathing in his renewed denunciation of Bergsonism. Maritain, however, concedes that the Bergsonian theory 'is the only possible metaphysics' of evolution (ibid., p. 336). Contrary to Maritain, Jean Guittou, an influential member of l'Académie française, in his *La vocation de Bergson* (Gallimard, Paris, 1960), is profoundly impressed by Bergson's sympathies for the Catholic doctrine. F. Delattre, *Feux d'automne* (Didier, Paris, 1950), p. 213 sees in Bergson a renewal of rapport with religion, a reintegration of mysticism in philosophy. Some of the reminiscences of G. Maïre, *Bergson, mon maître* (Grasset, Paris, 1935) seem to attest to the growing influence of religion upon Bergson.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: KESHAB CHANDRA SEN

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

While he himself was busy in finishing the exploration of the vast expanse of spirituality, Sri Ramakrishna, the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, as he was known in those days, was always eager to see great places and meet great men who had excelled in something or other. It became almost a passion with him. He reasoned, 'According to the *Gītā* there is the power of God in one who is respected and honoured by many.' Word reached him that Brahmos (members of the Brahmo Samaj) like Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), his young lieutenant Keshab Chandra Sen, and others prayed to God fervently. He persuaded his disciple Mathuranath Biswas to take him one day, very probably during the annual Brahmo festival in January 1864, to the Brahmo Samaj at Jorasanko. Later he recollected his experience:

'Many years back I had been on one Wednesday to the Brahmo Samaj at Jorasanko. I saw at that time young

Keshab in the pulpit conducting the service and hundreds of worshippers sitting on either side of him. I looked intently and saw that Keshab's mind was absorbed in the Brahman, his float had sunk. From that day my mind became attached to him. The rest in the congregation I found were, as it were, sitting with weapons. Seeing their faces I found that in their mind the attachment for the world, egotism, and passions were very strong.'¹

Keshab was then only twenty-six and belonged to the still undivided Brahmo Samaj.

Beginning in 1828 under the leadership of Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), the Brahmo Samaj movement gained its momentum soon after Devendranath Tagore, Ram-

¹ Girish Chandra Sen, 'Ramakrishna Paramahansa', *Prabuddha Bharata* (hereafter referred to as 'P.B.'), Feb. 1936, p. 90. Similar accounts by Sri Ramakrishna himself are on record; e.g., vide *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, by 'M' (tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947), p. 727

mohan's second successor, took its charge.² Nevertheless, with the quiet entry of Keshab Chandra Sen in 1857 dawned a new era for the movement, with a promise for great possibilities as well as danger of dissensions. Lack of homogeneous ideological identification among the members was less apparent in the beginning, nevertheless it was there. Keshab's formal installation as Ācārya (a preacher) of the Brahmo Samaj on 13 April 1862, brought into the open the currents that were already swirling beneath the surface. While Keshab's charismatic personality drew around him a number of earnest spirits, mostly of his own age, his innovations clashed repeatedly with the traditional outlook of the Samaj and they finally brought a serious fissure, which widened with the passage of time. Devendranath continued to lead the orthodox group under the name of the Adi Brahmo Samaj and Keshab and his youthful friends seceded to found the Brahmo Samaj of India in November 1866.

Born of Peary Charan Sen and Sarasundari Devi in 1838, Keshab had lost his father when quite young. His family-members were zealous worshippers of Kṛṣṇa. He was educated at the Presidency College and his intellectual training there proved fatal to this faith. Christ had touched his heart and this contact kept nudging him towards Christianity. As an undeclared champion of Christ he brought new elements into the Brahmo movement and this gave rise to much confusion among the rank and file, and also led to dissensions. 'The Adi Brahmo Samaj stuck to the traditions of old Hinduism, and gave itself out as a reforming body of Hindus, whereas the Brahmo Samaj of India professed broad and catho-

lic views, and began to cultivate special communion with the spirit of Christ and Christianity.'³ In 1870 Keshab went to England and impressed the English people with his oratory and his spiritual fervour. On his return he organized social reforms. Units of the Brahmo Samaj were founded in various parts of the country. In 1872 was started a novel institution, 'Bharat Ashrama', where Keshab, his missionaries and a number of leading Brahmos resided with their families. Keshab wanted to lead the community to higher planes of spiritual and moral excellence and exhorted that every worldly relation of the community should be submersed in religious fellowship. Though a noble concept, nevertheless the institution soon developed internal struggles and a disillusioned Keshab retired for some time to the garden house of Jaygopal Sen at Belgharia, a few miles north of Calcutta.

From the year 1876, the Brahmo Samaj of India in its turn was internally divided into two factions, one led by Keshab and his followers and the other consisting of younger members who wanted to introduce constitutional modes of Church government. The latter founded the 'Sadharan Brahmo Samaj' in May 1878 while the former emerged as the 'New Dispensation' in January 1880.

A stoical self-denying rigour formed the backbone of Keshab's genius. He had enforced it upon himself and he wanted to enforce it upon others. Thus in the garden house, Keshab with his intimate followers spent the days in devotions, scripture-reading, meditation, and conversation on esoteric subjects. He began to cook his food under a tree and take it in the open and observe strict rules of discipline for attaining self-mastery and detachment.

While the Brahmo movement launched

² For a concise, appreciative study of the great leaders of the Brahmos, see Romain Rolland: *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1947), Chapter VI ('The Builders of Unity')

³ Sivnath Sastri: *The Brahmo Samaj* (Abridged), (Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1958), p. 34

social reforms and aroused religious fervour among people of the then capital of India, the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar quietly built up a spiritual tower which radiated waves of spiritual power and faith among all, irrespective of caste and creed, age and sex.

Around 1875 Sri Ramakrishna was seized with a strong desire to meet Keshab Chandra Sen who had then become the most prominent Indian socio-religious leader. Depending as he did always on the Divine Mother, he one day received in a divine ecstatic state promptings that he should meet Keshab. 'He heard from the lips of the Divine Mother that Keshab will assist Her work.'⁴ As he was musing over the idea Sri Ramakrishna saw a vision, which he described later:

'I had seen Keshab before I actually met him—I had seen him and his party in my *samadhi*. In front of me sat a roomful of men. Keshab looked like a peacock sitting with its tail spread out. The tail meant his followers. I saw a red gem on Keshab's head. That indicated his *rajas*. He said to his disciples, "Please listen to what he (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) is saying." I said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, these people hold the views of 'Englishmen'. Why should I talk to them?" Then the Mother explained to me that it would be like this in the *Kaliyuga*. Keshab and his followers got from here the names of Hari and the Divine Mother.'⁵

Thus Sri Ramakrishna sent one of his devotees, Narayan Sastri, to call on Keshab. As the Master recounted the events of that visit:

'Before meeting Keshab, I asked Narayan Sastri to visit him and tell me what he thought of him. Narayan reported

that Keshab was an adept in japa. He knew astrology and remarked that Keshab had been born under a good star. Then I went to visit Keshab in the garden house at Belgharia.'⁶

On the morning of 14 March 1875,⁷ Sri Ramakrishna in the company of his nephew and attendant Hridayram Mukherjee went to the Colootola residence⁸ of Keshab, but came to know that he was just then staying in the garden house at Belgharia.⁹ So he returned to Dakshineswar, and again next morning, in the company of Hridayram, set off in an old hackney carri-

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 448. Sri Ramakrishna added that a few days after their first meeting, Keshab sent three members of the Samaj to Dakshineswar to test him. Prasanna was one. They were asked to watch him day and night and report to Keshab. 'They constantly uttered the word "Dayamaya" [The Compassionate One, a favourite Brahmo term for God] and said to me: "Follow Keshab Babu. That will do you good." I said, "I believe in God with form." Still they went on with their exclamations of "Dayamaya!" Then a strange mood came over me. I said to them, "Get out of here." I didn't allow them to spend the night in my room. So they slept on the veranda.

⁷ Upadhyaya, Gour Govinda Roy: *Ācārya Keshabchandra* (Bengali), p. 1041. Ramachandra Dutta's statement (*vide Sri-Sri Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvanvṛttanta*, (Bengali), Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Calcutta 54, 7th edn.), p. 60, and an account in the *Dharmatattva*, claiming that the meeting occurred in 1872, are not tenable. Among others giving the 1875 date are: *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 268; Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Madras Math, 1952), p. 315; and several articles in the *P.B.* for February 1936.

⁸ It was not till October 1877 that Keshab moved from this address to the Lily Cottage at 72, Upper Circular Road, Calcutta.

⁹ Sevak Priyanath Mallik: 'Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa', *P.B.*, Feb., 1936, p. 93 — 'In 1875 he [Sri Ramakrishna] went to Keshab's house at Colootola, and not finding him at home went to the Belgharia Garden where Keshab was then engaged in *sadhana* (spiritual culture) with his friends. This garden was named by Keshab, *Tapovana*.'

⁴ Chiranjib Sharma (also known as Trailokyanath Sanyal): *Keshab-carit*. (Bengali) 3rd edn., 1897, p. 249

⁵ *The Gospel*, p. 815

age¹⁰ for Belgharia. Before entering the carriage he had gone into an ecstatic mood. He was heard muttering, 'Mother, will You go? Will You go to see Keshab?' Such questions were repeated several times, and they were followed by his answer, 'Yes, I shall.' This mood of his persisted even when inside the carriage. Finally they reached Jaygopal Sen's garden house some-time around nine o'clock in the morning.¹¹

Hridayram got out, went inside the garden house and said to Keshab: 'My maternal uncle is fond of songs and discourses on Hari. When he hears them he often enters into *samādhi*. He has heard that you are a great devotee, and he has come to hear you talking about God and His glories. With your kind permission, I'll bring him here.' Keshab of course consented.

Hridayram helped Sri Ramakrishna out of the carriage and led him into the garden. They went first to the garden pond, where they washed their hands and feet at its southwestern bathing ghat. Morning service over, Keshab and his companions (minis-

ters of the Samaj) were seated on the steps of the large bathing ghat on the eastern side. They were preparing for bath. Their attention was now drawn to Sri Ramakrishna, aged about forty, thin almost to emaciation, with a short untrimmed beard and uncared-for hair. He had dressed himself in only a single piece of red-bordered cloth, one end of which, tucked in folds, was hanging over his left shoulder. He had neither a shirt nor a *caddar* to cover his body. He was barefooted. Hridayram, hefty and tall, stood as a striking contrast by his side.

Arriving there, Sri Ramakrishna, as was his wont, humbly bowed low to Keshab and others present. It seems neither Keshab nor his companions returned the salute.¹² However, they offered the visitors carpets to sit on. Evidently Keshab and his friends regarded them cautiously and took Sri Ramakrishna for an ordinary man.¹³

¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna in all probability did not ride in Viswanath Upadhyaya's carriage as stated by Swami Saradananda (loc. cit.). We should remember that the staunch Hindu Viswanath was strongly antagonistic to the Europeanized Keshab, and it is not likely that Sri Ramakrishna would use his carriage for such a visit! The Brahmo leaders who saw Ramakrishna on this occasion recorded that he had travelled in a third-rate hackney carriage. (cf. *P.B.*, Feb. 1936, p. 89.)

¹¹ Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-carit* (Pub. by Kalinath Sinha, 13 Nikasipara Lane, Calcutta, 1st. ed.), pp. 148-9. He mentions arrival at '3 p.m.'; Swami Saradananda (loc. cit.) says '1 p.m.' But their common source was Hridayram; whereas Akshay Kumar Sen said '11 a.m.', and the Brahmo leaders Girish Chandra Sen (*P.B.*, Feb. 1936, p. 89), Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Upadhyaya Gour Govinda Roy, etc., who were present, recorded 'nine o'clock in the morning' or even earlier. Circumstantial evidence corroborates this view (bath, etc.)

¹² Mahendranath Dutta in his *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Anudhyāna* (Bengali) tells us that greeting with deep bowing, etc., was not much in vogue in Calcutta then. Sri Ramakrishna himself narrates his experience of a subsequent visit to Keshab: 'I visited him at his house in Colootola Street. Hriday was with me. We were shown into the room where Keshab was working... But he didn't salute us or show us respect in any other way. He used to come here now and then... As soon as he and his friends would arrive, I would salute them before they bowed to me. Thus they gradually learnt to salute a holy man, touching the ground with their foreheads.' (*Gospel*, p. 384)

¹³ Pratap Chandra Majumdar: *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, 1887, p. 357: 'There came one morning... a disorderly looking young man, insufficiently clad and with manners less than insufficient... His appearance was so unpretending and simple, and he spoke so little at his introduction that we did not take much notice of him at first. But soon he began to discourse in a sort of half-delirious state, becoming now and then quite unconscious. What he said, however, was so profound and beautiful that we soon perceived he was no

Sri Ramakrishna spoke, with a very slight but endearing stammer in rustic Bengali: 'Is it true, gentlemen, that you have the vision of God? I have a desire to know what it's like. That's why I have come to see you.' Keshab's reply, if any, is not available. After some talk, the visitor burst forth in his melodious voice with a well-known song of Rāmprāsād:

'Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is?

Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.

It is She, the scriptures say, that is the Inner Self

Of the yogi, who in Self discovers all his joy;

She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits every living thing....'

Before the audience could grasp the import of the song, the singer became so much immersed in the divine spirit as to lose all perception, of the external world. He entered into *samādhi*. His whole body relaxed and then became slightly rigid. Both his hands lay on his lap with the fingers loosely interlocked. 'Tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then flashes of smile crossed his face.'¹⁴ He sat motionless, with eyes unmoving. So oblivious was he of the outer world that he seemed not even to breathe. His hair stood on end. It was an extraordinary sight to the on-lookers but they did not regard this state of ecstasy as more than a mere feigning, or something resulting from nervous debility, or perhaps as some magical feat. Presently Hridayram loudly chanted the sacred syllable *aum* into his uncle's ears, and asked the others to join him. As requested, all those present joined in the chanting, and as this created an intense spiritual atmosphere, it helped the Paramahansa return gradually to the world of sense. He, with

ordinary man.' Compare also: Swami Saradananda, loc. cit.

¹⁴ Roy, op. cit., p. 1043

an extraordinarily sweet smile, began to speak, at first in a semi-conscious state, but always in homely and impressive language using metaphors and illustrations taken from life, which held his listeners' attention and stimulated their imagination, convincing them that 'Ramakrishna was a divine person and not an ordinary man'.¹⁵ His words as well as mode of expression cast a spell over his audience.

From this point on, Sri Ramakrishna did most of the talking and the others heard him with reverence.¹⁶ With traces of divine inebriation still lingering, he said:

'Listen to a story. 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 a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: "When I went into the wood, I also saw the 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

¹⁵ Girish Ch. Sen, loc. cit.

¹⁶ Sen, op. cit., p. 91: 'Keshab...used to sit by the side of this illiterate Paramahansa like a disciple, like a younger brother, in all humility and hear his teachings with reverence (*Shraddha*) and appreciation. He never used to argue with him. He would assimilate well and adopt in his own life all the valuable things in the Paramahansa.'

Priyanath Mallik, op. cit., p. 94: 'At such meetings Sri Ramakrishna almost monopolized the conversation. Keshab Chunder hardly said anything. He only expressed his appreciation by smiles and nods.'

no colour at all. Now it has 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.... It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument.' ¹⁷

Sri Ramakrishna held each religion and creed to represent a step in the soul's progress towards the highest spiritual attainments. He continued:

'One can rightly speak of God only after one has seen Him. He who has seen God knows really and truly that God has form and that He is formless as well. He has many other aspects that cannot be described.

'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 one aspect of God limits God to that alone. It is his conviction that God cannot be anything else.' ¹⁸

With their attention riveted on the smiling face of the speaker, the Brahmo preachers felt in their heart of hearts how futile it was to try to measure God or His infinite glories. Sri Ramakrishna continued:

'Once an ant went to a hill of sugar. It took one grain of sugar, and that was

enough to fill its stomach. It did not have the capacity to swallow another grain. Similarly, who can master completely the knowledge about God? Besides none can comprehend Him without His grace.' ¹⁹

As time slipped by, the Brahmos eagerly drank in the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words. Though not all of them could have comprehended the import of all his sayings, yet they sat listening with rapt attention, gazing at him enthralled.²⁰ Then Sri Ramakrishna's eyes fell on Keshab and he said, 'Have you seen a custard apple made of pith?'

'Yes, sir.'

'As such a custard apple reminds one of a real custard apple, so the clay image of Kālī reminds a devotee of Her—the real blissful Divine Mother.' ²¹ Now drawing Keshab's attention to the spiritual life he said:

'In the beginning of spiritual practices there is much preparation; these activities, however, subside slowly. *Luchis*,²² when put into hot *ghee* (clarified butter), at first crackle, which noise however dies down as they become cooked. Similarly knowledge when ripe sheds its exterior signs and symbols. These are associated with unripe knowledge.'²³

¹⁹ Burman: op. cit., p. 151; compare: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 270

²⁰ Compare Rolland (op. cit., pp. 175-6) regarding his general effect on the Brahmos: 'It was above all his living certitude that impressed the onlookers;...as he spoke he lost himself in God, like a bather who dives and reappears dripping after a moment, bringing with him the smell of seaweed, the taste of the salt of the Ocean. Who can rid himself of its tang?... The greatest sceptic can touch the diver as he returns from the depths of the Dream, and catch some reflection of submarine flora in his eyes. Keshab and several of his disciples were intoxicated with it.'

²¹ Burman: op. cit., pp. 151-2

²² A popular dish in Bengal: a flat cake made of wheat flour and fried in *ghee*.

²³ Roy: op. cit., p. 1043

¹⁷ Burman (op. cit., p. 150) relates the gist of this story as told by Sri Ramakrishna at this point; the text however is quoted from *The Gospel*, p. 79. The same is true of fn. 18; and in fn. 24 similarly, inasmuch as Sri Ramakrishna told these and other stories to different persons throughout the years.

¹⁸ Burman: pp. 150-1; *The Gospel*, p. 125

'...there are two kinds of aspirants. The nature of the one kind is like that of the young monkey, and the nature of the other kind is like that of the kitten. The young monkey, with great exertion, somehow clings to its mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who think that in order to realize God they must repeat His name a certain number of times, meditate on Him for a certain period, and practise a certain amount of austerity. An aspirant of this kind makes his own efforts to catch hold of God. But the kitten, of itself, cannot cling to its mother. It lies on the ground and cries, "Mew, mew!" It leaves everything to its mother. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed, sometimes on the roof behind a pile of wood. She carries the kitten in her mouth hither and thither. The kitten does not know how to cling to the mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who cannot practise spiritual discipline by calculating about *japa* or the period of meditation. All that they do is cry to God with yearning hearts. God hears their cry and cannot keep Himself away. He reveals Himself to them.'²⁴

The spellbound listeners were unaware that the time for the noon meal had long since passed by. The Saint's words of infinite sympathy and deep understanding made his listeners feel that he was their own, as if a close relation. Appreciating the change in their attitude Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'If any other animal comes to a herd of cattle, they'll turn on it and attack it with their horns. But, if another cow joins the herd they welcome it as one of themselves and lick its body. That is what has happened to us today.' Those present burst into laughter but everyone felt the truth of it.

Sri Ramakrishna prepared to take leave of Keshab and others. He got up. Pointing to Keshab he said, 'He is the only one who

has dropped his tail.' Those present laughed loudly although most took the remark as rather uncomplimentary. Keshab was quick to interfere: 'Don't laugh. There must be some meaning in his words. Let us ask him.' Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna with a smile, went on to explain his remark:

'The tadpole, so long as it has not dropped its tail, lives only in the water. It cannot move about on dry land. But as soon as it drops its tail it hops out on the bank; then it can live both on land and in water. Likewise, as long as a man has not dropped his tail of ignorance, he can live only in the water of the world. But when he drops his tail, that is to say, when he attains the Knowledge of God, then he can roam about as a free soul, or live as a householder if he likes.'²⁵

'Your mind, O Keshab, has now attained that state in which you can live in the world as also in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.'²⁶ The light-hearted attitude of the listeners gave way to sombre thought. They were wonderstruck and felt elated at such a revelation about their leader.

Thus after nearly four hours of inspiring talk, Sri Ramakrishna bade Keshab good-bye and re-entered the carriage for Dakshineswar, leaving his new acquaintances, particularly Keshab, to ponder over the mellifluous words that had flowed forth from the saint's heart. Ever blazing as Sri Ramakrishna was with the fire of divine love and wisdom, he could very readily kindle the flame of faith and devotion in the hearts of sincere listeners.

Keshab soon began writing in his newspapers about the wonderful discovery he had made,²⁷ and before long returned

²⁵ *vide The Gospel*, p. 619. This part of the talk was recorded by many others present.

²⁶ Saradananda: *op. cit.*, p. 316

²⁷ For example: *Indian Mirror*, 28 March 1875: 'We met one (sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration, and simplicity of his spirit. The never-

²⁴ *Dharmatattva*, 14 May 1875; *The Gospel*, p. 315

Sri Ramakrishna's visit. Thus came together two 'opposite' types of minds—the great intellectual and 'Anglophile' Keshab, and the God-intoxicated Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. From this resulted a new impetus to the spiritual renaissance of the nineteenth century. Their relationship was intimate, affectionate, and lasting. So deeply attracted to each other did they become that they could hardly stay apart for more than a few weeks at a time. Sometimes Keshab would come to Dakshineswar; sometimes he would invite Sri Ramakrishna to his house in Calcutta; whenever convenient on such visits he would have him talk to his congregations; occasionally he would take Sri Ramakrishna for outings, such as a steamer-cruise on the Ganges. He spoke often of Sri Ramakrishna, in his sermons, his books, his writings in journals; and thus introduced the Saint of Dakshineswar to the intellectual middleclass of Bengal and beyond.²⁸ On the other hand, Sri Ramakrishna's love and longing for Keshab were touching and deep. As he once told Keshab:

'Whenever I hear that you are ill I become extremely restless. After hearing of your last illness I used to weep to the Divine Mother in the small hours of the morning. I prayed to Her. "O Mother, if anything happens to Keshab, with whom then shall I talk in Calcutta?"

ceasing metaphors and analogies, in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are the very opposite to those of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati, the former being so gentle, tender, and contemplative, as the latter is sturdy, masculine, and polemical. Hinduism must have in it a deep sense of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.'

²⁸ Bhudhar Chatterjee, editor of the monthly *Veda Vyasa* (in *P.B.*, Feb. 1936, p. 97): 'And afterwards it was Keshab Babu that became the chief helper in his (Ramakrishna's) preaching work and gradually extended the sphere of his activity.'

Coming to Calcutta, I offered fruits and sweets to the Divine Mother with a prayer for your well-being.'²⁹

Keshab had at least once declared, justifiably: 'If I am not a prophet I am a singular man. I am not as ordinary men are, and I say this deliberately.'³⁰ Yet he had great humility: Sri Ramakrishna's influence penetrated deep into his heart and extended his mental horizon. Sri Ramakrishna's was a personality that could not but alter, enrich and illuminate the texture of others' thought. Some have repudiated the view concerning the New Dispensation of Keshab's, formally heralded in January 1880, that 'it appears probable that it was a partial acceptance and propagation of the Master's [Sri Ramakrishna's] final conclusion regarding the true nature of all religions'.³¹ They argue that the germ of the New Dispensation could be traced to Keshab's works³² before he met Sri Ramakrishna. But who could deny the benign influence on, and the strong stimulant to, the Brahmos, which Sri Ramakrishna was? Certainly not a sensitive spiritual recipient like Keshab, who adored Sri Ramakrishna. The entry of the latter's spirit into the life of Keshab, and its workings, were imperceptible; but the result proved to be mighty. Very aptly have two of Keshab's staunch supporters observed:

'Paramahansa's simplicity, sweet child-like faith and devotion influenced Keshab's yoga, dispassion, ethics, devotion, and pure religious ideas.'³³ Acharya Deva [Keshab] learnt from him to a greater extent to address God
(Continued on p. 139)

²⁹ *The Gospel*, pp. 266-7

³⁰ Shivanath Sastri: *History of Brahmo Samaj*, Vol. II, p. 103

³¹ Saradananda: *op. cit.*, p. 318

³² Among others, his lecture 'Behold the Light of Heaven in India', 23 Jan., 1875. A careful summary of this controversy is given in Rolland, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-9.

³³ Sharma: *op. cit.*, p. 247

deteriorated, although something lived on, on the basis of the old prestige and glory. At last the congregation was dissolved in 1790, and the French Revolution demolished the traces. The power of Christ that had radiated from this centre withdrew as it were. Yet even today the signs of the past glory are evident there.

Can the power of God ever disappear like that? No. He may withdraw it in unsuitable circumstances. But He has His

own way of fulfilling His plans. Now again the time seems to be ripe for a spiritual resurgence. The spirit of the time demands it. Not far from the ruins of Cluny, at Taizé the power of Christ is re-manifesting. Perhaps one needs an eye of faith to see it. But anyone can see that something is happening: happening for the good of humanity.

—SWAMI BHAVYANANDA

(Continued from p. 134)

with the sweet appellation of Mother like a simple child, to pray to Her and crave indulgences like a child. In spite of the devotional aspect in it the Brahmo religion was more a religion of faith and rationalism. Due to the influence of Paramahansa's life it became sweet to a great extent.³⁴

We may quote another authority, J. N. Farquhar, who was not directly connected with either person. He wrote:

'The truth is that he [Keshab] was dazzled with the glitter of Ramakrishna's idea of the harmony of all religions;

and having once accepted the thought, he proceeded, in confidence in it, to attempt to hold in his own mind, at the same moment, the essential principles of Hinduism, the Christian doctrine of Trinity, and his own old theism.'³⁵

Unable though we are to measure the influences these two great personalities exerted on each other, we cannot however fail to appreciate the import of the fusion of the two mighty thought currents for guiding humanity towards peace and progress.

³⁵ J. N. Farquhar: *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Macmillan Co., 1915), p. 64

³⁴ Sen: op. cit., p. 90

'Arise, awake, and stop not till the Goal is reached.'

*

Where then comes the need for divine grace? Divine grace is not something new or strange. We all have contact with the Divine in an unconscious way and Its grace is shaping our spiritual destiny all the while. Only we do not realize it. Spiritual striving and hunger of the soul are themselves marks of divine grace. Human birth itself is not accidental. We should have a wider concept of divine grace if we wish to avoid the conflict between grace and self-effort. All forms of spiritual striving and longing for the higher life are the result of an impulse that comes straight from the Divine, which passes through the human being and goes back to the Divine, completing a circle.

Ordinarily this natural flow of grace seems to be slow. But if the aspirant is ready or strives with tremendous earnestness, sudden and powerful ingresses of grace can take place. Such sudden upsur-

ges are, however, rare. Self-surrender is an essential pre-condition for the inflow of grace. But real surrender is not possible for one who is full of worldly desires, whose body and mind are impure. Only when we have done our utmost, when in the end we find that our own striving alone is not enough, comes true self-surrender. We should not hope to become saints overnight!

*

There is a great danger in limiting the Divine. So glimpses, flashes of higher experience, can be dangerous, can bring complacency. The aspirant may try to evaluate the Divine by those experiences. These little peeps into the superconscious should not be regarded as the finale but only as the beginning. There are far higher experiences than these. In fact, there are no limits to spiritual experience.

Our contact with the Divine should be a conscious one, an expression of the superconscious. Make the Infinite the centre of your consciousness.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna had come to the house of Dinanath Basu, an attorney of the Calcutta High Court.¹ It was sometime in the first part of 1876. Keshab Chandra Sen

¹ Dinanath's youngest brother Kalinath Basu, Police Superintendent, was devotedly attached to Keshab Chandra Sen and at the latter's instance had invited Sri Ramakrishna to his house. Sri Ramakrishna's visit became an occasion of festivity. From there Sri Ramakrishna visited the house of Dinanath Basu with Hriday, in the company of Keshab and other Brahmo devotees.

and some other Brahmo devotees were sitting in front of him. In the course of conversation the Paramahansa, as Sri Ramakrishna was called, sang the song, 'O Śyāmā, please throw away Thy sword and dance with Thy flute in hand' etc. Suddenly he went into deep *samādhi*.² He sat still, his eyes fixed, his face beaming. Regaining his consciousness he resumed his religious

² Swami Akhandananda, 'Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa-smṛti', *Udbhōdhan*, Vol. XXXIX, p. 145 fn.

discourse interrupted by occasional states of ecstasy. Keshab and others were listening to his words with rapt attention. A neighbour, Girish Chandra Ghosh, then entered the parlour. It was dusk, and lamps were lit and placed in front of the Paramahansa. He was thin to the point of emaciation, and aged about forty. Girish heard him making repeated enquiries, 'Is it evening? Is it evening?' Girish had come there out of curiosity and to verify the genuineness of the claim of the Brahmos about the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. Some days earlier he had read about the Paramahansa in the *Indian Mirror*. When Girish saw the unimpressive man asking, 'Is it evening?', while the lamps burned right in front of him he could not but become sceptical and contemptuous. 'What pretension! It is dusk. Lights are burning in front of him. Yet he cannot tell whether it is evening or not!'—thinking thus, Girish left the house.

*

28 February 1844 is the date of Girish's birth. He was the eighth child of Nilkamal Ghosh. He had lost his father when he was fourteen and his mother when he was only eleven. His sole guardian, his elder sister, Krishnakishori, could hardly control him. He passed his days in gaiety, joking, and youthful ebullience. Krishnakishori arranged for his marriage soon afterward in expectation that Girish would be disciplined thereby. Her expectations were ill founded. His rebellious spirit made him break loose from all moral restraint. He began to earn his living by doing some routine jobs in a mercantile firm. He acted in various capacities for fifteen years, then became head clerk in the office of the Indian League in 1876. But the major portion of his time and energy was devoted to amateur acting, composing songs and writing: and also various kinds of debauchery. In his thirties he had already begun to be re-

cognized as a promising dramatist and an actor *par excellence*. He trained other actors and actresses, and through his leadership the Bengali stage was popularized as a national institution. In 1883 the Star Theatre was started under his initiative. Though he was honoured as a pioneer of modern drama in Bengal, the conservative Hindu society of Calcutta was agog with scandals of the sensual conduct of the Bohemian that was Girish.

While talent and debauchery coexisted, scepticism alternating with an occasional urge for devotional practices lurked in his heart. Such ambivalence manifested in him sometimes in peculiar ways. Just before one Durgā-pūjā some of his neighbours played a trick on him. They placed early in the morning an image of the goddess Durgā in the outer compound of his house, to see how Girish would react. Girish reacted violently. Enraged, he got hold of an axe, cut the clay image into pieces, and finally buried them in a pit made in the kitchen garden. His family members as well as neighbours were shocked. At the insistence of his friend Kalinath Basu, he attended the Brahmo Samaj for some days but then discontinued. For some days he became devoted to Mother Kālī, during which period, just after one of his stage performances, he had a vision of the Mother who cursed him that he would lose eminence as an actor.³ Subsequently, he became more renowned as a playwright. He wrote social, historical and religious plays numbering about eighty. Truly has it been said that his life-story was a narrative of conflicts between truth and falsehood, drunkenness and abstinence, imagination and realization, faith and doubt, temptation to sensuality and attraction for higher life, head and heart, and atheism

³ Srishchandra Matilal, 'Bhakta Girīścandra' *Udbodhan*, Vol. XV, No. 4.

and belief.⁴

Girish had lost his first wife in 1874. When working at the Indian League he was married a second time to Surat Kumari Mitra of Simulia. Six months had scarcely passed when he was attacked with a virulent type of cholera. Physicians gave up all hope of his recovery. While lying semi-conscious Girish saw a vision of a divine form clad in a red-bordered sari.⁵ On her advice he partook of *mahāprasāda* (offering made to Lord Jagannath of Puri) and immediately showed signs of improvement. He recovered his health but subsequent family mishaps, a series of bereavements, consequently his indulgent life, and his search for a solution to the mystery of life and death, led him through vaults of spiritual crises. He was smitten with grief and remorse; he felt intensely restless. Days rolled on till in early September 1884, Girish saw Sri Ramakrishna for the second time at the house of Balaram Bose. Balaram had invited his neighbours, including Girish, to meet the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar who was to visit his house. It became an occasion of festivity. Girish went but was rather disappointed to find Sri Ramakrishna somewhat different from the conventional idea he had about a Paramahansa. The Paramahansa repeatedly bowed his head to the ground to greet his visitors. A singing girl, Bidhu, was seated near to him, waiting to sing devotional songs. While Girish was carefully observing the Paramahansa, one of his old acquaintances came up to him and whispered sarcastically, 'Bidhu has a

previous intimacy with him. That is why he is laughing and joking with her.' Such insinuation displeased Girish. Soon after, Sisir Kumar Ghosh, the editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, arrived. He seemed not to have been much impressed by Sri Ramakrishna and said to Girish, 'Let us go; enough of him.' Girish wanted to stay a little more but was embarrassed to admit this. Sisir Ghosh insisted and Girish went with him.

*

Girish saw Sri Ramakrishna next at the Star Theatre. Before we describe the incident let us take a look at Girish's mental state at this time which he himself has painted in a masterly fashion in an article published in the *Janmabhumi*: (Vol. XXVII, No. 3)

'Whether God existed or not I was doubtful. If he existed, which religion should I follow? I argued much, deliberated much, but could not find any solution. This made me uneasy.... I thought: "All the necessities of material life, such as air, water, light are abundantly supplied by nature and available for man to enjoy. Why should not religion, so essential for eternal life, be equally available? To me, it seems neither natural, nor within my reach, and therefore false...." Thus I passed fourteen long years in a fog of gloom.

"Then came evil days which allowed me no rest. There was darkness within, there was darkness without—darkness everywhere. I thought, "Is there any escape?".... I made an honest attempt to resign myself to the will of the Lord (Tāraknāth Śiva). My attempt was successful. A network of danger was pierced through in no time. Firm conviction arose that God was not unreal.... But they said that no liberation is possible without a guru. Furthermore, I was told that one must look upon the guru as God. My reason found this hard to accept. The very idea was revolting to me, for nothing seemed more blasphem-

⁴ Devendranath Basu: *Girīścandra* (Bengali) (Calcutta University, 1939), pp. 13-15.

⁵ Regarding this divine form Girish told his brother-disciples long after, 'Sixteen years later (i.e., in 1891) when I first visited Jayrambati to see the Holy Mother, I found to my surprise and delight that the lady who saved my life with the *mahāprasāda* was none other than the Holy Mother herself.'

ous than to think of man as God. I must trudge on alone without a human guru. I would pray to Tāraknāth....

'At this time I became acquainted with a painter who was a Vaiṣṇava. I don't know if it was true or not, but he said to me one day: "I offer food to the deity every day and I am convinced by certain signs that he accepts it. Until one is initiated by a guru such a rare privilege will not come in one's life." My mind became restless. I took leave of him, went to my room, closed all the doors and began to weep.'

It was evident that his heart now yearned for a spiritual guide.

All this happened on 21 Sept. 1884, perhaps sometime in the morning. That evening Sri Ramakrishna visited the Star Theatre at 68 Beadon Street, Calcutta. Girish Chandra's play *Caitanyalīlā* (The early life of Caitanya) was being enacted there. The drama was a great success and had created a stir⁶ in and around Calcutta. Mahendranath Gupta ('M'), Mahendranath Mukhopadhyaya, Balaram Bose, and two or three other devotees accompanied Sri Ramakrishna. Girish was strolling in the courtyard of the theatre when Mahendranath Mukhopadhyaya approached him and said: "The Master has come to see your play. If you grant him free entrance, well and good. Otherwise, we will buy a ticket for him." 'He will not have to buy his ticket. But others will have to', saying this Girish went to greet Sri Ramakrishna who was alighting from the carriage. It was about half-past eight in the evening. Before Girish could greet Sri Ramakrishna, the latter bowed to him. Girish returned his salutation, but he bowed again. This little drama continued and Girish thought it might continue all evening. So he bowed mentally and conducted Sri Ramakrishna and others upstairs to a box, and arranged

for an attendant to fan Sri Ramakrishna. As Girish was not feeling well he left for home. It seems he found hardly anything impressive about Sri Ramakrishna on this occasion too. Mahendranath Gupta sat next to Sri Ramakrishna and Baburam and others sat behind him. The drama began. The devotional fervour of the theme of the play made Sri Ramakrishna excited. Apprehending his mood he warned Baburam, 'Don't make a fuss if I fall into an ecstatic mood or go into *samādhi*. Then the worldly people will take me for a cheat.' But he could hardly control himself. He shed tears of love, sometimes got overpowered with divine ecstasy and sometimes dived deep into *samādhi*. The performance over, Sri Ramakrishna observed, 'I found the representation the same as the real.'⁷

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As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna had made an assessment of Girish on this occasion, if not earlier. He recognized that behind a rough exterior Girish was tender, faithful and sincere. Recollecting one of his visions, he himself had once said:

'In the temple of Kali I was one day engaged in meditation. I found that a naked boy came tripping there with a tuft of hair on the crown of his head and a flask of wine under his left armpit and a vessel of nectar in the right hand. "Who are you?" I asked. "I am a Bhairava", replied he. On my asking the reason of his coming, he answered, "To do your work." When Girish in mature years came to me, I recognized that Bhairava in him.'⁸

In this connection, very significant are several remarks of Sri Ramakrishna. After a visit to the theatre of his great disciple,

⁷ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1947), p. 649.

⁸ *The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1943), p. 404.

⁶ *Caitanyalīlā* was first staged at the Star Theatre on 2 August, 1884.

the Master remarked that '.... if others were possessed of wonderful intelligence, the intelligence of Girish was one hundred and fifty in the per cent, meaning thereby that he eclipsed all.'⁹ Again the Master was heard to say: 'Girish has more than a hundred per cent faith. People will hereafter be surprised to see his spiritual progress.'¹⁰ Still again he had said, householder devotees like Girish form a class by themselves. They desire *yoga* and *bhoga*. Their attitude is that of Ravana, who wanted to enjoy the maidens of heaven and at the same time realize Rama.' Thus making an estimate of the spiritual potential of Girish, Sri Ramakrishna waited for an opportune moment to give it a suitable turn.

On the other hand whatever might been the image that Girish had formed of Sri Ramakrishna he could not avoid a direct encounter with the latter. This encounter, the first effective one between the two, proved to be momentous and gave a new turn to the life of the truculent Girish. (The previous three 'meetings' had been brief and apparently by chance.) It happened on 24 September 1884, three days after Girish had seen Sri Ramakrishna at the Star Theatre. Before we narrate the encounter we should reproduce another aspect of his mental condition, movingly recounted by himself in a Bengali article:

'Terrible conflicts pierced my heart through and through. That condition can better be imagined than described. Suppose a man, all of a sudden, is forcibly dragged to a dark, solitary room with his eyes covered and kept confined there with no food drink. What will be the state of his mind? If you can picture his mental condition, you will be able to understand something of my own. There were moments when I was breathless with emotion. Thoughts of

despair cut through me like a saw. At other times the memory of the past was revived and the darkness of my heart knew no bounds. Just at that time, I saw Sri Ramakrishna passing by our land to the house of Balaram Bose, the great devotee, and for the first time I felt irresistibly drawn to him.'¹¹

Girish was sitting on the veranda of a crossing of two roads when he saw Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by Narayan and a couple of other devotees slowly approaching him. Girish noticed that Narayan, pointing to him whispered something to Sri Ramakrishna, and the latter saluted Girish. Girish returned the salute. Sri Ramakrishna walked past him towards the near-by house of Balaram Bose. For no accountable reason Girish felt that something was pulling him towards Sri Ramakrishna. He longed to run and join him. In his own words:

'I felt as if someone were attracting me. I could not keep calm. No words could describe that mental state of mine. It was not comparable to the keen attachment one feels towards some near relation. It was something unique. I hadn't had any such experience before. I was hesitating whether I should go or not.'¹²

Just then a devotee came with a message from Sri Ramakrishna and said, 'Paramahamsadev is calling you.' Girish followed him with alacrity.

His pride and vanity had prevented him from looking beyond the walls of his preconceived ideas about a holy man. However, time after time the humility of the holy man of Dakshineswar forced him to look inward. Meeting him at the theatre it was the holy man who had saluted him first. Now again it was the holy man who

⁹ *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. XVII, p. 58.

¹⁰ Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Madras, 1956), p. 392.

¹¹ *Tattvamañjarī*, 'Paramahamsadever Śiṣyasneha', Vol. IX, Nos. 3 & 4. This is a reproduction of an article read by Girish Ghosh on the occasion of a birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math.

¹² *Tattvamañjarī*, Vol. IX, p. 69.

had greeted him first. The holy man's humility entered deep into Girish's heart and the hard crust of his pride began to crumble, as it were.

Sri Ramakrishna went on to Balaram's and entered his parlour. Balaram was lying on a couch, perhaps being unwell. As soon as he saw Sri Ramakrishna he got up and with due reverence prostrated himself before him. Following exchange of a few words with Balaram, Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, 'Well, I am all right, I am all right.' So saying, he underwent a transformation which seemed rather strange to Girish. Later he learnt that the holy man was seized by divine fervour, which had robbed him of external consciousness. Soon after Sri Ramakrishna remarked: 'No, this is not pretense! this is not pretense!' He continued in this state for sometime, after which he regained his normal state of mind and took his seat.

Girish, in the heart of his hearts, was longing to find a guru, although his vanity refused to place any human being in that place of honour. Presently he asked, 'Sir, what is a guru?' Sri Ramakrishna answered, 'Do you know what the guru is? He is like a match-maker.¹³ He prepares for the meeting of God-seeker with God.' After a while he said again, 'Your guru has already been chosen.' Girish's heart was filled with unspeakable joy. Quite unhesitatingly he accepted the words of Sri Ramakrishna. The latter's statement that the guru was already selected for him gave him great relief.

Next Girish asked, 'What is a *mantra*?'

'The name of God.' To cite an illustration Sri Ramakrishna narrated a story. Rāmananda used to take his bath in the Gaṅgā early every morning. One day a

weaver, Kabīr by name, was lying on one of the steps of the bathing ghat. While going down the steps Rāmananda uttered the holy name of Rāma. Kabīr took it to be his *mantra* and by repeating it, eventually realized God.

Girish was impressed by Sri Ramakrishna's sensitivity and deep understanding of him and his problems. The Saint's sympathy and affection for him were clearly evident. Girish felt more and more drawn towards Sri Ramakrishna.

The conversation went on. Sri Ramakrishna's mode of talking made Girish feel that he was an old acquaintance, as it were. The conversation drifted to the theatre. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'I liked your play very much. The sun of knowledge has begun to shine upon you. All the blemishes of your heart will be washed away. Very soon devotion will arise to sweeten your life with profuse joy and peace.'¹⁴ Girish could not accept such praise for he considered he did not deserve it. He submitted that he had written plays with the idea of making money. Sri Ramakrishna brushed aside this reply. He asked, 'Could you take me to the theatre and show me another of your plays?'

'Very well, any day you like.'

'You must charge me something.'

'All right; you can pay eight annas.'

'That's the price of a damned seat in the balcony.'

'Oh no, you won't have to sit there. You shall sit in the same place where you sat last time.'

'Then you must accept one rupee.'

'Well, as you please.'

Balaram brought some sweetmeats and offered them to Sri Ramakrishna. The latter broke a small piece from one and took it. Those present partook of the rest

¹³ A match-maker arranges for the union of the bride with the bridegroom. In fact he used not the word match-maker, but a slang expression which was perhaps more pointed.

¹⁴ Abinash Chandra Gangopadhyaya: *Giriscandra* (Bengali); p. 342.

as *prasāda* (consecrated food). Girish too felt like taking a portion, but resisted, lest others should gossip about it.

Soon after this, Haripada, a young devotee, and Girish saluted Sri Ramakrishna and took leave of him. On the way Haripada asked, 'What do you think of him?' 'He is a great devotee, no doubt,' answered Girish. He was now happy that he had no longer to trouble himself with the search for a guru.

After this meeting Girish began to wonder, 'Who is this man who speaks to me with such intimacy and makes me feel that he is my very own?' Something had happened in him which he could hardly explain. From that day life had a different import for him. More such encounters followed in quick succession. He felt more and more drawn to the Master, although he often heaped insults on him, drank in his presence, and took liberties which astounded the other devotees. 'Thakur, mere advice won't do,' he once told Ramakrishna. 'I know enough of advice. It does not help me. I want action. Do something to transform my life.'¹⁵ Sri Ramakrishna knew all this even before Girish said it and he treated the latter with motherly affection. Not merely advice but the influence of the deep love of the Master worked wonders; it chastened the turbulence in Girish and silently brought about a miraculous change in him. Girish himself experienced something of this change soon. He wrote about himself:

'My heart was filled with joy. I felt as if I was born anew. I was a totally changed man. There was no more doubt or conflict in my mind. "God is real. God is my sanctuary; I have found my refuge in this god-man. Now I can easily realize God." Thoughts like these cast their spell on me night and day. In waking or in dreaming, the same mood per-

sisted. "Fearless am I! I have found my very own. The world can no longer bind me, for even the greatest fear, the fear of death, is gone."¹⁶

It was the divine, unselfish love of the Master, that gradually took full possession of his heart. Girish used to say in his later life:

'Sri Ramakrishna has full sway over my heart—he has it by the right of his love. Lust, anger, and all the terrible passions vanish if one feels this transcendental love of his—no other spiritual practice is required.'

As Ramakrishna's influence was steadily gaining its hold upon Girish, the latter wondered if he should give up his work in the theatre. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Do what you are now doing, much will be achieved by it. This will educate the people.' Ramakrishna's influence, deeply ingrained in Girish, manifested itself as rich religious and moral sentiments in his dramas—*Vilwamaṅgal*, *Kālāpahār*, *Rūp-Saṅgātān*, *Pūrṇacandra*, *Viṣād*, *Nashiram*, etc. And quite justifiably has Hemendranath Dasgupta observed, 'We may thus conclude that the turning-point in Girish's life, and therefore in the history of the Bengali drama, was the sacred influence of Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeva over the mind and heart of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the greatest of the Bengali dramatists—past and present.'¹⁷ And Sri Ramakrishna remains to this day the patron saint of all public theatres in the city of Calcutta.

Fully understanding the attitude of Girish, the Master, one day, in an exalted mood offered to assume all responsibility for Girish and asked him to give him his 'power of attorney'. Girish happily consented.

¹⁵ *Vedanta and the West*, Mar.-Apr. 1953, 'Memoirs of Sri Ramakrishna' by Girish Chandra Ghosh, Tr. by Swami Aseshananda, p. 54.

¹⁷ Hemendranath Das Gupta: 'The Influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa on Girish Chandra's Drama', P.B., 1933, April, p. 196.

¹⁵ Ramchandra Dutta: *Śrī-Śrī-Paramahamsadever Jīvanvṛttānta* (Bengali), 7th ed., p. 144.

'But he did not then realize that he had put voluntarily round his neck a noose of love a hundred times stronger than the bondage of the rules, which, he thought, was so unbearable. And while eating, drinking, or being engaged in any other activity, he had but one thought, namely, Sri Ramakrishna had taken upon himself all his responsibility, a soothing thought, a balm to his mind, which through its deepening impression was gradually gaining mastery over his whole being and involuntarily making him meditate on the Master, thus bringing about a revolution in him, in all his thoughts and actions.'¹⁸

Honest and sincere to himself and devoted to the cause he held as dear, Girish responded to the loving treatment of the Master. As days rolled on the noose of the Master's love drew closer around Girish. The latter finally surrendered to God's will, and people heard him whisper more and more often, 'Let his will be done.' Truly did Swami Vivekananda remark: 'In G. C. (Swamiji lovingly called him so) alone I have seen that true resignation—that true spirit of a servant of the Lord. What a unique spirit of resignation to the Lord! I have not met his parallel. From him have I learned the lesson of self-surrender.'¹⁹

The Master's prophecy, 'You will be purer day by day. You will improve very

much day by day. People will marvel at you',²⁰ proved to be true in letter and spirit. He became fully possessed of the Master. He lived, moved and had his being in him. And it was no wonder that people heard him say: 'It is not difficult to accept him (Sri Ramakrishna), love him, nay worship him, but it is difficult to forget him.'²¹ Outsiders knew him only as a poet, littérateur, an actor, and a playwright, a patriot, and above all a 'fallen' man, but those who lived in close touch with him noticed with wonder the transformation of a sinner into a saint. Such was this transformation that Sri Ramakrishna chose him as one of his select spokesmen for preaching his message. His brilliantly chequered career came to an end on February 8, 1912.

²⁰ M': *The Gospel*, p. 718. The change in Girish has been affectionately painted by Swami Premananda in a letter of 1910. Girishbabu is in Banaras. He has recovered his health to some extent Ah! What a wonderful change in his attitude do we find! The Master had prophesied, "People will marvel at you." The prophesy has been fulfilled in the true spirit We do not know many monks as saintly as he is.'

²¹ *Proceedings* of the meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission (17th session) held on 15.8.1897. At the 14th Session (25.7.97) Girish had spoken almost in the same strain. He said: 'I do not know what the scriptures say about God but I cherished the idea that he who is God must love me as I do myself. He (Sri Ramakrishna) used to love me as I do myself. I never had a real friend but he (Sri Ramakrishna) who transformed my vices into virtues. He loved me more than I could myself.'

¹⁸ Swami Saradananda, op. cit., p. 330.

¹⁹ *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama), Vol. VII (1958), p. 271.

laws of spiritual life. Let them master the right techniques.

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Some people say: You will form complexes if you practise self-control and try to lead a life of purity. Don't listen to that sort of talk. Complexes are created anyway. Sense enjoyment produces one type of complex, self-control another—that is all. The wise policy is to accept those 'complexes' that ultimately lead us to the Divine, to supreme peace and the resolution of all complexes. Complexes are formed only in the beginning of spiritual en-

deavour. Later on, when the process of sublimation advances, the complexes dissolve one by one. All complexes vanish with superconscious experience. The child gets attached to the doll and creates a complex towards it. But when the child grows, the doll is put away and the complex disappears. So also in spiritual growth. It is a natural process. Things that attract us now cease to attract us later when we have grown in spiritual life. The complexes that are formed in the early stages are needed for our growth. Without them there would be no spiritual striving.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: ADHARLAL SEN

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

'Sir, you haven't been to our place for a long time. The drawing-room smells worldly and everything else appears to be steeped in darkness.' Deeply touched by these words of the disciple, the Master suddenly stood up and blessed him in an ecstatic mood, touching his head and heart. The Master's voice seemed soaked in love as he said: 'I look upon you as Narayana Himself. You are indeed my own.'¹

Such an intimate dialogue was exchanged between the Master and one of his disciples only two weeks beyond a year after they had met for the first time.

The Master was the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar who had made unparalleled experimentations in the field of religious realization and experience. For him, God was true only if He could be known directly.

To him, teaching religion was not mere talking or imparting doctrines; it was communicating a deep conviction and often a superconscious experience. Herein lay his extraordinary genius, his greatness as a spiritual teacher: in his ability to transform the minds of disciples by a touch, a word, a glance or even a wish, and bring them face to face with God.

And the disciple was Adharlal Sen, a distinguished product of the University of Calcutta and an ardent sceptic, who was to be transformed into a great devotee by the touch of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual power. Born on 2 March 1855, at 29 Sankar Halder Lane, Ahiritola, Calcutta, Adhar was in childhood extremely precocious. His father, Ramgopal Sen, a successful trader in cotton fibre, was a devout *vaiṣṇava*. He was proud in having all his sons—Balaichand, Dayalchand, Shyamlal, Ramlal, Adharlal, and Hiralal—established in life. Among them the eldest, Balaichand, who had authored

¹ Vide 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947), p. 364.

five books in Bengali, exerted considerable influence on Adhar, the brightest among them all. In keeping with the family tradition Adhar, when he was twelve, was married to the seven-year-old daughter of Ramchand Seal. Winning a high place in the University Entrance Examination in 1871, he joined the Presidency College wherefrom he passed the F.A. Examination in 1873, securing the fourth place in order of merit and the covetable Duff Scholarship in English literature. Four years later he passed his B.A. Examination, with distinction.² Proficiency in academic studies apart, Adhar had discovered that he could surpass most of his contemporaries in writing poetry; and by 1874 he had already published a few books of poems in Bengali, among them *Lalita-sundarī*³ (Part I) and *Menaka*. These were followed by *Kusumkāna* (Part I in 1877, Part II in 1878) and *Lyttoniana* (1880) a translation in Bengali verse of Lord Lytton's *The Wanderer*.⁴ At twenty-four he entered Government

² These academic achievements of Adharlal have been obtained from Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya's article on 'Adharlal Sen' in *Māsik Basumati* (Bengali), Agrahāyana, Bengali Era 1358.

³ Bankimchandra Chatterjee in *Baṅgadarśana* (Bengali), Śrāvaṇa, Bengali Era 1281, in reviewing this book observed that although the poems could hardly claim novelty, they were ample proofs of the promising future of a young poet.

⁴ Among the many literary criticisms of his work, we may quote one from the *Calcutta Review* which said: 'Babu Adharlal Sen writes in a style that shows evident marks of thought and cultivation. A distinguished graduate of the Calcutta University, he has well and wisely devoted his talents to the improvement of the literature of his own country; and in this field we confidently predict for him a highly successful career.' (Quoted by Narendranath Lahiri: *Subarnabanik Kathā O Kīrti*, 1941, Vol. II, pp. 377-8). The *Hindu Patriot* observed, 'There is indeed something very interesting, very touching, and truly poetical in the composition.' (quoted *ibid.*, p. 445).

service and was placed in Chittagong in East Bengal (the present Bangladesh) as the Deputy Collector. His explorations of the famous holy spot of Sitakundu in Chittagong were published in a scholarly work, 'The Shrines of Sitakundu' (1881). Next year, sometime about July, he was transferred to Jessore. By 26 April 1882 when he was transferred to Calcutta he had already won critical recognition from great literary men like Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Prasanna Sarvadhikari, Maheshchandra Nyayaratna, Krishnadas Pal, and Haraprasad Shastri, the last having been one of his classmates. In recognition of his erudite scholarship the Government nominated him as a Fellow of the University of Calcutta in March 1884. Thereafter he became a member of the University Faculty of Arts.

These literary pursuits notwithstanding, Adhar's religious propensities, temporarily overwhelmed by the onslaught of English education, were waiting to be revived. Like most other young scholars of the day he had revolted against idolatry and petty theistic beliefs. At nineteen, he had written in his *Lalita-sundarī*: 'The foolish Hindu offers sacrifices of animals just to please idols made of clay. No doubt he does this in anticipation that the propitiated Gods would transport him after death to the highest heaven where he shall reap the harvest of his good deeds.'⁵ Undoubtedly he had also been touched by the influence of the Brahmo Samaj, though only lightly.

About this time the popularity of the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar was rising among the young educated people of the area. The occasional publication in different Brahmo journals of the teachings of the Paramahansa, and his close contact with Brahmo leaders of all sections as well

⁵ Again in his *Nalinī* (1877), the hero says, 'Who has known and when, the whereabouts of God and His real form?'

as with other leading Hindus, had brought him to the forefront of religious activity. Glowing accounts of the influence of the Paramahansa on prominent men reached Adhar.

It is not definitely known what circumstances brought Adhar to Sri Ramakrishna first. However Akshay Kumar Sen narrates an interesting incident. One day Adhar visited Mahimacharan Chakravarty at the latter's Cossipore residence. Mahima was reading a Tantric text with a Sanskrit scholar, and very soon the three got engaged in a hot debate on the interpretation of a certain text. Now, to get the verdict of an authority, Mahima's choice fell on Sri Ramakrishna and the others readily agreed. The three immediately went to Dakshineswar;⁶ and this according to Akshay Sen, was how Adhar came to see Sri Ramakrishna for the first time.

In any case, according to Mahendranath Gupta, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Adhar met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time at Dakshineswar on Friday, 9 March 1883.⁷ It was a new-moon

⁶ Akshay Kumar Sen: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-puṇthi* (Pub. by Udbodhan Office, Calcutta-3, 5th edition), p. 347. Ramchandra Dutta (*Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvanvṛttānta* (Bengali), 7th edition, p. 191) has given an almost similar account, but his contention is that the three did not go to Sri Ramakrishna for the solution: it was only Adhar who went to Dakshineswar—perhaps not his first visit. Adhar did not raise the topic but to his amazement Sri Ramakrishna began to expound, on his own, the very text on which they had been disputing. Still, one must note that in the *Gospel* account of this first meeting, there is no mention of such an exposition.

⁷ One may note that in the portion of 'M's' *Gospel* published first in the Bengali journal *Tattwamañjarī* (Vol. VIII, No. 7, Kārtik, Bengali Era 1311), Adhar's visit to Sri Ramakrishna on 8 April 1883 has been given as his first visit to the Master. Obviously 'M' revised this point when he published the *Gospel* in book-form. Yet Narendranath Laha (op. cit., p. 372) upheld the view of the *Tattwamañjarī*. Again, Kumud-

day. As usual with him on such days, Sri Ramakrishna passed again and again through different phases of God-consciousness. Whenever he returned to his normal consciousness he talked about God and God alone, and people sat spellbound listening to him. The atmosphere vibrated with thoughts of God, as it were. Regarding the spiritual attitude that Sri Ramakrishna maintained at this time, 'M' observed that 'during these days Sri Ramakrishna's heart overflowed with motherly love like the love Yasoda felt for Krishna. So he kept Rakhal⁸ with him. Rakhal felt towards the Master as a child feels toward its mother.'^{9a}

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna rested for a while. In the meantime Adhar had arrived and other devotees had gathered in the room, including 'M' and Rakhal. As already indicated, it seems unlikely that anyone that day accompanied Adhar to Dakshineswar. Though the details of the first moments of his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna have not been recorded, we can safely infer that Sri Ramakrishna as was his wont, had observed Adhar's reverent bearing and divined behind it an unusual spiritual aptitude, which had drawn him to Dakshineswar. Adhar's first impressions too, seem to have been favourable. Soon he came forward with a question:

'Sir, I have a question to ask. Is it good to sacrifice animals before the Deity? It certainly involves killing.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'The sastra [scriptures] prescribes sacrifice on special occasions. Such sacrifice is not harmful.

bandhu Sen on analyzing the internal evidences in the *Gospel* itself has suggested that Adhar must have seen Sri Ramakrishna earlier than 9 March 1883, though he has not specified a date. (*Vide Udbodhan*, Caitra, Bengali Era 1356, p. 159). But in absence of any more reliable evidence, 9 March 1883 is accepted here as the date of their first meeting.

⁸ Later Swami Brahmananda, a prominent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

^{9a} *The Gospel*, p. 119.

Take, for instance, the sacrifice of a goat on the eighth day of the full or new moon.

'I am now in such a state of mind that I cannot watch a sacrifice. Also I cannot eat meat offered to the Divine Mother. Therefore I first touch my finger to it, then to my head, lest She should be angry with me.

'Again, in a certain state of mind I see God in all beings, even in an ant. At that time, if I see a living being die, I find consolation in the thought that it is the death of the body, the soul being beyond life and death.'^{9b}

Then, to his surprise, Adhar heard from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna words which seemed directed to his unspoken inner needs: 'One should not reason too much; it is enough if one loves the Lotus Feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning throws the mind into confusion. You get clear water if you drink from the surface of a pool. Put your hand deeper and stir the water, and it becomes muddy. Therefore pray to God for devotion.'

Thus recommending to Adhar the practice of devotion, he stressed the devotion which has no motive behind it. 'Behind Dhruva's devotion there was desire. He practised austerities to gain his father's kingdom. But Prahlada's love for God was motiveless—a love that sought no return.'

Last of all, Adhar heard Sri Ramakrishna say: '.... God can be directly perceived in a man with a tangible form. Seeing an Incarnation of God is the same as seeing God Himself. God is born on earth as man in every age.' From subsequent events, it seems probable that Adhar began to feel that Sri Ramakrishna himself was such an Incarnation.

For the impression Sri Ramakrishna had made on him was deeper than he could realize at the moment. It caused an upheaval in his soul, carrying him irresistibly out of

the confines of his intellectual scepticism. Such was the Master's attraction for him that within a few months Adhar was saying: 'You haven't been here for a long time. I prayed to God today that you might come. I even shed tears.'¹⁰ Later on he lovingly told Sri Ramakrishna: 'I can tell you truthfully, sir, that not more than six or seven persons like you have been born since the creation of the world.'¹¹ But long before that, he had accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guide, his mentor. Versatile master that he was, Sri Ramakrishna perceived at once Adhar's unsatisfied aspirations and the inadequacy of the answers he had obtained from his Western education and his literary pursuits. No sooner had he grasped Adhar's limitations than he took on himself the task of guiding him so that he might attain fullest development in the shortest time.

On his second visit, less than a month later, Adhar brought a friend grief-stricken by his son's death; Sri Ramakrishna not only gave him a consolation of heroic type, but proceeded to apply the thought to Adhar's own situation:

'You are a Deputy Magistrate. Remember that you have obtained your position through the grace of God. Do not forget Him, but remember that all men one day walk down the same path. We stay in the world only a couple of days.'

'It is necessary to do a certain amount of work. This is a kind of discipline.... One must have stern determination must make a firm resolve.

'There is a great power in the seed of God's name. It destroys ignorance.'

'The mind becomes very much distracted if one lives long in the midst of "woman and gold". Therefore one must be very careful.... Always keep your mind fixed on God. In the beginning you must struggle a little; later you will

^{9b} *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 201.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 478.

enjoy your pension.’¹²

The rapport thus established between the two was wonderful to follow. As early as 2 June 1883, Sri Ramakrishna visited Adhar’s house, and such visits became more frequent with time; they became occasions for religious festivals bringing joy to many devotees of the area. Sri Ramakrishna had seen in a vision that ‘the houses of Adhar, Balaram and Surendra were so many places for our forgathering’.¹³

When he visited Adhar’s house on 18 August 1883, Sri Ramakrishna, filled with spiritual fervour, said to Adhar, ‘My son, meditate on the Deity whose name you chanted.’ With these words he wrote something on Adhar’s tongue with his finger. It seems almost certain that, as ‘M’ suggests, the Master thus imparted spirituality to Adhar.

It was nonetheless clear that Adhar still had some worldly desires to work out: that he had ‘both—yoga and bhoga’.¹⁴ Though the Master showed him the ideal of Prahlada’s motiveless devotion, he also urged the *tāmasik* type of devotion by which one can force one’s demands on God. True to the spirit of the Master’s advice, Adhar moved ahead, and his yearning for God-

realization grew; his visits to Dakshineswar became almost daily.¹⁵ Still, the Master would often remind him, ‘This moment the body is and the next moment it is not. One must make haste to worship God.’¹⁶

Still, none was prepared for the regretfully premature end of Adhar’s brilliant life. Returning from an inspection tour in Manicktola, he fell from his horse on 6 January 1885. Sri Ramakrishna observed later that Adhar while on horseback had had a wonderful vision of his *Iṣṭa* (Chosen Deity) and being overwhelmed by religious emotion, had become unsteady and therefore fallen.¹⁷ A compound fracture of the left wrist developed tetanus, and Adhar died on 14 January. H.J.S. Cotton, presiding over a condolence meeting, rightly observed, ‘It is impossible not to labour under a sense of depression and sorrow when we see his place vacant and reflect how much fulfilment has been disappointed, how bright a promise has been blighted by his premature death.’¹⁸

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 637.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 364.

¹⁷ Swami Gambhirananda: *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa-bhaktamālīka* (Bengali) (Udbodhan Office), Vol. II, third ed., p. 246. Anticipating such a mishap Sri Ramakrishna had warned Adhar against riding horses, but the latter did not take this warning seriously.

¹⁸ Narendranath Laha, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 144-5.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 414.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 585.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: TARAKNATH GHOSHAL

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Seized by a longing to know of samādhi, the young Taraknath had gone to see the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar at the home of his devotee Ramachandra Datta, on Madhu Ray Lane, Calcutta. Elbowing his way through the crowd in the visitors' room on the ground floor of this house, Tarak moved forward to discover that the centre of attraction was a slender man with a short beard, transfixed as if in a picture on canvas. The glow of serenity on his face bespoke the supernatural bliss he was enjoying within. He seemed unconscious of what was happening around him. After a while he softly said, 'Where am I?' Someone promptly answered, 'At Ram Babu's house.' 'Oh yes,' said he approvingly. Then he began to expound the mysteries of samādhi. Startled at the marvellous revelation of the science of samādhi, answering his unspoken question, Tarak felt that here was a man who had realized God. The attraction which resulted made such a profound impression on his mind that he resolved to see the Master again within the week.¹

Tarak's father, Ramkanaj Ghoshal, of Barasat, 24 Parganas, who was himself an advanced spiritual aspirant, had once helped cure Sri Ramakrishna of an acute burning sensation all over the body, resulting from intense spiritual exercises and divine yearning. As a legal adviser to Rani Rasmani's family, he visited Dakshineswar a number of times during the 1850s. His only son to live beyond childhood, Taraknath, was born,

probably some time in the mid-1850s, in the Hindu month Agrahāyana (November-December); but with his characteristic indifference to such matters Tarak soon forgot about dates,² and when he became a monk he threw into the Ganges the horoscope which had been cast at the time of his birth. From early childhood he showed unmistakable signs of spiritual hankering. At the age of nine, he lost his mother, Vamasundari (later his father married a second time). Soon afterwards his eldest sister, Chandi, died leaving behind two children; and his second sister Kshirode became a widow and took shelter at her father's house. These bereavements removed much of the charm of worldly life which Tarak might otherwise have felt. Never serious about his studies, he gave them up while in the Entrance Class (pre-college), and went out on a pilgrimage. But his father's earnings had begun to decrease, and so Tarak found employment in the railways, spending some years in Ghaziabad and Mughalsarai. Nevertheless his early dedication to God continued to grow, expressing itself as meditation and contemplation whenever he could find free time. And one of his colleagues, Prasanna, told him for the first time of Sri Ramakrishna, who was known to have experienced samādhi.

Meanwhile Tarak had been persuaded by

¹ Cf.: Swami Apurvananda: *Mahāpuruṣ Śivānanda* (Bengali) (Udbodhan Office, Bagh-bazar, Calcutta, Bengali Era 1356), p. 23. The subsequent account of this visit and the first meeting at Dakshineswar are also based on this source-book, pp. 24-6.

² Apurvananda: op. cit., p. 9, gives the year as 1855; but the other more recent and definitive sources (Swami Vividishananda: *A Man of God* [Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1968], p. 5; and *The Apostles of Ramakrishna* [Ed. by Swami Gambhirananda, pub. by Advaita Ashrama, Mavavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1972], p. 200) indicate that no definite year is known. The latter however states that 'it is inferred' the year was 1854.

his father to marry Nityakali Chattopadhyaya, in exchange for his sister Niroda's marriage with Nityakali's brother. Foreed by circumstances and filial loyalty, he had to accept the marriage, but worldly life had no attraction for him. He dived ever deeper into the recesses of his own heart and devoted more time to meditation and prayer.³ Not long after this, he came down to Calcutta and joined Messrs. Mackinnon Mackenzie & Co., as a clerk. He lived for a time with one of his relations, not far from Keshab Sen's 'Lily Cottage'. He began visiting the Brahmo Samaj and the Lily Cottage: he had come under the Brahmo influence, but only slightly it seems. Although he was finding that the teachings of the Brahmos were inadequate, and though he was learning more about Sri Ramakrishna from the Brahmo leaders, he still did not meet him until his (Tarak's) residence was shifted to Simla where lived Ramachandra Datta.

To have a glimpse into the inner life of Tarak we may refer to one of his later letters—as the Swami Sivananda—in 1932:

'From my early boyhood I had a deep longing to know God and to realize Him. That longing grew with age. Urged by it, I would go to the Brahmo Samaj and visit holy men, who I thought would be able to help me. I also practised what they advised me. Family life had no charm for me, even from my boyhood.

... I had to give up my studies early on account of the straitened circumstances of the family. Myself being the only male child, with two dependent sisters, I had to come to Calcutta to seek a job. This made my heart very heavy. I

would often weep and pray to God, asking Him to free me from all these ties.'⁴

Again, in talking with some devotees in 1922 he related:

'I used to practise *Sadhana* even from a boy. I was attached to Brahmoism in those days, and I read about the Master in Keshab Babu's paper, *Dharma-tattva*. I did not, however, know the exact location of Dakshineswar or the way to it. I was afterwards told by Ram Babu's relation that it was opposite to the mouth of the Bally Khal [Bally-canal].... For a long time I had been eager to know the nature of *Samadhi*. I used to meditate and sometimes realize a condition which I thought was approximate to *Samadhi*. But I wanted very much to know what it exactly was. I questioned many people, but none could explain it to me. Only one man said: "None can realize *Samadhi* in this *Kali Yuga*. I have seen only one man who has it,—he is Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar.'⁵

It was at such a time, about the middle of 1881,⁶ that Tarak first saw Sri Rama-

⁴ Vividishananda: op. cit., p. 261

⁵ *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930, p. 120 ('The Diary of a Disciple')

⁶ In the introduction to *Vivekananda-carit* (Bengali) by Mahendranath Chowdhury (Ramakrishna Home of Service, Silchar, Bengali Era 1326) Swami Sivananda himself wrote that he had met Sri Ramakrishna at Ram Datta's house some time in 1879 or 1880. Later (*Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930, p. 107) the Swami mentioned that he went to see the Master in the house of a devotee in 1880 or 1881.

In Apurvananda: op. cit., p. 24, f.n., it is said that during the first visit to Dakshineswar Taraknath's companion brought with him mangoes: this suggests the time to have been about June or July. And 'M': *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* (Bengali), 17th Ed., Vol. I, p. 6, strongly implies that the meeting occurred earlier than the last part of 1881.

Sri Ramakrishna went to Kamarpukur and remained away from Dakshineswar from 3 March to 10 October, 1880. Soon after his return, he visited Ram Datta's house during the Pujas; thus it is possible that Tarak first saw him there

³ Tarak (then Swami Sivananda) wrote in 1932: 'I had to marry against my wish, and that was a great trial for me. My determination to renounce the world deepened as I prayed night after night with tears in my eyes, asking God not to bind me down with chains of the world.' (Quoted in Vividishananda: op. cit., p. 262)

krishna at Ram Datta's. Virtually unknown a few years before, Sri Ramakrishna had by then emerged as one of the most influential and lovable religious leaders in or near Calcutta, the then capital of India. One Saturday a friend of Tarak's who also was a relative of Ramachandra Datta, told Tarak that Sri Ramakrishna would visit Ram's house that very day. Tarak accordingly went there. Let us return to Taraknath's own account:

'Anyhow, I went that evening to Ram Babu's house. I found the Master sitting in a room crowded with people. The Master was scarcely conscious. I saluted and sat near him. What was my surprise when I heard him talking eloquently on a subject which I had been so eager to know about—on *Samadhi*! I do not remember details. But I remember that he dwelt on *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and said that very few could realize it in the *Kali Yuga*, and if one realized it, one's body did not live more than twenty-one days, and that Shyam Mukherji of Salkhia realized *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and his body lived only twenty-one days.

'I did not have any talk with the Master on that occasion.'⁷

then, as per Swami Gambhirananda in the *Udbodhan*, Vol. 52, p. 519. But in both of Swami Sivananda's writings cited above he mentions that his first visit was at the time when Vivekananda and other future sannyasin-disciples had begun to come to Sri Ramakrishna. Now Vivekananda first met Sri Ramakrishna in November 1881 (cf. among others, *The Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 16) and Rakhal about six months earlier was the first of them all. Since Sivananda seems to have had a marked indifference to dates, whereas his memory for personalities was keen, it seems best to fix the time of the first encounter not earlier than May 1881. The Master's second visit to Ram Datta's house was in that month. Again, Swami Saradananda [*Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1970), p. 711] states that the future sannyasin disciples began coming from about the first part of 1881.

⁷ *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930, pp. 120-1

But the Master's words had deeply stirred his heart.³ Though it is not known that Tarak was even introduced to him that day, it is most unlikely that the spiritual insight of the Master failed to recognize in Tarak an aspirant of great promise.

Tarak's resolve to visit Sri Ramakrishna the following Saturday remained fresh in mind, and a friend who lived near Dakshineswar agreed to accompany him. After office hours the next Saturday, Tarak went by boat to the friend's house and thence to the Kālī Temple. It was dusk and evening services were about to begin. They looked here and there for Sri Ramakrishna till at last they came upon him, standing on the western circular veranda of his room as if in expectation of someone's arrival. At first sight of the Master, Tarak was seized with a strange feeling of awe. He reverentially touched the holy man's feet. Sri Ramakrishna lovingly enquired, 'Have you seen me before?' 'Yes, sir, I saw you at Ram Babu's last Saturday.' Much pleased at this reply, the Master talked a bit with Tarak, then took him into his room. As he took his seat on the small couch, Tarak began to feel as if his own mother were sitting in front of him. Overwhelmed by this emotion, he again bowed to him and placed his head on Sri Ramakrishna's lap; he, too, began stroking Tarak's head very slowly. As Tarak later wrote:

'The short audience was enough for me: at once I felt a deep attachment for the Master. I felt as if I had known him for a long time. My heart became filled with joy. I saw in him my tender, loving mother waiting for me. So with the confidence, faith and certitude of a child, I surrendered myself to

⁸ Cf. Apurvananda, op. cit., p. 23: '...my mind was as it were dancing in joy.... It appeared to me that he who was speaking on samadhi in so simple a way surely had attained it.... I shall also attain samadhi and be blessed if somehow his grace falls on me....'

him, placing myself entirely under his care. I became certain that at last I found him for whom I had been searching all these days. Since then I looked upon the Master as my mother. He also treated me the same way.⁹

Soon Sri Ramakrishna asked him, 'In what do you believe—in God with form or without form?'

'In God without form,' replied Tarak humbly.

'But, you can't help admitting also the Mother, the Divine Energy, who manifests Herself in many forms.'

Hearing the peal of bells and the gong of the evening services, Sri Ramakrishna started for the Kālī temple, asking Tarak to accompany him. There he prostrated himself before the image of the Mother. Tarak hesitated as to what to do, for he had learnt at the Brahmo Samaj that prostration before an image was rank idolatry. Then however the idea flashed into his mind: 'Why should I have such prejudices? God being omnipresent must be present in this stone image as well.' His doubt thus resolved, he prostrated himself before the image. Sri Ramakrishna seemed greatly pleased by Tarak's presence of mind and broadness of view.

No doubt the Master's deep insight had already made an assessment of the young man's potentiality. He asked Tarak to stay overnight, and further said: 'Look here, you can't gain any lasting benefit by the chance visit of a day. You must come here often.' As Tarak had already promised to spend the night with his friend in the neighbourhood, he begged to be excused. This too seemed to please Sri Ramakrishna, for he said: 'One must keep one's word. In the Kali-yuga, speaking the truth is a penance.' After a while he bade Tarak farewell, and in an affectionate voice said, 'Well, come here tomorrow.'

Tarak left with his friend, but Sri Ramakrishna was in his thoughts all the time. Love for the Master was fast growing, and he visited him the next day and thereafter quite frequently. As he later wrote: 'After this momentous visit my life at home and work at the office seemed to be like a heavy load. I would often run to him, visiting him at Dakshineswar or Calcutta.'¹⁰ One may ask what it was in Sri Ramakrishna that appealed so much to him. Tarak himself has supplied an explanation:

'He used to love us; and this love of his attracted us to him. What shall I say of his love? His love was just indescribable. In childhood we were aware of the love and affection of our parents and imagined then that nothing could ever surpass it. But, having come to Sri Ramakrishna I found that the love of parents was quite insignificant compared with his. In his company I felt I had at last come to my own place—before that I had been moving in unfamiliar places.... The Master too took me as his own from the very first meeting.'¹¹

And recalling those wonderful days he said later:

'...we would spend an hour or two with the Master—sometimes there would be very little talk or exchange of words. The effect of his association lasted for days. We remained in a state of spiritual intoxication, as it were, absorbed in the thought of God.'¹²

Sri Ramakrishna's sympathetic treatment soon kindled in Tarak's heart such spiritual yearning that worldly life could hold him no longer. The Master himself recounted that one day—as a direct result of Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch—Taraknath experienced a great eagerness and a wailing, welling up in his mind, as a result of which

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 262

¹¹ *Śivānanda-vanī* (Bengali) (compiled by Swami Apurvananda, pub. by Belur Math, Dt. Howrah, W.B., B.E. 1344), Vol. I, pp. 36-7

¹² *Vividishananda*: op. cit., p. 305

⁹ *Vividishananda*: op. cit., pp. 261-2

all the knots of his heart were loosened.¹³ In later life Tarak wrote:

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

would be minimizing and lowering his supreme greatness.'¹⁴

It was this idea that grew and expressed itself in fullest grandeur in the life of Tarak, gradually transforming him into the Swami Sivananda who finally assumed the high responsibility of guiding the Ramakrishna Order for twelve years, as its second President. Purged of egotism¹⁵ and with all self-centred desires completely effaced, he lived a long life of approximately eighty years 'to bear a direct testimony to his [Sri Ramakrishna's] great spiritual powers'.

¹⁴ *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930, p. 107

¹³ *vide* Saradananda, op. cit., p. 812. Swami Sivananda himself wrote that he 'had the privilege to attain to that high spiritual consciousness (Samadhi) thrice by his (Sri Ramakrishna's) touch and wish during his lifetime'. (*Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1930, p. 110).

¹⁵ He would sometimes point to his pet dog and then to himself, saying, 'Here is that fellow's master'; and then point to himself and to the picture of Sri Ramakrishna, commenting, 'and this fellow is *his* dog'. (*vide* Vividishananda, op. cit., pp. 122-3.)

A NOTE ON SOME INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS IN MODERN MATERIALISTIC THEORY

DR. JAMES F. NEWELL

Since materialistic theories confuse illusion with reality by defining the universe as a complex mechanism of differentiated structures, each such theory must eventually develop internal contradictions showing that it is false and pointing towards what is actually true. These contradictions will arise naturally from the distortions inherent in a false theory.

Metaphysically based materialistic theories might be expected to develop internal contradictions among their assumptions. Empirically based materialistic theories, which are historically more recent, might similarly be expected to develop contradictions among their empirical observations. This implies that one might approach an

empiricist through his own system of data.

Modern materialistic theory completely equates events in consciousness with neurological activity, leaving no room for any Unity of all Consciousness. This assumption has in no way been proven by the materialist but it is not considered open to question. However, it appears that the assumption is not tenable if one looks at certain hard data, which the materialist always claims to accept.

For example, let us look at a concise *empirically* based *reductio ad absurdum* argument. Certain easily observable events in consciousness have properties which could not be produced by the neurological system because there are certain inherent

carry them on their heads to Jayrambati where, placing those bundles at the Mother's feet, they would prostrate themselves before her. Those who have seen that sight have never been able to forget it. Thinking that if they stayed on for lunch they would be adding to the workload of the Mother's household, they would eat a little *muḍi*, lovingly given by her, and talk a little while with her in great joy. Then they would enquire about the next needs of the Mother's household, and, taking her loving blessings and the dust of her feet on their heads, go back another four miles with their hearts filled and minds gladdened. There at Koalpara they would eat their lunch. If there was any special need, they would have to return to Jayrambati the next day! All this strain and trouble, the hard work involved, the austerity of a poor Ashrama's food and clothing—none of these could subdue their irrepressible zeal and spirit of service. Why? What nectar-stream had awakened in their souls this superhuman strength? Mother-love untouched by worldliness, the

unbounded love and tenderness of the Mother, was the original fountain of this inspiration. Satisfied and strengthened by that nectar-flow, they had made the impossible possible through their devotion to the Mother. O Mother, he to whom you feed the ambrosia of your love, he who drinks the milk of your love, for him there is nothing impossible. Drinking that nectar, your heroic son Swami Vivekananda became a world-conqueror; Rakhal Raja (Swami Brahmananda, who was lovingly addressed as 'Raja') became an empire-builder; and Swamis Premananda, Sivananda, Saradananda and other great children administered this kingdom ably. They have spread the empire of your love and affection to the farthest corners of the earth: they have brought the people of the earth and put them on your lap.

O Mother, please give me the ability to recount the rare sportive *līlā* of Motherhood that you have shown us, to the many new children who are so eager to hear about it!

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: WILLIAMS

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Soon after November of 1874, Sambhu Charan Mallick had been perhaps the first to read to Sri Ramakrishna from the Bible and to speak to him about Jesus of Nazareth. The life of Jesus was fascinating to Sri Ramakrishna, and his thoughts began to dwell on the personality of the Son of God. One day Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the parlour of Jadu Mallick's garden-house at Dakshineswar, looking intently at a painting of the Madonna and Child [Mary and Jesus], when a divine emotion

seized him and his heart was wholly filled with thoughts of the Christ. Notwithstanding his upbringing in a conservative brāhmaṇa family, his long practice of Hindu disciplines, and his adherence to the prescribed customs and rituals, he now abandoned himself to his ardent love for Jesus and Christianity, which simply crowded out from his mind all the Hindu ways of thinking and living. He spent three days continuously in that mood. At length, on the evening of the third day, he had a vision

of Jesus Christ, who appeared before him, embraced him and became merged in him. This vision convinced him that Jesus, like the Buddha and Śrī Kṛṣṇa among others, was fully a divine Incarnation and that Christianity too was a path which led to God-realization. In his search for more and more ways to reach God, Sri Ramakrishna was turning to the paths of others religions beyond the borders of India; and the experiences he thus gained led him to declare finally:

'I had to practise each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.'¹

His mission was not to start another religion but to re-emphasize the direct and immediate knowledge of God through any path as the goal of all religions.

To the claim by overzealous devotees that Sri Ramakrishna experienced God in the same way a Christian devotee does—that he became truly a Christian, and that in his moving from the Hindu faith to Christianity his personality went through a complete transformation—most Christian theologians will object. Here we may quote a typical view:

'Sri Ramakrishna was never confronted by the Kerygma [initial proclamation of the Gospel message] of the Church; the Christian teaching of the creatureliness of man, the bondage of sin, and salvation through Christ was never acceptable to him. He saw Christ from his own point of view, with the attitude of a bhakta and sannyasin steeped in the Indian tradition.'²

¹ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947), p. 57

² Sm. Nalini Devdas: *Sri Ramakrishna* (The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 6), p. 25

In any case, the outcome of this mystic experience, as Romain Rolland observed, was that 'Later it came to pass that Indian Christians recognized in him a direct manifestation of the Christ and went into ecstasy before him.'³ To illustrate Rolland's statement, we may bring before our readers Sri Ramakrishna's first meeting with a Christian devotee named Williams⁴—one among many who visited Sri Ramakrishna several times.

Williams lived somewhere in the north-western part of India. He had come in contact with Kedarnath Chatterjee, the Brahmo preacher, when the latter had gone to that region on lecture tour. He learnt that Kedar Babu had undergone considerable change in attitude and conduct ever since coming in contact with the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. Himself a sincerely religious man, Mr. Williams became eager to know more about such a Paramahansa. Occasional publication of news of the saint in the journals of the Brahmo Samaj, whetted his interest all the more. Finally he came all the way to Calcutta for the purpose of meeting Sri Ramakrishna. Since Good Friday was only a few days ahead, he waited patiently for that auspicious day, for his first visit to Dakshineswar.⁵

In the early afternoon, about 1 p.m., of Good Friday, very probably in the year 1881,⁶ Williams, accompanied by Kedar-

³ Romain Rolland: *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1947), p. 84 fn.

⁴ He seems to have been a school teacher, and is known to have been an erudite scholar of the Bible.

⁵ *Mahātmā Rāmacandrer Bakṛtābali* (Bengali), (Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-samādhi-mahāpāṭha, Sri Yogodyan, Kankurgachi, Calcutta), Vol. II, 3rd edition, pp. 384-5

⁶ Following Keshab Chandra Sen's first announcement in *The Indian Mirror* of 28 March 1875, the Brahmo devotees as well as interested among the general public came to know of Sri Rama-

nath, arrived at the Dakshineswar temple, and went straight to the northern porch of Sri Ramakrishna's room. He was a hefty, brown-complexioned, large-eyed man of middle age, and was wearing European dress. Taking off his shoes and hat, he reverentially stood with hands folded, in front of the door, with Kedar in all probability near him. Inside the room was the Paramahansa who was then talking with a small group of devotees, including Ramchandra Datta, one of his intimate disciples. Of medium height, although delicate in health, the Paramahansa with his short beard, beautiful dark eyes, and childlike face shining with radiance of divine joy, deeply impressed the new arrival.

Presently one among Sri Ramakrishna's audience drew his attention to the visitor, 'That Sahib, about whom Kedar Babu spoke, has come, it seems.' These words seemed to bring a sudden change in the Master. His mind was filled with spiritual emotion. As if losing control over himself, he rushed out of the room to receive the new arrival.⁷ One end of his dhoti was trailing behind him, but he was hardly aware of this.

krishna. Soon after this, Kedarnath Chatterjee became acquainted with him. Ramchandra Datta met Sri Ramakrishna first on 13 November 1879. Williams, we know, met him first on a Good Friday. According to Akshay Kumar Sen's *Punthi* (Bengali) (Published by Udbodhan Office, 1 Udbodhan Lane, Calcutta 700003, 5th Edition), this meeting occurred some time around that of Joseph Cook's meeting with Ramakrishna on 23rd February 1882. But the presence of Ramchandra Datta, at Williams' first meeting, with other circumstantial evidence, suggests that it occurred on the Good Friday of 1881.

⁷ According to *Punthi* (p. 376-7) the devotees did not tell Sri Ramakrishna about Williams' arrival; but they noticed that he all of a sudden became somewhat excited for no apparent reason, and rushed out to greet the new arrival. No other available evidence corroborates this account however.

As Sri Ramakrishna came out, Williams reverentially knelt before him, with his hands folded, and looked up at Sri Ramakrishna. Tears were rolling down his face. He kissed the saint's feet, and his tears wetted them.⁸ Sri Ramakrishna, on his part, merged in samādhi, his face beaming, seeming to scatter joy and bliss on all sides. Amazed at these developments, the other devotees could hardly even guess what was occurring between the two. After a while Sri Ramakrishna regained external consciousness and taking Mr. Williams by the hand, showed him into the room. He spread a mat on the floor for Williams, himself sitting on another. Pointing to the small gap left between the two mats, he remarked, 'Look, I am keeping this little gap of about a finger.' Smiling, Williams replied, 'Sir, gap there may be between the two mats, but my heart is already linked with yours.'⁹

Williams had come to Sri Ramakrishna especially to ascertain from him if one could have a direct vision of God. In this very first meeting, Williams had already experienced something which he perhaps had never in the least anticipated. For he later told many devotees that he was blessed with a direct vision of Christ in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, he had practically forgotten that he had come into the presence of a Hindu saint. He found that his cherished ideal, Christ his God, had manifested to him in varied hues in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he sat there all the while with hands folded in deep reverence.

Among the few and scanty records of

⁸ Ramchandra Datta narrated this incident thus in course of a lecture on Sri Ramakrishna, *vide Bakṛtābali*, Vol. II, p. 131

⁹ Williams narrated this incident to Swami Akhandananda, when he met him at Ajmer, *vide* Swami Akhandananda: *Smyṭi-kathā* (Bengali), (Udbodhan, 2nd edition), pp. 65-6

this noteworthy meeting, there appears consistently one particular detail. Following some preliminary words, Sri Ramakrishna rather abruptly asked, 'Well, what's your idea about me? Who am I?'

This was a question of the sort Sri Ramakrishna used often to put to a sincere visitor for ascertaining the attitude under impulse of which he had come to him. Thus, testing the other's faith in himself and attitude towards God, Sri Ramakrishna used to develop a special spiritual relation with each seeker and guide him in his pilgrimage towards God. Nor did he consider merely the words of reply; he would also observe whether a particular person was expressing spontaneously his own idea, or was prompted by others to reply as he did. Sri Ramakrishna's purpose was to help each person move on from where he stood—to give him a push forward towards his highest goal. Williams was, however, one of the rare few who was asked this type of question at very first meeting; and from the sequel it is clear why he was.

Williams was quick to reply, ['You are, Sir,] Jesus himself, the Son of God, the embodiment of eternal Consciousness.'¹⁰

No doubt Williams' viewpoint could rarely be approved by Christian theologians. According to the kerygma of the Church, God revealed Himself fully, finally once for all, in the person of Jesus Christ. The orthodox Christian acknowledges Christ as the only saviour; he believes in the fallibility of man, the bondage of sin, and salvation through Christ alone. Notwithstanding the fact that Williams was a Protestant Christian, he must have had some direct experience which prompted him to speak the words he did. There is no least reason to doubt his sincerity.

¹⁰ Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras, 1970), p. 781

Not much further is on record as to what transpired between the two, except that Williams clearly was convinced in that short time that, whether or not Sri Ramakrishna was a philosopher or a learned man, he was a man of highest realization, and that whatever he spoke he did it with authority.

Towards the end of the visit, moreover, we know Sri Ramakrishna said sweetly to Williams, 'Do not worry; but please do come to this place twice more.'¹¹ Further, so deep had been the impression on Williams of the Master's talks—replete with stories and illustrations from everyday life as they always were—that he readily took up this suggestion. And later it became increasingly clear that the impact of these visits (and quite probably more than 'twice more') had brought significant and lasting changes in Williams, deepening and enriching his spiritual life. Some years thereafter, Ramchandra Datta witnessed to his amazement that Williams the Protestant Christian was saluting the image of Siddheswarī (Kālī) at Thanthania. On being questioned, Williams said in a voice filled with emotion:

'I saw Christ in the image. Obviously, I do not hold my old views. Sri Ramakrishna crushed my prejudice and has given me a new vision, as it were. Through his blessings I can see and understand presently what did not strike me earlier. Now I do occasionally feel how foolish it was for us, the bigoted Christians, to hate images of gods. But it is my good fortune that I am blessed with a new lease of life.'¹²

Before ending this story, we should note here Swami Saradananda's concluding information about Williams:

¹¹ *Tattwamañjarī* (Bengali), Vol. XXII, No. 2, pp. 40-1, gives a brief description of this visit. A similar account of this, and some later data, are found in the *Bakṛtābali*, Vol. II, pp. 389-90.

¹² *Bakṛtābali*, Vol. II, p. 390 (translated)

'This person... came to the conclusion after paying but a few visits to the Master, that the Master was an incarnation of God, and renounced the world according to his instruction. He engaged

ed himself in practising austerities at some place in the Himalayas to the north of Punjab till death.'¹³

¹³ *The Great Master*, p. 781 fn.

SERMONETTES AT ST. MORITZ—VII

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

We must be in tune with ourselves. If we are not in harmony, we prick others. Before we become angry with others, we become angry with ourselves first. When somebody becomes angry we must sympathize with him. Have sympathy from a higher plane. There are times when you have to be a little harsh towards others or scold them. You can do this without losing your inner poise. If you have inner harmony, it will induce harmony in others. If we are restless, we get both inner troubles and outer troubles.

Suppression or repression of feelings and instincts is not enough. We should learn to sublimate them. Have harmony in body and mind. Those who are friends generally have similar vibrations.

We must first of all develop a spiritual attitude towards ourselves, and then only can we establish a proper relationship with the Divine.

First of all we must have a firm intellectual conviction that we are the Spirit. But we should not stop with that. Our faith must be tested. Belief must manifest itself in appropriate actions and thoughts.

There is too much of talk about religion. The less we talk the better. Let us act. Let us live up to the ideal. Only a few can have real religion. There is too much of theory now.

In India there are spiritual traditions

and also freedom in spiritual matters. But a favourable environment alone is not enough. There must be strict discipline. In the East or in the West nothing can be achieved in spiritual life without hard struggle and practice.

The ultimate principle is One. But the approaches to it are many. From lower truths we should reach out to higher truths. We must get glimpses of the Ultimate Truth. These glimpses point out to us the higher path. We have to proceed step by step. We must proceed from the gross to the subtle. Our vision must become clearer, steadier day by day.

In dualism God is thought to be different from us. He is looked upon as our Father, Friend, Lord, Beloved, or even Child. According to qualified monism we are parts of the One which is in all. Qualified monism is a link between dualism and non-dualism. According to it, God is not merely the sum total of all the souls but He is also the Soul of all souls. Individualism is thus a reality. All are fellow-souls controlled by the Supreme Spirit. God is immanent and transcendent.

To realize God in me is the first step; then I realize Him outside, in others also. Then comes a new outlook, a new sympathy.

First of all the mind must be purified by discharging the duties of life. Then all our faculties of feeling, willing and reason-

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA:

DEVENDRANATH MAZUMDAR

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

‘Who dares say there is no God? There must be a God, otherwise who saved Aghorenath?’—shouted Devendranath like a madman. His deep yearning for God had driven him hither and thither, but to no avail. Now sitting in the parlour of his maternal uncle, Harish Mustafi, Devendra was leafing through the pages of a biography of Sadhu Aghorenath.¹ He came upon the incident in which Aghorenath, fallen into the hands of a band of dacoits, had miraculously escaped being killed. Deeply impressed, Devendra rushed home, confined himself in a room, and prayed to God passionately, sometimes even banging his head against the wall. Thus three days and nights passed, without even food or sleep. On the fourth morning he climbed to the roof of the house and, looking at the rising sun, exclaimed: ‘Who says there is no God? Here is an illustration of the glory of God!’ And now his inner voice prompted him to find out his spiritual guide without delay.

Born in a brāhmaṇa family of the village Jagannathpur in Jessore (now in Bangladesh) in 1844, Devendranath was brought up in an orthodox way. His father, Prasannanath Bandyopadhyay Mazumdar (the family had dropped the ‘Bandopadhyay’ subsequently) died when Devendra was only two months old, and Devendra’s elder brother Surendranath took up the responsibility of the family. Their mother Bamasundari, a pious lady, came to have great influence over Devendra. As he grew out

of childhood he studied in a day school for five or six years, but was not a promising pupil and took little interest in formal education. But through the close association with his brother Surendra who became a poet of considerable reputation, Devendra developed a taste for Bengali literature. At 27, he was forced to marry, by his mother’s undertaking a ‘fast unto death’ for this purpose. Then eight years later Surendra died, and Devendra had to take up the family’s support, through great hardships. He took a clerical job in the manager’s office of the Tagore family at Jorasanko, and hired a humble cottage in Nimu Goswami Lane, in Ahiritola, Calcutta.

Being of a religious temperament, Devendra had meanwhile learnt the practice of Yoga from his elder brother; and such earnest practice through about eleven years had brought him visions of various kinds. But these could not satisfy him, since he strongly felt the need of direct perception of God. He began visiting Keshab Chandra Sen’s Brahmo Samaj. He was introduced to Keshab, the most popular among the Brahmo leaders of the day, but the latter did not prove to be that well of spirituality whence he had hoped to quench his thirst.

So, now, he set out in all earnest in search of a reliable spiritual guide. One day thus, he set out to visit Bhagawan Das Babaji, the well-known Vaiṣṇava saint of Kalna, but being late, he missed the steamer and therefore could not go. On the way back, he dropped in at the house of an acquaintance, Nagendranath Mukhopadhyay, at Pathuriaghata Street. Though Nagendranath was not at home, a book was lying on his table; and casually looking through

¹ *Sādhu Aghore-nāther Jīvancaṛit* (Bengali) 3rd ed., pp. 31-3. Quoted in Brahmachari Praneshkumar: *Mahātmā Devendranāth* (Bengali) (Calcutta, B. E. 1337), p. 35

its pages, Devendra chanced on mention of Paramahansa Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar.² It struck him that the Paramahansa must be a person of highly advanced spirituality and that such a one might be of help to him. Becoming deeply thoughtful, he walked homeward. On the way he met another acquaintance, who told him the whereabouts of the Paramahansa. Reaching home, and perhaps collecting some coins, he immediately set out for Dakshineswar. It was a day in the first part of February 1884,³ and around ten in the morning.

Devendra took a boat at Ahiritola. During the boat-ride, he tried to form a mental image of the Paramahansa, for he he had heard precious little about him so far. Now and then he thought he was perhaps hasty in undertaking such a visit—should he not go back rather than go through the ordeal of meeting such an advanced soul? But there was no time for retreat, for the boatman soon thereafter announced their arrival at Dakshineswar. Devendra's eyes fell on a person wearing

a red-bordered *dhoti*, with one bandaged hand resting in a sling. That man was standing on the bank, as if eagerly waiting for someone.⁴ Devendra got off the boat with some trepidation, but in the process lost sight of that person.

Then following the directions given by a young man⁵ at the bathing-ghat, Devendra went to the porch on the western side of Sri Ramakrishna's room. He found the room empty; but soon after there entered a man wearing slippers and with one end of his *dhoti* resting on his shoulders. His left hand was bandaged and supported by a sling. Devendra recognized him as the one he had seen on the bank of the river. It struck him suddenly that this might be the Paramahansa he had come to meet. But his ideas about Paramahansas, as with matted hair, ochre robe, and so on, did not seem to hold good here. He bowed low before him and took the dust of his feet. Sri Ramakrishna—for it indeed proved to be he—then said in rustic Bengali, 'Come in through the other entrance.' Devendra went around and, approaching the northern entrance of the room, found Sri Ramakrishna waiting to receive him. The Master said: 'Don't put your shoes there; thieves may take them away. Please leave them here.' Devendra obeyed, and stood in front of Sri Ramakrishna.⁶

The Master was then almost forty-eight years old, with a few hairs in his beard turning grey. Some days ago he had accidentally fallen and sustained a dislocation in his left wrist. He had already attracted the admiration of Keshab Chandra Sen and

² The book was *Bhakti-caitanya-candrikā* (Bengali) by Trailokya Nath Sanyal (p. 63). Cf. Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-carit* (Bengali) (Sri Kalinath Sinha, Calcutta, 1st ed.), Vol. I, page 276

³ One day in January 1884, Sri Ramakrishna was going alone towards the pine grove at the Dakshineswar garden, when he went into one of his frequent ecstatic moods. He fell and a bone in his left wrist was dislocated. From the account of 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1947), p. 331 etc., it can be inferred that the accident happened some time between 6 January and 1 February, 1884—presumably some time after Keshab's death on 8 January, 1884. Since it is noted that a physician bandaged the forearm on 2 February, it appears the injury was shortly before this date. This gives an approximation for Devendra's visit. In the following conversations it is evident that the diagnosis (fracture or dislocation) was still unclear.

⁴ Brahmachari Praneshkumar: op. cit., pp. 39-40

⁵ Swami Gambhirananda: *Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-bhaktamālīkā* (Bengali) Udbodhan, Calcutta, B. E. 1359). Vol. II, p. 328. Devendra soon came to know this young man as Sri Niranjana Ghosh, later Swami Niranjanananda.

⁶ Gurudas Burman: op. cit., p. 278

many others from among the educated middle class of Calcutta. Though he himself spurned formal education, his keen insight into the heart of men and his great spirituality made him a Master of a high order. He could study the spiritual potentialities of his visitors with an expertise that was phenomenal. His natural simplicity and purity made profound impression on all who met him and who had spiritual inclination.

Sri Ramakrishna enquired of Devendra, 'Where do you come from?' 'From Calcutta', was the reply. Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna, who was standing, assumed the typical posture of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with one leg gracefully bent across the other and hands in the position of holding a flute—and asked Devendra, 'Well, have you come to see this?'⁷ 'No,' came the reply, 'I have come to see you, sir.' On hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna rejoined in a troubled voice: 'What will you see of me? I have broken my hand in a fall. You see,—feel it. Look, here it is. Please see if a bone is really fractured. Terrible pain! What shall I do?'

Devendra examined the hand. He asked, 'How have you got this fracture, sir?' In the same complaining voice Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Oh, I am often seized by a strange state of mind. In such a condition I fell down a few days ago and broke my hand. Medicine often aggravates the pain. Adhar Sen applied some drugs but they have increased the swelling. Since then I have stopped applying medicines. Well, shall I all be right again?' Devendra pondered a little. He thought that, being a holy man, he would soon get cured, and he tried to console him saying, 'Surely! You will be quite well again.'

This visibly gladdened the Paramahansa. He called others and began to tell them: 'Look here, he says my hand will be all right again. He is a man from Calcutta.' Never before had Devendranath seen such a naive person. A doubt thus crossed his mind. He thought: 'Is this the nature of a Paramahansa? Whereas I have come to see a saint, he now takes *me* for an all-knowing person? He takes my words as authentic and conclusive. Because I have told him, he thinks he will get cured. Is it possible that any human being can have such childlike faith? Well, perhaps all this is fake!' And now, to make a definite assessment of the man before him, he looked intently at his face. He had observed already that Sri Ramakrishna's body seemed tender as a woman's and his mind appeared as clean as that of a child. Now on the whole, the Master's childlike demeanour made a favourable impress on Devendra's mind. He soon lost all suspicion about feigning and became convinced that such childlike simplicity was but natural to this man.⁸

After a while, at Sri Ramakrishna's bidding a young man named Harish gave the visitor some offered sweets (*prasāda*). Devendra partook of these. Then Sri Ramakrishna began to speak on love of God. 'Do you know what is *prema*—ecstatic love of God? At the upsurge of such love one forgets all outer things, forgets the world; one even forgets one's own body which is so dear to all. As in a dust-storm one cannot distinguish the trees and the houses—all look alike—, similarly at the dawn of love for God all ideas of distinction vanish.' These words enchanted Devendra: he had never before heard anyone speak thus. In the course of this talk the Master referred again to Adhar Sen, a deputy magistrate and an acquaintance of Devendra's who used to visit Sri Rama-

⁷ Thereby Sri Ramakrishna was by implication asking if he had come to see the image of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

⁸ Brahmachari Praneshkumar: op. cit, p. 42

krishna frequently. Devendra could now see there was something unique about the Master. He felt deeply drawn towards him.

It was time for the midday meal. Sri Ramakrishna said to Devendra: 'Look, high-caste brāhmaṇas take their food here, for there is a temple. No one should object to partaking of the *prasāda* of the deity. So, you too eat here; don't go home now.'

Staunch brāhmaṇa that he was, Devendra was very particular about his food. However, the sweet words of Sri Ramakrishna now dispelled his hesitation. Addressing Ramlal, his nephew, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Look here, he is a pious man. He will take food here today. Give him the *prasāda* offered to Lord Viṣṇu.' Devendra was wonderstruck—recalling the Master's assuming the posture of Lord Kṛṣṇa immediately on meeting Devendra, his anticipation of his visitor's strictness about food, and now this specific choice of *prasāda*, he thought: 'How could he know I am a strict vegetarian since childhood? How did he find out my inborn love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa? It seems he definitely can read others' minds.' Devendra then partook of *prasāda* from the Rādhākānta temple, though he had that day to forgo his regular bath.

Sri Ramakrishna had so much impressed Devendra that, while with Ramalal, he talked of nothing else but the Master. Then after some rest-time, he came and sat before Sri Ramakrishna. He listened with rapt attention to all that came out of his lips. The Master, dwelling again on the love of God, said: 'The one goal of life is to cultivate love for God, a love like that of the milkmaids, the milkmen, and the cow-herd boys of Vrindaban for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. When He went away to Mathura the cowherds roamed about Vrindaban weeping bitterly because of their separation from Him.' Saying this,

Sri Ramakrishna burst forth with a rapturous song on Śrī Kṛṣṇa.⁹

Himself a composer of songs,¹⁰ Devendra was stirred to the depths of his soul. The sweet song, laden with love, brought tears to his eyes. Sri Ramakrishna had captured his heart.

Then at the Master's bidding Devendra went to visit the temples in the compound and returned. After a little more talk, Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'Why do I find your face sickly?' Devendra had till now given no thought to himself; but now the affectionate words of Sri Ramakrishna made him aware that he was feeling quite feverish. Anxiously Sri Ramakrishna further enquired, 'Do you have any chronic illness?' Devendra told him that he had been laid up with malaria fever, but had had no such fever for the last three months. Very worried, like a mother for her child, Sri Ramakrishna moved about restlessly in the room. At last he arranged an escort, Baburam (later Swami Premananda) a young devotee who had just come there to enjoy his holy company. Standing on the western porch of his room, facing the Ganga, Sri Ramakrishna waited till he noticed a boat with a roof-cover. At his bidding Baburam called the boatman and engaged him for the journey.

While Devendra was taking his leave, Sri Ramakrishna endearingly told him: 'On your return home please consult a good physician and when you have gotten over the illness please call at this place again. Well, will you come?' Devendra replied, 'Yes, sir.' Holding Baburam's hand, the Master said to him: 'You please

⁹ Akshay Kumar Sen, *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Punthi* (Bengali), (Udbodhan, Calcutta, 2nd ed.), p. 383

¹⁰ Besides the composition of many devotional songs, Devendra composed (later on) the famous *Gurustāvāṣṭaka*—Eight stanzas on the Guru—in 'Totaka' metre.

visit here another day. I shall talk a lot with you that day. You please escort him home now.' So the two boarded the boat and left for Calcutta, while Sri Ramakrishna stood on the bank to see them off. With the help of Baburam, Devendra that day could barely reach the house of one of his relatives. He could go no further, and for the next forty-one days he was dangerously ill, with high fever, prostration, and often unconscious. During those long days, whenever he opened his eyes he saw the loving form of Sri Ramakrishna sitting near him and in delirium he was often heard to mutter the name of Sri Ramakrishna. However, as he convalesced, one idea troubled him: 'A visit to a holy man brings good and peace. But this time it almost cost me my life. Enough of it! I had better not go that way again.' Thus doubt once again assailed his mind. And he dismissed these visions of Sri Ramakrishna as mere hallucinations.

However, many days later, Devendra came across the news in the *Sulabh Samachar* (Brahmo newspaper), of Sri Ramakrishna's next visit to Balaram Bose's house at Baghbazar. On reading of this, he felt as it were forcibly drawn to Balaram's house on that day. There he saw, in the evening light, Sri Ramakrishna dancing to the accompaniment of *kīrtan* (devotional singing) sung by a group of devotees. The Master's rhythmic dance, expressing deep feelings, greatly impressed the devotionally-minded Devendra. Finally Sri Ramakrishna stood still, deep in *samādhi*, and the assembled people began to take the dust of his feet. Devendra wanted to make his obeisance incognito. But as he touched the Master's feet, he heard to his surprise the sweet voice of Sri Ramakrishna who had by now regained a little outer consciousness: 'Well, how do you do? Why haven't you visited Dakshineswar so long? I do often

think of you.' These endearing words melted wholly the mists of doubt that had besieged Devendra, and he promised to visit Dakshineswar soon.

Thereafter Devendra began visiting Dakshineswar as often as he could. Soon he became convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was far from an ordinary holy man and that a gracious glance from him could ensure liberation of a soul! Until his contact with the Master, he had met no one whose life and words carried nearly such immediacy of impact for him. Devendra was now completely won by the great love, purity, and holiness of Sri Ramakrishna.

One day Devendra prayed for formal initiation, which Sri Ramakrishna gently but firmly declined. But some days later, seeing that the desire was still in Devendra's mind, he told him: 'Look, you will not have to do any special practice. You simply chant "Harinām" (the name of Hari) while clapping your hands. That will be enough for you.'¹¹ And indeed, following this simple instruction, Devendra found great peace of mind. This as well as the affectionate treatment by the Master, brought him to Dakshineswar even more frequently. One day, the Master asked him: 'Well, as you visit here so frequently, what do you think of "this place" (referring to himself thus)? What have you found?' The unpretentious Devendra frankly replied: 'I have not found anything very special. However, no more do I feel that urge for moving hither and thither in search of God and religion. Again I do not have that restlessness in my mind any more.' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'You have tried much, no doubt.' Then interlocking his fingers in between his two palms, he said: 'But the sword has not been fitted into the right scabbard. You know, every-

¹¹ *Udbodhan*, Vol. XXIX, No. 2, p. 68

one has his own characteristics.' ¹² Henceforth Devendra directed his efforts into the proper channel, under the guidance of the Master.

One day Devendra prostrated himself at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and earnestly prayed for *sannyāsa* (monastic vows). The Master did not agree. On the other hand, he lifted the disciple from the floor and sang a song describing the pangs of Śacī-mātā, the mother of Śrī Caitanya:

'Why, golden Gaur, should you leave Nadia to become a mendicant?

Oh, what will happen to your wife Viṣṇupriyā?

Viśwarūp's loss still I do harbour;

Do you, too, want to hurt your unfortunate mother?'

Clearly the Master thus hinted that Devendra's old mother had not yet been reconciled to the death of her eldest son Surendra. Again, Devendra should remember that his pious wife was there to be cared for. ¹³ And actually it seems that this song convinced him that monasticism was not meant for

him. His life's course was ordained otherwise.

Like the other disciples, Devendranath too enjoyed a personal and exalted relationship with Sri Ramakrishna. But unlike many others he was favoured with the disclosure of the nature of that relationship. One day the Master, explaining the significance of a dream of Devendra's, said: 'Do you know, your attitude is that of the *gopīs* to Kṛṣṇa. That's why you have seen such a dream. You are extremely lucky. Such dreams indicate the gradual blotting out of lust.' ¹⁴ Thus made aware of this inner nature of his mind, Devendra made progress steadily, and so much that he became saturated, as it were, with the *gopī-bhāva* (attitude of the *gopīs*). He became absorbed in thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna, and gradually proved to be a very effective instrument for the spread of the message of his Great Master. He among other things, built 'Sri Ramakrishna Archanalaya' at Entally in Calcutta, and spent his latter days there, full of the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna. Finally he breathed his last on 11 September 1911.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 69

¹³ Akshay Kumar Sen: *op. cit.*, p. 556

¹⁴ *Udbodhan*, Vol. XXIX, No. 5, p. 267

THE MIND OF MAN

DR. RALPH W. G. WYCKOFF

(Continued from the previous issue)

Just as we establish the structure of the world of matter and decide about occurrences within it by applying the criterion of truth to sensory experiences and propositions about them formed within the mind, so we give them life by the values we place on them, by the feeling judgments we make

concerning them. Some decisions of a primitive nature have an emotional irrational motivation but it should be realized that feeling judgments can be as rigorously disciplined and hence as rational as the intellectual judgments we have learned to make about truth. The logic behind these feel-

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: SHIVANATH SHASTRI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Although coming from a poor family and rural surroundings, Shivanath Bhattacharya, son of Haramohan Bhattacharya and Golakmani Devi, rose rapidly from obscurity to eminence in Calcutta, the then capital of India. Born on 31 January 1847, at Chaugaripota, Hooghly district, in the residence of his maternal uncle, Shivanath easily drew the attention of others, even as a boy. His maternal uncle, Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan, an erudite scholar and editor of the Journal *Somprakash*, exerted considerable influence on the growing boy. His coming to live in the family of Mahesh Chandra Chaudhury at Bhowanipur, South Calcutta, in 1862 opened up a new horizon for him.¹ His dominating father married him first to one Prasannamayee, daughter of Nabin Chandra Chakravarti, and thereafter to Virajmohini, daughter of Abhayacharan Chakravarti. The second marriage took place in 1865, and it notably changed the course of Shivanath's life. He considered this second marriage very unjust, especially since it resulted simply from his father's taking a dislike to Nabin Chandra's family. His conscientious mind constantly reproached him, and finally he was driven to seek shelter in God only. Theodore Parker's *Ten Sermons and Prayers* helped him learn how to pray. Still, he had to live through a time of mental torment and he needed healing. He resolved to obey the dictates of religion and the God dwelling in the heart.²

The Brahmo Samaj movement was then at its zenith, among all classes of society

¹ Shivanath Shastri : *Atmacarit* ('Autobiography' in Bengali), (Signet Press, Calcutta-20), p. 57.

² *ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

and especially the English-educated youths. Though naturally attracted to its programme, Shivanath was a strongly orthodox brāhmaṇa boy, and to explain how he came to join the Brahmo fold his biographers—as well as he himself—have suggested at least two factors : firstly his natural religious inclinations, and secondly the unfortunate second marriage.³ In any case, up to 1868, he was associated with the Adi Brahmo Samaj (the original group founded by Ram-mohan Roy) rather than the new-formed Brahmo Samaj of India led by Keshab Chandra Sen. Soon thereafter, however, Vijaykrishna Goswami, Shivanath's friend and classmate, prevailed upon him to join Keshab. So Shivanath gradually detached himself from the Adi Samaj and joined the more progressive group. And in August of 1869, Keshab initiated Shivanath and twenty other educated youths into Brahmoism on the occasion of the consecration of the Brahmo Mandir (temple). This shocked Shivanath's father so much that he actually disowned his son! All the same, Keshab's dynamic influence soon transformed the orthodox brāhmaṇa youth into an ardent leader of the Brahmo movement. Justifying his conversion, Shivanath wrote :

'When we renounced Hinduism for Brahmoism, we did so in the firm conviction that Brahmoism is a religion not only of the soul, but of the Mind, the Heart and the Conscience. We re-

³ Hemlata Devi, a daughter of Shivanath and one of his biographers, wrote emphatically : 'I can say definitely that had he not been married a second time, he would never have come under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj . . . Almost mad because of the terrible agonies of his heart, he took shelter in God.'—*Śivanāth Jivanī* (Bengali), p. 104.

nounced a religion which not only worshipped a myriad of Gods and Goddesses and failed to satisfy the higher craving of the soul, but which was also a hot-bed of superstitions, social evils which stunted and hindered the growth of healthy social and religious customs and habits among our countrymen, [—this we renounced] for one which was capable of satisfying not only our spiritual aspirations but our purer social and intellectual wants too.⁴

On the successful completion of his Master's degree course in Sanskrit, Shivanath was awarded the title of 'Shastri' (lit., one versed in scriptures) in 1872. Two years later he joined the South Suburban School as its Headmaster and took up his residence in Bhowanipur. Soon the Bhowanipur branch of the Brahmo Samaj of India began its meetings at his residence and he became not only an ardent follower of Brahmoism but an aggressive leader, ready to meet any challenge for vindicating his rationalistic standpoint. So, by 1877, strong forces of dissension had polarized around Shivanath, Anandamohan Bose and a few other youth leaders, resulting a few years later in the second and perhaps the deepest schism in the Brahmo movement. The apparent acceptance of divine honours by Keshab, the mixing of male and female worshippers in the congregations, and the 'Bharat Ashrama libel' controversy had already prepared the ground for this dissension. The new group which split off from Keshab's Samaj was named the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.

To appreciate Shivanath's role in these evolving phases of the Brahmo movement, one must take note of the elements of his mental make-up. He observed in his diary :

'The nature of certain persons is conducive to spiritual life—they are natural-

ly endowed with spirituality. In my nature my love for men prevails over my love for God—I am more sensitive to morals than to spirituality. I was not born with the nature of Devendranath, Keshabchandra, Vijaykrishna or Umeshchandra Datta.⁵

Kind-hearted, truthful and courageous as Shivanath was, his learning, dutifulness, and patriotism further marked him among his fellows. Still, his natural talents were tending more towards literary achievement than spirituality. Valuable as were his contributions to Bengali literature, we must keep in mind the view held by no less a man than the patriot-orator Bipin Chandra Pal :

'Had he [Shivanath] devoted his heart and soul to develop his natural literary power and poetic talent he would have occupied a much higher place in modern Bengali literature and in the history of social life than what he has achieved as a Brahmo leader in his country's religious thought and life of activity. Besides, what he had achieved in the Brahmo Samaj is in fact based on his oratory and literary achievements and not on any other extraordinary spiritual practices.'⁶

Rabindranath Tagore wrote to Shivanath, 'You have God-gifted mastery in literature.'⁷ However, the pushes and pulls of circumstance around Shivanath, especially those associated with the internal conflicts among the Brahmos, did not permit a spontaneous and all-round manifestation of his literary potentialities. All the same, his relentless and continuous struggle from boyhood for rising in life, and optimistic, ceaseless search for new light and inspiration, built his life into what it eventually became.

⁵ *Diary* (in Bengali), dated 12/9/1888, as reproduced in *Alekhyā*, B.E. 1380, Pous-Māgh issue, p. 293.

⁶ Quoted in *Sāhitya Sadhakmala* (Bengali), Pub. by Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Vol. VII, p. 42.

⁷ Quoted by Pramathanath Bishi, in *Banglar Lekhak* (Bengali), B.E. 1357, p. 2.

⁴ *The Brahmo Public Opinion*, dated 2 May 1878,

The mounting pressure of western secular institutions and the subsequent slandering of Hindu society by the Brahmos and the Christian missionaries, threw a great challenge to the Hindus. But at this juncture, Sri Ramakrishna emerged as a mighty support. Though not a scholar, he was the owner of the 'book of life'; and the magnetism resulting therefrom attracted to himself great intellectuals and leaders of thought. He actually showed how the life divine could be *lived*. Religion was for him the very essence of man. Religion stripped of its theological intricacies, was held by him to be the all-comprehensive dynamic force competent to solve all the basic problems of life. His life and teachings injected fresh vigour into the veins of Hinduism. Again, his God-intoxication, his burning faith in God and man, his profound respect for women, his unsullied purity of character, and his love and respect for all faiths, endeared him to the Brahmos and Hindus alike.

But to return to the historically significant year of 1875: on 15 March of that year, Sri Ramakrishna first met Keshab Chandra Sen. The latter, whose broad heart and keen spiritual insight responded at once to the saint's personality, announced in the *Indian Mirror* of 28 March 1875, his discovery of the great 'Yogi of Dakshineswar'. Naturally then, Keshab's admirers and Brahmos in particular began to show interest in Sri Ramakrishna. Even a bit before this, Shivanath had heard about the Saint from one of his neighbours who was a teacher of the London Missionary Society's School. This man was married to a girl of the Dakshineswar village, and so used often to visit Dakshineswar. He told Shivanath the fascinating story of Sri Ramakrishna, 'his sayings and doings'; and often quoted from his illuminating teachings. These, clothed in simple and easily understandable language, were profound and beautiful. Though Shivanath was extremely busy with his own responsibilities, the teachings

of Sri Ramakrishna stirred his mind, and he began to feel attracted towards the Saint.⁸ Thus the *Indian Mirror* announcement served to hasten Shivanath's decision to visit the Dakshineswar temple soon.

One day, almost certainly in April 1875,⁹ Shivanath visited the temple of Dakshineswar accompanied by the teacher of the Missionary School. Sri Ramakrishna was then almost forty; Shivanath, only twenty-eight. After formal exchange of greetings, Shivanath and his friend took their seats. Sri Ramakrishna was expressively glad to see Shivanath. No doubt he could at once recognise the spiritual potentialities of the new arrival. The Master used to say, 'I know the nature of a man by a mere look; I know who is good and who is bad; who is of noble descent and who is not; who is a man of knowledge and who is one of devotion; who will realise God and who will not . . .'¹⁰ Shivanath was pleased to notice that the Paramahansa (as Sri Ramakrishna had come to be called) was treating him as one of long acquaintance. Shivanath thought his teacher-friend might have already told the Paramahansa about him; otherwise how could he treat him with such familiarity?

Even in the first few minutes Shivanath became greatly impressed by the Paramahansa—especially by his extraordinary simplicity. The latter too formed a high estimation of Shivanath, as can be seen from some of his later remarks, such as: 'Ah! What a devotee Shivanath is! He is soaked in the love of God, like a cheese-

⁸ Shivanath Shastri: *Men I have Seen* (Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta-6), p. 59.

⁹ Shivanath first went to Dakshineswar soon after the publication of the article about Sri Ramakrishna in the *Indian Mirror*, March 28, 1875. It thus seems the visit cannot have been later than April 1875.

¹⁰ Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-600004, 1970), p. 348.

cake in syrup.’¹¹ ‘I feel very happy when I see Shivanath. He always seems to be absorbed in the bliss of bhakti.’¹² ‘Ah! Here is Shivanath! You see, you [Shivanath] are a devotee of God. The very sight of you gladdens my heart. One hemp-smoker feels very happy to meet another. Very often they embrace each other in an exuberance of joy.’¹³

Shivanath was moved to hear Sri Ramakrishna say ‘again and again’ in his open-hearted, simple and childlike manner, “I am so delighted to meet you; won’t you come to see me now and then?”¹⁴ Sri Ramakrishna told him—if not in the first visit, at least soon thereafter—that he had formerly been the priest of the temple of Kālī. Many mendicants and friars, belonging to different sects, used to visit the temple. Whatever instructions they used to give him about spiritual practices, he would follow implicitly; and the resulting austerities actually drove him to insanity for a time. Besides, he had contracted a disease which made him lose his consciousness whenever he was seized by trance.¹⁵

¹¹ ‘M’: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, pnb. by Madras Math, 1947), p. 88.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 255.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴ *Men I Have Seen*, p. 60.

¹⁵ *Atmacarit*, p. 128. Obviously Shivanath held some wrong notions about what Sri Ramakrishna might have told him. He has himself recorded that the Master once strongly emphasized this ‘insanity’ in order to stop his nephew Hriday from ‘flattering’ him before rich visitors [cf. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Almora, U.P., 1964, p. 282)]. Later Sri Ramakrishna tried to correct Shivanath’s ideas, saying: ‘Look here, Shivanath, is it true that you call these [his ecstatic states] a disease and say that I become unconscious at that time? Ah, you people remain all right, although you apply your minds night and day to insentient things like brick, wood, earth, money, etc., and I, who think night and day of Him whose consciousness makes the whole uni-

Though the Master’s mind had never been drilled and disciplined according to Western methods, as had been Shivanath’s the latter found in Sri Ramakrishna a deep philosopher, a lover of God, and above all, a noble soul. What surprised the highly educated visitor was not only the lucidity of the spirited talks but also their deep mystical import. In short, he was charmed by the sweet personality of the Master. Later on he was to conclude that Sri Ramakrishna was ‘certainly one of the most remarkable personalities I have come across in life’. Further he wrote:

‘In fact, the impression left in my mind, by intercourse with him, was that I had seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst for spiritual life was so great and who had gone through so many privations and sufferings for the practice of religion. Secondly, I was convinced that he was no longer a Sadhaka or a devotee under exercise, but was a Siddha Purusha or one who had attained direct vision of spiritual truth.’¹⁶

In another place he wrote:

One effect from these austerities was that Ramakrishna’s health was permanently undermined and he emerged from his wonderful religious exercises with the direct vision of many spiritual truths, and with the grand conception of Divine Motherhood. There was another faculty in him. His expositions of great spiritual truths, and specially of the motherhood of God, were very remarkable. He would often use the simplest and most familiar facts of ordinary life as parables to illustrate these truths. Many of the parables he used were so apt and so simple that men were often left wondering and highly edified.’¹⁷

verse conscious, become unconscious! Where have you borrowed your intellect from?’ (*Great Master*, pp. 542-3).

¹⁶ *Men I Have Seen*, p. 66.

¹⁷ Shivanath Shastri: *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, Vol. II, p. 7-8.

Unfortunately, nothing else of note is recorded about this important first meeting. Nevertheless its significance can be easily and clearly seen from subsequent events. For, though Shivanath tried hard—from sectarian as well as social considerations—to remain aloof, still he could not altogether resist the great attraction which the Master possessed for so many sincere seekers. He visited Sri Ramakrishna many a time, yet tried his best to keep himself at a safe distance from the orbit of his penetrating influence. Though the unfailing judgment of the Master had revealed the spiritual potentialities of Shivanath, still the latter did not benefit so much as he could have from the influence of the Master. Nonetheless Sri Ramakrishna's love and compassion for him knew no bounds. As Swami Saradananda well summarizes :

'Seeing the love of truth, the disposition to renunciation and thirst for spirituality and other good qualities of the members of the Brahmo Samaj . . . , the Master tried to help them forward on their own chosen path of religion It did not take him long to understand that, under the influence of Western education, they were being carried far away from the religious ideal of the nation and were regarding social reform as the acme of their practice of religion. He, therefore, tried to make them accept the realization of God as the ideal of their lives even if their Society failed to follow them to that extent.'¹⁸

Naturally then, for some time Shivanath showed ambivalence in his attitude towards Sri Ramakrishna. Finally, following the secession of Vijaykrishna Goswami from the Brahmo Samaj in order to devote himself wholly to spiritual practices, Shivanath entirely stopped visiting the Master, thinking that the latter's ideas were partly if not fully responsible for the sharp turn in the

course of Vijay's life. In fact Shivanath—now the leader of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj—openly confessed, 'If I go there [to Sri Ramakrishna] frequently, all the others of the Brahmo Samaj will do so in imitation of me and, as a result, the Samaj will collapse.' Yet try as hard as he might to dispel the Saint's influence, he could not help being seized by occasional self-reproach and lamentation, which became frequent in his later life. No wonder we find him admitting several times, 'It is true that the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj has failed to implant well spiritual ideas in our countrymen.'¹⁹ Again: 'I failed to comprehend the seriousness involved in establishing the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj as a measure of protest against Brahmananda Keshab Chandra. I have failed to devote myself to spiritual practices as much as I should have done.'²⁰

Still, although Shivanath thus failed to admire and accept Sri Ramakrishna as much as he might have done under other circumstances, the latter's benign influence on him was in many ways evident. Indelible as it was, it worked on his heart slowly and silently but steadily. As he himself once put it: 'My acquaintance with him, though short, was fruitful by strengthening many a spiritual thought in me. I owe him a debt of gratitude for the sincere affection he bore me.'²¹ His biographer writes: 'True it is that the deep attachment Shivanath had then developed towards Ramakrishna left its permanent impress on Shivanath. He acquired the concept of the universality of religion specially from Ramakrishna.'²² A still more striking statement to this effect is recorded in Shivanath's autobiography:

¹⁹ *Diary*, 12/9/1888—in *Alekhya*, Vol. IV, No. 4, p. 292.

²⁰ *Diary*, dated 9/1/1915 (*Alekhya*, Vol. IV, No. 3, p. 179).

²¹ *Men I have Seen*, p. 77.

²² *Sivanath Jivani*, p. 146.

¹⁸ *Great Master*, pp. 686-7.

'Contact with Sri Ramakrishna brought home the truth that religion is one, various are its manifestations. Such catholicity and universality in religious ideas were widely interspersed in his teachings In the company of Ramakrishna I have convincingly realized the universality of religion.'²³ Similarly the concept of Divine Motherhood, so dear to Sri Ramakrishna, influenced Shivanath no less than many others Brahmo leaders. Many will be surprised to learn from his authentic biography that Shivanath used to recite every morning a Sanskrit hymn to Gurus, composed by himself, in which occur the lines :

'Ramakrishna who was perfected in the worship of Śakti and endued with the attitude of Divine Motherhood These men and women are all my Gurus. By thinking of them, remembering them, I derive great strength in religious practice.'²⁴

Shivanath considered that Brahmoism as

²³ *Atmacarit*, p. 128..

²⁴ रामकृष्णः शक्तिसिद्धो मातृभावसमन्वितः ।
... ..

एते मे गुरवः सर्वे योषितः पुरुषाश्च ये ।

स्मृत्वैतान् महतीं शक्तिं लभेऽहं धर्मसाधने ॥

Śivanāth Jivanī, p. 289.

represented by the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was a God-sent religious dispensation²⁵ and that it was the religion of the age.²⁶ Also he took on himself the leadership of the Brahmo movement as a divine command. But his regrets in later years over his shortcomings, were many and deep. In 1903 he confessed that the spiritual condition of the Brahmo Samaj was low and that his own condition was worse still.²⁷ On the completion of his 68th year, he admitted that he had neglected his search for depth in spiritual life, that he had dedicated himself to preaching Brahmoism at the cost of progress in his own religious life, and that his reliance on and faith in God had loosened.²⁸ Could any serious student of Sri Ramakrishna or of Shivanath's life miss seeing herein the permeating and abiding influence of the Master, who advocated religion as *being* and *becoming*? Surely Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings continued to inspire Shivanath till his death on 30-9-1919.

²⁵ Prafulla Kumar Das: *Śivanāth Śhāstrīr Aprakāśita Vaktrta O Smaraklipi* (Bengali) (Pharma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1975), p. 85.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

SERMONETTES AT ST. MORITZ—XIV

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

It is important to make our thoughts, speech, and action one. We should be true to ourselves. But that does not mean we should go about telling every one about our mistakes. Do not tell people about your weakness. That weakens you as well as your listener. Confess your weaknesses and troubles to the Divine. Let us be true to God and not try to hide anything from

Him. Let us place our troubles before Him and seek His assistance. That is a means of acquiring familiarity with the Divine. This sort of intimacy slowly takes you nearer to Him. Instead of washing your dirty linen in public, retire into the sanctuary of your heart and pray to the Divine.

It is a mistake to think that we can

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : SWAMI NIRANJANANANDA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

One afternoon there appeared three persons at the Rani Rasmani's temple of Kali at Dakshineswar, to see the Paramahansa Ramakrishna, whom the great Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen so much revered. Two of them, rather elderly, had accompanied a young man of about twenty. He was tall, handsome, and with a crop of curly hair on his head. His princely bearing was quite impressive; his eyes were beaming with courage and joy. Though quiet in nature, he was an energetic youth possessing unusual talents. He had clairvoyant powers and was used as a medium by a group led by Dr. Pearychand Mitra of Ahiritola, Calcutta, in their sittings with the planchette. He was also an acknowledged connoisseur of brave deeds, himself endowed with great courage and strength. In addition, he was well known for his piety and kindness, particularly towards the poor and usually neglected people. The young man and his companions had come to see the Paramahansa, who, they had heard, possessed great spiritual powers. They were not aware perhaps that the Paramahansa had a special power by which he could see through a man and know his psychological constitution. As his eyes fell on the young man, the Paramahansa softly remarked, 'Ah, a fine boy, he is guileless.'

The group expressed a desire to use Sri Ramakrishna as a medium for their planchette. Childlike and innocent as he was, the Paramahansa readily agreed to act accordingly, and took his seat on a chair. They tried to mesmerize him, but however hard they tried, they failed to cast their spell on him; he remained calmly seated throughout, sometimes looking at them with a smile. It seems, he sensed something

wrong in their experiment, for soon thereafter he refused to continue. Disappointed, a senior member of the group remarked, 'You are an extraordinarily stubborn person indeed. We have failed to mesmerize you.'¹ The Paramahansa on the other hand, had discovered in the young man an advanced spiritual aspirant with qualities to which his companions were blind. More than that, he knew that the young man was one of those select few who were to carry out later his noble mission for the spiritual uplift of humanity. The Paramahansa was the greatest spiritual giant of his time, whom leaders of many religions and sects adored. He attracted all who came in contact with him—child or grown-up man, ignorant or scholarly—as the magnet draws steel. And the young man was Nityaniranjan Ghosh (later Swami Niranjanananda) who was identified by Sri Ramakrishna as a Nitya-siddha, an ever-perfect soul born for the good of others.

Born, probably about the year 1862², in Rajarhat-Vishnupur, a village in the 24-Parganas (West Bengal), Nityaniranjan Ghosh (usually called Niranjana) was reared in an aristocratic middle class family in a typical orthodox atmosphere. His father

¹ *Tattvamanjari* (Bengali), Vol. VIII, No. 4, p. 94.

² His exact date of birth is not known. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by 'M', translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1947), p. 980, it is mentioned that his age (in April 1887) was about 25 years. On the strength of this evidence Swami Gambhirananda has mentioned Swami Niranjanananda's probable birth year as 1862—In his *Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika* (Udbodhan, Calcutta-3, 3rd edition, p. 226). The date of his birth on Shravana-Purnima has not been definitely ascertained yet.

was Ambikacharan Ghosh and his maternal uncle was Kali Krishna Mitra, a renowned Sanskrit scholar of Barasat (West Bengal). His other maternal uncle, Rajkrishna Mitra, was a renowned homoeopath.³ Little is known about the details of his early life, but being born with the characteristics of Sri Ramachandra inherent in him—as Sri Ramakrishna later pointed out—Niranjan was, in childhood fond of playing with bow and arrows, swords and so on. For better education he was sent to Calcutta, where he stayed with his uncle Kalikrishna Mitra, at Ahiritola. He did not have so much interest in his studies as for the activities of the spiritualists narrated earlier. As a sensitive medium for the group of spiritualists, Niranjan became possessed by spirits and developed a psychic power to heal the sufferings of people. However, his mind became troubled when he perceived the futility of wealth and worldly pleasures, in the life of a rich man who had come to him for help. This man had been suffering from insomnia for eighteen years, and had come to him for help. Niranjan used to say later that he did not know if he had been able to cure the man, but the immense sufferings of the man in spite of his wealth, made him realize the emptiness and futility of all earthly possessions. He began to feel that this hobby was leading his nowhere except making his mind as well as his body weaker. This hobby came to be outweighed by the dormant fire of spiritual fervour in him, which the intuitive knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna could easily recognize at their very first meeting.

This most important event in Niranjan's life occurred, when he was about twenty years old (and not at the age of eighteen, as it is claimed by some). It was on the day, when he had come for the first time to see

Sri Ramakrishna and had tried the psychological gimmicks on him. It was some time in the early part of 1882.⁴ A few other visitors were also present near Sri Ramakrishna on that day. Among them, Niranjan was definitely a distinguished personality. About his physical appearance Sri Ramakrishna later remarked that not only Niranjan's eyes, but his entire person was expressive of his noble qualities.⁵ He naturally attracted everyone's attention. Regarding him, the Master had observed that Niranjan was 'absolutely guileless'.⁶ He had 'a masculine nature'.⁷ 'Look at Niranjan. He is not attached to anything. He spends money from his own pocket to take poor patients to the hospital.'⁸ About his spiritual status,

⁴ It is traditionally believed that Niranjan's age was only eighteen when he first met Sri Ramakrishna. To quote one source, 'Niranjan . . . followed Baburam in order of succession . . . He was 18 years of age when he had his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna.'—Sister Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and his Disciples*, Ananda Ashrama, La Crescenta, California, p. 93.

Swami Gambhirananda has discussed in detail the probable date of Niranjan's first meeting (*vide* his article on 'Tyagi Bhaktader Sri Ramakrishna Samipe Agaman', *Udbodhan*, Vol. 52, No. 10, p. 522). He has fixed the first part of 1882 as the probable time of meeting. If we should accept the age of 18 for his first meeting with the Master—and that he was born in 1862—the meeting would have occurred some time in 1880, which is not acceptable. According to Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, the first meeting took place some time after 1881. Again, 'M' writes, 'Towards the end of 1881 and the beginning of 1882 came Narendra, Rakhal, Bhabanath, Baburam, Balaram, Niranjan, M, Jogin'. (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* according to 'M', 4th Ed., Vol. I, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1924, Introduction, pp. 9-10). Further circumstantial evidence points to the conclusion that the first meeting took place in early 1882, most likely in February.

⁵ 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, (1947) p. 465.

⁶ 'M', *op. cit.*, 401.

⁷ 'M', *op. cit.*, 412

⁸ 'M', *op. cit.*, 793.

³ Vaikunthanath Sanyal : *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* (Basumati Sahitya Mandir, Calcutta-12), p. 312.

Sri Ramakrishna remarked that it was "rather exceptional".⁹

On the first day, after the spiritualists' experiments were over, Sri Ramakrishna resumed his religious talk for the devotees who had assembled there. With his child-like gaiety which was so much a part of his being, the Master held the audience spell-bound by his rapturous discourse on the life divine. The splendid spiritual truths expressed in homely parables and fables easily touched the hearts of all. It seemed that he was diving deep in divine consciousness; in fact he was most of the time in a state of spiritual ecstasy. The Master was then about 46, and was known as a great figure and the main-spring of the spiritual regeneration that was then sweeping over the country. Niranjana was deeply impressed by the Master's personality; but it was nothing as compared to what the Paramahansa did and said to him some time later.

The sun was about to set. The charm of of the Paramahansa's religious discourse was still in the atmosphere, when some of the visitors became conscious that they have to go back home. Kind and sympathetic as he was, Sri Ramakrishna tried to find room in the boats or carriages hired by others, for his visitors and newcomers who could not afford passage money for hiring transport independently. Every devotee felt himself grateful for the opportunity of obeying some wish of his.¹⁰

The Master could have easily found some room in a boat for Niranjana, if he had so wished, but he asked him to wait. According to one eye-witness, he lovingly gave Niranjana some sweetmeats to eat.¹¹ Thereafter he took the young man to one corner of the room and began to talk to him as one of

his own. He asked him about his whereabouts. He passionately appealed to him with the words: 'Well, look, if you let your mind dwell on ghosts and spooks, you will become ghosts and spooks. And if you fix your mind on God, your life will be divine. Now which one do you prefer?' 'Of course, to become divine', was Niranjana's prompt reply. In this way, the Master advised Niranjana to dissociate himself from the activities of the spiritualists. Niranjana had had the feeling of something happening; something over which he had no control. He readily gave him word that he would leave the spiritualists. Thus Niranjana fell at once under the charming spell of Sri Ramakrishna.

Then the Master talked with Niranjana for a while and seemed to be pleased with his findings about him. In the course of conversation, he told the young man, 'Look, if you do ninety-nine per cent good and one per cent bad to the householders, they will accuse you. But if you commit ninety-nine offences with regard to God, but do only one act for His satisfaction, He will exonerate you of all blemishes. So wide is the difference between the love of God and the love of man.'¹² Niranjana treasured this advice as a pearl of wisdom. It sank deep down into the recesses of his heart.

Quite satisfied with Niranjana, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'It is getting dark. Please do not go back. Why do you not stay here?' But Niranjana did not agree. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly pleaded with him and said, 'My boy, it will be quite troublesome for you to go such a long distance. Don't go. Please pass the night here.' Nothing however could alter the young man's decision. Yet this seems to have pleased, rather than annoyed, Sri Ramakrishna. At last he lovingly said, 'All right, you go; but you must visit this place again. When will you

⁹ 'M', *op. cit.*, 411.

¹⁰ Burman Gurudas : *Sri Ramakrishnacharita*, Udbodhan, Calcutta-3, Vol. I, 216.

¹¹ Sen Akshay Kumar : *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Puthi*, Udbodhan, 4th Edn., 318.

¹² Chattopadhyaya Chandrashekhar : *Sri Sri Latumaharajer Smritikatha*, Udbodhan, 2nd Edn., 400.

come?' Niranjan promised to revisit soon, then took the dust of the Master's feet, and left for Calcutta. Enthralled by the love and affection of Sri Ramakrishna, Niranjan perhaps could not even anticipate that all this was just a prelude to further great happenings in his life.

Niranjan started for home, but his mind was dragging him to the Master : he kept thinking that he should have stayed at Dakshineswar ; but again he also thought that he had done the right thing in returning, else his uncle would have been greatly annoyed. But Niranjan had understood that Sri Ramakrishna loved him. He was now a changed man.

In fact, the Master had stolen Niranjan's mind so much that he occupied all his thoughts. The young man passed his time restlessly till, after a couple of days, he came to Dakshineswar again. It was almost dusk, when he appeared at the entrance of Sri Ramakrishna's room. As the Master's eyes fell on the young man, he rushed up, lovingly embraced him, and with warm feeling said, 'Oh, Niranjan, time is fleeting, when will you try for God-realization? The days are running fast, and if you do not attain God your life will turn out to be useless. Please tell me when you will strive for realization ; when will you fix your mind on the lotus feet of God? I am anxious for you, really.' Mute with amazement, Niranjan brooded, 'Strange indeed ! Why should he be so anxious because I have not realized God? Who can this man be?' The words of Sri Ramakrishna shook him to the very marrow. The Master's deep concern and tenderness made him feel within himself the deep longing for the realization of God. He was completely won over. He felt that Sri Ramakrishna was his very own—so much so that this time the Master did not have to coax him to stay overnight. In fact, he spent three days with him in great joy. Truly has one biographer of Sri Ramakrishna observed, 'Niranjan needed

no argument. Sri Ramakrishna himself was to his mind a supreme reason for choosing the religious life and God above all else.'¹³

Now there opened up for Niranjan a hitherto unknown world of infinite dimensions—the world of divine knowledge. To the great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, Niranjan was already known as a Nityasiddha. 'The Nityasiddha is a class apart. He is like *arani* wood. A little rubbing produces fire. You can get fire from it even without rubbing. The Nityasiddha realizes God by practising slight spiritual discipline and sometimes without practising any at all. But he does practise spiritual discipline after realizing God. He is like the gourd or pumpkin vine—first fruit, then flower.'¹⁴ He used to say further 'Their spiritual consciousness has been awakened since their very birth. They assume human bodies only to impart spiritual illumination to others.'¹⁵ The principle behind their spiritual practices, explained Sri Ramakrishna, lies in only knowing who Sri Ramakrishna really was, who they themselves were, and what their relationship was to the Master.¹⁶

In the group of young devotees who constituted the inner circle of Sri Ramakrishna, Niranjan with his strong physique, religious fervour, courage, enthusiasm, ever-readiness for service, his guilelessness and self-sacrificing spirit, soon became a prominent figure. One day, while in ecstasy Sri Ramakrishna touched Niranjan. The touch brought him wonderful mystical experiences. With the resplendent vision of light before him, he could not close his eyes for three days. He repeated the holy mantra without a break. The Master humourously told Niranjan, 'Now has descended on you a spirit—the spirit of the divine. However hard you may try, you

¹³ Sister Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 93.

¹⁴ 'M', *op. cit.*, 438.

¹⁵ 'M', *op. cit.*, 115.

¹⁶ *vide* 'M', *op. cit.*, 412.

cannot get rid of it.¹⁷ Years later (in July, 1885) Sri Ramakrishna said about Niranjan, 'I see him seated on a light'.¹⁸ Niranjan always remained close to Sri Ramakrishna, except for a brief period, when he had to accept a job with an indigo-planter at Murshidabad, to maintain his widowed mother. While the spiritual bud in Niranjan gradually blossomed in varied hues and fragrance, its outward manifestations also took interesting forms. As days rolled on, he fell more under the loving spell of Sri Ramakrishna, and one day he confessed to his Master, 'Formerly I loved you, no doubt, but now it is impossible for me to live without you.'¹⁹ Any attempt to portray the unique

relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Niranjan merely uncovers more facets of the wonderful nature of the Master. This relationship gradually opened up new avenues in the life of the disciple, making him a fit instrument to carry out the mission of his great Master.

Niranjan served his Master in his own way, as much as his any other brother-disciple; and after the passing away of the Master he zealously worked under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda. After his sannyasa ceremony, he was named Swami Niranjanananda. Towards the end of his life, he stayed at Kankhal, where he fell a victim to cholera, dying on May 9, 1904 (or 27 Vaishakh, 1311²⁰ according to the Bengali calendar.)

¹⁷ Chattopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, 400.

¹⁸ 'M', *op. cit.*, 793.

¹⁹ 'M', *op. cit.*, 923.

²⁰ *Udbodhan*, Vol. VI, No. 11, 346.

SERMONETTES AT ST. MORITZ—XVI

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

Success in spiritual life depends on your ability to cultivate the right mood and to relax. You cannot hold on for long with your mind in tension and conflict. Learn to relax your body and mind by opening yourselves to the Divine who is not only in you but in all. Try to see the Divine in all and be friendly with all. Hatred and spiritual life never go together. Sometimes thoughts about the past keep us in tension. Do not brood over past events. Place them all before the Divine and seek His grace and protection. The light of His grace can destroy the effects of the past. Do not worry about the future. Have trust in the Divine. If you surrender yourself to Him and keep yourself in a mood of acceptance, you can lead a peaceful life free from tension.

In the beginning meditation may appear to be a troublesome affair. Instead of providing us peace and relaxation, it may disturb us. All sorts of ideas and pictures and impulses come up from the unconscious. Forgotten or unrecognized memories crop up, as if from nowhere, disturbing our mind. The forms and ideas appear that before us are imaginary but are powerful enough to disturb us. Why so? Because we have developed the natural but unfortunate habit of thinking these forms to be real. If you are unable to think of these thought-forms as illusory, then you should at least imagine that they are all bubbles arising from the Cosmic Mind. Try to see the Divine through all these forms, real or unreal.

*

Before you begin your meditation you

*

strict disciplines (*nirjalā-ekādaśī*;⁴⁶ but for both, goal is the same.

In the end, it will be inspiring and illuminating to see what Swami Vivekananda has said on this subject. In a class lecture delivered in America he observed: 'All the misery we have is of our own choosing; such is our nature. . . . we are all going to be happy and never meet with misery, but the more we go towards happiness, the more it goes away from us. Thus the world is going on, society goes on, and we, blinded slaves, have to pay for it without knowing. Study your own lives, and find how little of happiness there is in them, and how little in truth you have gained in the course of this wild-goose chase of the world. . . . Such is the life-story of each one of us; such is the tremendous power of nature over us. It repeatedly kicks us away, but still we pursue it with feverish excitement. We are always hoping against hope; this hope, this chimera maddens us; we are always hoping for happiness. . . . Nobody is ever really happy here. . . . Because happiness and misery are the obverse and reverse of the same coin; he

who takes happiness, must take misery also. We all have this foolish idea that we can have happiness without misery, and it has taken such possession of us that we have no control over the senses. . . . Few men know that with pleasure there is pain, and with pain, pleasure; and as pain is disgusting, so is pleasure, as it is the twin brother of pain. It is derogatory to the glory of man that he should be going after pain, and equally derogatory, that he should be going after pleasure. Both should be turned aside by men whose reason is balanced. Why will not men seek freedom from being played upon? . . . The sage wants liberty; he finds that sense-objects are all vain and that there is no end to pleasures and pains.'⁴⁷ He, therefore, prefers *niḥśreyasa*—the path of the good.

Thus, keeping the eye-opening words of the wise men of the East and the West quoted so far in mind, and infusing ourselves with new spirit at the start of the New Year, let us march ahead according to our own path (*svadharma*) on the way to Blessedness and make our lives fruitful.

(Concluded)

46. See : *Gospel*, p. 675 ; and Śrī Ma, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa-Kathāmṛta*, (Bengali), Calcutta: Anil Gupta, B.S. 1361, pp. 203-4.

47. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, I, 1970, pp. 408, 409, 410, 411.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : SWAMI ADBHUTANANDA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

In the Ramakrishna phenomenon,¹ marked by many extraordinary and mysterious happenings, one of the most striking events is the transformation of the shepherd boy Rakhturam, into the extraordinary

saint, Swami Adbhutananda. Very truly has this transformation been described as the 'greatest miracle'² of Sri Ramakrishna,

1. Christopher Isherwood in his book *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1965, p. 1) has described Sri Ramakrishna's life and doings as a phenomenon.

2. Swami Vivekananda once observed, 'Lata is the greatest miracle of Sri Ramakrishna. Having absolutely no education, he has attained to the highest wisdom simply at the touch of the Master.' (See *The Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1967, p.271).

the Godman of the nineteenth century. Rakhturam was the first among Sri Ramakrishna's all-renouncing disciples to see him. Again, he was the only apostle of the Master who had no book-learning. Sri Ramakrishna at least had some knowledge of the three R's, but Rakhturam was blissfully ignorant of them. Once Sri Ramakrishna himself tried to teach him the Bengali alphabet, but the endeavour did not succeed.

Very little is known of Rakhturam's childhood, for he was always reluctant to speak of it. He was born of humble parents in a remote village of Chapra District of Bihar. In his infancy he had a severe attack of smallpox, and finding no way out his mother fervently prayed to Lord Rama for the child's life. Miraculously enough, the infant recovered gradually from the deadly illness. The parents, taking it to be due to the mercy of Lord Rama, named him Rakhturam—one saved by Rama. As he grew into boyhood, being a son of a shepherd, he had to tend the flocks of sheep. Reminiscing about his boyhood experiences, he told later, 'Well, you know, I used to spend my days with shepherd boys. ... They were very guileless indeed. Unless one becomes guileless as they were, one cannot have real joy.'³ Poverty, misery and bereavement dogged every footstep of the boy. When scarcely five he lost his parents. Amidst such hopeless circumstances there bloomed spontaneously the bud of religious disposition which child Rakhturam was endowed with. His close affinity to nature helped him perceive the glory of God. In his quietude he used to sing, 'O mind, sing the glory of Sitaram.' The orphan boy was taken care of by his generous uncle. Extravagance, however, finally ruined his

uncle, and the latter was compelled to go to Calcutta in search of a job. Rakhturam naturally had to accompany him there.

Banishment from the rural setting was rather a shock to Rakhturam, and he took quite some time to get himself adapted to city life. After some struggle his uncle found out one of his native villagers named Phulchand who was serving as an orderly to Ramchandra Datta, the Assistant Chemist of the Calcutta Medical College. Phulchand succeeded in placing Rakhturam as an attendant in the Datta's stationery shop at College Square.⁴ Sometime later the shop had to be closed, and the boy was employed as a servant in the home of Ramchandra Datta. Hard working, simple and loyal Rakhturam—lovingly called Laltu by the household⁵—by virtue of his quick grasp soon felt at home in the intricacies of a sophisticated urban life. Modest and humble though he was, his moral courage and conviction gave him strength enough to stand against odds. Although he was busy in obeying errands for the family, he utilized his leisure in learning wrestling and body-building.

Ramchandra Datta being a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, his house was surcharged with a religious atmosphere and frequent talks of God. Once Laltu heard Ramchandra say, 'God watches man's mind. He does not bother about man's placement in life, his status and achievements.' On another occasion he heard him say, 'One who is earnest in seeking God will surely realize Him. One should go into solitude and pray and weep for Him.'⁶ These words

4. See *Udbodhan* (Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order), Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, Śrāban. B.S. 1331, p. 403.

5. Swami Gambhirananda, *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Bhaktamālikā* (Bengali), Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, (hereafter *Bhaktamālikā*), I, B.S. 1359, p. 412.

6. *Smṛti Kathā*, p. 27.

3. Chandrasekhara Chattopadhyaya, *Śrī Śrī Lātu Mahārājer Smṛti Kathā* (Bengali), Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, second edition (hereafter *Smṛti Kathā*), p. 11.

sank deep into his heart; not only did he remember them throughout his life, but they also brought about some visible changes in him. It seems, his strong common sense helped him choose a way of life for himself. Thereafter, Laltu would sometimes be seen lying covered with his blanket, often wiping tears from his eyes. Hardly anyone could understand him. The ladies of the family sympathized with the poor boy who, as they thought, was perhaps grieving for his home or family members.

Laltu often heard Ramchandra talk reverently of Sri Ramakrishna, and felt an urge to see the great Saint. Soon thereafter he got an opportunity to do so. One Sunday in early January of 1880,⁷ when Ramchandra was preparing himself for a visit to Sri Ramakrishna, Laltu ventured to ask his permission to accompany him to Dakshineswar, to which Ramchandra agreed.

Sri Ramakrishna (then forty-four years old) was a unique personality, who radiated peace and tranquility. He had found peace by realizing all varieties of religious experience, some of which even surpassed those described in the holy texts. His wonderful power of integrating apparently

divergent religious paths, his profound knowledge of the science of spirituality, his broad vision of the divine nature of men and, above all, his deep love and concern for human beings, made his life and teachings a living exposition of the bright Indian tradition. In fact he was like a great epic which epitomizes all shades of religious faith in one life. And soon he was to become the centre round which sincere aspirants of different faiths were to rally, each regarding him in his own light.

Dakshineswar temple had been his home for the past twenty-four years, almost half of his life. He lived in a room in the north-west corner of the temple-complex built by Rani Rashmani. He deprecated sectarian views, controversial theological discussions, and encouraged in men child-like simplicity, love of God, and resignation to His will. Naturally, he exercised profound influence on all who happened to come in his contact. Men of high rank and great learning flocked around the simple and unassuming Saint of Dakshineswar who seemed to remain saturated in divine bliss. He once explained the magnetic attraction people felt for him. He said, 'It is God alone who exists in this [meaning his body]. That is why so many people are feeling more and more attracted to it. A mere touch is enough to awaken their spirituality. This attraction, this pull, is the attraction of God and of none else.'⁸ Laltu also came under the spell of this attraction.

Ramchandra came with Laltu to Dakshineswar temple when Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, was standing near by. Ramchandra entered into Sri Ramakrishna's room, while Laltu kept standing in the western porch. Sri Ramakrishna was not then in the room, but soon after appeared

7. Swami Gambhirananda in an erudite Bengali article—'Tyāgi Bhaktader Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa-Samīpe Agaman' ('Coming of the Sannyasi Disciples to Sri Ramakrishna')—which appeared in the *Udbodhan* (Asvin and Kārtik, B.S. 1357), pointed out that the meeting took place in 1879-80. Now to locate a probable date we should remember that Ramchandra Datta met Sri Ramakrishna first on November 13, 1879. Laltu saw the members of the Datta family well acquainted with Sri Ramakrishna. Again, Sri Ramakrishna spent about eight months at Kamarpukur from March 3, 1880 to October 10, 1880. Before he left for Kamarpukur Laltu met him thrice, the last meeting being on the day when Sri Ramakrishna's physician was present. The second meeting took place in February after a gap of a few weeks. It can be assumed that the first meeting, in all probability, took place on a Sunday in the first week of 1880.

8. 'M'. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974 (hereafter *Gospel*), p. 780.

in the porch crooning the song, 'O friend, that day I stood at my door as you were going to the woods...etc.' Seeing him there Ramchandra came to the porch. As his eyes fell on the short-statured, strong and stout Laltu, Sri Ramakrishna asked Ramchandra, 'Have you brought this boy with you? Well Ram, where did you find him? I see in him signs of a holy man.'⁹ A connoisseur of the science of spirituality, Sri Ramakrishna could see a man through and through. He easily assessed the spiritual potentiality of Laltu and decided to bring it into full manifestation without changing the distinctive features of his personality. He also recognized the new arrival as belonging to his inner circle of devotees. On the other hand, Laltu was charmed to see the most unassuming but attractive personality of Sri Ramakrishna, radiant with a smile of innocence and purity. A wave of joy leapt into his heart as he looked into the affectionate eyes of Sri Ramakrishna. Timid, unobtrusive and loving Laltu felt deeply drawn towards Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna and Ramchandra entered into the room, but Laltu hesitated to go inside. Ramlal's persuasions also failed to dispel his hesitations. Now summoned by Sri Ramakrishna Laltu went into the room, and following Ramchandra Datta, made obeisance to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna began to converse with Ramchandra. Noticing that Laltu was still standing Sri Ramakrishna lovingly said to him, 'Take your seat!' Laltu wavered to take a seat near his master Ramchandra, and kept standing. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Knowledge is always within the grip of Nityasiddhas in every birth. They are like fountains hidden under stone. As soon as some expert removes the obstacle water gushes out.'¹⁰

Scarcely had the topic of discussion closed

before Sri Ramakrishna came forward and touched Laltu with his hand. The electric touch gave rise to a wonderful experience within Laltu. A mighty and mysterious love of God invaded his heart, and he lost his outer consciousness. His body became motionless; suddenly his hair stood on end, and he began to sob with profuse tears of joy streaming down his cheeks. His lips began to tremble. Ramchandra was astonished at such an outburst. Under the pressure of a surprisingly sweet experience Laltu continued shedding tears for more than an hour. At last Ramchandra pleaded with Sri Ramakrishna to help Laltu regain his normal state. Sri Ramakrishna touched him again, and thereafter Laltu could control himself to a certain extent.¹¹ At Sri Ramakrishna's bidding, Ramlal gave *prasāda* (offered food) to Laltu. When he partook of the *prasāda* he came back to his normal self. This was certainly a revealing experience for the simple-minded boy which revolutionized his mind. And to Ramakrishna the test revealed Laltu's potentialities and mental preparedness for receiving the spiritual gifts he was eager to distribute.

Sri Ramakrishna asked Laltu to visit the temples, and he did accordingly. When Ramchandra was about to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna the latter said, 'Hallo, please send the boy here now and then.' Addressing Laltu he said, 'Come here, come as frequently as possible.' Sri Ramakrishna used to address Laltu as 'Leto' or 'Neto'; and for all others the name 'Laltu' became popular. With an indelible impression in his mind Laltu returned home a changed man. He became indrawn. Despite all remonstrances from the members of the Datta family he was finding his household duties insipid and uninteresting. He was moving like a wound-up spring toy. He felt

9. *Smṛti Kathā*, p. 31.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

11. This narration is according Ramchandra Datta; See *Smṛti Kathā*, p. 33.

that his contemplative mood was being interrupted by idle diversions again and again.

Weeks later in February 1880 another opportunity came for Latu to go to the Master. He walked more than six miles carrying some fruits and sweets sent by Ramchandra and arrived at Dakshineswar about 11 a.m. He met Sri Ramakrishna in the garden path itself and prostrated at his feet. In the company of Sri Ramakrishna he witnessed the *āratrikam* (evening service) at the Vishnu temple. So much fervency he felt that he began to chant loudly, 'Jay Ram, Jay Ram.' *Ārati* over, Sri Ramakrishna asked Latu to take *prasāda* at the temple, which the boy's orthodox mind refused to accept. But his strong common sense immediately made a compromise and he said, 'I will take your *prasāda* only—and nothing else.'¹² Obviously this pleased Sri Ramakrishna. Latu passed the day in the company of Sri Ramakrishna and left for Calcutta in the late afternoon.

Some days later Sri Ramakrishna went to Kamarpukur under the advice of his physician and stayed there for nearly eight months. Latu missed him very much and felt a void in his heart, as it were. Visits to Dakshineswar made him all the more desolate and morose, for the memory of Sri Ramakrishna's deep affection and concern haunted his mind. Writhing in mental agony he would unburden his heart by weeping in secret. Describing his sufferings he later said, 'You know, my mind used to get restless very much. ... What will you understand of the sufferings I had then? Truly do I say that you cannot understand my heart. Only Rambabu could to some extent appreciate my feelings, and he used to console me. He gave me a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna.'¹³

When Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar, Latu acquired a new lease of life, as it were. On the occasion of his next visit to Sri Ramakrishna the latter asked him to stay overnight, which Latu gladly did. After night meal he began to massage Sri Ramakrishna's feet. This touch brought an overwhelming experience in him, and he began to shed tears. Gradually he became speechless, and sat motionless with his eyes fixed. Hours after hours passed, his condition remained unchanged. This upsurge of ecstasy continued till next day noon, when Sri Ramakrishna helped him to regain his normal consciousness, and he became himself again. On this occasion Latu stayed with Ramakrishna for three days. After some persuasion only could he be sent back to the house of Ramchandra.¹⁴ By this time Latu had developed such an attachment to Sri Ramakrishna that he wished to live always with him.

In June 1881, Hriday Mukherjee—Sri Ramakrishna's nephew and attendant—had to leave Dakshineswar for good; and to replace him Sri Ramakrishna proposed Latu's name to Ramchandra, to which he gladly agreed. This fulfilled Latu's most cherished wish of doing personal service to Sri Ramakrishna. He began to serve his Guru with one-pointed devotion. The claim of holy texts that service to the Guru leads one to the highest spiritual realization, has been successfully verified in the life of Latu. A simple wish or a mere remark of the Guru was as good as a sacred injunction to him. One day Sri Ramakrishna found him sleeping in the evening and mildly reproved him, saying, 'If you sleep at such a time, when will you meditate?'¹⁵ It was enough, and Latu gave up sleeping at night for the

^{12.} *Ibid.*, p. 35.

^{13.} *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

^{14.} *Bhaktamālīka*, I. p. 417.

^{15.} *Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1955 (hereafter *Disciples*), p. 184.

rest of his life. He would take a short nap in the daytime and pass the nights awake, pouring all his energy on repeating the sacred Name or meditating on God. Though he held Sri Ramakrishna in the highest esteem, he had with him a very close relation. Describing his own attitude he said later, 'Did I take the Master as God? Had it been so, how could I serve him or live in his close company? He appeared to me as my dear father, so I had no anxiety and I was quite free with him.'¹⁶ The dedicated personal service he offered was spontaneous. 'He seemed to understand his Master's every need and gave him the tender care a mother might give her little child, scolding him when he did not eat enough or was too indifferent to his own welfare.'¹⁷ Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of the Master, admitted that he had learned the technique of loving service from Latu.

Years later Latu, as Swami Adbhutananda, said, 'Many do not succeed in religious practices for they do not live their lives in obedience to the instruction of the Master.'¹⁸ His own life was an illustration of perfect obedience. Unlettered and unsophisticated as he was, Latu never questioned or reasoned out his Master's words. Any word from the Master's lips was final and binding on him.

To the ardent disciple, Sri Ramakrishna was everything—friend, philosopher and guide in one. Latu once resolved that on waking up he would see no face first other than that of his Master. One morning when he got up he could not see his Master, and so he began to shout for him with his

eyes shut. Hearing Latu's voice Sri Ramakrishna came and rescued him.

Latu was one of the very few who were permitted to attend on the Holy Mother. He kneaded flour for her, washed utensils, did marketing and so on. She loved him as her own child, and he in turn held her in a very high esteem. He said, 'She is none other than Lakshmi.' Again he said, 'Mother knows my past, my future and everything. ... I do not speak about Mother to all and sundry because they won't understand her, rather they will misunderstand.'¹⁹

While Latu devoted his heart and soul in the service of the Master, the latter guided him imperceptibly but firmly along the spiritual path. So effective was his guidance that Latu in four years' time made astounding progress; so much so that Sri Ramakrishna said of him on June 20, 1884, 'The nature of these attendants of mine is undergoing a change. Latu is always tense with spiritual emotion. He is about to merge himself in God.'²⁰ Such yearning for God invited problems and dangers too for him, but Sri Ramakrishna like a loving mother always protected him. One day when he was meditating on the bank of the Ganga, there came the flood-tide, and waters surrounded Latu. The news reached Sri Ramakrishna who at once rushed to the place and brought Latu back to his consciousness. Another day, Latu sat deeply absorbed in meditation in one of the Shiva temples. Hours passed unnoticed. Coming to know of Latu's whereabouts Sri Ramakrishna came and began to fan Latu who was perspiring. Returning to normal consciousness, Latu felt deeply embarrassed. In fact during these days the Master was taking care of his attendant, instead of the attendant taking care of the Master.

16. *Sat Kathā* (Bengali), ed. Swami Siddhananda, Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, fifth edition (hereafter *Sat Kathā*), p. 9.

17. Sister Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, La Crescenta: Ananda Ashrama, 1928, p. 88.

18. *Sat Kathā*, p. 39.

19. *Smṛti Kathā*, p. 416.

20. *Gospel*, p. 412.

With the gradual unfoldment of the inner life Latu became a changed person. His complexion became brighter; his look steadfast, sharp and meaningful; his voice solemn and commanding; his gait measured and slow.²¹ The rustic boy was gradually transformed into a self-confident disciple and apostle of Sri Ramakrishna.

After the passing of the Master, Latu became overwhelmed with a strong aspiration to attain the highest ideal, and accordingly plunged deeper into spiritual practices. Continuously for more than six years he passed his days and nights practising *japam* and meditation without caring for his bodily needs. His untiring effort coupled with his absolute surrender to God led him ultimately to the realm of highest illumination. Like his Master he had access directly to the fountain-head of knowledge; and bereft of formal schooling, he nonetheless turned into an enlightened spiritual giant. Scholars and philosophers used to become dumbfounded listening to the stream of wisdom falling from his lips. The uncouth language he spoke was a funny mixture of Bengali and Bhojpuri Hindi, but the ideas they conveyed were pregnant with highest wisdom. In him was fulfilled the prophetic promise of Sri Ramakrishna, who in semi-ecstasy had once said, 'O Leto! You will babble out Veda and Vedanta.'²²

At the time of his initiation into sannyasa, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) gave him the name Swami Adbhutananda, in consideration of his extraordinary renunciation and austerities.²³

Appreciating Latu's outpourings of knowledge Swami Vivekananda lovingly called him 'Plato'. To 'Plato' the great

Vivekananda was his dear 'Loren-Bhai', whose company he always aspired after. He used to say, 'I am ready to take hundreds of births if I can have the companionship of Loren-Bhai.'²⁴ Likewise he developed sweet relationships with other sannyasi and householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Notwithstanding his childlike faith, his filial devotion, his chaste character and the sincere recollectedness practised by him, the key to his fast spiritual progress lay in his complete resignation to the Master. He said, 'The road that leads to Him is full of many obstacles and temptations... With every step you take, you will have to call upon your saviour, resign yourself utterly to his protection. Only with such one-pointed resignation as this, can we hope to escape the snares of temptations. If we fail in being ever-watchful and do not resign ourselves completely to His will, we will never be free from passions and desires.'²⁵ When he thus advised one of his disciples, he in fact quoted his personal experiences.

Beneath an apparently rough exterior, Latu Maharaj hid a kind heart always eager to sympathize with the lowly but sincere, downtrodden but devoted, poor but enriched by faith. In fact he was a friend of all, he was a holy man, a messenger of Sri Ramakrishna. Once he said, 'Howsoever one can, one should keep company with holy men. God is vividly manifest in them. A favour from them opens the gate to God's grace.'²⁶ This is true about his own life.

Like other all-renouncing disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Adbhutananda was unique. But he was the wonder of wonders,

21. See Mahendranath Datta, *Tāpas Lātu Mahārājer Anudhyān* (Bengali), Calcutta: Mahendra Publishing Committee, B.S. 1363, p. 58.

22. *Smṛti Kathā*, pp. 491.

23. See Swami Abhedananda, *Amār Jīvan Kathā* (Bengali), Calcutta: Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, B.S. 1371, p. 141.

24. *Disciples*, p. 193.

25. 'Conversations with a Saint', *Vedanta and the West*, Hollywood: Vedanta Press, May-June 1967, p. 38.

26. *Adbhutānanda Prasānge* (Bengali), ed. Swami Siddhananda, Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, B.S. 1367, p. 15.

for he attained the highest wisdom by mere touch of the Master. Swami Turiyananda, a brother-disciple of his, said, 'Many of us had to go through the muddy waters of knowledge before we attained God, but Latu jumped over them, like Hanuman.'²⁷ Girish Ghosh, another miracle of Sri Ramakrishna, once said about Latu, 'Even the moon has dark spots, but Latu is like pure gold. I have never seen before such a spotless character. Latu's holy company purifies men.'²⁸

And Swami Vivekananda observed, 'Comparing Latu's great rise in spiritual life from the extremely unfavourable circumstances with those of ours, he is far superior to us.... Depending entirely on contemplation and recollectedness Latu climbed from a very low rung of the spiritual ladder to the highest realizations. This only proves his great innate strength and Sri Ramakrishna's infinite benediction upon him.'²⁹

In Varanasi, Latu Maharaj passed the sublime years of matured sainthood radiating a hue of grandeur, disseminating peace

27. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, trans. E. F. Malcolm-Smith, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1970, pp. 194-95.

28. *Smṛti Kathā*, p. 501.

29. *Bhaktamālīkā*, I, p. 410.

and joy, guiding aspirants along the path divine and exemplifying the glory of Sri Ramakrishna. Imbued with the true spirit of his Master's life and teachings, his illumined life proved to be a most effective instrument for the propagation of the bracing gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. 'Original' though every disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was, Swami Abdhutananda will be honoured as perhaps the classical illustration of the *dāśya* (servant) attitude of Bhakti discipline, of which his own Master had attained the highest perfection.

As the last hour of his life arrived, he became deeply self-absorbed, with his gaze fixed between his brows. He entered into Mahasamadhi on April 24, 1920. His face beamed with light and an intelligence unspeakable, as if he was taking leave from his friends for the last time. The last few moments of his extraordinary life was like a rocket that bursts into sparks of various hues.

When Swami Abdhutananda breathed his last, the *Prabuddha Bharata*, the English organ of the Ramakrishna Order, paid tribute to him saying, 'His passing away was a wonderful thing and a glorious finale of a life-long spiritual living and realization.'³⁰

30. *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1920, p. 119

A REMINISCENCE OF SWAMI TURIYANANDA

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

When I was twenty-two years old, in 1915, I stopped in Varanasi on my way to Mayavati in the Himalayas. There I fell ill with chickenpox. Swami Turiyananda (Hari Maharaj) would not let me proceed further. Swami Atmabodhananda had already had the disease; so he took care of me. I had a high fever.

Every day Swami Turiyananda would come, sit on my bed, and put his hand on my forehead. After a few days he said to me: 'Abani,¹ ask a boon of me.'

I said: 'Maharaj, please do not come

1. A nickname of Swami Prabhavananda.

worship, or the worship of the Divine Mother, or condemnation for any gods or goddesses. His broad heart had place for all. That is why Swami Vivekananda

called him a 'great man', his works 'noble works' and his life a 'noble life'.

(Concluded)

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA AGHORAMANI DEVI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

It happened in the spring of 1885.¹ One early morning while the old Brahmin woman was telling her beads in her living room, overlooking the Ganges, she was wonder-struck by a vision of Sri Ramakrishna, with his right fist half-clenched in the typical posture of baby Gopala. She was visibly moved, and noticed the baby Gopala fixing his beautiful eyes on her and smiling. As she tried to catch hold of his fist the form of Sri Ramakrishna melted, and therefrom emerged a baby, about ten months old, as though of flesh and blood. Strangely, the baby crawled forward lifting one of his fists, and approaching the old woman said, 'Mother, get me cream.' Wild with joy she shouted, but soon thereafter recomposed herself and pleaded her inability to feed him with butter, cheese or cream. This could hardly pacify the baby.

It repeatedly begged of her some food. Finding no escape she took out from an earthen pot hung from the roof some stale coconut balls, all she had in stock, and gave the baby to eat. Gopala was happy, and avidly partook of the sweetmeat. Although she could temporarily satisfy Gopala, she could not proceed with her usual spiritual practices, for the baby Gopala, restless as he was, now would spring on her shoulder, now would sit on her lap and snatch away her rosary, and the very next moment would romp about in the room. This vivid experience overwhelmed her. As soon as the day broke she hastened to the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, holding the baby Gopala close to her heart; his head rested on her shoulder and his beautiful rose-red feet kept dangling upon her breast. Approaching Sri Ramakrishna's living room at Dakshineswar she shouted, 'Gopala ! Gopala !' She used to worship God in Ramakrishna as baby Gopala, as did mother Yashoda.

In a dazed condition she arrived there, looking like a mad woman, her hair dishevelled, the end of her sari trailing on the ground. Taking no notice of Golap-Ma,² who was tidying Sri Ramakrishna's room,

1. Swami Saradananda in his *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (trans. Swami Jagadananda, Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970, [hereafter *Great Master*], p. 633), writes, 'When we saw her first with the Master at Dakshineswar in the month of March or April in 1885, she had been visiting the Master for about six months. . . . She met Sri Ramakrishna first in November-December 1884. Sister Devamata, on the authority of Swami Ramakrishnananda, mentioned 1884 as the year of her first visit to Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore the said incident took place in March-April 1885 and not 1884 as mentioned in the *Great Master*, p. 639.

2. Golap-Ma was a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and later a member of Holy Mother's household in Calcutta.

she entered into the room and took her seat near Sri Ramakrishna. Forty-eight-year-old Sri Ramakrishna too, over-powered by spiritual ecstasy readily sat on her lap. With a radiance of joy on her face she fed Sri Ramakrishna with the food she had brought. Tears of joy rolled down her cheeks. Soon afterwards Sri Ramakrishna came back to the normal plane of consciousness and returned to his seat on the small cot. On the other hand the Brahmin woman, overwhelmed with joy, began dancing and singing, 'Brahma dances, Vishnu dances,' etc. As soon as she could gain control over herself she declared that the divine baby Gopala was passing between them, now entering into Sri Ramakrishna's body, now sitting on her lap and playing with her. While her divine ecstasy continued Sri Ramakrishna eulogized her spiritual attainments and fed her sumptuously. However, he pacified her before he allowed her to leave for Kamarhati in the late afternoon. From that day Sri Ramakrishna began to address her as 'Gopaler Ma' (Gopala's Mother).

A few months before this drama was enacted this pious Brahmin woman, Aghoramani by name, had met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar for the first time. It was the Bengali month Agrahayana (November-December) of 1884. Aghoramani was more than sixty years of age. She had come from Kamarhati, about three miles from Dakshineswar, by boat, accompanied by the widow of her landlord, Govinda Chandra Datta, and one of her distant relations, Kamini by name. She was married at the age of nine to a family at Paighata, Bodra, in 24-Parganas district. Widowed while still a girl, Aghoramani following her natural propensities, dedicated herself entirely to spiritual pursuits, for she was born a docile child with spiritual hunger in her soul. Regular religious observances and strict disciplines apart, she lived the sheltered life of a Brahmin widow, wor-

shipping Gopala, the baby Krishna, according to the Vatsalya attitude of the Bhakti cult. Here God as the divine Child is regarded as completely dependent on the devotee, much as a child to a parent. Initiated with the 'Gopala' Mantra she gradually learnt the art of loving God as her own child, and through this she was able to satiate her unassuaged maternal love. She cooked for Him, fed Him, bathed Him and played with Him. Catering to the daily needs of the baby Gopala she forgot her own wants and eventually developed a selfless love for God. Devoted to the practice of religious piety, strict austerities and Brahmacharya, she was a typical orthodox Brahmin. As sister of Nilmadhav Bandyopadhyaya, priest of the temple of Govinda Chandra Datta, she was well acquainted with the members of the Datta family, particularly Govinda Chandra Datta's widow. She could secure a small room in the southern end of the temple garden, and in this bare room she lived more than thirty years before she met Sri Ramakrishna, longing ardently for realization of God. She had to pass her days through great hardships,³ so much so that sometimes she had to earn her living by selling sacred thread spun by her with the help of a spindle. But no hardship, come what may, could discourage her from her daily practices. Hour after hour, day after day and sometimes day and night together she devoted herself over her rosary, deeply absorbed. Writes one biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, 'Lest her telling of beads get disrupted she used to use her left hand for cooking while her right hand remained busy

3. The landed property she inherited from her husband was sold out at Rs. 300/-. It was invested and she earned a monthly interest of about Rs. 3/-. See Swami Nirlepananda, *Ramakrishna Sāradāmṛta* [Bengali], p. 46 and 49; and also *Udbodhan* (Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order), Calcutta: Udbodhan Office Asvin, B.S. 1346, p. 567.

with her rosary.⁴ Pathos and tenderness, aches and ecstasies of her motherly loving heart were her only companions over all these years. Her continuous yearning over thirty years reminds one of Sabari of the *Ramayana*.

As far as her personal life went, there could have been little difference, if any, between this time and the time when Sister Nivedita visited her place one evening in 1898. Sister Nivedita writes, 'And how beautiful seemed the long flight of steps rising out of the water, and leading up, through its lofty bathing-ghat, past the terraced lawn, to the cloister-like veranda on the right, where, in a little room—built probably in the first place for some servant of the great house at its side—Gopaler Ma had lived and told her beads, for many a year. . . . And her own little room was absolutely without comforts. Her bed was of stone, and her floor of stone, and the piece of matting she offered her guests to sit on, had to be taken down from a shelf and unrolled. The handful of parched rice and sugar-candy that formed her only store, and were all that she could give in hospitality, were taken from an earthen pot that hung from the roof by a few cords. But the place was spotlessly clean, washed constantly by Ganges-water of her own sturdy carrying. And in a niche near her hand lay an old copy of the *Ramayana*. . . .'⁵

By that time Sri Ramakrishna was a well-known figure in and around Calcutta. Born of poor and orthodox Brahmin parents, Sri Ramakrishna was averse to formal education as well as to the profession of a priest. However, circumstances compelled him to accept a priest's job at Dakshineswar for about six months and soon thereafter

he began his arduous journey to the path divine. His childlike implicit faith in God and resignation to His will, his self-sacrifice and purity of character led him fast along the flights of religious experience. Verifying the existence of God through various paths, within and outside the pale of Hinduism, he gained an experience that has perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius. For all his renunciation, he was not a typical Hindu hermit, for he bore deep love and concern for all human beings. He was particularly happy in the company of people dedicated to the love of God. In fact he was always on the look-out for genuine God-lovers. He himself was a lover of God of the highest order, and he himself realized God through each path recommended by Vaishnava discipline, including the Vatsalya attitude. His experiences with Ramlala, apparently an image of child Rama made of eight metals, is a wonderful illustration of the fusion of the devotee's love for God and His warm response to it.

Both Govinda Datta's widow and Aghoramani heard people talk much of the Paramahansa, as Sri Ramakrishna was known in those days, and became curious to see him. In fact they felt an urge⁶ and one afternoon set out in a boat for Dakshineswar. Sri

4. Vaikunthanath Sanyal, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Lilāmṛta* [Bengali], Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandira, p. 366.

5. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him*, Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 10th edition, (hereafter *The Master*), pp. 148-49,

6. Sister Devamata narrates an incident to explain the longing of Aghoramani. Her source of information was Swami Ramakrishnananda. One day Aghoramani prepared a meal for her deity Gopala with difficulty, for the firewood was soaked with moisture and the wind was stormy. When she was about to pour the food on a leaf, the wind blew away the leaf. She was annoyed and began accusing Gopala, but to her surprise a little boy brought back the leaf and helped her to put food on the leaf and disappeared. A little later it struck her that Gopala himself had appeared before her in the form of the boy. This made her grief-stricken. In order to console her, one day some friends proposed to take her to see Sri Ramakrishna at the temple of Dakshineswar. She readily agreed. See Sister

Ramakrishna received them standing at his door, as if he expected them, and made them sit in his own room. Sri Ramakrishna gave them spiritual instruction and said that the love of God was the only thing to be attained in life. He also sang some devotional songs and gave them sweetmeats. An orthodox Brahmin lady as she was, Aghoramani did not eat them, for Sri Ramakrishna was once a priest of the Kali temple founded by Rani Rashmani of Kaibarta caste. She gave the sweets to someone else,⁷ which did not escape Sri Ramakrishna's notice.

Sri Ramakrishna could easily gauge the spiritual status, particularly the high degree of devotional fervour, of the arrivals. Later he told about Govinda Datta's widow and Aghoramani, 'Ah, how beautiful is the expression of their faces and eyes! They are, as it were, floating on the current of the love of God. Their eyes are full of the intense love of God. Even the paste-mark on the nose is beautiful.'⁸ In fact their dress and manners expressed only their inner bloom of divine love. Sri Ramakrishna's words and manners gripped their hearts, quietly and imperceptibly. He bade them goodbye with the request, in his typically endearing voice, to visit Dakshineswar once again. Govinda Datta's widow invited Sri Ramakrishna to grace her temple at Kamarhati, and the latter readily agreed.

An interesting anecdote of the same day was narrated by Swami Ramakrishnananda and recorded by Sister Devamata. Aghoramani had brought with her a small bundle containing a little rice, dal (pulse) and some vegetables, while her companions brought rich presents of fruits, flowers and other

things. To Aghoramani's great discomfiture Sri Ramakrishna went and sat near her and said, 'I am feeling very hungry; can you not give me something to eat?'⁹ The poor and humble woman shuddered to think of what she had brought. But Sri Ramakrishna would not spare her. He pointed to her small bundle, which she opened with trepidation. He asked her to cook food for him and showed her the kitchen. Finding no escape she prepared food. When the humble dish was laid before him he asked her to feed him. 'She mixed the rice and curry, and as she put the first mouthful into his mouth she saw her Gopala.'¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna indeed relished the food. Repeatedly he praised her cooking saying that he had tasted real nectar. She was delighted, and her accumulated griefs were blown away.

Aghoramani returned home much impressed but not aware of the depth of her impression perhaps. Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her to be a noble soul, a genuinely holy man and perhaps nothing else. But a few days later as she sat telling her beads she felt an irresistible urge to visit the holy man. As it is customary to offer sweetmeats when one visits a holy man, she bought some ordinary sweets worth about two paise and came to Dakshineswar for the second time. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw her, he said, 'You have come! Give me what you have brought for me.'¹¹ To her astonishment Sri Ramakrishna ate them and seemed to relish her gift. In her presence Sri Ramakrishna behaved like a little boy before his mother. He repeatedly asked her to bring for him her own preparations—vegetable curries and sweets, however humble they might be.

Nevertheless, in her utter bewilderment

Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, La Crescenta, U.S.A.: Ananda Ashrama, 1928, (hereafter *Ramakrishna*), pp. 112-13.

7. See Akshay Kumar Sen, *Śrī Rāmākṣṇa Punthi* [Bengali], Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 5th edition, p. 301.

8. *Great Master*, p. 634.

9. *Great Master*, p. 638.

10. *Ramakrishna*, p. 113.

11. *Ramakrishna*, p. 114.

the 'Brahmani of Kamarhati', as Sri Ramakrishna called her in those days, thought that he was a queer sort of holy man ; for instead of talking of God he talked only of food. She made up her mind not to visit him again, but something strong drew her back to Dakshineswar soon. On that day she brought a vegetable preparation in a bowl. Sri Ramakrishna ate and praised it highly saying, 'Ah, how beautifully cooked! It is, as it were, very nectar.'¹² It brought tears of joy to her eyes. She returned home with a tingle of joy lingering in her heart. The charm of the holy man had gradually its firm hold upon her, and she began to frequent Dakshineswar, always with some preparations in her hand. Sri Ramakrishna ate with relish whatever she brought for him. But he went on pestering her with demands more and more. All this would often set her thinking, 'Gopala, is this the result of my meditation on you? You have brought me to a sadhu who wants only to eat. I'll never [visit him] any more.'¹³ Nevertheless, however hard she might try she could not resist the deep attraction she felt for Sri Ramakrishna, and kept visiting Dakshineswar all the more. Love of God had deeply penetrated her. 'Vatsalyabhava' was in her very nature, and for that she loved to feed the Master. She did not bother much about theology.¹⁴ This attraction for Gopala in Sri Ramakrishna gradually took hold, melted and transformed the aspirant Aghoramani Devi into Gopaler Ma.

Following that remarkable experience, Gopaler Ma had unbroken communion with God for about two months. No delight of life could give her more contentment than

this surpassingly sweet experience. On her next visit to Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna said to her : 'Why do you perform so much Japa now? You have achieved much indeed.'

Gopaler Ma : Shall I not perform Japa? Have I attained everything?

The Master : Yes, you have attained everything.

Gopaler Ma : Everything?

The Master : Yes, everything.

Gopaler Ma : What do you say? Have I attained everything?

The Master : Yes, everything. Performance of Japa, practising penance, etc., for yourself have been finished. But you may do these things, if you like, for this body [showing himself], so that it may keep well.

Gopaler Ma : Then whatever I'll do from now on, is yours, yours, yours.¹⁵

And from now onward Gopala fully occupied her heart. She came to realize, and Sri Ramakrishna too approved of it, that Sri Ramakrishna was not different from her baby Gopala. In fact they were one and the same. To her, Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of spiritual love, and her mind was now filled with deep love and attraction which a mother feels for her young child.

She threw her rosary into the Ganges. Her only spiritual practice remained confined to prattling with the baby Gopala. However, about a couple of months later the visions became rarer. Had it not been so, said Sri Ramakrishna, her body would have perished. Sri Ramakrishna always spoke highly of her exalted spiritual state. For instance, he said on July 13, 1885 : 'The Brahmani of Kamarhati sees many visions. . . . 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. . . . Formerly, I too

¹². *Great Master*, p. 638.

¹³. *Great Master*, p. 639.

¹⁴. See Ramchandra Datta, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvan Vṛttānta* [Bengali], Calcutta : Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyan, B.S. 1357, p. 152.

¹⁵. *Great Master*, pp. 642-43,

used to see many visions, but now in my ecstatic state I don't see so many.'¹⁶

One day Sri Ramakrishna confronted this simple-minded woman with Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda), then a sceptic and proud of his critical reason. He asked Gopaler Ma to narrate her experiences to Narendra. She hesitated to speak about her experiences to anyone other than Sri Ramakrishna, for they were too dear to her heart to expose them to doubt and distrust. However, being told by Sri Ramakrishna she narrated with great hesitation the story of her experiences with Gopala. She finally pleaded, 'My son, I am a poor ignorant woman. I don't rightly understand things. You are learned and intelligent. Now tell me if these visions are mere imaginations or realities.' Deeply moved by her story Narendra assured her saying, 'Yes mother, they are all true.'¹⁷

The great connoisseur of spirituality that Sri Ramakrishna was, he led Gopaler Ma along the golden path of divine love; and in that journey he not only tenderly regarded her attainments but chastised also, when the situation so demanded. Once Sri Ramakrishna was annoyed when he observed that Gopaler Ma had accepted a packet of gifts from Balaram's family members. Only when she was struck with repentance did he treat her as before.

As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna maintained throughout, the same attitude towards Gopaler Ma. Over and over again, with a conviction that could not perhaps be argued with, he treated her as his mother, for he was her baby Gopala. One day in the presence of some devotees, Sri Ramakrishna in a divine mood began to caress Gopaler Ma from head to foot, like a child when it meets its mother, and said, 'This body is filled with Hari only; it con-

sists of Hari alone.'¹⁸ On the sacred Janmashtami Day, the birthday of Sri Krishna, Gopaler Ma brought her Gopala (Sri Ramakrishna) some food prepared by herself. But Sri Ramakrishna was already affected by throat-cancer and could not take the food, at which she felt dismayed. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Please give me your blessings.'¹⁹

The throat-cancer worsened, much to the distress of Gopaler Ma, and the frail body of Sri Ramakrishna finally succumbed to it. Sri Ramakrishna gave up his mortal coil, but left Gopaler Ma as a living example of the great tradition of the Vatsalya attitude and as the moon of inspiration to aspirants who tread the path of devotion to God.

Sri Ramakrishna's mortal life over, Gopaler Ma was greatly disheartened, but her spiritual life deepened further and led her to greater heights of realization. Once while attending the Chariot Festival at Mahesh on the western bank of the Ganges, she was blessed with the vision of Gopala in all beings, and she saw in every created thing a revelation of Gopala. Inebriated with this divine vision she lost her external consciousness for the time being. Describing her experience she later said, 'At the time, I was not myself; I danced and laughed—created a second Kurukshetra.'²⁰ Till then only a lover of Gopala, she now became also a lover of her fellowmen; everybody to her was but Gopala.

Saintliness shone on her countenance, and in fact her very being radiated comfort and solace. She continued to inspire people from far and near. Once in Balaram's house a group of devotees pestered her with questions. She tried to avoid them by persuading them to approach Sarat, Tarak and Yogen—the sannyasi disciples of Sri Rama-

16. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, (hereafter *Gospel*), p. 780.

17. See *Great Master*, p. 657.

18. *Great Master*, p. 655.

19. *Gospel*, p. 825.

20. *Great Master*, p. 661.

krishna. This could not dissuade the devotees, and she finally agreed saying, 'Well, wait a while, let me ask Gopala.' It seems she came into communion with her Gopala, and the question-answer session went on smoothly—devotees questioning and Gopala answering through Gopaler Ma.²¹

With advancing age her body became decrepit, but she continued to live a life representing 'the old India . . . the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, . . .'²² Her life was a challenge to modern sceptics who always suspect the validity of spiritual experience. The living flame of love that she was, she was always radiating love and sweetness, purity and peace. To the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna she was a living exemplar of the glory of the Master's life and teachings.

Gopaler Ma, beginning her life as a typical orthodox superstitious Brahmin lady, underwent an amazing transformation.

21. See Swami Gambhirananda, *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Bhaktamālīkā* [Bengali], Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, II, B.S. 1359, pp. 410-11.

22. A statement made by Swami Vivekananda; *The Master*, p. 149.

Enlightenment brought her broad-mindedness. Love of God, which welled endlessly from her heart, loosened the grip of prejudice, narrow traditions, formal ceremonials and rigidity of faith, on her. This octogenarian lady accepted the European, Sister Nivedita, as the 'daughter of Naren', and showered affection on her. Sister Nivedita wrote, 'I feel thrilled, for I believe that Gopaler Ma's sainthood is as great as that of Paramahansa. For in her was such motherhood that the heart of Ramakrishna became a child to her. Could more be said?'²³ Gopaler Ma spent the last two and a half years of her life with Sister Nivedita at 17 Bosepara Lane, Calcutta. She died of old age at over ninety years,²⁴ on July 8, 1906. In India of the nineteenth century, the exalted woman mystic Gopaler Ma shines as one of the brightest stars, shedding light and bliss and exemplifying all-consuming love for God.

23. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Nivedita Girls' School, 1961, p. 202.

24. See *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, II, 1967, p. 370.

AGING AND EVOLUTION

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

None of us likes the idea of aging. We view the passing years with alarm. We see the changes that come despite anything we can do: the tendency to walk up flights of stairs we used to run up, the need to rest after the midday meal, an increasing dislike to participate in active pastimes.

Ours is a moment in history when youth is honoured above all else. There are organizations which ban those over twenty-one as too aged to qualify as members. Em-

ployment opportunities decline radically for those approaching thirty-five. Recently one of our young devotees at the Centre Védantique Ramakrichna at Gretz (France) replied with real anguish, when I congratulated him on his birthday, 'I don't want to be old.' He had just turned twenty.

We tend to feel today, as we reach forty or fifty, completely out of things—disgraced, humiliated, almost good for nothing. And the increasing numbers of retired

his servants according to their action and also the example of the rain which helps different seeds to sprout, each according to its nature.

From the foregoing explanation it is obvious that there is a two-way relation between God and *dharmādharmā*. God functions with reference to *dharmādharmā*, and *dharmādharmā* requires God. It means that the moral argument is presented in Vedānta against the theistic background and that it is significant only in the context of belief in God. The moral argument is not intended to secure belief in a non-believer.

Several objections against the Vedāntic account of God and the moral argument have been anticipated by Bādarāyaṇa himself in his *Brahma-sūtra*. There is an objection in the form of the problem of first creation. It is asked : Whence comes the difference in the condition of the *jīvas* in the first creation ? There is again the objection of circularity in reasoning (*anyonyāśraya-doṣa*): the diversity in the conditions of life depends on karma, and vice versa. *Sūtras* II.i.35 and 36 are relevant in this connection. Creation, according to Vedānta, is *anādi* (beginningless), and so the problem of first creation does

not arise. The question, 'Which is chronologically prior—karma or diversity of condition ?' cannot be raised at all when creation is said to be *anādi*. Śaṅkara justifies this position in his commentary on the *sūtra* II.i.6 through reasoning and Scripture. Russell's criticism⁶ of the moral argument loses its force when we view the moral argument as presented in Vedānta. Is it the case, asks Russell, that right and wrong came into existence through God's fiat ? If so, God, says Russell, is not good. If they do not come into being through God, then they are, says Russell, logically anterior to God. Objections of this type have to be ruled out when it is held that creation is *anādi* and that both *Īśvara* and the *jīva* are *anādi*.

Scripture is the *pramāṇa* for our knowledge of God. What is known through Scripture is made intelligible through reasoning. Scripture gives the content, and reason provides the necessary form to the content. And it is in this perspective, according to Vedānta, that we have to view the moral argument.

6. Bertrand Russell, 'Why I am not a Christian?' *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*, op. cit., p. 119.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : MRIDANI CHATTOPADHYAY

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Mridani was the fourth child of Parvati Charan Chattopadhyay. Her mother, Giribala Devi, had distinguished herself by composing Bengali songs and Sanskrit hymns, some of which were published ; she had some knowledge of Persian and English too, and was well-known for her religious zeal and piety.

Born in 1857 at Sibpur, in the district of Howrah in Bengal, Mridani was brought up in the typical religious Hindu family of her grandmother at Bhowanipur, Calcutta. As a child she was most devoted to prayer and the practice of austerities, and naturally drew the attention of the other members of her family. On the growing girl the religious

temperament of her mother and grandmother must have exercised great influence. A powerful religious fervour seemed to have taken hold of her mind even at a tender age, and it continued to be the ruling passion of her later life. Even as a child she showed no attachment for luxuries in food, dress, ornaments or the like. She was a vegetarian from childhood. Mridani was admitted to a school in South Calcutta started by Bishop Robert Milman, but she did not continue there for long as the young girl became disgusted with the hostile attitude of her Christian teachers towards Hindu religious beliefs. However, she learnt by heart many Sanskrit hymns as well as the *Gītā* and *Caṇḍī* and select passages of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. As she passed into girlhood her distaste for the world and her yearning for a more spiritual life also increased.

At about ten years of age she came across by chance a simple-looking brahmin who blessed her with the words, 'May you have devotion to Kṛṣṇa'. Some days later the girl met him again in a garden near Dakshineswar where he initiated her with a holy *mantra*. This event kindled a new flame in the heart of the girl. In later life, she was convinced that it was Sri Ramakrishna who had appeared before her as the unassuming brahmin. Strangely enough, some days later she was presented with a sacred stone emblem, called Rādhā-Dāmodara, by a pious woman from Vrindaban who stayed for some days with her family. Mridani worshipped the emblem throughout her life and experienced therein the holy presence of the Lord of her heart's love and adoration. From now on she secluded herself from worldly affairs and passed her days in prayer and contemplation. The advancing spiritual fervour of the girl and her detachment from the world made her widowed mother and other relations apprehensive. While still a girl of only thirteen years she

was bold enough to declare to her parents, 'I shall wed only that Bridegroom who never dies'. She had already accepted as her husband the eternal Spouse and heavenly Bridegroom who, to Mridani was, of course, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Astounded at the young girl's audacity, but incompetent to appreciate her deep spiritual attitude, the elderly members of her family decided to force a marriage upon her. Lest she should flee home she was confined to a room on the day preceding the one appointed for the marriage, but she escaped at night. She was, however, found out and brought home. All the family members except her mother did their utmost to dissuade her from her resolve. But Mridani held her own with a firmness above her years. The family members were finally obliged to leave her in peace.¹

Her strong desire to consecrate herself to God alone made her abandon every wish for temporal things, and she became restless. To console Mridani, her relatives agreed to send her on some pilgrimages, long and short. Aspiring after a mendicant's life she left her companions unnoticed during one such journey to Gangasagara. A maiden of eighteen, Mridani joined a group of up-country monks and nuns bound for Hardwar. She continued changing the company of monks and nuns until she decided to walk her path alone facing all kinds of dangers and hardship. Dāmodara, the stone emblem, tied to her neck in a small bag, was her only friend and protector. A few sacred books, the pictures of Śrī Gaurāṅga and Mother Kālī, and a few articles of everyday use were her sole possessions. Her stout and undaunted spirit was all the more strengthened as she moved through the centres of holy pil-

1. Swami Vivekananda once observed, 'She is very pure, pure from her infancy—I have not the least doubt about it.'

grimage in India, from Kailas and Amar-nath in the north to Rameswaram and Kanyakumari in the south, and from Dwaraka in the west to Kamakhya in the east. During the first part of her travels she visited Navadwip where she was initiated by a Vaiṣṇava guru and received the name Gaurdasi.² During her travels through hill and dale, town and village, she used to put on the ochre robe; at times she would cover her body with ashes or mud, and often she wore flowing garments and a turban like a man. She cut her hair short and on certain occasions she had to feign that she was a lunatic. Thus for seven years she passed her days in *tapasyā* (austerity) and in visiting holy places. Under the most difficult and trying circumstances, when an ordinary woman would have lost her bearings, she remained steadfast to her ideal. In later years, when a courageous young man who had already visited some of these difficult places of pilgrimage asked her, 'Did you really undertake such adventures?' she smiled and remarked, 'Well, I am a mother to sons like you.'³

During her wide travels the simple village folk used to refer to her as Gaur Mayi, the 'fair-complexioned mother', and it finally led to her being called Gaur-Ma or Gauri-Ma. Later Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Saradamani were to call her simply Gaurdasi. All these hazardous travels lent her invaluable help in understanding people of various kinds. But more important than this were the blessed spiritual experiences she was crowned with at different centres of pilgrimage, particularly at Dwaraka.

At Puri an old man named Harekrishna Mukherjee, told Mridani: 'Mother,

I saw at Dakshineswar a wonderful man of unique appearance; he goes frequently into divine ecstasy. Filled with the knowledge of God he radiates love.' On her return to Calcutta she put up with Balaram Bose at Baghbazar, Calcutta. As Balaram Bose was a close friend of Mridani's eldest brother, Abinashchandra, Mridani used to address him as 'Dada', elder brother. As in the past, Balaram told her once again about Sri Ramakrishna. Still, she did not feel the urge to visit the saint. She simply brushed aside the idea by saying, 'I have had enough of holy men. If your holy man has the power, let him draw me to him; otherwise I shall not visit him.'

It was 1882. Mridani was only twenty-five. Sri Ramakrishna, forty-six, was living at Dakshineswar. Born of a pious brahmin family in a remote village of Bengal Sri Ramakrishna had begun a life which was more traditional than that of most orthodox brahmins, and which was at the same time more unconventional than that of the English educated 'Young Bengal'. The priestly duties he began performing in the temple of Mother Kali at Dakshineswar brought to a focus the vague yearnings and aspirations of his boyhood interspersed with flashes of spiritual experiences. Unconcerned about hunger and thirst and the happenings around him, the young man spent twelve long years in search of God, with an astonishing tenacity of purpose, till he was crowned with the highest spiritual illumination, the experience of identity with God. All those years he lived as if there were none in the world except himself and God.

Without remaining satisfied with even the highest form of illumination, Sri Ramakrishna practised the spiritual disciplines of Islam and Christianity, and was rewarded with the same experience through all of them. This led him to the firm conviction that all religious paths lead ultimately to the same goal.

2. See Ramchandra Dutta, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvanbr̥ttānta* (Bengali), (Kankurgachhi, Calcutta: Yogodyan, B.S. 1310), p. 126. Hereafter, *Jīvanbr̥ttānta*.

3. Mahendranath Dutta, *Māṭṛdvaye* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Mahendra Publishing Committee).

Returning to the world with a rich harvest of spiritual experiences, he met other spiritual aspirants and checked his experiences with theirs. On looking at the society around him, he was deeply moved at the educated youths' rank materialism and their playing with religion without any religious experience. Dependent entirely on the Divine Mother, he soon perceived that God was to speak and work through him to save human society from rank materialism.

Sri Ramakrishna could see God everywhere and in all beings every second of his life. And it was because of his unbroken communion with the God in all that people who used to visit him felt uplifted and strengthened without understanding why. His life ushered in a rising tide of pure religion which slowly rolled on over the land, and brought in new strength, light and joy for the coming generations.

While living in the home of Balaram Bose, one day Mridani was in her worship room. A murmur of a song composed by Srinibas Das broke from her lips.⁴ She was about to place on the throne the stone emblem of Dāmodara after *abhiseka* (ritual bath), when she suddenly noticed a pair of footprints on the throne. As she offered *tulasī* leaves to the stone emblem, they slipped onto the footprints. This remarkable experience brought her spiritual ecstasy, and she lost outward consciousness for hours together. When returned to the consciousness of the world, she felt in her heart the pull of a string, as it were. In the night Mridani dreamt of a holy man. She distinctly heard him call her and felt once again the strong pull at her heart. Early next morning Mridani went to Dakshineswar in the company of Balaram Bose, his wife, Chunilal Bose's wife, and some others.

As their hackney carriage⁵ reached Dakshineswar a bright clear morning greeted the party. When the group entered the living room of the saint of Dakshineswar the latter was seen sitting on a cot, winding some thread around a stick. Mridani observed that, overwhelmed with divine ecstasy, the saint, with his face radiating joy, was singing in a melodious voice the song :

O Mother, for Yasoda Thou wouldst dance,
When she called Thee her precious 'Blue Jewel';
Where hast Thou hidden that lovely form,
O terrible Syama?
Dance that way once for me, O Mother!
Thrw down Thy sword and take the flute...⁶

Winding of the thread over, Sri Ramakrishna kept the roll aside. Following others she took the dust of his feet. The first sight of the holy man's smiling face brought an upsurge of emotion in Mridani, for she immediately recognized in him the man who had met her in her childhood and had given her spiritual initiation. She discovered that the pull she was experiencing at her heart had suddenly been replaced by an ineffable joy. Soon after, she could discern that the footprint she had vividly seen on the throne of the emblem, Dāmodara, was of the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. She was now smitten by divine love.

Like other ladies Mridani had kept her face covered with the end of her sari. Though Sri Ramakrishna could see her through her veil, he enquired of Balaram about her. Balaram introduced her as the youngest sister of one of his friends, and

4. See Durgapuri Devi, *Gaurīmā* (Bengali), (Calcutta : Sri Sri Saradeshwari Ashrama, B.S. 1346), p. 73. Hereafter, *Gaurīmā*.

5. According to Akshay Kumar Sen the party travelled by a country boat to Dakshineswar. See *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Punthi* (Bengali), (Calcutta : Udbodhan Office, 5th edition), p. 305.

6. Translation of the Bengali song done by Swami Nikhilananda. See *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), p. 452.

as one now living with him like a member of his own family. Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'That's right. She belongs to this place only. She is known for long.'⁷ (Sri Ramakrishna later said about Gaurdasi that she was 'a Gopī perfected by God's grace'.)⁸ Now, satisfied with the account of Balaram, Sri Ramakrishna gave a brief religious discourse in his inimitable way. Gaurdasi was simply charmed. When the party was about to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna the latter told Gaurdasi in a sweet voice, 'Please come again, Mother.'

These parting words of the great saint of Dakshineswar worked wonders on her as they did on many others. She returned to Balaram's house in Calcutta but her mind was hovering around Sri Ramakrishna and the memories associated with him. Early next morning she took a holy dip in the Ganga and, carrying a packet of clothes, she started for Dakshineswar. Her Dāmodara was in a small bag suspended from her neck. Sri Ramakrishna who was standing near the main entrance of the temple received her cordially and said, 'Well, I was just thinking of you.' Much moved, Gaurdasi narrated many incidents of her personal life. She also narrated how she had seen Sri Ramakrishna's footprint on the sacred throne of Dāmodara. She finally observed, 'I wish I had known earlier that you had kept yourself hidden from public gaze here.' Similingly Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Then, how could you perform all the austerities that you have done?' Sri Ramakrishna took her to the *nahabat* (music tower) and told Sri Sarada Devi who was staying there, 'O dear, you had asked for a companion—here is one.' Gaurdasi lived now and then with Sarada Devi at the *nahabat*. Gaurdasi regarded Sri Ramakrishna as her father and

mother in one. She used to prepare various delicacies and feed Sri Ramakrishna with devotion. She often sang devotional songs in her melodious voice in the *nahabat*, which frequently induced deep spiritual ecstasy in Sri Ramakrishna.

As in the case of many other devotees, Mridani's mind got crimsoned with the tinge of Sri Ramakrishna's personality. In fact, the influence of Sri Ramakrishna worked silently on her mind like leaven until her personality was entirely transformed. Sri Ramakrishna took charge of her spiritual welfare and guided her along the path divine. His life and words transmitted spiritual vitality into her pure heart and gradually transformed her life entirely. She developed deep regard for Sri Ramakrishna, for she came to realize the identity between Śrī Caitanya and Sri Ramakrishna. Her regard for Sri Saradamani was also equally deep, and she once observed, 'Sri Sarada Devi was not only the Master's partner in his life-work but also the object wherein he worshipped the Cosmic Mother... A full appreciation of the significance of her life is bound to have a liberalizing influence upon the whole world.'⁹ In her holy company Gaurdasi experienced spiritual moods several times. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked Gaurdasi jokingly, in the presence of Sarada Devi, which of them she loved more. Gaurdasi promptly replied through a song :

O Kṛṣṇa, player of the flute, surely

You are not greater than Rādhā.

Those who are in distress may pray to You,

But when You are distressed, it is Rādhā

You call upon with Your flute.

An embarrassed Sarada Devi pressed Gaurdasi's hand. Sri Ramakrishna laughed heartily and walked away.

7. Durgapuri Devi, *Gaurīmā*, p. 78.

8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 650.

9. Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother* (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1969), p. 195.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say about Gaurdasi, 'If a woman takes to Sannyāsa she ceases to be a woman ; she becomes a man.' Sarada Devi once remarked, 'A great soul is always a rarity, having hardly any parallel. Gaurdasi is one such rare soul.'

Gaurdasi looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as Śrī Caitanya reincarnated. She cherished a desire to witness the manifestation of love displayed by Śrī Caitanya at Navadvīp. One day when she was serving meal, Sri Ramakrishna introduced her to Kedarnath Chatterjee, a great devotee. Under the spiritual influence of Sri Ramakrishna both Gaurdasi and Kedar were fired with divine love and ecstasy similar to that experienced by the followers of Śrī Caitanya. Love is very infectious. Not only they but others present began to behave like madcaps, intoxicated with joy, till Sri Ramakrishna brought them back to normalcy.¹⁰

One day Gaurdasi was plucking flowers in the temple garden. Sri Ramakrishna came to her and said, 'Well Gauri, I am pouring water on the earth ; you knead the clay.' She could not grasp the significance of this cryptic remark. Then he explained smilingly, 'What I mean is, the women of this country are in a sad plight. You must work for them.' Though she did not quite like the idea, she offered to train, if necessary, young girls in a quiet retreat in the Himalayas. But he would not let her go. He emphatically told her, 'No, no ! You must work in this very city. You have had enough of spiritual practices. Now dedicate your life to the service of women. They are suffering dreadfully.' In the words of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Sri Ramakrishna decided to provide her with the life-giving spirit, and Gaurdasi was to transform the raw material of young women to be placed under her charge. A healthy

combination of work and contemplation constituted the essence of the Neo-Vedanta preached by Sri Ramakrishna. Now he demanded a demonstration of this from Gaurdasi.

Towards the end of his earthly life Sri Ramakrishna had an attack of throat cancer. Brave and cheerful to the last, in spite of his long and painful illness, he busied himself with the training of his faithful followers. He asked Gaurdasi to take up certain austerities, and early in 1886 she began them at Vrindaban. Her spiritual exercises lasted for nine months, but before they ended Sri Ramakrishna left his body. She became all the more sorry, for she gathered that Sri Ramakrishna had wanted several times to see her at Cossipore, Calcutta. Struck with utter grief she resolved to end her life by severe austerities but was dissuaded from this by a vision of Sri Ramakrishna. When Sarada Devi went to Vrindaban she had Gaurdasi searched out. She met her in a solitary cave at Rawa. After Sarada Devi left Vrindaban, Gaurdasi continued to stay in and around Vrindaban, except for a second pilgrimage to the Himalayas, for nearly ten years. The entire gamut of her hard austerities and spiritual disciplines coupled with God's grace flowing through Sri Ramakrishna resulted in the spiritual unfoldment of a high dimension in her. Such unfoldment may be compared to the transformation of a larva into a butterfly. The larva lives on leaves, and with the aid of air and sunlight changes into a chrysalis and then finally into a beautiful butterfly. Mridani was transformed into the saint Gauri-Ma, a spiritual luminary and Sri Ramakrishna's torch-bearer. On her return to Calcutta in 1895, a new chapter in her illustrious life opened up. She was, in fact, the only monastic woman-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. It has been claimed that during her stay at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna presented her with ochre cloth.

10. See Ramchandra Dutta, *Jivanbhṛtānta*, pp. 126-27.

According to his instruction Gaurdasi arranged for the Sannyāsa rituals. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna himself offered a bilva leaf to the sacred fire.¹¹

Her wide travels which gave her first-hand knowledge of the pathetic condition of women in this country, her scholarship, her dynamism and organizing ability, her spiritual experience and, above all, the order of her Master, urged her to take up the task of educating Indian women. The uplifting letters of Swami Vivekananda from America inspired her further to take up that responsibility. He had written in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda, 'There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing... Hence, in the Ramakrishna Incarnation, the acceptance of a woman as the guru, hence His practising in the woman's garb and frame of mind, hence too His preaching the Motherhood of women as representations of the Divine Mother... Hence it is that my first endeavour is to start a Math for women. This Math shall be the origin of Gargis and Maitreyis, and women of even higher attainments than these...' ¹² To achieve that end he wanted to depend primarily on those who were chosen by Sri Ramakrishna himself. In another letter addressed to Swami Ramakrishnananda he wrote in 1894, 'Where is Gaur-Ma? We want a thousand such Mothers with that noble stirring spirit.' ¹³ In still another letter dated April 27, 1896, Swamiji suggested, 'Please show this letter to Gaur-Ma, Yogin-Ma and others, and through them establish a Woman's Math. Let Gaur-Ma be the President there for one

year... They will manage their own affairs.' ¹⁴

Thus drawing her inspiration from Sri Ramakrishna and encouraged by the blessings of Saradamani Devi and the letters of Swami Vivekananda, Gauri-Ma started the Saradeswari Ashrama at Kapaleswar on the Ganga in Barrackpore. As the institution grew rapidly, in 1911 it was shifted to a rented house in Calcutta, and in 1924 to its present site at 26 Maharani Hemanta Kumari Street, Shyambazar, Calcutta. In the new resurgence that burst on this country with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, the walls of superstitions about women broke down, and a tide of progressive ideas swept across the country. Saradeswari Ashrama did pioneering work in guiding the course of this tide for the benefit of hundreds of girls and women in Bengal.

Gauri-Ma enjoyed the special love and affection of Sarada Devi. About her dedicated service and its purpose Sarada Devi once said: 'Gaurdasi takes great care of the girls of her Ashrama. If anyone is ill, she does all her personal services herself. She has never had to do these things in life; but the Master is making her do them this way, this being her final incarnation.' ¹⁵

After the Master had departed from the world-scene his directive assumed a concrete form in Gaurdasi. She remembered that Sri Ramakrishna had demanded of her the love and service of women of the country. Sarada Devi's life was a demonstration of the Motherhood of God, acting as a leaven to silently change the newly awakened consciousness of womanhood. Blessed by Sarada Devi, Gauri-Ma dedicated with unflagging zeal the last forty years of her illustrious life to the service of the living temples of the Mother of the uni-

11. See Durgapuri Devi, *Gaurimā*, p. 103.

12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama), 6(1978): 328. Hereafter, *Comp. Works*.

13. *Comp. Works*, 6:285.

14. *Comp. Works*, 7(1972):497.

15. Her Direct Disciples, *At Holy Mother's Feet* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1963), p. 188.

verse, namely, the girls of the country. And behind all her service there stood the eternal fount of inspiration, the life and deeds of Sri Ramakrishna.

Hundreds of persons received spiritual guidance from Gauri-Ma. She was a tower of strength to her disciples as well as to her colleagues and workers. Truly one writer observed, 'She was what the Upaniṣads ask one to be—strong, courageous, full of determination... Her very presence radiated strength and would infuse courage and hope into drooping spirits... She had a dynamism rare even amongst men.'¹⁶ To Indian housewives she exhorted, 'Mothers, you must never forget that, in the present state of society, your responsibility is the greatest for maintaining the order and equilibrium of social life through peace, purity and steadfast conduct.'¹⁷

16. *The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama, 1955), p. 489.

17. *Gauri Mata and Her Mission* (Calcutta : Saradeswari Ashrama, 1958), p. 23.

February 28, 1938, was the day of Śivarātri. Gauri-Ma, the octogenarian nun, declared that she was feeling the irresistible pull of Sri Ramakrishna once again. Towards the close of the night Gauri-Ma asked of her Dāmodara. When the stone emblem was brought she exclaimed, 'How beautiful. I see Him vividly with my eyes open and with my eyes closed. I see Him all the time.' She kept the emblem on her head and then on her bosom and finally handed it over to the chief inmate of the Ashrama. Next day she breathed her last. It is difficult to estimate how far the silent influence of this great woman-saint worked in transforming the lives of those who came in contact with her. But her saintly life, inspiring personality and untiring work have won her an important place not only in the Ramakrishna movement, but also in the history of the awakening of Indian womanhood.

A NOTE ON PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

S. BALASUNDARAM

What is philosophy? Philosophers have answered this question variously. To define philosophy is not easy. The ancient Greek philosophers defined it as the love of wisdom and knowledge. The ancient Indian sages and philosophers confined it to the theory and practice of religion, and declared that philosophy was not only an inquiry into the nature of the self of man and the Ultimate Reality, but also the realization of the Truth through experience. Our definition is that philosophy is the persistent attempt to lift the veil of the existential mystery and wonder; it is the attempt to understand the world and man and the relation of man to the world. For such an

understanding, we have to undertake a general survey of the world and life as a whole instead of limiting our inquiry to some particular aspect. Religion, on the other hand, is the intuitive realization by man of God, the absolute Supreme Being, who is the cause and governor of the world.

The philosophic attitude is speculative, analytical and critical, whereas the religious outlook is marked by faith, love and worship. The philosophic enquiry starts as a result of wonder, intellectual curiosity and the thirst for knowledge, which are natural to the human mind. Intellectual curiosity is curiosity about everything that exists, that is actual, and everything that is possible,

men in all civilized nations. As such we can safely apply this method for the purpose of ascertaining the dates of past events wherever found relevant. To ignore and dismiss it as primitive or outdated is a sure sign of *avidyā* (nescience) on the part of modern professional historians.

This is in short the national method of

historical research bequeathed to us by Swami Vivekananda for acquiring beneficial, worthy knowledge of our past for the regeneration and welfare of future India. It is indeed an arduous and uphill task to follow this original path of research. Still we have to do it for the good of the nation.

(To be continued)

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : YOGINDRAMOHINI BISWAS

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

It was during one of those many visits of Sri Ramakrishna to the house of Balaram Bose¹ that Yogindramohini came to see him for the first time. It was sometime in the last part of 1882.² Sri Ramakrishna was the topic of frequent discussion in Calcutta, particularly in the locality of Baghbazar where Yogindramohini lived. Besides, being a distant relation of Balaram Bose, the great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, she perhaps had heard of the saint from her own relations; for once her grandmother, who had a religious disposition, had visited the Dakshineswar temple to meet the saint. It is told that the unorthodox dress and

demeanour of Sri Ramakrishna had befuddled her. She had met Sri Ramakrishna unknowingly and had asked him, 'Where is the Paramahansa?' It seems that the latter was in an indrawn mood and did not disclose his identity.

Yogindramohini, thirty-two, 'possessed exceptional beauty and uplifted dignity which told of rare nobility of character'.³ 'She was regal in appearance and dignified in deportment'.⁴ 'She had ... big lotus-like sparkling eyes.... She was of short-stature, heavily built, bright-complexioned, very sagacious, well-balanced in her judgement....'⁵ That day at Balaram's house, Sri Ramakrishna, then forty-five, was reeling like a drunkard in a state of spiritual ecstasy. It was difficult for a newcomer to distinguish this God-intoxicated person from a tipsy fellow. Later she recollected her first impression of Sri Rama-

1. According to Akshay Kumar Sen's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Puthi* (Calcutta : Udbodhan Office, fifth edition), p. 304, and the *Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1955), p. 471, the first meeting took place at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar.

2. A spiritually advanced young man, Vishnu of Ariadaha, had committed suicide; and this matter was being discussed by Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar on 14 December 1882. From Holy Mother's remarks it would appear that Yogindra was then present at the Nahabat at Dakshineswar. Many, however, hold the view that the meeting took place in 1883. See *At Holy Mother's Feet*, by Her Direct Disciples (Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1963), p. 264.

3. Sister Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (La Crescenta, California : Ananda Ashrama, 1928), p. 118.

4. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York : Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1962), p. 60.

5. Swami Nirlepananda, 'Yogin-Ma', *Prabuddha Bharata*, July 1942, p. 341.

krishna in the following words : 'One day Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] came to Balaram Bose's and we went to see him. This was my first meeting. To one side of the hall on the first floor Thakur was standing filled with divine emotions. Merged in deep *samādhi* he had lost outward consciousness. Everybody was making obeisance to him from a distance. We too followed them. Till then I did not know anything about *samādhi*, nor could I decipher its significance. This much I could comprehend, that he was perhaps a devotee of Kālī. But he looked as though tipsy ! ... First, an idea flashed across my mind : I thought, well, one drunkard ruined my family life ; now should my religious life too be ruined by another? This was like getting frightened at the sight of a crimsoned cloud.'⁶ Since her unhappy experiences of life had shattered her self-confidence and liberal attitude, faith and hope, she had practically forgotten to see good intentions and happy tidings in the people and events around her. Obviously she could not appreciate the saint's divine ecstasies, much less when they took the form which had already created unhappiness in her life. She returned home rather disappointed.

Yogindra was not aware that Sri Ramakrishna's influence had begun working on her ; it was working more deeply than she could even imagine. This first contact with Sri Ramakrishna had made a far reaching impact on her life. Sri Ramakrishna's appearance, particularly his face glowing with divine emotion, kept appearing on the screen of her mind. She was gradually seized with the desire of visiting the saint again ; and after her second visit, she started visiting him again and again. Frequent and closer contacts with the saint dispelled the misapprehension she had had

during her first meeting. She discovered to her joy and surprise that Sri Ramakrishna's character, bereft of airs and pretensions, was as simple as that of a child, but at the same time as deep as the ocean.

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual perception was so keen that at the very first glance he could see through and through the newcomer and discern her spiritual status and her future spiritual development. Sri Ramakrishna's later remark that 'Yogin is not an ordinary woman—she is like the bud of a thousand-petalled lotus which slowly blossoms and delights all with its beauty and fragrance', tells in a nutshell the story of the unfoldment of the spiritual grandeur that was to come in the life of Yogindramohini under the guidance of the great Master Sri Ramakrishna.

An adept in cooking, she would sometimes carry some sweetmeats or some cooked preparations for him, and he would partake of them with the joy of a child. Every time she took leave of him he would quietly tell her, 'Come again, please.'

Under the guidance of the Master Yogindramohini gradually rose to such stature that she was pointed out as a true Jñānin⁷ (enlightened person) among the women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Coming as it did from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna, it should be taken as the most reliable measure of her spiritual status.

The daughter of a well-to-do medical practitioner of Baghbazar and lecturer in the Calcutta Medical College, Prasanna Kumar Mitra, who had earned a reputation in midwifery, she was born on January 16, 1851, at her father's house at 59 Baghbazar Street, Calcutta.⁸ Though Yogindra was born with a deep strain of mysticism running

6. Lakshmimani Devi and Yogindramohini, *Sri Ramakrishna Smriti*, Bengali (Calcutta : Udbodhan Office, third edition).

7. 'Among women devotees Yogin is a Jnanin.' See 'Yogin-Ma' by Swami Arupananda, *Udbodhan*, vol. XXVI, no. 6, p. 370.

8. Swami Nirlepananda, 'Yogin-Ma', *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1942, pp. 294-5.

through her personality, her upbringing under the living guidance of her pious mother, the second wife of Dr. Mitra, cannot be ignored. In keeping with the social custom, at the age of only six and a half she was given in marriage to Ambika Charan Biswas, the adopted son of the Zamindar family of Khardah, 24-Parganas, reputed for its charity. To the utter disappointment of all, particularly to the young Yogindra, Ambika turned out to be a very indolent, pleasure-seeking and extravagant person; and he could not give anything but neglect and refusal in response to the love and care of his devoted wife. She failed to bring any effective change in Ambika. He became a moral wreck and a pauper; the family was ruined. She had given him a son who lived not more than six months, and a girl who was lovingly called 'Ganu'. A striking contrast to her debauchee husband, Yogindra was calm and majestic in her bearing. She practised righteousness and lived on frugal fare in her husband's household. All around her there reigned dissipation and moral laxity. As soon as her only daughter 'Ganu' was given in marriage, however, she took a bold decision: instead of compromising with disgrace and dishonour any further, she left her in-law's house for good and took shelter again in her father's house at Baghbazar. Her father, Dr. Mitra, had already passed away; but her dear mother welcomed her. Once having lost its moorings, her life had all these years drifted on a river of agony and humiliation. Now, however, the tide was to turn, and it came most unexpectedly.

Atop the new tide was Sri Ramakrishna, the God-man of the age, whose brilliant intellect and wonderfully expansive heart brought a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart, into existence for the present age and a glorious assurance for the future. He demonstrated in his life

that whatever be the approach according to individual differences in taste and temperament and the differences in social heritage, the one and the same spiritual truth reveals itself in infinite lustre and supreme bliss to men of all ages and of all climes. Though his mind's natural tendency was to rest in the transcendental experience of oneness with the Truth, he always tried to come down and live like a great swan in the lake of divine bliss so that he might help the devotees around him share the same spiritual joy with him as his partners. He had the wonderful capacity to put himself into another man's very soul, and it helped him approach the distant reaches of their mental spectrum. In the words of his great disciple Swami Vivekananda, he was 'the latest and the most perfect [of Incarnations]—the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity, and the desire to serve mankind.'⁹

Sri Ramakrishna laid stress on the need to look upon all women as representations of the Divine Mother. It was the Divine Mother who played through the body and mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He had married Sarada Devi, who herself experienced God as the Divine Mother and who experienced Her in her 'husband'. They saw the Divine Mother in each other.

Amidst all her worldly trials and tribulations Yogindra battled to hold on to the thought centred round this holy man. When she began to open her heart to his influence, subtle and quiet, it helped her in disciplining her inner life and to bring some order and peace into it.

However, exasperated by worldly problems Yogindra one day became so restless that she decided to rush to Dakshineswar and tell her secrets and problems

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, in 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), vol. VII, p. 483.

to the saint. Early next morning she walked all the way to Dakshineswar but, strangely enough, as soon as she met Sri Ramakrishna all her agonies seemed to vanish. After a while she plucked some flowers from the garden and collected them in the apron of her sari. Moved by spiritual compassion, Sri Ramakrishna, who at that time was abstractedly leaning against a wall of the northern porch of his room, noticed her as she was passing by and softly asked her, 'What are you carrying, dear?' She showed him the flowers; and then approaching him she placed the flowers at his feet. This act of devotion served to transport Sri Ramakrishna's mind to a lofty region; he became engrossed in spiritual emotion and in that mood he placed his feet on her head. At the suggestion of Gopal's mother, who was then waiting upon Sri Ramakrishna, she held his feet on her chest. She experienced some spiritual exhilaration and came to believe that Viṣṇu Gadādhara's footprints had been enshrined in her heart.¹⁰

She registered later one of her typical experiences during her visits to Sri Ramakrishna. She writes, 'Often I noticed that I had gone to him with certain questions in mind; strangely, such or similar questions I would hear someone else asking and in response he would resolve all my doubts directly or indirectly. He was indeed the Indweller [*antaryāmi*].'

Following a few visits she was introduced to Sarada Devi, who was almost of her age. They developed a deep liking and affection for each other. Recollecting her experiences of those days Yogindramohini said: 'Whenever I went to the Mother, she took me into her confidence and even sought my counsel. I used to visit Dakshineswar at intervals of seven or eight days and some-

times spent nights there. The Mother would not allow me to sleep separately. She would drag me to her side and make me sleep with her at the Nahabat.'¹¹

To Yogindramohini, Sarada Devi was the ideal of harmony between mystical intensity and dedication to worldly duties. Wonderfully joyous were their days at Dakshineswar. Sarada Devi and her companions would stand for hours behind the matting partition around the Nahabat, gazing at the joyous scenes centred on Sri Ramakrishna. She used to help Sarada Devi in her household duties. Sarada Devi liked so much the way Yogindra braided her hair that she often waited three or four days for Yogindra's return to have it done again. At the same time she sincerely practised spiritual disciplines in seclusion. Yogindra developed such power in plunging her mind in deep meditation that Sarada Devi once remarked, 'And look at Yogen. In those days she would fall into such deep meditation that if a fly settled inside her eye, she was not aware of it.'¹² They were days of bliss indeed for Yogindramohini, and in later years she used to say: 'Such happiness cannot be put into words. Even to think of it today moves my heart.'¹³

Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, like the sun and moon, cast their influence on Yogindramohini, gradually transforming her being, drawing out the divinity within and causing it to manifest in various ways. Sri Ramakrishna confirmed and revitalized the spiritual *mantra* Yogindra had received from the family priest of her in-laws. The *mantra* which had been insipid once, now worked wonders. It brought unspeakable joy. A new vista of life opened up before

10. Swami Saradananda, *Bhagavan Sri Sri Ramakrishnadev*, Bengali (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, B.S. 1352), p. 7.

11. Swami Madhavananda and Sri Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, eds., *Great Women of India* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1953), p. 443.

12. Direct Disciples, *At Holy Mother's Feet*, p. 304.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

her. One day Sri Ramakrishna, in an ecstatic mood, said to her while pointing to his own bodily form, 'Look, your Iṣṭa [chosen deity] is within this. Think of this form; it will lead to the thought of your Iṣṭa.'¹⁴ And actual experience testified to the truth of this guidance of Sri Ramakrishna. He taught her also the method of counting beads, meditation, etc. One day while she was accompanying Sri Ramakrishna in a boat to Dakshineswar, the latter advised her: 'Why not surrender yourself to Him? One should live in the world like a leaf before the wind—a leaf thrown out after food has been eaten out of it, cast off to be blown by the wind whithersoever it likes. . . . One should live one's life depending on Him, and the mind should move as the wind of divine consciousness moves it.'¹⁵

She too in her turn served obsequiously both Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. She would consider it imperative to obey their errands without any questioning. A trickle of their goodwill was considered a great favour by her. And ever since she was instructed in the course of a vision by Sri Ramakrishna, she accepted Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi as one undifferentiated being.¹⁶

Encouraged by Sri Ramakrishna she began to study devotional literature. Her prodigious memory helped her to get by heart a number of Purāṇas, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the life of Sri Caitanya. So reliable were her studies that Sister Nivedita wrote in the preface to her book *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* that her (Yogindra's) 'deep and intimate knowledge

of the sacred literature is only equalled by her unfailing readiness to help a young student' (like Nivedita). Yogindra also took classes on such religious subjects as the *Gītā* in the women's section (opened on November 2, 1903) of Nivedita's school at Baghbazar.¹⁷

The spiritually surcharged lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi naturally spurred Yogindra to deeper and more arduous spiritual practices. She subjected herself to manifold austerities and spiritual disciplines, resulting in rapid progress towards life's goal. Sri Ramakrishna smilingly drew her attention to the efficacy of genuine faith, saying, 'What more is left to be attained by you? You have seen, fed and served this body [referring to himself].'¹⁸ In fact, she had developed an abundance of such faith in Sri Ramakrishna. When he paid a visit to her home on July 28, 1885, she begged him to enter her bedroom, for she believed that the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet would make the place as holy as Benaras, and that if she died there she would attain liberation.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in order to saturate her with spiritual fervour so that all doubts and wrong ideas about life's goal might cease altogether, Sri Ramakrishna instilled in Yogindra the strong desire for austerities, as well as steadfast devotion for life's ideal. Thus equipped she made steady progress in the spiritual path. Simultaneously, he trained her to practice selfless service to help her strengthen her moral fibre as well as to enable her to serve the cause of suffering humanity, particularly womankind, under

14. Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika*, Bengali, in 2 vols. (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, second edition), vol. 2, p. 458.

15. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 626.

16. Swami Gambhirananda, *Bhaktamalika*, vol. II, p. 459.

17. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1963), p. 153; and Sankari Prasad Basu, *Nivedita Lokamata*, Bengali (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers), p. 234.

18. *Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 472.

19. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), p. 808.

the loving guidance of Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother.

One day news reached her that her drunkard husband Ambika Charan had been bitten by a rabid dog. He was brought to Yogindra's parental home. Medical treatment and the best services offered by the devoted wife could not keep him alive long. Overly preoccupied with bitter memories of the past and now overwhelmed at this bereavement, Yogindra perhaps did not realize the seriousness of the Master's failing health. For she decided to visit Vrindaban and undertake rigorous spiritual austerities while Sri Ramakrishna was lying seriously ill at Cossipore. When she approached Sri Ramakrishna for permission, he encouraged her. Pointing to Sarada Devi, who was standing nearby, he emphatically advised Yogindra, 'My dear child, you go after obtaining her consent—you will get everything.' Next morning Yogindra came to Cossipore and received the blessings of the Master and the Holy Mother and left for Vrindaban.²⁰

Busy as she was with her spiritual practices at Vrindaban, she was nevertheless rudely shocked to hear of Sri Ramakrishna's passing away at Calcutta. She was soon joined by Sarada Devi. While they were mourning Sri Ramakrishna's death, one day Sri Ramakrishna appeared in a vision and assured them : 'Here I am. Where have I gone? It is just like passing from one room to another.' Now, intense aspiration for higher illumination led Yogindra to valuable spiritual experiences. One day she attained a state of *samādhi* at Lala Babu's temple, referring to which she admitted, 'Then my mind had plunged so deep into meditation that I had totally forgotten the existence of the world.... I could see the presence of my Iṣṭa everywhere. This lasted for three

days.'²¹ In fact, her life was full of fasts and vigils. She did *pañcatapā* in the company of the Holy Mother, and took the vow of sannyasa from Swami Saradananda at Puri, though she used to put on ochre cloth only at the time of worship. One day while meditating she was blessed with frequent visions of Balarām and Kṛṣṇa ; but soon thereafter, particularly after the death of her only daughter Ganu, these visions ceased ; then she had to spend much of her time caring for her three grandsons. In spite of such worldly duties and responsibilities she maintained the spirit of austerity with single-minded devotion almost to the last day of her life.

Joys of spiritual experiences apart, the major part of her life was perhaps a story of sorrows and sufferings. In 1906 her only daughter became a widow and three years later lost one of her sons ; soon thereafter the daughter herself died. The upbringing of three grandsons and serving her own old mother engaged much of her time. She also saw her old mother die in 1914. Bereavements of close relations, one after another, purged her mind of the dross of worldly attachments that might have been lurking in its deep vaults. They gave her not only infinite forbearance and unsullied strength of mind, but also helped her to cultivate deeper divine fervour and attain the highest illumination.

One of the best spiritual diamonds that Sri Ramakrishna, the expert jeweller, had discovered and gathered round him was Yogindramohini, whom devotees lovingly called Yogin-Ma. She was unique in the swiftness of her comprehension, in the depth of her sympathy for suffering people, and above all in her role as 'Jayā'²² of the

²⁰. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, third edition), p. 132.

²¹. *Women Saints of East and West* (London : The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1955), p. 131.

²². Sarada Devi referred to Yogindra as 'my Jayā'. Jayā is one of the two attendants of the Divine Mother Durga ; the other is Vijayā,

Holy Mother. Holy Mother held her in such love and regard that she used to consult her 'even about *mantras* and spiritual matters, not to speak of many other knotty problems she was confronted with in her daily affairs'.²³ Her purity, humility, compassion, intense spiritual practices, calm steadfastness and motherly affection towards the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, made her dear to all. Though a zealous Hindu, she was quite liberal in her attitude. Sister Nivedita appreciated much the 'instant power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea' in her.²⁴

A worldly woman turned into a mystic of a high order, Yogin-Ma attained the dizzy heights of spiritual development. She had the experience of *samādhi* once again at her Calcutta residence.²⁵ Pleased with her one-pointed devotion, Sri Ramakrishna the great Master had blessed her with the boon of passing away in *samādhi*.²⁶ Swami

Vivekananda, too, predicted, 'Yogin-Ma, you will pass away in *samādhi*, for once a person experiences this blessed state, the memory of it is revived at the time of his death.' Yogin-Ma was one of the striking examples of the fulfilment of Swami Vivekananda's hope about Hindu women. The latter wrote in a letter, 'Mother [Sri Sarada Devi] has been born to revive that wonderful *śakti* in India, and making her the nucleus, once more will Gārgīs and Maitreyīs be born into the world.'²⁷ Much earlier than this Sri Ramakrishna himself had declared about Yogin-Ma, 'She is a Gopī perfected by God's grace.'²⁸ And this perhaps explains how she attained such great success in her spiritual practices.

She survived the Holy Mother by four years and passed away in *samādhi* on June 4, 1924. The halo of glory that surrounds the charming life and deeds of Yogin-Ma will be a source of solace and inspiration to all those who have sought shelter at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

23. Swami Nirlepananda, 'Yogin-Ma', *Prabuddha Bharata*, July 1942, p. 341.

24. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, in 4 vols. (Calcutta : Sister Nivedita Girls' School), vol. I, p. 107.

25. Swami Arupananda, 'Yogin-Ma', p. 367.

26. Baikunthanath Sannyal, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-Lilamrita*, Bengali (Calcutta : Basumati Sahitya Mandira, B.S. 1343), p. 365.

27. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. VII, p. 474.

28. Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master*, p. 650 ; and also Swami Saradananda, *Bhagavan Sri Sri Ramakrishnadev*, p. 4.

A CRITIQUE OF THE MARXIST VIEW OF RELIGION

PROF. RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE

Marxism is the offspring of Hegelian dialectic and Feuerbach's materialism, and is also known as dialectical materialism and scientific socialism. Marxism is not a system of philosophy according to the common usage of the term. What Marx really expounded was a new system of economics, a new political ideology which, he claimed, would usher in a new social system. Never-

theless, materialism, as it was understood during Marx's time, acts as the philosophical basis of scientific socialism. 'The philosophy of Marxism is materialism... The enemies of democracy therefore exerted all their efforts to refute, undermine and defame materialism and advocated various forms of philosophical idealism which always in one way or another

Christ: My honour is yours, your honour is mine!

Teresa: He will take charge of my affairs and I of his!

God the Father: I have given you my Son, the Holy Spirit and the blessed Virgin here. What can you give me?

Teresa: What can I do for my Bridegroom? What could anyone so clumsy as I do? Waste the graces you have given me....

Christ: Do you imagine, daughter, that to be in a state of joy is meritorious? The only way to merit is to act, to suffer and to love.

Teresa: Stay me up with flowers. It does not seem to me that that is asking for death, but more to consecrate one's life to serve him to whom one owes so much.... Let Bridegroom and bride be no longer two but one single will, not so much in words or desires but in acts.⁸²

What was this marriage that, for St. Teresa, was illumination itself? Of the

joy of the illumination she has left an ecstatic account:

...A sort of divine intoxication, oblivious of what it wants, what it says, what it demands... He wants to fill her to overflowing, to delight her still more, he changes her into himself, and like all those who faint away through excess of pleasure and joy, she remains as it were unconscious in the divine arms and on the divine breast. She no longer cares for anything except to abandon herself to joy, nourished by the divine milk.... This heavenly inebriation by which she is delighted and terrified at the same time.... this holy madness.... Thy breasts are better than wine.... entirely saturated in the ineffable greatness of God... My Bridegroom, a single drop of the precious wine which you give me makes me forget every created thing.... Let me gaze at my Beloved and he at me.... I beseech you, O God, by the blood of your Son, to give me this grace: Kiss me with a kiss of your mouth!.... And what can I do for my Bridegroom?⁸³

(To be continued)

⁸². *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁸³. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: NITYAGOPAL GOSWAMI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Krishnakamal Goswami (1810-1888), better known as 'Baro Gossain', popularized Vaiṣṇavism in Dacca, largely through his composition of innumerable Vaiṣṇava lyrics and dramas of unique beauty, of which *Rāi Unmādinī* was the most famous. He belonged to the Vaidya caste, and his forefathers had been direct disciples of Śrī Nityānanda, the spiritual companion of Śrī Gaurāṅga.

His handsome son Nityagopal showed deep religious inclinations right from his childhood, and also earned a name rather early in life as a good scholar. Of religious temperament and docile nature, Nityagopal

felt the pang of spiritual poverty and turned hither and thither for its alleviation. This search brought him first to the Brahmo Samaj, which utterly failed to satisfy him. Rather, he became all the more restless. Under the influence of a friend's suggestion, he joined a group of atheists; but being a firm believer in God, Nityagopal could hardly stand their uncongenial companionship. Then he became a member of the Theosophical Society. His experience there found expression in his observation: 'I cannot say that my association with this institution did not do me any good.' Nonetheless he continued to read and discuss the

Sāṁkhya and Yoga Śāstras. During this time he met Vijay Krishna Goswami, then the Head of the Dacca Brahmo Samaj. Spiritual poverty apart, the pecuniary difficulties of his family made him anxious enough. He had long talks with Vijay Krishna Goswami about his mental agonies, and during one such discussion he heard of the Paramahansa of the Dakshineswar temple for the first time.

The son of Khudiram Chattopadhyaya, an austere Brahmin, Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up in the village of Kamarpukur, which lies in the Hooghly District of Bengal. Possessed of an extraordinary memory, a keen intellect and fine aesthetic abilities, he refused to acquire traditional secular knowledge. Instead, his ecstatic experiences in boyhood led him to seek greater spiritual enlightenment. As a young man he went to Calcutta and then to the Dakshineswar temple, where the intense hunger of his soul led him through hard disciplines to the divine vision, which in time came to him not only in trance but in the normal state of consciousness, even with open eyes. Though living in a state of almost constant divine inebriation, he yearned for the vision of the Godhead in its different aspects and forms. Thus with superhuman energy, ardour and devotion he practised the spiritual disciplines of various Hindu sects. Next he turned to Islam and then to Christianity, and in each case he was blessed with wonderful experiences and the ultimate spiritual realization. The unique genius of Sri Ramakrishna allowed him to pass through the whole gamut of the world's spiritual teachings within a few years. During his spiritual practices this mystic lived as if there were none in the world except himself and God; but on his successful completion of his quest he returned to the world, realizing that it was the outer court of eternity.

The rich fund of mystical experiences gathered over twelve years led him to a sublime state called 'Bhāvamukha'. Reaching that state, it gradually dawned on him that he had a divine mission to fulfil, and he began to propagate his message. He wanted to set in a religious resurgence for the regeneration of India, for the spiritual awakening of all mankind, and for the establishment of harmony among the different religions of the world. Both by precept and by his own day-to-day life Sri Ramakrishna revealed to incredulous men, then under the spell of natural science and rationalism, the divine nature of human beings and the basic divine unity pervading the diversity of the universe. He demonstrated repeatedly that the spiritual goal is one, though the paths vary, and that the Divine Being is both transcendent and immanent and has many facets and expressions. He looked upon all men and women as living manifestations of God.

The story of Paramahansa Ramakrishna as presented by Vijay Krishna fascinated Nityagopal, who at that time was a lecturer in the Jagannath College at Dacca, now the capital of Bangladesh. He felt an urge, which became stronger with the passage of time, to meet the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. He availed himself of the first opportunity and went to Dakshineswar, near Calcutta, to see the saint. It was sometime after Sri Ramakrishna's participation in the festival at Mani Mallick's on November 26, 1883, that Vijay Krishna Goswami took charge of the Dacca Brahmo Samaj, and it was during this period that Nityagopal came in close contact with Vijay.¹

1. After his formal spiritual initiation from a holy man of the Nanak school at Akasganga, Gaya, and a period spent in spiritual austerities, Vijaykrishna went to see Sri Ramakrishna at the temple of the Brahmo Samaj on September 26, 1884. Observing the striking change in Vijay

In all probability Nityagopal met Sri Ramakrishna sometime in the middle of 1884. The popular version of the first meeting was that Sri Ramakrishna, who was having his midday meal at the time of Nityagopal's arrival, was so pleased at the sight of him that he could not enjoy his meal, and in fact left it half-finished.² Nityagopal himself, however, said later³ that he had found Sri Ramakrishna lying on a cot in his room at Dakshineswar when he met him first. Sri Ramakrishna was taking rest after his midday meal. An adept at seeing the inner nature of a person, Sri Ramakrishna could immediately assess the spiritual potentiality of the new arrival. Being pleased with him, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to softly massage his feet. This blessed favour moved the devout Nityagopal so much that tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Sri Ramakrishna poured out his soul in rhapsodic talk of God and his rare spiritual experiences. In the course of conversation Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Nothing happens without the aid of a Guru. Vijay had his Guru and so he has now attained peace of mind. What is the necessity of your practising austerities and Yoga? It will be done in a trice.' Nityagopal further recollected that at one stage Sri Ramakrishna, in an ecstatic mood, had placed his feet on his chest.⁴ Nityagopal, however, continued

to massage the feet of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna softly told him that, 'It will be done in a trice. Can you counteract the Divine Mother's will?'

These unexpected developments stunned Nityagopal. The experience of spiritual joy he was now blessed with was more than he could ever have dreamt of. Such a brief acquaintance resulted in amazingly rich impressions on his devout mind. Sri Ramakrishna's conversation, his appearance, gestures, manner of speaking, and above all the inexplicable charm emanating from his personality helped Nityagopal to form an exalted opinion of the saint.

While he was taking leave of Sri Ramakrishna, the latter advised him to visit Dakshineswar again, preferably on Tuesdays and Saturdays. He returned to Calcutta but longed to return to Dakshineswar for another visit. Unfortunately he contracted high fever the next Friday at night. He was seized with fear that he might not be able to visit Dakshineswar the following morning as he had planned. In the morning, however, he summoned all his strength, took a bath and went forward to Dakshineswar to meet the Paramahansa. Sri Ramakrishna was glad to see him. On this occasion Nityagopal told him privately that he would not be able to do anything by way of practising spiritual austerities as he felt that he didn't have strength enough to do so seriously. Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna placed his right palm on Nityagopal's chest and said, 'You will not have to do anything. I am in you and you are in me.'

Krishna the authorities of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj sent him to Dacca, away from the influence of Sri Ramakrishna.

2. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, in Bengali (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 5th edition), p. 387.

3. Sri Nityagopal Goswami narrated his reminiscences at the fifth meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission Association under the chairmanship of Swami Brahmananda held on May 23, 1897. An edited version of this appeared in the *Vedanta Kesari*.

4. The scientist Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar and other rationalists could hardly appreciate such happenings. On a similar occasion on October 25, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna explained his conduct

in these words, 'Something happens to me in that state of intoxication. Now I feel ashamed of myself. In that state I feel as if I were possessed by a ghost. I cease to be my own self. While coming down from that state I cannot count correctly.' ('M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974], p. 871).

After this the influence of Sri Ramakrishna began to work in his mind like yeast till it was leavened. The yeast worked silently, almost unknown, but certainly, until his whole personality was transformed. It took its own time, yet it certainly followed the course chalked out by the Master.

In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna developed throat cancer. As soon as the news of his fatal illness was published in the Brahmo papers, Nityagopal hurried to Calcutta to see him. He learnt that Sri Ramakrishna was living in the house of Balaram Bose at 57 Ramkanta Bose Street, Calcutta, where he had been brought for better medical care and proper nursing. Nityagopal went there to see the ailing Sri Ramakrishna one Sunday afternoon⁵ in the third week of August 1885. Sri Ramakrishna, as was his wont, had forgotten all about his illness and was speaking of God to inspire his listeners in the spiritual path. Young Sarat (later Swami Saradananda), then a college student, had come to see the Paramahansa. His friend Vaikunthanath Sanyal was also present. Besides them, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Kalipada Ghosh, 'M', Balaram Bose and members of his family, and a few others were present. Sri Ramakrishna, with his face glowing in spiritual ecstasy, was seated in the western corner of the hall on the first floor. Following some religious conversation by Sri Ramakrishna, Girish Chandra Ghosh and Kalipada Ghosh together sang a beautiful *kirtan* which ran as follows:

Hold me fast, O Nitai! I feel as if I shall
pass away!

Bestowing Hari's name on men,
I raised high waves in the river of my love,
And now upon its raging stream I am carried
helplessly.

Alas! Nitai, I have written the bond with my
own hand,

To which the 'eight friends' stand as witness.
(Now). how shall I pay off my debt to the
creditor of love?

For all my accumulated riches have run out,
And still the debt remains unpaid.

I am now going to be auctioned to meet the
debt of love.

As the song poured out its pathos, Sri Ramakrishna in deep ecstasy raised his right leg and stretched it forward. Nityagopal, who sat before him, held it very tenderly and carefully on his breast. The impact was overwhelming for Nityagopal. Sri Ramakrishna's lips were adorned with a wonderful smile of bliss and graciousness, while Nityagopal, with his eyes shut and tears profusely flowing over his cheeks and breast, was also in ecstasy. Everyone present there was besieged, as it were, by the charm of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual power and filled to capacity with a flood of bliss and peace.

The song over, Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness of the external world. After a while he beseechingly told Nityagopal and other devotees present, 'Please say Sri Krishna Chaitanya, say please Sri Krishna Chaitanya, say Sri Krishna Chaitanya.' Thus making Nityagopal and others utter the holy name thrice⁶ Sri Ramakrishna

5. Vaikunthanath Sanyal, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita*, in Bengali (Calcutta: Sudhir Nath Sanyal, 2nd edition), p. 178. Sri Sanyal has not mentioned any date. According to Ramchandra Dutta, however, Sri Ramakrishna left Dakshineswar one Saturday in the middle of August 1885, and went to stay with Balaram Bose (see *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivanbrittanta*, in Bengali [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 7th edition], p. 164).

6. Vaikunthanath Sanyal in his *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* gives an explanation for repeating the holy name thrice. In order to purify the three mental states of waking, dreaming and sleeping in the disciple, holy texts enjoin that the holy name should be repeated thrice. According to Sri Ramakrishna, as told by Sri Sanyal, boatmen of a barge carrying a heavy load thrust thrice a bamboo pole till it gets firmly stuck in the river bed. So the thrust of the holy name should be given three times.

gradually regained his normal consciousness. Shortly thereafter he began to speak on religion with others. His heart-stirring words, parables and illustrations, bewitching in their simplicity, unfolded before his hearers the wonderful experiences of his spiritual life.

Subsequent to this important episode Nityagopal had an amazing experience which he narrated before the members of the Ramakrishna Mission Association in 1897. Here in brief is what he told: 'I went again to Dacca. I was then suffering from great mental turmoil. In the outskirts of Dacca there was a forest which was used by the Muslims as a burial ground. One day when I was sauntering about there I found a man sitting a few steps ahead of me. I asked him, "What are you doing over there?" I was aware that people came to that forest to catch those birds which are called Indian Nightingales. I took the man in front of me to be one of them. As if anxious to tell me something, he beckoned me to go near him. And his words dissolved all my doubts. He got up to walk away. As he proceeded he turned back and told me in that gracious voice, "Nityagopal, my child, do not give up what you have seized." After this I could not find him there any more. I went to Vijay Babu and told him everything. Vijay Babu told me that he too had received several times his [meaning Sri Ramakrishna's] *darsan* in like manner. The night was full of dreams: all the time I was talking to him and he to me and I continued to experience ineffable bliss. When I got up in the morning I met a sannyasin. He begged food of me and also a wrapper for his body. When I gave him his requirements he placed his feet on my head and blessed me. After that I could not find him there any more.'

7. The fifth meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission Association held on May 23, 1897.

The irresistible influence of Sri Ramakrishna deeply permeated Nityagopal's being. The scholar Nityagopal gradually changed into a mystic, an enthusiastic pilgrim on his way to the shrine of divinity. Ardent as he was, he came closer and closer still towards Sri Ramakrishna, the person as well as the ideals he stood for. He gradually became a suitable conduit for the propagation of the new gospel which had transformed his being and which held new promises for the rest of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna, then living in the Cossipore garden house at 90 Cossipore Road, was full of concern and compassion for the devotees. A few days before his passing away, Nityagopal came to see him again. Towards the end of their conversation Sri Ramakrishna touched Nityagopal's chest with his hand, and then raising his hand said, 'Well, I am leaving.' This was their last meeting.⁸

We find Nityagopal, in his later life, as an active worker for the propagation of Sri Ramakrishna's life and message. He actively participated in the weekly proceedings of the Ramakrishna Mission Association held at 13 Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta. Some days he used to give talks and on other days he used to entertain the audience with his devotional songs. The Ramakrishna Mission Association's branch at Dacca was inaugurated on the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna in 1899, and its first session was held at the residence of Nityagopal Goswami. On this occasion Nityagopal read out a paper on Sri Ramakrishna's important statement 'Tie the nondual knowledge in the hem of your cloth and then do whatever you like.'⁹

During the period from 1912 to 1919, Manibhusan Gupta, a devotee of Sri

⁸. Manibhusan Dasgupta, 'Smritir Saurabh', in *Udbodhan*, vol. 46 no. 9, p. 390.

⁹. Letter of Swami Virajananda from Dacca; see *Udbodhan*, vol. 1 no. 6, p. 187.

Ramakrishna, saw him now and then at his residence in Malakar Tola in Dacca. Bright-looking, fair-complexioned, well-built, medium-statured and with long, silver-grey hair and beard, Goswami was attractive and sage-like in appearance. Every Sunday devotional songs were sung in his presence. One day he was rapt in ecstasy and stood during the songs with his body bent in three places like Śrī Kṛṣṇa. His dhoti fell off, but he had no outward consciousness. He was in deep spiritual ecstasy with the thought of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.¹⁰

¹⁰. 'Smritir Saurabh', p. 389.

Nityagopal was a typical example of those worthy devotees in whom Sri Ramakrishna awakened spiritual consciousness along the path best suited for each individual. Again, he was one of those rare devotees who was repeatedly blessed by Sri Ramakrishna with direct communication of the experience of God. The final result was, however, similar to that of many: Nityagopal Goswami finally realized that Sri Ramakrishna was the centre of divine grace from which all the radii of religious experiences travelled towards the circumference of Divinity.

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

If we look as far back as possible in the past, we find that religion has always had a very intimate connection with society. In primitive societies, from very ancient times, we find that religion was interwoven with the social life. They used to do everything within a religious context: eating and sleeping and hunting; singing and dancing and painting; and everything else. Religion guided and controlled everything and provided the background to thought, to art, to architecture. In Europe, even after the Middle Ages, we find the same thing: all our art, whether music or painting or sculpture, was predominantly religious. Religion, therefore, formed the greatest force that gave impetus to all the religious sciences and arts.

But later we find that as knowledge grew—secular knowledge, knowledge of the sciences—gradually the various departments of knowledge and activity began to be dissociated from the religious influence. The various arts and sciences came out of

the orbit of religion and struck out their own independent paths. Thus we find now that there are very many secular sciences which did not grow from religion at all; and the development in science and technology has been admirable, even against the opposition of religion in the West.

But this is not all there is to the story. It began to be thought on various plausible grounds that religion was the cause of much of the misery of humanity. The Industrial Revolution and the great disparity between the rich and the poor aggravated the situation. The rational and socio-political thinkers, especially of the last century in the West, pointed out that religion was at the root of all our unhappiness and misery. Religion is the opiate of the people and it lulls people into submission, they said. The powerful, those who are well off and high up in society, control the means of production etc. and want to keep down the people. And these capitalists see religion as the best means of keeping them down;

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : PRATAP CHANDRA HAZRA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

His name was neither Jaṭila nor Kuṭila,¹ but people who gathered around Sri Ramakrishna used to call him by those names because he reminded them of these two legendary characters of Rādhā-ḥilā fame. He was Pratap Chandra Hazra, a man of average stature, prosaic in attitude, appearance and manners, and endowed with a peculiar blend of piety and spitefulness. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked Pratap, 'Tell me what you think of the people that come here. How much *sattva* does each one possess?'

Pratap : Narendra has one hundred per cent and I have one hundred and ten per cent.

Sri Ramakrishna : What about me?

Pratap : You still have a trace of pink. You have only seventy-five percent, I should say.

The people listening to these words laughed heartily.

Sri Ramakrishna's audience hardly ever included a person like Pratap who was always prepared to sneer and snigger at everything. His presence was like a discordant note in the melodious symphony that was produced around the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. A puzzling meddler, Pratap with his sharp tongue and queer attitude was found to be rather amusing by many. One of the biographers of Sri Ramakrishna wrote, 'Like a buffoon in a drama, Pratap finds a place in Ramakrishna's life.'² In fact, this was precisely the reason

why Sri Ramakrishna tolerated him and showed sympathy and concern for him. It was he who first hinted at the similarity between the role played by Hazra and that of Jaṭila and Kuṭila. Sri Ramakrishna once observed humorously in a state of partial consciousness, 'Yes, I have found Hazra to be like a piece of dry wood. Then why does he live here? This has a necessity too. The play is enlivened by the presence of trouble makers like Jaṭila and Kuṭila.'³ On December 23, 1883, Sri Ramakrishna told him, 'But you have hardly any faith; you simply live here to add to the play, like Jaṭila and Kuṭila.'

Born sometime around 1846 in Mahmudpur, popularly known as Margere, in the District of Hooghly, Pratap Chandra Hazra grew up like almost any other person in his native village. The Viṣṇu temple at the northern end of the family courtyard and the annual worship of the Goddess Durgā in the family shrine testify to the religious tradition of the middle-class brahmin family to which he belonged. Pratap's father Narayan Hazra, belonging to the Sadgop community, was a man of moderate means.

Pratap had some schooling, but perhaps not in a systematic way, either in a Sanskrit Tol or an English school. However, as regards his intellectual capabilities we may depend on Swami Saradananda's unerring observations. He said, 'With other good and bad qualities, Hazra had a sceptical temperament. Compared with other persons of similar education, he was quite intelligent.

1. Jaṭila and Kuṭila are two trouble makers depicted in Vaiṣṇava literature, in the episode of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs of Vrindaban.

2. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, Bengali (Calcutta : Udbodhan Office, 5th edition), p. 188.

3. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 5th edition), p. 210.

Therefore, he could understand a little of the discussion of the doctrines of the Western agnostic philosophers carried on by English-educated persons like Narendra. The intelligent Narendra was, therefore, pleased with him and spent at his convenience an hour or two in conversation with Hazra whenever he came to Dakshineswar. Hazra, of course, had to bend his head before Narendra's keen intellect. He listened with great attention to Narendra's words and sometimes prepared a smoke for him. Seeing that attitude of Narendra towards Pratap Hazra, many of Sri Ramakrishna's admirers said jokingly, "Mr. Hazra is Narendra's ferend [friend]." ⁴ Pratap had married and begot one son, Yatindranath, before meeting Sri Ramakrishna. His religious propensities often urged him to the path of religious piety, and a spirit of renunciation occasionally dominated his mind; at such times he sought the company of holy men and devotees. Nonetheless, his mind was a motley combination of religious thoughts and worldly ambitions. He kept a shrewd eye on materialistic gain in all his dealings.

In or before 1879⁵ Sri Ramakrishna went to Natabar Goswami's⁶ at Beldiha (Belte), a village adjoining Phului-Shyambazar (not far away from Kamarpukur), and lived there for seven days. The bliss of *samkirtan*

accompanied by Sri Ramakrishna's repeated upsurges of spiritual mood drew crowds of people day and night. Sri Ramakrishna recollected later, 'Once I visited Hriday's house at Sihore. From there I was taken to Shyambazar. I had a vision of Gauranga before I entered the village. . . . For seven days and nights I was surrounded by a huge crowd of people. Such attraction! Nothing but *kirtan* and dancing day and night. People stood in rows on the walls and were even in the trees. I stayed at Natabar Goswami's house. It was crowded day and night. In the morning I would run away to the house of a weaver for a little rest. There too I found that people would gather after a few minutes.'

As the 'mart of joy' became almost a threat to the health of Sri Ramakrishna, Hriday secretly took him with him to Sihore. During Sri Ramakrishna's stay there, Pratap Chandra Hazra came one day to see him whose deeply spiritual life and ecstasies had already created a sensation in the locality. Rumour had it that the saint of Dakshineswar was falling dead and rising up again. During this visit Pratap asked Sri Ramakrishna an interesting question: 'Repeated and continuous calling on Hari often leads to the suspicion whether Lord Hari has any hearing capacity at all.' Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, "You must try to understand the reason for it. You have seen peasants bringing water to the sugarcane field. The fields have ridges on all sides to prevent the water from leaking out, but those are made of mud and often have holes here and there. The peasants work tremendously hard to draw water along the drains but it leaks out through the holes and doesn't reach the destination. Desires are like the holes. Your practice of austerities and your calling on God practically go in vain, for the holes of your desires sap them up. Minds freed from worldly desires naturally look up towards God. Faith and devotion to God will find the way

4. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2nd edition), p. 764.

5. According to the *Great Master*, p. 316, Sri Ramakrishna visited Natabar Goswami's house in 1879; but the *Gospel*, p. 502, claims it to be 1880. However, it is agreed that the first meeting between the two took place at Sihore at the house of Hridayram Mukherjee, the Master's nephew.

6. Natabar Goswami lived at Belte, a village next to Phului-Shyambazar. A well-known Vaiṣṇava devotee, he had met Sri Ramakrishna earlier. The latter stayed in his house for about a week.

out of the bush.⁷ This brief explanation by Sri Ramakrishna and his lucid treatment of the subject greatly impressed Pratap, and he benefited in spite of himself. However, disparities between precept and practice in his life stood in the way of changing his personality and stoutly opposed any deliberate transformation by the Master. Indeed his defence mechanism was so adamant that Sri Ramakrishna himself warned the lay devotees of its incipient dangers.

Sri Ramakrishna, now forty-four, possessed an irresistible charm which made people adore him, love him and finally accept him as a dear and near one. He had already attained the rare experience which made all religions look like a spectrum of divine wisdom and love, a universal vision rare in any religious tradition. Considering himself a child of the Divine Mother, he would speak and act spontaneously as She spoke and acted through him. He spoke in parables which seemed to be deceptively simple. For him, the spiritual development of each human being was unique. He could definitely assess the spiritual potentiality and attainments, if any, in a man. He would then guide him along the path best suited for him and finally lead him to the infinitude of blessedness.

One characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual leadership was his unique ability to release aspirants from their narrow outlook or sectarian approach to the Divine. He could and did transmit the spirituality and joy which flooded his being to any spiritual aspirant according to the latter's receiving and retentive capacity. He would get hold of a man where he stood and push

him forward. As a teacher he could immediately come down to the level of the pupil and share his experience with him. He used to develop a distinct relationship with each disciple, maintain it throughout his life and communicate spirituality directly through words, touch, wish or even a glance or smile. Everyone experienced ineffable joy in his company and gradually discovered in himself the transformation that he was already going through.

Pratap came in close contact with Sri Ramakrishna sometime after his first meeting at Sihore. Before Hriday left Dakshineswar for good, Pratap Hazra came there in the company of Natabar Goswami of Phului-Shyambazar.⁸ It was definitely before June 12, 1881. Sri Ramakrishna received both of them cordially. He allowed Pratap to live with him at Dakshineswar and took good care of him. He used to tell others, 'Hazra is not a man to be trifled with. If one finds the big *dargā* [Muslim shrine] here, then Hazra is the smaller *dargā*.'

But a great spiritual master like Sri Ramakrishna could see through the mind of a man. He could immediately recognize the spiritual status of Pratap, his foibles and future possibilities. Later at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna was heard to observe, 'He [Pratap] is steadfast in his devotion.' He practises *japa* a little. But he also behaves in a queer way.' Somewhat contrary to this he once told Narendra, an admirer of Pratap, 'He is a rogue. He is a rascal. You don't understand him.'⁹

Following the illness of Pratap's mother, Sri Ramakrishna tried to persuade him to go home and serve his mother. Pratap was less than pleased, and instead he went to Sinthi, Bhatpara and then to Baidyanath. On hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna was annoyed. In ecstasy he quarrelled with the

7. *Punthi*, p. 118. We find Pratap asking the Master a similar question on September 19, 1884; and the Master assured him a hundred times that God listens to man's prayer for Bhakti, provided it is genuine and earnest (see *Gospel*, p. 502).

8. *Punthi*, p. 276.

9. *Gospel*, p. 744.

Divine Mother saying, 'Why do you bring such worthless, wayward people here? I cannot do so much. Let there be at the most one fourth or so of a seer of water to one seer of milk; my eyes are burning with smoke as I continue pushing the fuel into the fire. If you like, go and give personally. I cannot do so much pushing of fuel into the fire; don't bring such people any more.'¹⁰

Calculative Pratap weighed his every step even in the practice of religion, and was obsessed with the idea of acquiring some miraculous power by means of austerities. The Master's advice of giving up such ulterior motives was not acceptable to him. Though kind and sympathetic towards Pratap, Sri Ramakrishna had to warn his young disciples, saying, "That fellow Hazra, has a very calculating mind; don't give ear to him." These two persons, living at a distance of, say, ten yards from each other, hardly showed any similarity in their approach to life's goal; but in spite of it there was no lack of warmth between them.

Equally striking is the fact that Pratap soon made a position for himself at Dakshineswar. Posing himself as a follower of the path of knowledge, he loudly repeated now and then '*soham, soham*'. He spent quite some time in telling his beads. Observing his conduct Sri Ramakrishna once observed, 'Hazra with all his austerity and *japa*, doesn't allow an opportunity to slip by for earning money as a broker.' Pratap had a debt of about one thousand five hundred rupees which made him very much worried.

He had devotion to his ideal, but he was conceited. He told Sri Ramakrishna, 'You don't care for me now, but later you will be seeking my company.'¹¹ It was because of this defect in Pratap's character that he

ignored all sense of propriety and decorum. Unlike other devotees he was almost impervious to the spiritual influence ever radiating from Sri Ramakrishna. Pratap used to believe that God would grant him wealth because he had devoted himself to *japa* and meditation. His exaggerated self-esteem and bolstered pride prevented him from appreciating, not to speak of relying on, the assurance kindly offered by Sri Ramakrishna in these words: 'One day I was returning from the pine-grove, when I saw you telling your beads. I said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, what a small-minded fellow he is! He lives here and still he practises *japa* with a rosary! Whoever comes here will have his spiritual consciousness awakened all at once; he won't have to bother much about *japa*..."'¹²

Sri Ramakrishna advised him, 'People with a craze for ritual purity do not attain knowledge. Follow conventions only as much as necessary. Don't go to excess.' Contrary to this valuable advice, Pratap became a strong advocate of the petty religious conventions and rules of conduct, and he criticized others including Sri Ramakrishna. At times he thought of Sri Ramakrishna as a great soul, but soon thereafter he would slight him. After he got himself settled at Dakshineswar he came forward to advise even Sri Ramakrishna. Observing that Sri Ramakrishna was not practising formal worship, telling of beads, marking the forehead, etc., Pratap one day said, 'Look, this is not good. If you continue this way for long people will disrespect you. Please do something—at least tell beads as I do, to satisfy the visitors if not for anything else. So many people visit here. If they find you telling beads they will think that you have gone through some spiritual practices at least.' Laughing heartily, Sri Ramakrishna called Latu, Harish, Ramlal and others and told them

¹⁰. *Great Master*, p. 605.

¹¹. *Gospel*, p. 747.

¹². *Gospel*, p. 552.

Pratap's words.¹³ Sri Ramakrishna's patience with him, as he tried to give Pratap comfort and happiness, defies description. With all his intelligence, Pratap could hardly appreciate the saint's compassion towards him. Sometimes he appeared to the Master as a pest. Sometimes he became mellowed in the presence of the Master, but the next moment he was his old self again.

Conceited and vituperative, Pratap used to uphold controversial and heretical views. He would say, 'What does it matter whether an incarnation of God exists or not?'¹⁴ Compassionate as he always was, Sri Ramakrishna thought, 'Why should I blame the poor man? How is he to know?'¹⁵ Sri Ramakrishna observed sympathetically, 'Hazra is not to blame. During the period of struggle one should follow the method of discrimination... but the state of perfection is quite different. After reaching God one reaffirms what formerly one denied.... After the realization of God, He is seen in all beings. But His greater manifestation is in men. Again, among men God manifests Himself more clearly in those devotees who are sattvic, in those who have no desire whatever to enjoy "women" and "gold". Where can a man of *samādhi* rest his mind after coming down from the plane of *samādhi*? That is why he feels the need of seeking the company of pure-hearted devotees, endowed with *sattva* and freed from attachment to women and gold. How else could such a person occupy himself in the relative plane of consciousness?'¹⁶ Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly advised Hazra not to find fault with others. One day he told him, 'Don't speak ill of anyone. It is Nārāyaṇa Himself who has

assumed all these forms.' But Pratap did not pay heed to the advice.

Pratap was inconsistent, often reversing his own stand; but then, he had to evolve his own understanding like others, and he was allowed to correct his wrong notions under the loving care of Sri Ramakrishna. The adept Master assured Pratap on September 19, 1884, 'What you are doing is right in principle, but the application is not correct. Don't find fault with anyone, not even with an insect. As you pray to God for devotion, so also pray that you may not find fault with anyone.' Pratap, however, was perhaps not serious enough to take such advice. Though he would openly declare, 'The world is unreal, like a dream,' he had a penchant for money, material things and people's attention. Such lack of sincerity was no doubt the biggest stumbling block to his spiritual progress. And he was fond of arguing. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes pointed him out as an example of barren argumentation, as when he said: 'Hazra used to practise much *japa* and austerity here. But in the country he has his wife, children and land. Therefore, along with his spiritual disciplines he carried on the business of a broker. Such people cannot be true to their word. One moment they say they will give up fish, but next moment they break their vow.'¹⁷

The shrewd Pratap was perspicacious enough to draw the attention of Sri Ramakrishna's well-to-do devotees and tell them his high-sounding religious views. He even succeeded in endearing himself to some of the devotees, including the brilliant Narendra. Simultaneously he could alienate himself from the rest of the devotees for he was, in fact, outstanding for his pretentiousness and idiosyncracies. Many pooh-poohed him for the contradiction between his words and conduct.

Thinking too highly of himself, Pratap

13. Chandrasekhar Chattopadhyay, *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti Katha*, Bengali (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 2nd edition), p. 106.

14. *Gospel*, p. 175.

15. *Gospel*, p. 168.

16. *Gospel*, p. 264.

17. *Gospel*, p. 352.

was always hypercritical of others, particularly of some of the youths living under Sri Ramakrishna's care. At times he was even mischievous. He tried to distract others from their particular spiritual attitude and upset the faith of the young men living under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna. To cite a few examples of his arrogant views: he held that Totapuri was an ordinary man;¹⁸ he spoke slightly of Śrī Caitanya as a 'modern incarnation';¹⁹ he opined that 'a man cannot be liberated unless he was born in a brahmin's body';²⁰ he could not be persuaded to believe that Brahman and Śakti are one and the same, a fundamental teaching of Sri Ramakrishna; he addressed pure Ātman as 'Īśvara'.²¹

Nonetheless, in spite of all Hazra's limitations, Sri Ramakrishna lent him his love and sympathy so that Pratap could advance in his journey towards the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna advised him in 1884, 'What will you achieve by mere study of scriptures? ... Gather all information and then plunge in. Suppose a pot has dropped in a certain part of a lake. Locate the spot and dive there. ... After the realization of God, how far below lie the Vedas, the Vedānta, the Purāṇa, the Tantra! ... I had all the experiences that one should have, according to the scriptures, after one's direct perception of God. ... I would see God in meditation, in the state of *samādhi*, and I would see the same God when my mind came back to the world. When looking at this side of the mirror I would see Him alone, and when looking on the reverse side, I saw the same God.'²² Sri Ramakrishna used to push men up from the point where they actually stood. Kind and benevolent as he was, he assuaged Pratap's sorrow by once allowing him to massage his feet—

a privilege given to a rare few—for he had noticed that his earlier refusal had hurt Pratap greatly.²³

Unlike the myriad contortions in Pratap's psyche which deserved only a mild sneer, there was one area which cried out for severe castigation. Annoyed at Pratap's interference in the training of the young aspirants, Sri Ramakrishna one day prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother! Hazra is trying to upset the views of this place. Either give him right understanding or take him away from here.'²⁴ Sri Ramakrishna was fed up with him and was no longer willing to argue and quarrel with him to straighten out his ideas. Deeply concerned as he was with the young men growing under his loving care, he sheltered them from all alien thoughts and deeds like an aggressive mother-bird brooding over her chicks. But his infinite compassion could never be kept long in check. He once said to Mahimacharan, 'Now and then he [Pratap] teaches me a lesson. Sometimes I scold him when he argues too much. Later, when I am lying in bed inside the mosquito curtain, I feel unhappy at the idea of having offended him. So I leave the bed, go to Hazra, and salute him. Then I feel peace of mind.' Sri Ramakrishna gave him a long rope, but unfortunately Pratap misused it. His egotism, instead of being checked, got inflated all the more. He became quite incorrigible and was sometimes an out-and-out nuisance. Upset by Pratap's conduct, Sri Ramakrishna complained to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, see what a fix I am in! Hazra scolds me because I worry about those young men.'

Sri Ramakrishna one day prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, if Hazra is a hypocrite, then please remove him from here.' Later on he told Pratap of his prayer. After a few days Hazra laughed

18. *Gospel*, p. 298.

19. *Gospel*, p. 554.

20. *Gospel*, p. 555.

21. *Gospel*, p. 623.

22. *Gospel*, p. 505.

23. *Latu Maharajer Smriti Katha*, p. 107.

24. *Gospel*, p. 529.

at him saying, 'You see, I am still here.' But strangely enough, he soon had to go away from Dakshineswar.²⁵ With the irritant gone, Sri Ramakrishna had some respite and could guide the young aspirants without interference. Yet Hazra wasn't gone forever, for we find him at the Cossipore Garden in the last week of December 1885.

In spite of a false sense of spiritual growth which induced complacency in Pratap, Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual greatness was so palpable that it impressed itself even on Hazra's mind at times. One day he told Sri Ramakrishna in the presence of Mahimacharan, 'You, sir, are incomparable. You have no peer in the world. Therefore nobody understands you.'²⁶ We find him also making salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, acknowledging his guardianship and seeking his protection. A mood so congenial for spiritual development, however, never persisted in him for long, though we find him remaining near Sri Ramakrishna wherever the latter went.

On January 1, 1886, at the Cossipore Garden, Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed by the urge of divine grace, blessing Girish Chandra Ghosh and many others among the thirty-two devotees present, exclaiming, 'What more need I tell you? Be illumined!' Those blessed persons felt that Sri Ramakrishna had for the first time revealed himself directly as a divine incarnation. Pratap was absent when this happened. On his return in the evening he heard all about the wonderful grace showered by Sri Ramakrishna. Full of remorse he went to Narendranath, who had coined the humorous name 'Thousand-a' the enlightened one, for him.²⁷ Narendranath,

specially sympathetic and friendly with 'Thousand-a', came to his rescue and took him to Sri Ramakrishna who was lying seriously ill. Despite Narendranath's persistent request, Sri Ramakrishna refused to grant any special grace to Pratap just then, for he knew that such grace would be too much for Pratap to stand. The kind-hearted Master, however, took a very sympathetic view and assured Pratap of enlightenment before the latter's physical death. Poor Pratap could not believe it, perhaps, for only five days later he fasted for the whole day and caught hold of the Master's feet, begging him for his special grace. Only with great difficulty could he be made to spare Sri Ramakrishna.²⁸ But now Pratap felt that his enlightenment was assured, and he was happy.

Sometime thereafter, he left for home. His eldest son Yatindranath had come to Calcutta and persuaded his father to accompany him to their native village. He returned home but tried to lead a life bereft of worldliness. Apparently he could not reconcile himself to the worldly life even though he felt a keen urge for it. He lived in the parlour of his house for quite some days and then returned to Dakshineswar. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, his egotism swelled up further. It reached its apotheosis when he had the effrontery to ask Saradaprasanna (later Swami Trigunatitanānda), 'What do you think of me?' Latu Maharaj later reminisced, 'Following Sri Ramakrishna's passing away Pratap developed the idea that he was a great incarnation of God; he was greater than Sri Ramakrishna himself.'²⁹

Even so, some serious change did come over him. He was able to stem the tide of hypercriticism to a certain extent, though he could not easily straighten all the

²⁵. *Gospel*, p. 744.

²⁶. *Gospel*, p. 623.

²⁷. In Bengali, *hāzār* means 'thousand'; so 'Hāzrā' becomes 'Hāzār-a'. See Mahendranath Dutta, *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jibaner Ghatanabali*, Bengali (Calcutta: Mahendra Publishing Committee, 3rd edition), vol. I, p. 141.

²⁸. *Udbodhan* 76 (Agrahāyan 1381 B.S.): 528-29.

²⁹. *Latu Maharajer Smriti Katha*, p. 107.

many twists and turns in his crooked character. He went home and lived there, begetting another son, named Saratchandra, and a daughter. A recent search in the locality revealed that few of his descendants survived. The present head of the Hazra family is one Chandi Hazra, forty-eight, a descendant of Pratap's first cousin Yatindranath.

Though outwardly Pratap did not admit that Sri Ramakrishna was anything more than a holy man, he gradually developed dependence and finally took refuge in him. We learn from the memoirs of Mahendranath Dutta that Pratap used to spend much of his later days with Iswarchandra Mukherjee, a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna at Mechuabazar Street, Calcutta. In 1894 when Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated at Dakshineswar, Pratap took his seat on a carpet spread on the northeast verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room. He told his beads throughout the day. No doubt he was an adept in *japa*.³⁰

And the last days of his life presented a dramatic picture of the transformation he had already undergone. In the month of Chaitra 1306 B.S. (March-April 1901), he was in his native village. For three days he suffered from slight fever; a village doctor attended to him. One evening Pratap asked his wife to request the villagers to visit his home next morning, for he was going to die at about 9 a.m. Accustomed to such high-sounding pronouncements, she didn't pay heed to his words. Next morning, however, he persuaded her to go to the villagers. Some laughed to hear it, and some again came to see the fun.

At about 8-30 a.m. people found him telling beads as was his wont, but some noticed a change in him; his face was lit up. Pratap seemed delighted and loudly said, 'Welcome! Most welcome! Here comes Thakur! After such a long time

Thakur has kindly remembered me!' He asked his wife to spread a carpet for Sri Ramakrishna. After some coaxing she reluctantly obliged him. Pratap said, 'Thakur! You may kindly take your seat and wait for me till I breathe my last.' Again Pratap devoted himself to telling his beads. Soon thereafter he exclaimed, 'Welcome! Ramdada! Here is Ramdada! How fortunate I am!' His wife obeyed his request to spread another seat and he requested this invisible guest also to take his seat and wait. Again he concentrated his mind on *japa*. Suddenly he shouted joyously, 'Welcome! Most welcome! Here is Yogin Maharaj! Oh! what a joyous day!' Pratap made a similar request to Swami Yogananda too. Then with folded hands he addressed Sri Ramakrishna, 'Since you have been so kind to me, please do me another favour. Please accompany me to the *tulsi* plant where I want to give up my body!' With Sri Ramakrishna's consent Pratap asked his wife to spread the carpets near the *tulsi* plant in the courtyard. He asked her to spread his bed there too. Then going to the *tulsi* plant, he requested the three visitors, unseen by others, to take their seats. He lay down on the bed and began telling his beads again. His face was beaming with joy. But doubt dies hard: everyone thought this was just some more of his usual bombast; they believed him only when they heard him say 'Hari' thrice and breathe his last. They were shocked as also amazed. None was prepared for such a turn of events.³¹ Hazra was sixty-two to sixty-three years of age.³²

Swami Adbhutananda observed that it was
(Continued on page 230)

31. *Tattvamanjari* 7 (no. 9): 214-16.

32. Subodh Chandra De, *Sri Ramakrishna*; Bengali (1334 B.S.), p. 276. According to M, Pratap Chandra Hazra passed away in the month of Baisākh 1307 (April-May 1901) when he was sixty-three or sixty-four years of age; see *Tattvamanjari* 4 (no. 4): 73.

30. *Jibaner Ghatanabali*, p. 107.

edge cancels past sins and permits the knower unblushingly to continue in what seems to be much evil with impunity.³⁰ Notwithstanding the insistence on good conduct in many places, knowledge of a doctrine is more powerful to save than commission of moral fault is powerful to destroy.³¹ The search for the Divine in intellectualist Vedanta is apart from con-

duct and ethics, since the doctrine of Ātman is continually coming in conflict with our consciousness of moral distinctions and necessity of choice between good and evil, which are seen as mere verbal distinctions at the level of partial knowledge. Critics hold that the doctrine of *jñāna* may not produce evil living, but its neglect of morality produces bad results on untrained minds.³²

30. R. E. Hume, *Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads*, p. 60.

31. Dorothea Jane Stephen, *Studies in Early Indian Thought*, p. 106.

(To be continued)

32. Cf. N. N. S. Gore, *Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems*, p. 276-77.

(Continued from page 224)

through the friendly assistance of Narendranath that a hypocrite and peculiar man like Hazra, in spite of all his many shortcomings, was blessed by Sri Ramakrishna. Now Sri Ramakrishna's promise was fulfilled, and Hazra was bathed in tranquillity at the time of death. A study of Hazra's role in Sri Ramakrishna's divine play on earth is of great value. His relationship with Sri Ramakrishna yielded a wealth of instruction and inspiration for other sceptics, cynics and men who cannot overcome their crookedness in spite of themselves. Sri Ramakrishna's treatment of Hazra was a vivid illustration of how marvellously he

could assist a handicapped aspirant who grossly misused his talents, patiently helping him to strengthen his spiritual consciousness and leading him to the shrine of eternal joy.

Wherever Sri Ramakrishna is remembered in the following centuries, there Pratap Chandra Hazra will be remembered with love and a laugh for the vivid colour and lively humour he added to the Ramakrishna Līlā.³³

33. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Mahima*, Bengali (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 2nd edition), p. 63.

been defined for all times by Jesus Christ in these words :

For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not, shall be taken away that which he hath.³⁴

Therefore, early in the morning we should fill ourselves with holy thoughts to the maximum, saturate ourselves, so to say, through prayer and meditation. This will give us a frame of mind with which we shall be able to easily go through our daily round of duties without losing our balance, poise and tranquility.

It is important that a portion of the spiritual mood created in the morning be carried like an imperceptible thread through

all our actions to the next hour of meditation in the evening. Thus from morning to evening, and evening to morning, we shall carry the refrains of meditation, so that in the hour of meditation we may find ourselves in readiness to spontaneously plunge in. Daily pilgrimage to the hour of meditation is the only way open to man for spiritualizing his life, for reaching the destination of his life which is realization of God.

To that supreme end which is all illumination, all joy and all bliss, all of us stand cordially invited by the Lord Himself. Let us all enthusiastically and whole-heartedly accept that ever-open invitation of the Lord, and move onward and forward, inward and Godward.

(concluded)

³⁴. Matthew, 25.29.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : PADMALOCHAN TARKALANKAR

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

A poor unlettered brahmin, Sri Ramakrishna attained by his extraordinary long-ing and austerities a spiritual state the like of which cannot be found in the history of religion. Faith, love, self-sacrifice, purity of character and entire resignation to the will of God : these are the chief signs of a religious man, and they found their highest perfection in Sri Ramakrishna. He avoided contention and subtle disputations, placing much less reliance upon book-knowledge than most of his contemporaries. Instead, he plunged headlong into spiritual practices and achieved experientially the highest and noblest reaches of philosophy and religion. Then returning to humanity, he demonstrated by his every word and deed that man can find real joy, the divine bliss, in this very life.

Devoid of external religious marks and symbols, including miracles, his face retained 'a fullness, a childlike tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile ... seen in no other face'¹—this was the only insignia which marked him as a holy man. The words of the older mystics and holy texts sounded on his lips with new life and truth. His attitude towards all religions and sincere aspirants was one of deep reverence. In those visionary eyes of his one could see, as it were, the spiritual experiences of past mystics of all religions. This universality produced in him a broad

1. P. C. Majumdar, quoted in *Samasāmayik Dr̥ṣṭite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* (Bengali) (Calcutta: General Printers & Publishers), p. 198.

understanding, wide sympathy and deep concern for all men and women which endeared him to all.

Ornamented with chastity, humility, devotion and radiant renunciation, the beauty of his personality used to draw people of all walks of life. And his words, like a winged shaft, used to go straight to their hearts. Indeed, such a power developed in him that he became one of those rare souls who give a new impulse and direction to history.

Sri Ramakrishna always appreciated the good qualities in other persons and paid due honour to them. He used to say, 'The Divine Lord is displeased if due respect is not paid to men of honour. It is by His power that they have risen to rank and position; it is He who has made them such. When they are dishonoured, He is slighted.' On this subject Swami Saradananda observed, 'Therefore, when he heard of a man of special good qualities residing anywhere, we found the Master eager to see him somehow or other. If he came to the Master, well and good; otherwise, the Master would himself go to him uninvited, meet, salute and converse with him; then thus satisfied, he would return.'²

One day Sri Ramakrishna heard of Padmalochan Tarkalankar Bhattacharya, a brahmin born somewhere near Kalna, Burdwan, who had spent long many strenuous years in Benaras to master the Vedanta philosophy. Earlier he had mastered Nyāya philosophy and secured for himself the much-sought-after position of principal court pandit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. There were in vogue many tales about his greatness.

We learn from Swami Saradananda that, 'acquainted in their daily life with the repeated manifestation of his noble qualities

of liberality, nonattachment, good conduct, practice of austerities, steadfast devotion to his Chosen Ideal, etc., people came to the conclusion that he was an unusually great *sādhaka* and lover of God. The co-existence of true scholarship and profound devotion to God is rare indeed in the world. So, people are attracted towards a person in whom both these are found. It was, therefore, no wonder that when the Master heard of him, he had a desire to see that good soul who had been adorning the court of Burdwan for a long time and was approaching his old age.'³ According to Swami Saradananda, the Pandit met Sri Ramakrishna sometime before the *annameru* held in 1864.⁴ This was after the latter had attained perfection in Tantric practices.

The childlike Sri Ramakrishna, desirous of meeting the scholar, approached Mathuranath, who readily agreed to make arrangements for his journey to Burdwan. Sri Ramakrishna, however, was told by the Divine Mother that the great scholar would be visiting Calcutta in ten days' time. Strange enough, it came to pass. One day Mathuranath brought the news that Padmalochan had come to Calcutta and that he was staying in the garden house of Vimalacharan Biswas at Ariadaha; that he was lying ill and was receiving medical treatment from the reputed physician Gangacharan Sen (1231-1320 Bengali era). Thereafter, Hriday confirmed the news from local sources.

First, Hriday went to Pandit Padmalochan, returned and reported that the scholar was not egoistic; rather he was a noble soul. He also mentioned the great eagerness he had noticed in the scholar for meeting the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar.

Next day Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by Hriday journeyed by boat to Ariadaha, a

². Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, second revised edition), p. 617.

³. *Great Master*, p. 549.

⁴. *Great Master*, p. 302.

few miles up the Ganges. Without waiting for formalities Sri Ramakrishna went straight into the room where Pandit Padmalochan lived. The scholar, who was resting in bed, was startled; he rose and stood before Sri Ramakrishna, and with a beaming face joyously exclaimed: 'What a wonderful sight—outwardly the form of a human being, covering the beautiful Mother Kālī inside.' With folded palms the Pandit greeted him and requested him to take his seat.

Sri Ramakrishna could see to the heart of a man with unerring accuracy: his extraordinary wealth of spiritual experiences as well as psychic powers helped him to assess the spiritual potentiality of a previously unknown person. A glance at Padmalochan revealed to Sri Ramakrishna that he was equipped with occult powers through the blessings of Mother Ambikā.⁵

While taking his seat Sri Ramakrishna entered an ecstatic mood and in his usual childlike manner asked, 'Are you Padmalochan?'

'Yes, I am known as Padmalochan.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Are you really a great scholar?'

Humble as he was, Padmalochan replied, 'Since you call me a scholar surely I am so.'

In a moment Sri Ramakrishna, still in an ecstatic mood, sang a song of Ramprasad's in his melodious voice:

Who is there that can understand
What Mother Kālī is?
Even the six darsanas are
powerless to reveal Her.
It is She, the scriptures say,
that is the inner Self
Of the yogi, who in Self
discovers all his joy;
She that, of Her own sweet will,
inhabits every living thing.

5. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, fifth edition), p. 125.

The macrocosm and microcosm rest
in the Mother's womb;
Now do you see how vast it is?
In the Mūlādhāra
The yogi meditates on Her, and
in the Sahasrāra:
Who but Śiva has beheld Her
as She really is?
Within the lotus wilderness She sports
beside Her Mate, the Swan.

When man aspires to understand Her,
Ramprasad must smile;
To think of knowing Her, he says,
is quite as laughable
As to imagine one can swim across
the boundless sea.
But while my mind has understood,
alas! my heart has not;
Though but a dwarf, it still would strive
to make a captive of the moon.⁶

Following this, he sang wrapped in fervour:

Brother, tell me what happens to a man after
his death, for everyone disputes on this:
Some say he becomes a ghost, some assure
of ascent to heaven,
Some suggest attainment of the Lord's abode,
while others union with the Lord Himself....⁷

Still in an ecstatic mood, Sri Ramakrishna sang a few more devotional songs expressing soul-stirring spiritual ideas. He merged in *samādhi*, with his faculty of perception directed to the inner Self only. Pandit Padmalochan stood dumb-founded, with his eyes fixed on Sri Ramakrishna's strangely radiant countenance. Streams of tears rolled down the Pandit's cheeks. He could readily understand that this change in Sri Ramakrishna was not the outcome of emotionalism but the sign of some rare

6. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1969), p. 32.

7. Gurudas Burman, *Sri Ramakrishna Carit* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office), vol. I, p. 101.

spiritual gift. The atmosphere was intense, and Pandit Padmalochan was deeply affected, for he felt that the essence of the scriptures he had read were being demonstrated before him and his pupils. After the singing, an overwhelmed Padmalochan composed himself as best he could, wiped his tears and told Hriday, 'How strange; never before have I shed tears. His devotional music brought tears to my eyes.'⁸ It was indeed a rare experience for him, for never before did he witness religious truth so palpably demonstrated.

After a while he said, his voice choked with emotion: "Blessed has my life become at this sight. My long and continuous study of holy texts has now proved to be fruitful." The Pandit was delighted to present Sri Ramakrishna as the living illustration of what he had tried to explain to his pupils through texts and commentaries all these years. Addressing the pupils who were standing around him, the Pandit said, 'Do you see? He has acquired a million times more, without study of scriptures, than what I have achieved in mastering a roomful of scriptures.'⁹

A few moments passed. Sri Ramakrishna in his childlike simplicity asked the Pandit, 'Well, can you tell me what this is that possesses me?'

Padmalochan: 'This is *samādhi*, not easily achieved even by gods.'

Hriday asked the Pandit, 'Some great pandits understood him to be an incarnation of God. What do you say?'

Shorn of scriptural hyperbole, the scholar spoke his true conviction. Getting somewhat excited he said, 'What do you mean

by incarnation! If he so pleases, he can create many an incarnation.'

Sri Ramakrishna laughingly remarked, 'You are the court pandit of Burdwan Maharaja. Why do you treat me so respectfully?'

Padmalochan: 'The holy dust of your feet can turn scores of fools into pandits like me.' The Pandit continued: 'The concept of incarnation is a trifling one. You are the one who creates incarnations of God. Well, if anyone challenges my statement I am prepared to defend it on the strength of holy texts.'¹⁰ He went on to say, 'Your experiences have gone far beyond those recorded in the Vedas and Purāṇas.'¹¹

Sometime after, the Pandit expressed a desire to call on Sri Ramakrishna. He wanted to read out his argumentations with great scholars like Utsabananda Goswami on religious topics. A patient hearing by Sri Ramakrishna would be considered a blessing for him.¹² Thereafter the scholar read out his letter addressed to Utsabananda Goswami. Recalling the incident Sri Ramakrishna later remarked, 'Once he [Padmalochan] entered into a controversy by correspondence with Utsabananda, Vaishnavacharan's Guru. He told me, "Please listen to it."'¹³

Padmalochan once said, 'Rani Rasmoni and Mathur Babu are extremely fortunate for they are having the rare privilege of serving you, the direct manifestation of the Mother Goddess. After my recovery from this illness, I shall convene an assembly of pandits and proclaim your spiritual experiences before all. I shall see who can

8. Devotees heard Sri Ramakrishna say on July 22, 1883, 'Though a man of great knowledge and scholarship, he began to weep on hearing me sing Ramprasad's devotional songs.' (*Gospel*, p. 206).

9. *Ramakrishna Carit*, p. 101.

10. *Ramakrishna Carit*.

11. *Great Master*, p. 238.

12. *Ramakrishna Carit*, p. 102.

13. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmṛta* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Kathamrita Bhavan, seventeenth edition), vol. 1, p. 109. It seems he read it out at his residence at Ariadaha itself.

dislodge me from my claim.'¹⁴ Surprised, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Well, would you visit the garden of Rasmoni who belonged to a low caste?' Padmalochan was a rigorously orthodox brahmin. Nevertheless he replied, 'What does it matter if I accompany you to a meeting at the house of a fisherman? With you I can dine at the house of a pariah.'¹⁵

The talk continued for quite some time. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted, eager as he was to assess the spiritual attainments of the renowned Pandit. Later Sri Ramakrishna reminisced, 'We talked together a long while; conversation with nobody else gave me such satisfaction.'¹⁶

During this conversation Padmalochan advised Sri Ramakrishna, 'Give up the desire for the company of devotees; otherwise people of all sorts will come to you and make you deviate from your spiritual ideal.' A typically orthodox Pandit could not fathom the infinite untaintable purity of Sri Ramakrishna or the spiritual power he was endowed with. Sri Ramakrishna's reaction is not recorded, but we can safely presume that he was in disagreement with the Pandit.

Sri Ramakrishna left for Dakshineswar but his enchanting memory lingered with the Pandit. About the scholar's experience during and after the first meeting, Swami Saradananda observed: '... not finding some of the ultimate experiences of the Master recorded in the Śāstras, he could not clearly ascertain whether what was written in the Śāstras or the experiences of the Master, were true. Therefore, the discriminating mind of the Pandit, always accustomed to arriving at sure conclusions in all spiritual matters with the help of

scriptural knowledge and a keen intellect, experienced a sort of restlessness in the midst of joy, like a spot of darkness in light.'¹⁷

While living at Ariadaha the ailing Padmalochan used to send his son to invite Sri Ramakrishna to his place. Sri Ramakrishna gladly accepted. As his illness was getting worse, Padmalochan could not visit Dakshineswar. Both of them used to spend hours in speaking on religious topics. On one occasion Padmalochan narrated an interesting incident. Once a meeting of scholars tried to decide which of the two, Śiva or Viṣṇu, was greater. Unable to arrive at a decision the pandits approached Padmalochan for his expert opinion. Without hesitation the guileless Padmalochan said, 'How do I know? Neither I nor any of my ancestors, back to fourteen generations, has seen Śiva or Viṣṇu. However, I can expound the viewpoints as expressed in the holy texts. Texts popular with the devotees of Śiva have exalted his greatness. The same with the devotees of Viṣṇu. Nonetheless, I humbly submit, one is neither greater than nor inferior to the other.'¹⁸

These words delighted Sri Ramakrishna so much as to transport him into *samādhi*. Regaining his normal consciousness he told Padmalochan, 'You have got the right understanding.'¹⁹

It seems that the great Vedantin Padmalochan, however, could not appreciate Sri Ramakrishna's idea of renunciation. Years later Sri Ramakrishna said, 'About the renunciation of woman and gold he [Padmalochan] said to me one day, "Why have you given up those things? Such distinctions as 'This is money and this is clay' are the outcome of ignorance." And

14. *Ramakrishna Carit*, p. 103. As he died shortly thereafter, he could not do it. (*Gospel*, p. 856).

15. *Gospel*, p. 324.

16. *Gospel*, p. 206.

17. *Great Master*, p. 549.

18. *Gospel*, p. 158.

19. *Ramakrishna Carit*, pp. 103-04.

what could I say to that? I replied: "I don't know all these things, my dear sir. But for my part, I cannot relish such things as money and the like."²⁰

The close acquaintance which developed between the Pandit and Sri Ramakrishna helped the former to have a firm conviction about the spiritual achievement of the Master. And Padmalochan came to perceive an almost inexplicable spiritual power manifested in Sri Ramakrishna, as can be seen from the following incident.

Fascinated by the lure of power, Padmalochan had practised Tantric disciplines for a long time. He was endowed with some divine power which made him practically invincible in debates and discourses. Advised by his Chosen Deity he used to carry a country-made towel and a *kamaṇḍalu* (spouted pot) filled with water. Before he participated in any religious debate he used to walk a few steps hither and thither and wash his mouth and sprinkle his head with that water. This secret was not disclosed to anyone, even to his wife. One day before participating in a debate the Pandit discovered that Sri Ramakrishna had removed the towel and the pot. The Divine Mother had revealed to Sri Ramakrishna the secret of the Pandit's power attained through spiritual disciplines.²¹ He realized that Sri Ramakrishna had come to know everything, and 'the Pandit could

not help reciting hymns to and singing praises of the Master as his Chosen Ideal.' Thus Sri Ramakrishna removed from him not only that occult power, but the very thirst for powers, so that the Pandit could attain pure devotion.

Padmalochan came to regard him as an incarnation of God from that time,²² and was devoted to him accordingly. The Master said, 'Though Padmalochan was so great a scholar, he had so much faith and devotion to "here" [me].'²³ According to Akshay Kumar Sen, Padmalochan was blessed with a vision of his Chosen Deity, Mother Kālī, in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.²⁴ Sri Ramakrishna too admitted later, '...many persons like Padmalochan, who spent their whole lives in the study of these things ... came here and called me an incarnation.'²⁵

As his health continued to deteriorate, one day the Pandit bade goodbye to the Master with tears in his eyes and went to Benaras. It is said he passed away there shortly after.²⁶

Padmalochan's encounter with Sri Ramakrishna illustrates Sri Ramakrishna's ability to understand advanced spiritual aspirants, their strong identification with certain traditional approaches, and the prejudices and narrow ideas which impeded their progress. And it shows how he could lead them into greater dimensions of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, finally opening to them the highest realization of the Infinite Consciousness.

20. *Gospel*, p. 207. However, in support of Sri Ramakrishna's viewpoint we need not quote from scriptures more instances than the following two: 'Immortality can be obtained through renunciation alone, and not through work, progeny or wealth' (*Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad*, 12.14). And, 'Giving up his wife, man in fact gives up worldly attachment, and by giving up the latter man attains happiness' (*Yogavāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa*, Vairāgya Prakaraṇa, 21.35).

21. *Great Master*, p. 550.

22. Sashibhusan Ghosh, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva* (Bengali) (Calcutta : Udbodhan Office), p. 244.

23. *Great Master*, p. 550.

24. *Punthi*, p. 126.

25. *Great Master*, p. 551.

26. *Great Master*, p. 551.

about moral education. It may be added in conclusion that the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna combine in themselves the sum total of the spiritual wisdom of mankind, and to learn of it somewhat is ethical rebirth for modern man.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : SURESHCHANDRA DUTTA

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

One evening about 1894 the members of the Dutta family were anxiously waiting for Charuchandra, the youngest of the Dutta brothers and head clerk in the Assay Office, to return from his office, but he did not. He didn't return home the next day or ever afterwards. All attempts to trace him resulted in failure. Later it was discovered that he had renounced family life, leaving behind his wife and only son, and gone out in search of God. It upset his elder brother Sureshchandra, who was largely depending on Charuchandra for the maintenance of his own family. Certainly Sureshchandra was not aware then of the incident's far-reaching impact, particularly in kindling imperceptibly his own spark of detachment from worldly life, into a blazing fire.

Born in 1850 at 6 Balaram Majumdar Street, Shobhabazar, Calcutta, Sureshchandra Dutta was the second son of his parents.¹ His father Madhavchandra of the well-known Dutta family of Hatkhola, Calcutta, was a clerk in the Government Telegraph Office; he was also a poet of some repute, and his Bengali poems were published in the contemporary journals *Prabhākar* and *Rasarāj*. From his father, Suresh picked up a love for literature and

esthetics. His mother Trailokyamohini's intellect, piety and above all her strong determination also exerted a great influence in moulding the boy's character. Suresh's mother died when he was only five, and he was brought up by his grandmother, the widow of Harachandra Dutta. Notwithstanding the liberalism of the family, nothing hurt its members more when the eldest son, Jogeshchandra, got baptized. Jogeshchandra separated himself from the family.

Simplicity and religious piety found special manifestation in Suresh from his childhood. His broad vision and questing mind put him head and shoulders above many of his contemporaries. Even terribly strained circumstances could not rob him of his spirit of dignity and independence. He started his elementary education in an indigenous school but could not continue long, as the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 created a period of social unrest and uncertainty. Next he read in Banga Vidyalaya, Ahiritola, for two years. Circumstances then compelled him to pass one by one through the school run by Mr. Duff, the school of the Paikpara Raj family, the General Assembly's institution and finally the Church Mission Society's school. He qualified at the Entrance Examination in 1870 and was placed in the second division. Frustrated and unhappy, Suresh enrolled himself in the Medical College but dropped out after about a year.

1. The basic data are taken from the biography of Sureshchandra Dutta, published in *Pratibasi* (Bengali monthly edited by Satyacharan Mitra), vol. 2, nos. 10 and 11, B.S. 1319.

Suresh came to know Durgacharan Nag in the late 1870's. Durgacharan was then an apprentice under Dr. Behari Lal Bhaduri. Younger than Suresh by four years, Durgacharan was an orthodox Hindu. Suresh found in him a man of spotless character while Durgacharan too found in Suresh an upright man of pure character. Apparently of quite opposed temperament and outlook, they somehow felt attracted towards each other and became close friends. Often they indulged in heated discussions on religious topics.

Like many educated youths at that time, Suresh had a leaning towards Brahmoism and was perhaps a registered member. Apparently he was convinced of the value of worshipping the formless aspect of God. Nonetheless, the sincere practice of traditional disciplines by his friend Durgacharan, a staunch believer in the orthodox Hindu faith, made him ponder. This conflict persisted, and Suresh had to pay heavily to get rid of it.

Since worldly life could not be avoided altogether, Suresh tried to live above it. Though it is difficult to say just how much attention he gave to the various forces in his life, his sympathies may be guessed from the indifference with which he treated creature comforts and the increasing emphasis he placed on religious matters. In fact, his life proved to be an inspiring display of courage, diligence and devotion to all that is best in a householder's life. More than this, sincerity of purpose and yearning for a higher life provided the mortar for his ideological structure. God-fearing, humble and detached as he was, Suresh moved about without paying heed to other's comments or criticism.

Soon, however, it dawned on Suresh and his friend that mere talk was futile. Religion must be experienced in life. Then one day Suresh heard in the Brahmo Church of the New Dispensation which he fre-

quented, of a unique saint living at Dakshineswar. Curiously enough it slipped from his memory, and only two months later did he tell his friend Durgacharan.

Dakshineswar was not far from Calcutta, then the capital of British India. There, in a beautiful, secluded garden lay the famous temple of Bhavatārīṇī, with its white spire rising high above the treetops. To its west stood twelve temples of Śiva in two blocks of six, and to the north stood the temple of Rādhākānta. Set in a grand courtyard and surrounded by charming flower-bedecked meadows and deep jungle, with the holy Ganga flowing past a flowering bank, it was a place of heavenly beauty, soft and serene. It lifted up man's soul and helped to rid him of temporal trifles, at least for the time being. Pilgrims visited the temple in the hope of obtaining some spark of holiness to light their lamp of spirituality. An even greater attraction was Sri Ramakrishna, the saint of Dakshineswar who lived in the room at the northwest corner of the courtyard. Word had spread in Calcutta that Sri Ramakrishna was something more than human, and already many distinguished persons worshipped him as divine. Boundless in his love, profound and liberal in his vision and yet simple as a child, Sri Ramakrishna was a unique personality, and very few indeed could fathom him. But his very form and every mood expressed tender compassion and sympathy, and this exerted an irresistible attraction on all who came within his orbit.

Following a dark period of about a century and a half which had been swept by the cross-currents of materialistic European culture and rigid but lifeless orthodox traditions, Sri Ramakrishna appeared as a dazzling beacon, belittling even the gleams of light coming from the activities of the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Theosophical Society. Testing the validity of all major faiths he became the embodiment of all the past religious thought of India. During the

years in which he practised various religious disciplines of the different Hindu sects as well as of other religions, life rolled on and brought him richer and richer realizations and ever more intense love of God. He shared the life of those around him, entered into their joys and sorrows, rejoiced with them, mourned with them, but through it all he led men finally to the shrine of divinity.

Besides its innate value, the very beauty of the spiritual message which he spoke with a slight stammer in his village patois charmed all. He used with telling effect homely parables and illustrations. Enraptured, his audience would hang upon his every word. Moreover, his divine presence radiated peace and tranquillity over one and all. His benign spirit soothed their lacerated hearts and gave strength to their drooping spirits.

As soon as Durgacharan heard of the saint of Dakshineswar from Suresh, he insisted on calling on him then and there. So both of them started out for Dakshineswar soon after their morning meal. It was some time in April 1882.

In the broiling sun they walked a long distance, only to discover that they had passed the village of Dakshineswar. They turned back and retraced quite a distance before arriving at the Dakshineswar Kālī temple at about two o'clock. Trying to locate the residence of the saint, they came upon a long-bearded man who was jokingly referred to as Jatila-Kuṭīla—Pratap Chandra Hazra—sitting by the side of the eastern door of Sri Ramakrishna's room. Hazra tried to dissuade the visitors,² saying that Sri

Ramakrishna was away and that they should come some other day.³ A temporary disappointment swept over them, and they were about to turn back when they noticed through the open doors somebody motioning them to enter. Walking past the bearded man they entered the room to discover the most fascinating character they had ever come across. He was seated facing north on a small couch with his legs outstretched.⁴ They could easily recognize him as the holy man they had come to meet.

As was his wont, Sri Ramakrishna greeted them as soon as his eyes fell on them. While Durgacharan prostrated himself before the saint and took the dust of his feet,⁵ Suresh, like a typical Brahmo, made obeisance to him with joined palms. Directed by Sri Ramakrishna they took their seats close to him⁶ on the mat spread on the floor.

Not satisfied with a merely external view, Sri Ramakrishna always looked into the very depths of a person. He saw through and through Suresh and Durgacharan and could easily measure their spiritual potentialities.

Following some introductory inquiries, Sri Ramakrishna began to talk on spiritual practice. In the course of his talk he said, 'Live in the world as the mudfish lives in the mud. One develops love of God by going away from the world into solitude

2. According to Saratchandra Chakravarty who was close to Durgacharan Nag, Pratap Hazra kept silent and did not reply. (Saratchandra Chakravarty, *Nag Mahasaya* [Bengali] Udbodhan Office, vol. 7, no. 9, p. 270). And according to Akshaykumar Sen's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (ninth edition), p. 302, Sri Ramakrishna was having a talk with Pratap at that time.

3. *Saint Durgacharan Nag* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, third edition), p. 43. Though Pratap was living under the loving care of Sri Ramakrishna, he did not like anybody to come to the saint. Strangely enough, he didn't feel any remorse for his conduct.

4. Bijaynath Mazumdar's article on 'Pujaniya Durgacharan' (Bengali) published in *Tattvamanjari* (vol. 10, no. 1, p. 16), states that Sri Ramakrishna was holding a religious discourse before the devotees present in his room.

5. *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1974, p. 203, footnote.

6. Gurudas Burnian, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-charit* (Bengali), vol. 1, p. 208.

now and then and meditating on God. After that one can live in the world unattached. The mud is there, and the fish has to live in it, but its body is not stained by the mud. Such a man can lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment.' He added, 'Live in the world unattached. Be in the world, but not of it. Just see that the dirt of the world does not touch you.'

A hapless victim of worldly bondages and concerns, Suresh's long quest for spiritual help and guidance had perhaps been as exasperating as the pain of spiritual illness itself. Occasional financial difficulties and such elusive factors as mental stress and worry had aggravated the malady. Yet he had never considered renouncing his family life. He had perseveringly braved all miseries and maladies. While his search for mental poise and tranquillity had led him to the Navavidhan Brahmo Samaj, it seems that he was drawn to Sri Ramakrishna more by the thirst for adventure. In fact, he was searching beyond for something unknown; he was in search of the supreme Reality. Almost unconsciously he had hoped for some guidance from Sri Ramakrishna. Now he held his breath in suspense as the words of the saint deeply stirred his heart. Like his companion Durgacharan, he had a strong inner feeling that the words of the saint were specifically meant for him. There was something inexplicable about Sri Ramakrishna and his demeanour. Suresh was deeply impressed; he felt irresistibly drawn towards the saint.

Durgacharan seems to have been even more deeply moved. He could not remove his transfixed eyes from the frail form of the saint. Thus Suresh and his companion spent quite some time there, letting the saint's radiant spirit play about them until they too were in some measure absorbed in it. From that moment Suresh marvelled at the astounding devotion Sri Ramakrishna had inspired in him.

Sri Ramakrishna asked them to go to the Pañcavaṭī and meditate for some time. On their return after about half an hour, Sri Ramakrishna took them round the temples, he in front and they behind, going first to the twelve Śiva temples and the temple of Rādhākānta, and then to the Kālī temple. In the presence of Mother Kālī's image, however, Suresh noticed a striking transformation in Sri Ramakrishna. The latter entered a deep ecstatic mood. 'As a restless child holds the hem of its mother's garment and runs round her, so the Master [Sri Ramakrishna] went round the image of Kālī and Śiva and bowed down to them.'⁷ This opened up for Suresh a new insight into the depth and reality of the spiritual realm. In fact, he could hardly realize at that moment that all his habits of thought about religion had been blown apart, and he didn't even make prostration before any of the deities as did his friend Durgacharan.

At about 5 p.m.⁸ they partook of the *prasād* (consecrated food) of Mother Kālī given them. When they took leave of Sri Ramakrishna the latter advised them to repeat the visit, saying that then only the acquaintance would deepen. The words 'pay another visit' told repeatedly by Sri Ramakrishna in his sweet voice cast a charm on Suresh.⁹

Sri Ramakrishna's guileless ways and childlike innocence were probably the secret of his enduring charm and appeal. Whatever, the visit was a wonderful experience for Suresh. Much of the temple milieu was fascinating; it afforded a peep into another world of another age, and yet very much

7. Swami Jagadiswarananda, 'Sureshchandra Dutta', *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1948, p. 232.

8. *Vedanta Kesari*, June 1918, p. 45.

9. In the short biography of Sri Ramakrishna, *Sri Sri Ramakrishnalila* Sureshchandra writes, 'Again, when seeing off his visitor Sri Ramakrishna used to say endearingly, "Do come another day, do come another day." Who could not but be enchanted?'

of his own time. Now Suresh could sense an air of tranquillity that had settled about him. Still more, the visit showed him once for all the purpose of his life and brought a ray of sunshine into his dreary existence. Later, Suresh admitted that Sri Ramakrishna's great devotion and extraordinary ecstasy, which he had noticed during his first visit, left an indelible impression on him.¹⁰

The very next week Suresh and his friend called again on Sri Ramakrishna. The latter received them with elation, beaming all over. He went into ecstasy and said, 'You have done well to come here. I waited for you both.'¹¹ On his advice Durgacharan and Suresh spent some time meditating in the Pañcavaṭī this day too. When alone with Suresh, Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'He [Durgacharan] is really a blazing fire.' It evoked in Suresh deep regard for his friend.

Suresh could but rarely find time to visit Dakshineswar. While his rational mind was being inundated by the unearned love of Sri Ramakrishna, he felt convinced that one must straighten one's life in order to really turn to God. So he now placed more emphasis on strengthening his moral life. Suresh and Durgacharan began to spend more time in religious discussion centred on Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Observing Suresh's growing desire for spiritual experience, Durgacharan recommended that he take initiation from a competent Guru. Indoctrinated by Brahmo faith, Suresh couldn't swallow the idea. However, to receive authoritative guidance on the matter they approached Sri Ramakrishna, who explained to them the necessity of spiritual initiation. Suresh told him quite frankly,

'I have no faith in *mantras* or in the forms of God.' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Well, you need not have initiation just now. Later you'll be convinced of its need and will receive initiation in course of time.'¹²

Another day Suresh heard Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'As the moving hand of a clock coincides with the hour hand at twelve noon, my mind too tends to merge in God at all times. But as I am here with a mission of bringing good to mankind, I force my mind down to worldly things.'¹³

Suresh had a fairly good job. But when his friend Durgacharan gave up the practice of homoeopathy and devoted himself entirely to spiritual practices, Suresh likewise resigned from his employment.¹⁴ This was perhaps the first time he relinquished employment.

Of the many instructions Sri Ramakrishna used to give to householders like Suresh, the following are a sampling of those which seem to have especially helped him to fashion his life.

A thick spring mattress, depressed low when someone sits upon it, recovers its original form as soon as he stands up. Similarly, spiritual instructions produce some temporary religious feeling in a householder, but they are erased from his mind as soon as he enters into his household.¹⁵

A person must perform household duties as long as he cherishes a desire for worldly enjoyments. He is like the bird which sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganga. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses it could find no shore in any direction. It flew towards the north

¹⁰. Swami Jagadishwarananda, 'Bhakta Sureshchandra Dutta', *Udbodhan*, vol. 50, no. 8, p. 422.

¹¹. *Saint Durgacharan Nag*, p. 48.

¹². Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, fourth edition), vol. 2, pp. 354-55.

¹³. Sureshchandra Dutta, 'Sri Sri Ramakrishna-lila', *Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Haramohan Publishing Agency, twentieth edition), p. 19.

¹⁴. Mahendranath Dutta, *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jibaner Ghatanavali* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Mahendra Publishing Committee, third edition), vol. 1, p. 146.

¹⁵. *Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh*, p. 72, no. 214.

hoping to reach land; it went very far and grew tired but could find no shore. It returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After a while the bird flew away again, this time toward the south, but it could find no land in that direction either; it saw nothing but limitless ocean all around. Very tired, it returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After resting a long while, the bird went toward the east, and then toward the west. When it found no trace of land, it came back and settled down again on the mast. It didn't leave the mast; it made no further effort.¹⁶

Shall one renounce the world? Arduous spiritual practices even in the worldly set-up help one get rid of worldliness.¹⁷

O God, You have created everything and You are my sole refuge. All these houses, sons, wife, friends and everything else belong to You.' If one lives in the world with this conviction he will certainly realize God.¹⁸

Those who do worldly duties in a detached spirit and live in the world with the knowledge that the world is unreal will attain to God.¹⁹

It is true that no difficulty is as coldly real as the attempt to live the worldly life with a spirit of detachment. But Suresh succeeded considerably in his endeavour to practise spiritual disciplines in the midst of worldly life. Most of those close to him, even his employer, were loathe to see the hope and support of the family fraternizing with the crazy Durgacharan and sitting with devotion at the feet of the mad priest of Dakshineswar. As for himself, however, Suresh never felt the discomfort of having taken a difficult moral stance, though at times it caused difficulties.

Except for the publication of a booklet containing a few teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Keshab Chandra Sen in January 1878, Suresh was the first to bring out Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in the form of a book. The first part of his *Paramahansa Ramakrishner Ukti* ('Sayings of Paramahansa Ramakrishna') came out on

December 23, 1884.²⁰ The second part came out in 1886 soon after Sri Ramakrishna's demise. Subsequently a second edition was published containing a short but comprehensive biography of Sri Ramakrishna called 'Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lila' and his teachings distributed over eight parts.²¹ The third edition containing 750 teachings of Sri Ramakrishna was published in March 1909 by Messrs. S. C. Mitra & Co., 38 Nandalal De Street, Kuthighata, Baranagore, Calcutta. In course of time another 200 teachings were added. The real merit of the book lies in the wealth of soul-stirring words of Sri Ramakrishna culled diligently by Suresh from a wide range of materials which included his own records, other persons' firsthand records and published notes, etc. He excluded as far as possible all inauthentic hearsay and threw an open challenge in the introduction of the book by inviting readers to prove any falsity, inaccuracy or exaggeration in the teachings, giving the assurance that all genuine corrections would be incorporated in the next edition.²² This gives an indication of how painstakingly the author sought to make this unique publication cohesive, realistic and interesting.

Suresh was thus instrumental in spreading the Master's message among aspiring souls.²³ Certainly, Suresh, like Ramchandra

20. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajani-kanta Das, *Samasamayik Dristite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers), p. 119.

21. *Udbodhan*, vol. 2, no. 11, p. 125.

22. Introduction to *Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh*.

23. About this book Swami Vivekananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1895, 'Suresh Dutta's object is noble; his book, too, is well written; it will bring some good, no doubt. However, how far have they been able to fathom Sri Ramakrishna?' *Swami Vivekanander Bani O Rachana* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, third edition), vol. 7, p. 251. It may be recalled that this publication induced Subodhchandra Ghosh

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14, no. 770.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 214, no. 771.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 184, no. 649.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 184, no. 648.

Dutta and Manomohan Mitra, was one of the pioneers who undertook even during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime public lectures, musical processions and the publication of books and magazines 'to present the new ideas' as he understood them²⁴ It may not be out of place to mention some of his subsequent Bengali publications: *Narada-Sutra*, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Samalochan*, *Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna O Brahmo Samaj*, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita*, etc. which aptly illustrate his literary talent as well as his love for religious life.

Family circumstances led him to accept a job in the British military service at Quetta. Quetta occupied a strategic position on the frontier, as it controlled the route to Qandahar. He was offered a monthly salary of two hundred rupees. In the war situation the British Government spent money lavishly. This tempted some of the military personnel to dishonesty. Suresh's superior officer, who had been misappropriating money from the Government, demanded of Suresh his assistance in grabbing more on a share of two-thirds and one-third. Suresh's stiff resistance only angered the officer, so Suresh decided to give up his job to avoid further trouble. His boss, however, refused to release him in the emergency situation and went so far as to threaten him with court martial on a charge of disobedience, which could have meant the death penalty. And in fact, Suresh was kept under strict surveillance.²⁵ Rather than yield to such tactics, Suresh approached a kind-hearted British doctor

and unburdened the agony of his heart. He persuaded the doctor to issue in his favour a medical certificate declaring him unfit for the job. Even then, he had to drag on for some time more till he was relieved by a replacement.

Free at long last of this obnoxious situation, Suresh left for Calcutta. Intolerable as it seemed, however, the uncomfortable situation he left was nothing compared to what accompanied his return journey. His small purse of twenty rupees could take him no further than Benaras. Left with no other choice, he set out on foot. Casual offerings of food by generous persons and reading of the *Gītā* sustained him through his journey. Finally, at Bhagalpur, a generous person helped him by giving a railway ticket to Howrah Station. Reaching home he discovered that the joint family (his and his youngest brother's families) was struggling with the paltry income of twenty-five rupees a month earned by his youngest brother.

Instead of succumbing to the adverse circumstances the undaunted Suresh worked as a porter and sometimes as a potato-seller earning about half a rupee a day. A few weeks thereafter he secured a job earning him sixty rupees a month. Contented, Suresh now turned his attention to building up his inner life.

On his return to Calcutta he had hurried to see Sri Ramakrishna, who was lying seriously ill at the Cossipore Gardenhouse. Sri Ramakrishna cordially received him. He visited Sri Ramakrishna again and again, but could not express his ever-swell-ing desire for spiritual initiation from the Master, for the latter's illness proved to be fatal. Suresh was baffled.

Almost drowned in despair at the news of Sri Ramakrishna's death, on August 16, 1886, Suresh bitterly lamented his having ignored Durgacharan's advice to take spiritual initiation. Deeply worried, he

(later Swami Subodhananda) to join the fold of Sri Ramakrishna. The book was highly acclaimed by contemporary journals such as *Bangabasi*, *Dainik*, *Pataka*, etc. See Sankariprasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsa* (Calcutta: Mondal Book House, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 269-70.

²⁴. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), p. 41.

²⁵. *Udbodhan*, vol. 14. no. 12. p. 773.

didn't sleep for weeks. He wept bitterly, and would pray alone at dead of night on the bank of the Ganga, his heart yearning for some ray of light. Fortunately, he was blessed with a wonderful vision. One night he lay prostrate on the bank of the Ganga, praying for many hours. In the early hours he saw Sri Ramakrishna rising from the Ganga and, to his great surprise, initiating him with a *mantra*. Overwhelmed with devotional fervour Suresh reached to touch Sri Ramakrishna's feet, but lo! he had vanished. Inspired by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna he plunged deeply into spiritual practices.

Now 'the holy contact of the Master inspired him to such an extent for God vision that occasionally he provided his family with a few month's subsistence and retired from the world into solitude and devoted himself wholly to spiritual practices.'²⁶ This he did repeatedly, much to the annoyance of his family members. Mystified and anxious, they made bitter complaints regarding his negligence of worldly duties; but he calmly tolerated everything, all the time implicitly obeying his conscience. While his family members became increasingly apprehensive of Suresh's motive, the latter steadily gained in faith and self-surrender to God.

Curiously enough, as Suresh grew increasingly dependent on God he gave up jobs of high and low salaries many a time but was always fortunate enough to secure again some job or other to enable the family to scrape through. Thus contented with bare necessities, he steadfastly steered himself in

his life's journey, keeping himself always firm in his resolve of reaching the spiritual goal.

Non-attached to worldly cravings and attached to spiritual attainments, Suresh successfully chiselled out of himself a model householder as envisaged by Sri Ramakrishna. In his case it was not a sudden mental revolution that forever transformed the man; it was rather a series of insights, followed each time by a decision or action dictated by the insight. It was more a determination to follow the voice of his conscience, as and when it spoke. In three decades his life underwent a radical change. Commenting on his golden character Swami Vivekananda feelingly told Saratchandra Chakravarty, one of his prominent disciples, 'Look here, whoever has been touched by Sri Ramakrishna has turned into gold.'²⁷

In the family, he was forced as it were to almost a solitary pilgrimage from the day Sri Ramakrishna touched his heart until November 18, 1912, when he died. He became a living illustration of what a sincere and determined soul, having firm faith and unswerving devotion to Sri Ramakrishna, can achieve in the family life. More than this, his life was a benediction, a calling down of good upon a sick and miserable world.

If Sureshchandra Dutta left us with any message at all, it was probably: Just take refuge in God and stay calm and faithful. Be sincere to yourself and to your ideal and other things will take care of themselves.

²⁶. *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1948, p. 234.

²⁷. *Bhaktamalika*, vol. 2, p. 358.

ment from God to the soul. In the next stage the soul starts offering all that it has, all that it does, and itself, to God. This offering is worship. It is a movement from the soul to God. Through these two movements the soul draws closer to God. This 'mentally approaching' God is meditation. *Upāsana* includes all the three steps. It

begins as a prayer, grows as worship and matures into contemplation.

We thus see that *upāsana* is a unified discipline which includes aspects of Jñāna, Karma and Bhakti. As knowledge it reveals the Self, as activity it impels the Self Godward, as devotion it unites the Self with the Supreme Self.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : GOLAPSUNDARI DEVI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

It was the latter part of 1912. Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was living at Lakshminivas at Ramāpurā, Varanasi. Her immaculate purity, her all embracing compassion and utter selflessness endowed her with the delicacy and tenderness of a maiden, a subtle grace and quiet dignity, and yet the guilelessness and simplicity of a child. One day a few women came to see her. Impressed by the dignified figure of Golapsundari who was also present, the leader of the visitors took her to be Sarada Devi and went to prostrate before her. (As Sarada Devi carried no air of authority, people used to mistake her at first for a simple woman; indeed, Sri Ramakrishna had once described her jokingly as 'a cat hidden under ashes'.) Understanding the woman's mistake, Golapsundari pointed out to her the Holy Mother. Going over to the Holy Mother she was about to prostrate in salutation when the Mother, in a spirit of fun, said, 'No, no, she herself is the Holy Mother.' Now completely confused, the woman decided to follow her first impulse and went again to Golapsundari. Annoyed, Golapsundari finally said to the stranger in her characteristically sharp manner: 'Can't you distinguish a divine face from a human one!'¹ Such was Golapsundari: regal of bearing and spiritually illumined, yet

humble and simple, but with a straightforwardness which could be crushing.

Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn) once observed, 'Golap-ma — tall and powerful in build, conservative, orthodox and uncompromising — acted as gendarme to Mother, protecting her against intrusion, guarding her safety, even scolding her when she thought Mother was growing careless in caste observance and too indulgent towards her foreign children.'² Strongly built, with warm but alert black eyes, she had an appealing manner, though with a touch of apprehension in her conduct.

Born about 1864 of an orthodox brahmin family in north Calcutta, Golapsundari Devi was brought up in the orthodox tradition, though she also learned to cherish liberal ideas. Her family name was Annapurna Devi³ but she became popularly known as Golap. Her married life was not happy, and her husband died young, leaving her a son and a daughter. To fill the cup of

1. Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Ma Sarada Devi* (Calcutta : Udbodhan, 5th edition), p. 322.

2. Sister Devamata, *Days in an Indian Monastery* (La Crescenta, Calif. : Ananda Ashram, 1927), p. 278.

3. Brahmachari Akshayachaitanya, *Sri Sri Saradadevi* (Calcutta, 1st edition), p. 25, footnotes.

her misery, the little son also died shortly thereafter. Her only daughter Chandi, an exquisitely beautiful girl, had been married to a very aristocratic man, a landlord with the title of Raja named Sourindra Mohan Tagore of Pathuriaghata, Calcutta. Happily she was able to move in with this son-in-law, who took good care of her.⁴ Whenever the daughter visited her she was escorted by liveried footmen, at which the mother's heart swelled with pride. Then the daughter also died and Golapsundari was beside herself with grief. She had practically none left to call her own. Weighed down by this succession of shocking bereavements, her faith in herself eroded and the absence of a bright future made her life miserable.

Significantly, these bereavements forced Golap to turn her attention to her inner life. In utter helplessness she looked to Providence for some relief, and she prayed arduously. It seems her prayer did not go in vain, for while seeking solace she met Yogindramohini Biswas, who lived in the neighbourhood of Baghbazar. A distant relation of Balaram Bose, Yogindramohini had had the fortune to meet Sri Ramakrishna in 1883 at Dakshineswar. She now talked to Golap about Sri Ramakrishna, the God-intoxicated man of Dakshineswar; and to bring solace to the unfortunate lady she decided to take her to Sri Ramakrishna. They set out expectantly on a pleasant morning sometime in the first part of 1885.

As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna cordially received the newcomer. In fact, Golapsundari discovered to her great surprise that he had apparently been expecting her, strolling along the path of the temple garden. After a formal exchange of greetings Golap gave vent to her pentup sorrows. She burst into tears and lamented the loss of her dear daughter Chandi. Sri Ramakrishna fathomed the depth of her suffer-

ings. All his features expressed deep sympathy for her. Then the pathos of her grief threw Sri Ramakrishna into a unique mood. He laughed, danced, and said that she was lucky in having none but the Lord to engage her attention, that the Lord was her real saviour, that the series of her bereavements were blessings in disguise inasmuch as they opened up for her the possibility of a life exclusively given to spiritual practices. Just as a snake-bite victim is resuscitated by a magic spell, so the aggrieved brahmin lady was startled to her very core. Now she could throw aside her griefs. Almost enchanted she followed him into his room, where he began singing in divine ecstasy :

Dwell, O mind, within yourself ;
Enter no other's home.
If you but seek there, you will find
All you are searching for.
God, the true Philosopher's Stone,
Who answers every prayer,
Lies hidden deep within your heart,
The richest gem of all.
How many pearls and precious stones
Are scattered all about
The outer court that lies before
The chamber of your heart.⁵

The import of the song as expressed through Sri Ramakrishna's melodious voice sank deep into her heart. It blew away the clouds of her grief. It lighted up a deep, long-hidden chamber of her heart. Golap then entreated him to grant her refuge from the snares of Māyā. More than that, she prayed for real devotion to God. This pleased Sri Ramakrishna. He could easily recognize her spiritual potential and aspirations. Now his inspiring counsels acted as a silent force animating to life her who had been half-dead. And through his grace the window of her heart's chamber opened up, giving free access to the 'southern breeze'

4. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Calcutta : Udbodhan, 7th edition), p. 411.

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 6th edition), p. 172.

of devotion.⁶ Introducing her to Sarada Devi at the Nahabat he advised, 'Give her a lot of food to fill her stomach. That will assuage her grief.' He also told the Holy Mother, 'Keep your eyes on this brahmin woman. She will follow you like a shadow throughout your life,' a prophecy which was later proved abundantly true.

In later life Golap recounted her blissful experience when she met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar for the first time. As soon as she had related to him the story of her woes, he patted her on her back, thereby absorbing all her sorrows, as it were. It had a most salutary effect on her. She laughed away all her grief like one illumined. It suddenly struck her that human life on earth was like a theatrical performance on the world-stage. Besides, in the ultimate analysis who was a mother and who her daughter? Why should she weep for her so-called loss? The real marvel was to weep for God.⁷

The next few days found her repeatedly at Dakshineswar, where she had been running from her home at Baghbazar like a mad woman in expectation of some relief. On Sunday, June 13, 1885, she was seen standing near the north door of Sri Ramakrishna's room. From there she listened to Sri Ramakrishna's description of Ram Mallick's grief for his deceased nephew. The Master in his unique manner said :

The truth is that God alone is real and all else unreal. Men, universe, house, children—all these are like the magic of the magician.... But the magician is real and his magic is unreal. The unreal exists for a second and then vanishes.... God alone is real and all else unreal. Water alone is real; but its bubbles appear and disappear. They disappear into the very water from which they rise. God is like an ocean, and living beings are its bubbles.

6. *Ramakrishna Punthi*, pp. 412-13.

7. *Sri Ramakrishna Smriti*, Memories of Lakshmimani Devi and Yogindramohini Biswas (Calcutta : Udbodhan, 3rd edition), p. 32.

They are born there and they die there. Children are like the few small bubbles around a big one. God alone is real. Make an effort to cultivate love for Him and find out the means to realize Him. What will you gain by grieving?⁸

Sri Ramakrishna's words had a sobering effect on Golap. In fact, her whole being was stirred by the living reality of his words. She recomposed herself and wanted to leave for home. It was 3 p.m., in the month of June. Sri Ramakrishna said tenderly, 'Do you want to go now? It is very hot. Why now? You can go later in a carriage with the devotees.' Such kind treatment by Sri Ramakrishna touched her heart.

Her urge to get away from the confines and constraints of family life to the peace and quiet of a place of pilgrimage was satisfied now at Dakshineswar. Soon she became an intimate companion of the Holy Mother and oftener than not stayed with her in the Nahabat. Sarada Devi's ingenuity in household management led Golap to reflect on the numerous things for which she paid exorbitantly, assuming that there was no other option, when they could very well be solved by much simpler means. Golap derived inspiration even for her household management from the unostentatious life of Sarada Devi.

The negative desire to free herself from grief gradually gave place to positive attraction and appreciation for Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. Being repeatedly requested, Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to her old, dilapidated brick house in Nebubagan, Baghbazar, on July 28, 1885. She had a sister who was a widow too, and their brothers also lived in the house with their families. Golap had been terribly busy all day making arrangements for receiving Sri Ramakrishna. As it was getting rather late, Golap went to Nanda Bose's house to inquire about the visit.

8. *Gospel*, p. 769.

Soon thereafter she returned home and found Sri Ramakrishna, who sat smiling, surrounded by devotees. Golap came and saluted the Master. She was so overwhelmed with joy that she didn't know what to say or do. 'This joy is too much for me. Perhaps I shall die of it,' she said. 'Tell me, friends, how shall I be able to live? I did not feel such a thrill even when Chandi, my daughter, used to visit the house accompanied by liveried footmen, with armed guards lining both sides of the street. Oh! Now I have no trace of my grief at her death.... Let me go and tell everybody how happy I am....' Being beside herself with joy, she continued, 'A labourer won a hundred thousand rupees in a lottery. The moment he heard the news he died of joy. Yes, he really and truly died. I am afraid the same thing is going to happen to me. Please bless me, friends, or else I shall certainly die.' Indeed, Golap was as blessed as Mary of the Bible had been, for both of them had chosen the 'better part': to sit at the feet of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted to hear later from Mahendranath Gupta of the close parallel between these two women devotees.

To further assuage her sorrows Sri Ramakrishna asked Golap one day to bring his night meal. Now, this service was one of the few prerogatives enjoyed by the Holy Mother, but the fact never struck Golap. She often spent long hours in serving Sri Ramakrishna and would return to the Nahabat quite late. The Holy Mother thus had to wait for a long while with Golap's meal. This perhaps annoyed Holy Mother. When Sri Ramakrishna pointed out the fact to Golap she innocently remarked, 'No, Mother loves me much and regards me as her own daughter. She calls me by my first name,' thus displaying a curious mixture of simplicity and insensitivity which always characterized her.

The tender plant of Golap's spiritual life which grew into a big tree, developed silently

in the congenial environment of Dakshineswar. Here she found Sri Ramakrishna the Godman, who, though living in the world, was completely detached from it, who was constantly absorbed in God-consciousness, and who sang, danced and forgot himself in divine ecstasy. No less significant than her coming under the care of Sri Ramakrishna was the fact that she became very intimate with Sarada Devi. Referring to her one day, Sri Ramakrishna said to Golap, 'She is Saraswati. She has assumed a human body to impart wisdom to men; but she has hidden her celestial beauty lest people, by looking at her, should befoul their minds with sinful thoughts.'⁹

Sri Ramakrishna took Golap's entire responsibility.¹⁰ The inner light of his words pierced to the very depths of her soul, settled there and wrought a transformation as unique as it was complete. Spiritual instruction apart, some mysterious incidents too forged in her deeper bonds of faith. One day while attending on Sri Ramakrishna as he was taking his noon meal, she was stunned to see distinctly the hood of a snake which was devouring every morsel of food put into Sri Ramakrishna's mouth. The latter's confirmation and clarification of the incident brought her all the more spiritual light.¹¹ In the scriptures such eating is called an offering to the coiled-up power of Kundalini.

Another day she noticed Sri Ramakrishna strolling along the northern veranda of the temple courtyard in an ecstatic mood. She

9. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), p. 79.

10. Vaikunthanath Sanyal, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* (Calcutta: S. N. Sanyal, 2nd edition), p. 366.

11. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 6th edition), pp. 580-81; and Swami Arupananda, 'Sri Sri Golap-mata', *Udbodhan*, vol. 27, no. 1, p. 49.

clearly saw that it was not Sri Ramakrishna but Mother Kālī who was walking. The experience was thrilling.¹²

To live in the holy company of Sarada Devi was to take lessons in practical spirituality. Golap took many responsibilities of the household upon herself out of devotion and a sense of consecration. By her outward manner Sarada Devi was the most obscure of all in the household, yet beneath the veil of simplicity which enveloped her there was lofty majesty of bearing. Love and an atmosphere of sanctity pervaded the household. Perceptive aspirants who lived therein soon learned that religion was a sweet, natural, joyous thing; that purity and holiness were tangible realities; that sanctity like a sweet perfume was overpowering the foulness of their selfishness. Thus, living a typical householder's life, struggling on the battleground of conflicting interests, Golap learned to perform her duties so that they did not conflict with her love for God. She was like the mudfish, which lives in the mud but is not stained by it, or like the waterfowl who, though diving under water, shakes off all trace of it by fluttering its wings but once. This skillfulness in work was testified to by no less a person than Sarada Devi, who said of Golap, 'When Golap performs any work she does it with undivided attention, as if she were absorbed in meditation and *japa*—so deep is her mental application.'¹³

An adept in meditation, Golap reached the heights of spiritual realization. Once Sarada Devi observed: 'What a tremendous amount of meditation and *japa* Golap and Yogen have done! Golap has become illumined through *japa*.'¹⁴ Golap herself admitted: 'By the grace of Sri Thakur I

have been blessed with the direct vision of the living goddess Tārā, my Iṣṭā, during meditation.'¹⁵ And Sarada Devi said of her: 'This is her last birth.'¹⁶

Even aside from such arduous efforts, some free and unmerited favours of Sri Ramakrishna came to her in an unexpected manner. One such rare grace was granted her on December 23, 1885, at the Cossipore Garden House. Overwhelmed by love for the devotee Sri Ramakrishna in a state of *samādhi* touched Golap's heart with his feet. She shed profuse tears of joy, and her spiritual life was intensified.¹⁷

Golap was with Sarada Devi at Shyampukur and the Cossipore Garden to help her serve Sri Ramakrishna during his last illness. The fatal disease of cancer ended his life on August 16, 1886, though his spirit still nourished and protected the devotees. Golap now clung to Sarada Devi more closely than ever before. As Sarada Devi's ideal was complete identification with her husband and his divine mission, the spiritual training of Golap continued undisturbed.

In fact, Golap served Sarada Devi with unflagging zeal and unquestioning loyalty for thirty-six years, till the latter passed away in 1920. She was a constant and watchful attendant of Sarada Devi, protecting her from the unreasonable importunities and idiosyncrasies of devotees. Whether at the Belur Maṭh or at the Baghbazar residence or at Jayrambati—everywhere Golap was to be found guarding her as her devoted companion. The Mother would hold like a child to the corner of Golap's cloth while going on foot from one place to another. 'I cannot go to any place without Golap,' Mother said, 'I feel assured when she is with me.'

Life at the Udbodhan convent, Calcutta, circled round the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna

12. Swami Saradananda, *Bhagavan Sri Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Udbodhan), p. 10.

13. *Vedanta Kesari*, July 1954, p. 70.

14. Swami Madhavananda and R. C. Mazumdar, eds., *Great Women of India* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1954). p. 451.

15. *Sri Ramakrishna Smriti*, p. 32.

16. *Great Women of India*, p. 452.

17. *Gospel*, p. 924.

and his living representative Sarada Devi. Though Indian saints and seers have a clear, broad grasp of the infinitude and oneness of the impersonal Supreme Being, a devotee like Golapsundari, in her daily intercourse with the divinity, does not hesitate to make Him personal and concrete. That is how she maintained a point of contact between the outer and inner, between the material and the spiritual; the service offered to the concrete was as real and genuine as would be the care of a dear father or mother. Her household duties were thus sublimated into worship.

Her daily life was of the simplest sort, springing as it did from a profound spirit of renunciation which had been impressed on her heart by Sri Ramakrishna. Once she had gone by boat from Calcutta to Dakshineswar in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, Gopaler Ma and a few other devotees. Gopaler Ma was carrying some provisions gifted by the family of Balaram Bose. Sri Ramakrishna said to Golap, 'One who is a person of renunciation realizes God. One who after taking food in people's houses comes away empty-handed, sits leaning against the body of the divine Lord, that is, can exert force, so to say, on the Lord because of renunciation and dependance on Him.'¹⁸ Though meant for Gopaler Ma these words impressed Golap deeply.

Unsophisticated, frank and outspoken, Golap-Ma, as she was called among the devotees, was sometimes misunderstood. But underneath that rough exterior was her relentless perfectionism and loving urge for service. Appreciating her pragmatism, liberality and broadmindedness, Sarada Devi once said of her: 'Golap's mind is very pure; it is never ruffled. She does not know what pride or vanity is.'¹⁹ Sarada Devi said on another occasion:

Golap's mind is very pure. Once, while at Vrindaban, we found the floor of the temple of

Madhavji dirtied by some child. Golap, seeing the inconvenience of all visitors, at once tore a portion of her new cloth and with it cleansed the spot. Some amongst the bystanders misjudged her, while others truly appraised this voluntary service.... Mental purity is the outcome of a good deal of austerities practised in previous lives.²⁰

Sri Ramakrishna as well as Sarada Devi would not, however, hesitate to chastise an erring Golapsundari for her senseless chatter, her tactless handling of a situation or her garrulous comments inspired by her over-concern for the Holy Mother, or when she became critical of the Mother's 'sons'—monastic or non-monastic. Sarada Devi tried to restrain Golap by saying, 'How can I help it, Golap? I can't contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother.'²¹ She repeatedly tried to correct Golap's harshness, saying that an unpalatable truth should always be avoided. In spite of this sometimes annoying trait, Golap's unquestioning submission to the Master and the Mother when they would reprimand her was exemplary. And her deep love and sympathy for the poor and distressed revealed a soft heart. Half of the small allowance she received from her daughter's son she spent in charity to the poor. Her gentleness, humility, and above all her dedicated service impressed all who had the occasion to see her closely. Her life was indeed 'characterized by non-attachment, love, service and inwardness of devotion.'²²

Sarada Devi sometimes referred to Golapsundari as her Jayā.²³ So deeply did

20. *Great Women of India*, p. 452.

21. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2nd edition), p. 366.

22. *Prabuddha Bharata*, February 1925, p. 93.

23. Jayā and Vijayā are the two attendants of Jagaddhātṛī, the Mother of the Universe. Sarada Devi sometimes referred to Golapsundari and Yogindramohini as her Jayā and vijayā respectively.

18. *Great Master*, p. 652.

19. *Holy Mother*, pp. 61-62.

she participate in Sarada Devi's day-to-day life of holiness that the latter once remarked, 'People call me goddess, and I too am led to think so; or how could you explain all the strange things that have happened in my life? Yogen and Golap know much of this.'²⁴ Moreover, she like other companions of Sarada Devi 'who were touched by the hand of Sri Ramakrishna' developed to a wonderful extent 'the instant power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea.'²⁵ This helped her overcome social and religious prejudices, making her quite liberal and catholic in her outlook. Even when annoyed or overwrought by others' conduct she could rise above her emotion in no time and forget about it completely.²⁶

Such attributes of her character apart, the life and words of the Master as also of the Mother, reached down to the deepest roots of her being, so that there seemed to be no limit to her utter self-surrender and trust till she became a living conduit for the

spread of the Master's and Mother's holy influence. Like other illumined souls her mind radiated compassion, devotion and joy all about her. In addition to the deep insight into the spirit of the Ramakrishna Movement she developed, she enthused monastic and lay members with courage and faith, hope and illumination.

Whenever time permitted her, particularly in the afternoons, she used to read the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Mahābhārata*, as well as the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.²⁷ To the younger generation of devotees she felt proud to be a granny who charmed them by her fresh, fascinating stories. Like Yogin-Ma she used to narrate tales from Paurāṇik literature to Sister Nivedita.²⁸ She also enjoyed the pranks sometimes played by others, particularly Swami Brahmananda.

Golapsundari outlived Sarada Devi by four years. Except for brief pilgrimages the saint's life was one of continuous *tapasyā* and spiritual fulfilment within the household, which finally ended by her merging in the Light of Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi on December 19, 1924.

24. Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 5th edition), p. 110.

25. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan), pp. 107-08.

26. Swami Arupananda, 'Sri Sri Golap-mata', *Udbodhan*, vol. 27, no. 1, p. 54.

27. *Women Saints of East and West* (London: Ramakrishna-Vedanta Centre, 1955), p. 132.

28. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Nivedita Lokamata* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers), vol. 1, p. 200.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION OF SOME GREAT EDUCATORS

PROF. RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE

The philosophy of education is that field of philosophical enquiry which looks at education as a whole and tries to make a consistent and sensible idea of that whole. It seeks broadly to define the values that constitute the ultimate aim of education.

But the necessity of philosophical examination of education has not been universally recognized. A little reflection will, however, make it clear that such an examination is a prerequisite for the formulation of educational schemes and policies. Education

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : KALIPADA GHOSH*

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Smt. Krishnapriyangini had become embittered and cynical, for in spite of all efforts, she had not been able to rectify the ways of her husband Kalipada Ghosh. In desperation she came one day with some other women to offer *pūjā* to Mother Kālī at Dakshineswar. There she met Sri Ramakrishna and, finding in him a sympathetic listener, unburdened her tale of woe. Her husband had fallen into evil company and was bringing ruin on the family. She prayed to Sri Ramakrishna for some remedy. Loathe to make use of occult power, particularly for alleviating material afflictions, Sri Ramakrishna refused to give her a charm. However, out of deep sympathy—tinged with his irrepressible sense of humour—he also did not dismiss her outright. He advised her to go to the music tower saying, ‘There lives a woman. She knows such *mantras* and charms, and in this matter her power is superior to mine.’

Sri Sarada Devi was then at worship. She gave a patient hearing to the woman, but persuaded her to approach Sri Ramakrishna again for some help. Sri Ramakrishna was happy that the fun had worked. Again he sent her to Sarada Devi. Thus tossed back and forth thrice the poor Krishnapriya was much confused. This time Sarada Devi took pity and consoled her. Giving her a *bilva* leaf out of the offerings made to the deity she said, ‘Take this with you, my child; this will fulfil your desire.’¹ Sri

Ramakrishna too assured her, saying, ‘Kalipada belongs to this place. Don’t worry at all. He will come back here in the near future.’² Amazingly, Kalipada began to change for the better. In course of time he even became a prominent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and his wife too realized that the world was no place of mirth, but neither was it the place of continuous sorrow she had once thought it to be.

Kalipada was born on a new moon day in 1849 to the Ghosh family of Shyampur, Calcutta. His father Gurudas Ghosh, a petty trader in jute, was very much a man of the world but was also well known for his piety and devotion to Mother Kālī. His mother Menakabala was dutiful, pious, kind-hearted and generous. She exerted considerable influence in moulding the character of the boy. As for the lad Kalipada, he was so unusually lively that he could hardly keep himself confined within the walls of a classroom. His interests were wide-ranging : music, composition of songs, dramatics, cooking, etc. Since early childhood he was stubborn, which proved in time to be a dominant trait of his character. But there was another side to him which was ready to submit and adore.

Too poor to allow his son to continue his education beyond class eight, Gurudas found a job for the boy as shop-assistant with Messrs. John Dickinson Co. It seemed at first that he was fated to continue his unpromising lot. But he was a man of driving energy. His dedication and enthusiasm won him the respect of his superiors, and his intelligence, diligence and above all his per-

* The author wishes to express his gratitude to Sri Jitendranath Ghosh, grandson of Kalipada Ghosh, for helping him in the collection of material for this article.

¹. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2nd edition), pp. 124-25.

². Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 9th edition), p. 377.

severance helped him to improve his lot steadily. In time he joined the administrative staff of the company, earned a fortune and built a three-storey residential building at 30 Shyampukur Street, Calcutta. He became so prominent a figure in the establishment that a watermark of his bust was imprinted on sheets of paper manufactured by the company.³

Kalipada now became close to Girish Chandra Ghosh, though the great dramatist was five years his senior. They developed a deep friendship mellowed on Kalipada's side by reverence and on Girish's side by an elder-brotherly feeling for his well-being. But they were so close to each other, even in many character-traits, that they were often called 'Jagai-Madhai' after the two ruffian devotees of Śrī Caitanya. As with Girish, talent and debauchery co-existed in Kalipada's character; but unlike the former, the latter had a devout urge for spiritual guidance and did not care much for reason and argument. Tempted by his own dark and irrational impulses he had plunged into a life of dissipation, overriding his basic devout nature and the strings of his conscience. His desperate need to soothe his guilty conscience led him on occasion to participate in religious rituals and festivities. The continuous endeavours of his pious wife for correcting his ways also brought him occasional pangs of misgiving. He began to feel that the only way he could survive was through faith in a higher power, and he occasionally felt an urge to seek shelter in some spiritual master.

Late in 1884, the incredible happened.⁴

3. Originally an agent of the renowned book publisher, Messrs. MacMillan Co., Messrs. John Dickinson Co. later established an independent firm of manufacturing paper of various kinds. Kalipada Ghosh's contribution in this respect was highly acclaimed in the journal of the company.

4. It was early in 1884, according to Swami Gambhirananda (see *Sri Ramakrishna Bhakta-*

One afternoon Kalipada accompanied Girish Chandra to meet the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. Persuasion by Girish apart, it was nothing more than curiosity which brought Kalipada to Rasmani's temple garden at Dakshineswar. He came just to see the Paramahansa, the Guru of his friend and guide, Girish.

At first glance the temple garden looked like any other well-maintained temple compound. As Kalipada strode forward to enter the room of Sri Ramakrishna, his tall, hefty frame, light brown complexion, large eyes and smiling countenance all bespoke his self-confidence and jolly temperament. He noticed the frail person of Sri Ramakrishna. The latter's peculiarly attractive look strangely stirred Kalipada. He gazed entranced at Sri Ramakrishna's radiant face. Following Girish Chandra he saluted Sri Ramakrishna.⁵ Girish must have introduced Kalipada to the Master.

Exceptionally gifted in the art of judging a person through natural and spiritual means, Sri Ramakrishna could immediately recognize him as the wayward person about whom a lady had approached him quite some time ago. As was his wont, he estimated Kalipada's spiritual worthiness also, and foresaw that Kalipada was destined to take part in his divine play. In the course of conversation Sri Ramakrishna casually mentioned that Rakhal's father, being a wealthy man of the world, was always involved in litigation. He had come to

malika [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 4th edition], p. 407). Girish Chandra Ghosh's first encounter with Sri Ramakrishna took place in early September 1884, and the next encounter on September 21, 1884, at the Star Theatre. Girish Chandra took Kalipada to Sri Ramakrishna only when he was convinced of the greatness of the saint. Thus the time of Kalipada's first visit to Sri Ramakrishna is probably November 1884 at the earliest.

5. According to the *Punthi*, p. 477, Kalipada went to Dakshineswar alone. He made no salutation to Sri Ramakrishna on this occasion.

believe that because of Sri Ramakrishna's protection of Rakhal, he had won three law suits, every one of them beyond his expectations. On that very day Kalipada too was facing three law suits. Being almost sure of defeat in all the cases he had not ventured to present himself in the court.

Though not recorded, it can be safely guessed that Sri Ramakrishna bade him farewell with his familiar words. 'Please come again'. After leaving Dakshineswar, Kalipada was astonished to discover that the saint had mysteriously bound his heart.⁶ And strangely enough, on his return home Kalipada was surprised to learn that he had won all three law suits which had appeared hopeless. This forced him to believe in the power of Sri Ramakrishna's grace. He then began to regret his haughtiness which had prevented him from even saluting the saint.⁷ A flood of devotion overwhelmed him.

Kalipada felt an ever-growing urge to visit the saint again. Soon he did so, going by a hired boat. Having risen from his midday nap, Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his cot and welcomed Kalipada as one of his own. Sri Ramakrishna expressed his desire of going to Calcutta. This proposal from the reclusive Paramahansa was mystifying to Kalipada. Nonetheless he greeted the

suggestion and offered him a free boat ride. A hired boat was waiting for them. Sri Ramakrishna in the company of his attendant Latu boarded the boat with Kalipada and left for Calcutta.

In the course of conversation Sri Ramakrishna learnt from Kalipada that he was devoted to Kālī, the Divine Mother, but that he had never received spiritual initiation for he had no faith in ordinary Gurus; and that he was looking for an illumined master. In an ecstatic mood Sri Ramakrishna asked Kalipada to stretch out his tongue. As Kalipada obeyed, Sri Ramakrishna scribbled something on it with his finger and asked him to repeat the holy *mantra*. Kalipada felt something heaving up within his chest. Though ebullient, he could hardly realize then the import of this unusual favour.⁸ The inexplicable joy he experienced was something previously unknown to him. Now he discovered that Sri Ramakrishna intended to visit his house. Overwhelmed by this kind gesture Kalipada tenderly took him and Latu to his house at 30. Shyampukur Street in a hired carriage.

It was November. The room where Sri Ramakrishna was seated had a number of large oil paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses on the wall. The paintings gladdened Sri Ramakrishna, who soon plunged into an ecstatic mood. He began chanting some beautiful verses. Then a silence descended. By some strange miracle the images in the paintings appeared living to those present in the room.⁹ This unique incident made a tremendous impression on Kalipada.

No endeavour is as coldly real as the attempt to live the worldly life with a spirit of detachment; however, Kalipada now began reordering his life. As with the great majority who take up the religious life, Kalipada's renunciation wavered. He would

6. In his reminiscences of Dakshineswar days Latu Maharaj gives a different version of Kalipada's first meeting with the Master. According to Latu Maharaj, the Master then asked Kalipada, 'What do you want?' Kalipada asked shamelessly, 'Can you give me a little wine?' The Master smiled and said, 'Yes, I can. But the wine I have is so intoxicating that you will not be able to bear it.' For a moment Kalipada was thoughtful and then said, 'Please give me that wine which will make me intoxicated my entire life.' The Master touched him, and Kalipada started to weep. The other devotees tried to calm him, but he went on weeping for a long time. *Vide* Swami Chetananda, *Swami Adbhutananda* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1980), p. 44.

7. *Tattvamanjari* (Bengali monthly), vol. 9, no. 4, p. 91.

8. *Punthi*, pp. 477-78, and *Tattvamanjari*, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 92.

9. *Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika*, vol. 2, p. 407.

drop his ill habits and then pick them up again, again drop them, until his renunciation became firm by force of repetition. Many thought that all this was too good to last; in fact, it lasted for the rest of his life. Subtly and surely, Sri Ramakrishna led him out of worldly life into the circle of devotees.

It seems Sri Ramakrishna, an exquisitely subtle moulder of character, did not impose strict conditions on Kalipada but showered love on him unconditionally. And Kalipada made steady progress. So liberal was Sri Ramakrishna that Kalipada one day smilingly told the devotees, 'Ours is a grand teacher! We are not asked to practise meditation and other disciplines.'¹⁰ Yet his mind quite naturally began to dwell on Sri Ramakrishna whose silent influence worked miracles in the transformation of his life.

In time Kalipada became a staunch follower of the Master, so much so that he didn't keep even a picture of Sri Sarada Devi in his parlour. When questioned he saluted the picture of Sri Ramakrishna with folded hands and said, 'He is indeed our father, and he is our mother.' As days rolled by, love and devotion blossomed in his heart side by side with an undeniable wilting of licentiousness and worldly ambition. He used to declare openly in later life, 'Though I indulged in revelry like Jagai and Madhai, the Master blessed me of his own.'¹¹ Almost as in the case of Girish, Sri Ramakrishna allowed him many liberties denied to others. Though there were many—and justifiable—complaints against him, Sri Ramakrishna wasted no time in negative 'thou shalt not' moralizing. Rather he coaxed into prominence the good, holy and beautiful traits of character already lying

dormant within him. Elevated by this positive method, it was easy for Kalipada to correct himself. Sri Ramakrishna remarked on October 18, 1885, 'Kalipada told me that he had altogether given up drinking.'¹²

Endowed with exceptional qualities of head and heart, Kalipada soon endeared himself to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Efficient as he was in managing affairs, he would gladly take on all sorts of difficult situations. Sri Ramakrishna would often address him as 'Manager'. He was also an exquisite cook, and the devotees sometimes addressed him jokingly as 'housewife'.

Among his artistic qualities his musical talent, both vocal and instrumental, is worth mentioning. One day the melodious tune he played on his flute threw Sri Ramakrishna into ecstasy. Another day in Balaram Bose's house in Baghbazar, Girish Chandra and Kalipada began singing fervently:

Today my heart feels an unknown sensation,
as it were.
Hold me, O Nitai!
I am now being carried away by the waves
That rose in the river of love.¹³

The hall of the first floor was packed to capacity. The Master went into deep ecstasy, seated in the western extremity of the room facing the east.

When Sri Ramakrishna was moved to Shyampukur for treatment of his throat, Kalipada took great pains in tidily arranging the rented house. He procured articles necessary for the household and even hung pictures of gods and goddesses on the walls, for he wanted to make the Master's stay there as comfortable as possible. But the same Kalipada took compassion when Binodini Dasi, whose acting in the role of Caitanya was highly praised and who had

¹⁰. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), p. 879.

¹¹. Vaikunthanath Sanyal, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita*, 2nd edition, p. 333.

¹². *Gospel*, p. 850.

¹³. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 4th edition), p. 838.

been blessed by Sri Ramakrishna, wanted very much to see the ailing holy man. To dupe the attendant Kalipada dressed the actress up as a man in European clothes and brought her thus disguised to the Shyampukur house. They succeeded in entering and saw Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna laughed heartily on discovering the identity of his guest and gave her some spiritual instruction.

Faith begets grace. It was the Kālī Pūjā day in 1885. On the Master's instruction the devotees, particularly Kalipada, made arrangements for the worship of Mother Kālī in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Flowers, sandal-paste, *bilva* leaves, red hibiscus, rice pudding and various sweets and other articles of worship were placed in front of the Master. About thirty devotees gathered there. The Master offered all the articles to the Divine Mother. On the advice of the Master the devotees sat quietly in front of him and tried to meditate. Then it struck Girish Chandra that the Master was perhaps giving them an opportunity to worship the Divine Mother within his own body. Never slow to carry into action his slightest impulse, Girish offered a garland of flowers at Sri Ramakrishna's feet. Others, including Kalipada, followed suit. A thrill passed through Sri Ramakrishna's body, and he entered *samādhi*. 'His face shines with a heavenly light. His two hands are raised in the posture one sees in the images of the Divine Mother.'¹⁴ It was an exhilarating experience for Kalipada. Speechless with wonder, he like the others felt in his heart that Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of the Divine Mother was blessing him. This special worship of the Mother was followed by ecstatic songs and dancing by the devotees.¹⁵

The Master showered blessings on him individually, too. On December 23, 1885,

at the Cossipore Garden, Sri Ramakrishna gave unrestrained expression to his love for the devotees. He touched Kalipada's chest and said, 'May your inner spirit be awakened!' Affectionately he stroked Kalipada's chin and said in an exalted mood, 'Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious devotions will certainly come here.'¹⁶ Overwhelmed by this rare gift of grace Kalipada had an experience of bliss beyond anything he had ever imagined.

Kalipada belonged to that group of the Master's devotees who looked on him as a divine Incarnation and who therefore thought that his illness was just a pretext serving some deeper purpose; he would himself get rid of the fatal disease as soon as that purpose was served. Swami Saradananda comments, 'Kalipada was a follower of Girish in all matters and did not believe that the Master's illness would increase if an evil-doer became repentant and touched his holy feet, as Kalipada was convinced that the Master was the Incarnation of the age' and therefore beyond the law of Karma.¹⁷

But Sri Ramakrishna was not to recover, and when he passed away in August 1886, Kalipada felt the pang of separation unbearable. The raft which he had depended upon to carry him across the ocean of the world had disappeared, and Kalipada was afraid of sinking once more. Instead of succumbing to this despair, however, he clung to the rich inheritance of hope and assurance left by the Master. Sitting in front of a picture of Sri Ramakrishna, he prayed long with deep yearning: 'O Thakur, please reveal thyself!'¹⁸

His deep love and adoration for Sri

14. *Gospel*, p. 928.

15. *Udbodhan*, vol. 75, no. 7 (Śrāvaṇ, 1380 B.S.).

16. *Gospel*, p. 932.

17. *Great Master*, p. 867.

18. It is said that Kalipada kept himself locked for a few days in a room on the second floor of 30 Shyampukur Street. It seems he was blessed with a spiritual vision.

Ramakrishna found expression in the innumerable songs he composed. The publications *Ramakrishna Saṅgīt* by Yogodyan Math in 1893 and *Thākurer Nāmāmṛta* by Yogabinod Ashrama, Simultala, amply testify to his literary talent, musical sense and above all his deep devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. Instead of the back-sliding he had feared, he moved forward in his pilgrimage to God, and people marvelled to notice the transformation wrought in him.

Kalipada was among the pioneers who organized the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday even during the latter's lifetime.¹⁹ Devotees like Manomohan Mitra and Kalipada Ghosh lent all assistance to Ramchandra Dutta in his efforts to spread the name of Sri Ramakrishna.²⁰ Most of the songs sung before and after the lectures of Ram Babu were those composed by Kalipada. At Bombay, too, Kalipada celebrated Sri Ramakrishna's birthday on a grand scale.²¹ The success of these celebrations was largely due to the earnestness and unwearied labour of Kalipada.

In the early days of the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore he helped the monastics as much as he could. Even when he was transferred to Bombay, serving the same British Company in a higher post, he continued his support. The itinerant monks of the Ramakrishna Order who travelled in Western India paid visits to this dear devotee of their Master.

A typical manifestation of his rapturous love for the Master was the time when

Kalipada participated in the annual celebration held at Navagopal Ghosh's. The devotees of the Kankurgachhi Yogodyan were singing *kīrtan* to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals, while Kalipada sat quietly among them. As soon as Girish Chandra appeared on the scene the devotees began to beat the drums enthusiastically. This inspired Girish and Kalipada to join them. The devotees began to sing and dance around the two known affectionately as 'Jagai and Madhai'. Swept away by the infectious rhythm Kalipada and Girish, with the upper part of their bodies bare, suddenly began to dance, their portly frames swaying back and forth to the rhythmic beat. Navagopal garlanded them. After a while the two stood still with their hands locked together and eyes shut, chanting 'Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna,' their countenance beaming with the light of Sri Ramakrishna's benediction. The congregation of devotees sang fervently and swayed with the rhythm. It was indeed a rare sight.

Kalipada would never accept personal services from others; rather he made himself available for the service of all. One could take the dust of his feet only at the cost of his being very annoyed. Anger and egotism were almost obliterated in him. One day when a rogue slapped him on the cheek, the stout Kalipada didn't even protest. When his friends advised him to take revenge Kalipada said mildly: 'Has that ruffian struck me? I being a servant of Sri Ramakrishna, who can beat me? It is Ramakrishna who hit me that day.'²² He had the fervent conviction that Sri Ramakrishna had taken full charge of him.

Named 'Dāna Kālī' by Narendran because of his courage and generosity, Kalipada was very large-hearted and well known for his liberal charities and lack of wavering. Being

19. Ramchandra Dutta, *Sri Sri Paramahansa Ramakrishnadever Jivanbrittanta*, 3rd edition, p. 130.

20. *Bhakta Manomohan* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1351 B.S.), p. 178.

21. Sankariprasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha* (Calcutta: Mandal Book House), vol. 2, p. 173.

22. *Tattvamanjari*, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 93.

so appropriate, the name given by Narendra struck.²³

After Ramchandra Dutta's death on January 17, 1899, Kalipada took upon himself the management of the Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyan, Kankurgachhi, where the holy remains of Sri Ramakrishna's mortal body were worshipped.

His love and adoration of Sri Ramakrishna found expression in his household as well as at his job. His sister Mahamaya Mitra²⁴ was a well-known devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Among his three sons and two daughters,²⁵ the most celebrated was his eldest son, Barendrakrishna, who died at the early age of forty-seven, but who is remembered for his dedication to the principles of his father.²⁶ Through all his activities and achievements Kalipada could perceive the grace of Sri Ramakrishna working, and in recognition of this he displayed Sri Ramakrishna's picture in his house as well as in the head office and branch offices of the British firm he was serving.

Kalipada told his friends, 'I never asked Sri Ramakrishna any question as such.

Once I secured an assurance from him, and I stayed satisfied. I requested him to assure me that upon my death he would kindly lead me holding my hand in his and carrying a lantern in the other. Sri Ramakrishna readily said, "Well, your wish will be fulfilled." ' Kalipada's death on the night of June 28, 1905, at 9.30 p.m. with his hands outstretched and face radiant suggested to many, including Swami Premanandaji,²⁷ that Sri Ramakrishna had fulfilled his promise to the letter. This was in a second-floor room of the three-storeyed building at 30 Shyampukur Street.

His life is a glowing testimony of what wonders could be accomplished by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. As the philosopher's stone transforms base metal into gold, so the touch of Sri Ramakrishna transformed Kalipada Ghosh—a worldly man addicted to drink and pleasure—into a man of saintly character who lived in faith and died in the embrace of Sri Ramakrishna. The light which shone in his face at his death can even now enkindle faith and hope in the hearts of all householder devotees.

23. Mahendranath Dutta, *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jivaner Ghatanavali*, vol. 1 (3rd edition), p. 142.

24. Kalipada had one brother Tarapada, and two sisters, Mahamaya Mitra and Jogamaya Basu.

25. Kalipada had two daughters, and of his three sons Barendra was the eldest while Harendra and Dharendra were twin brothers.

26. Considering the significant contribution made by Barendrakrishna, *Udbodhan*, the monthly Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order, published a long obituary in its vol. 29, no. 12, pp. 754-62. Among his many achievements worth mentioning is his organizing of Sri Ramakrishna Mills in 1908 and Sri Vivekananda Mill in 1919, both cloth mills at Ahmedabad.

27. According to Swami Adbhutananda, Sri Ramakrishna of his own had asked Kalipada of his innermost desire, and as soon as he expressed it Sri Ramakrishna granted it. On hearing from Swami Premananda, who had been at the death bed of Kalipada, Swami Adbhutananda said later, 'Look ! Sri Ramakrishna visited Kalipada at the last moment of his life and led the way for him. Baburam Bhai [Swami Premananda] clearly perceived it. All the pledges made by the Master are being fulfilled in letter and spirit.' (Chandrasekhar Chattopadhyay, *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti Katha* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 3rd edition), p. 325 ; also see *Tattvamanjari*, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 94.

vidual Self, with the *paramātmān*, the Supreme Self, the Inner Controller. How does he do it? First of all he looks upon his own Self as light. Then he regards the Inner Controller as the Light of this light—that is, as the true Light which illumines even the light of his own soul. This is not a process of imagination but an actual intuitive experience. The mind then remains absorbed in the interior Light. The image of his Chosen Deity no longer remains a picture, but becomes identified with the Inner Controller and becomes the very source of the interior Light. Or it may merge in that Light and disappear. It is through this *upāsana* that the aspirant realizes that God is infinite and dwells in the hearts of all beings as the Inner Controller.

According to Advaita Vedānta, this is the highest realization attainable through *upāsana*s, also called *vidyā*s, described in the Upaniṣads. Beyond this lies the uncharted realm of the impersonal Brahman, the Absolute; which can be realized only by following the path of negation, the *Jñāna-mārga*.

What are the results of *antaryāmyupā-*

sanā? It expands our consciousness. It gives an infinite dimension to our life. During the early stages of spiritual life the aspirant usually thinks of himself first and then tries to accommodate God and the world into his mental frame. *Antaryāmyupāsana* reverses this process. The aspirant now spontaneously comes to regard the Infinite as of primary importance and himself as of secondary importance. He realizes that consciousness is infinite, that his own Self is only the individual (*ādhyātmika*) aspect and his Chosen Deity only the theistic (*ādhidāivika*) aspect of that infinite consciousness. He sees the whole universe governed by a divine order and harmony—the Logos. The harmony that his life now attains is unchangeable because it is grounded in the Infinite.

A person's life, especially spiritual life, attains maturity only when he experiences the Infinite. The Infinite can be contacted at different levels, and the course of a person's life depends upon at what level he establishes this contact. Human life becomes full only when it partakes of infinite life. Every person is great in proportion to his share of the Infinite.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : NARENDRANATH

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

[A hundred years ago in December 1881 an event of great significance to the modern world took place in a quiet suburb of Calcutta—the meeting of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda (then known as Narendranath) at Dakshineswar. It marked the end of the ancient age and the dawn of a new renaissance. However, the event signified not merely the transition of one age into another but more importantly, it actualized the transmission of the spiritual wealth of ancient India into an incipient new nation and through that the establishment of a spiritual channel between the East and the West. As a centenary commemoration of this historic event, we are publishing the following article which recreates the original scene with a wealth of research details—Ed.]

Every great world teacher had a dynamic counterpart, a chief apostle, to spread his message. Christ had Peter and later on Paul, Śrī Kṛṣṇa had Arjuna, Buddha had

Ānanda, Gourāṅga had Nityānanda, and the latest of God-men Sri Ramakrishna chose Narendranath to serve as the chief apostle of his mission.

If Narendranath was the symbol of the modern spirit, Sri Ramakrishna represented the best of India in the ancient tradition. In fact, the transformation of the former into Swami Vivekananda may be regarded as the resultant force of the convergence of the two personalities, Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath. The relationship between these two great personalities was not merely that of Guru and disciple. It was the fusion of two mighty wills and the creation of a tremendous spiritual power which burst upon the world like a new sun rise. It was the fusion of the ancient and the modern, of the East and the West, of religion and science, of love and knowledge, of devotion and service. The meeting of these two great personalities is thus an important historical event.

Born in Simulia, Calcutta, on January 12, 1863, of an aristocratic Kāyastha family, Narendra grew up into a handsome young man, possessing presence of mind, keen intelligence and prodigious memory, a passion for truth and devotion to purity in thought and action. His father Viswanath Dutta, a distinguished attorney of the Calcutta High Court, was a man of independent spirit, agnostic about religion, a lover of travel, literature and music and a critic of social conventions. But the grandfather, Durgacharan, a rich and cultured man had renounced his wife and children at the age of twenty-four and had become a Sannyasin. From his boyhood Narendra felt an irresistible desire to realize the ultimate Truth. His mother Bhuvaneswari Devi was a pious Hindu woman of regal bearing. Deeply devout and of heroic spirit, she was a source of constant inspiration to him all through his life.

About Narendranath's adolescent period

one of his college friends Brojendranath Seal wrote :

He was undeniably a gifted youth, sociable, free and unconventional in his manners—an excellent singer—the soul of social circles—a brilliant conversationalist, though somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with shafts of wit the shows and mummeries of the world—sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under the mask of cynicism—altogether, an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack, an iron will ... and withal possessing a strange power of the eye which could hold his listeners in thrall.

Distinguished for his brilliant intellect and phenomenal memory, he studied with zest world history, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, art, music, etc., and tried to 'weld Hellenic beauty and Indo-Germanic thought into one harmonious whole'.¹

During his college days the views of Western philosophers had unsettled his faith in God. He wanted a demonstration of God before he could accept Him. Though universal reason was having the upper hand in his mind, his emotional nature became dissatisfied with mere abstractions. He longed for a concrete support, a *guru*, who embodying perfection in the flesh would be able to guide him. This attitude distinguished him from his contemporaries. Unlike most of his college friends, he felt the urge for a spiritual life, as distinct from the philosophical pursuit.

It was this spiritual quest that took him to several religious leaders of the time who belonged to the Brahmo Samaj. He had a meeting with Maharshi Devendranath Tagore who encouraged him. He was for a time influenced by the magnetic personality of Keshab Chandra Sen and his eloquent sermons. He joined as a singer in his choir and was a member of the 'Band of Hope'. With the formation of the Sadharan Brahmo

1. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1974), p. 224,

Samaj, he 'became an initiated member of the Samaj'.² He also participated in other activities like mass education, the Hindu Mahāmela of Navagopal Mitra, etc.

Narendra heard the name of Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar for the first time perhaps from Principal Rev. William Hastie of General Assembly's Institution where Narendra was a student. Rev. Hastie introduced Sri Ramakrishna by way of illustration to bring home the concept of 'a momentary trance' in Wordsworth's poem 'Excursion'. It is also quite likely that Narendra heard about the saint of Dakshineswar mentioned in the Brahmo circles he was closely acquainted with. Eulogistic accounts of the saint used to appear in Brahmo journals and books and, a voracious reader that Narendra was, he might have read about the saint. Besides, it is not unlikely that he heard of the saint from his neighbours Ramachandra Dutta and Surendranath Mitra, both greatly devoted to the saint. In fact the saint came to be widely known in the Simulia locality after Ramachandra became a staunch disciple of his in 1879. Nevertheless, it may be concluded that such pieces of information did not prompt him to pay a visit to the saint of Dakshineswar.

As to when and under what circumstances Narendranath met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time there are several surmises. The first edition of *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Vol. 1, p. 53), mentions the meeting of the two at Dakshineswar as 'their first meeting' although it makes a brief reference to a meeting of the two at Surendranath Mitra's house in November, 1881. Swami Saradananda, in his *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, categorically claims that the first meeting took place at the house of

Surendranath Mitra just before Narendra's F.A. Examination which began from November 28, 1881. Rakhal Chandra Ghosh, who had first met Sri Ramakrishna about six months earlier and was said to have been present in that meeting, supports this viewpoint.³ Curiously enough Narendra does not mention this when he gives Mahendranath Gupta (the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) an account of his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna. Nevertheless many biographers have finally agreed that an early meeting of the two at the house of Surendranath Mitra did take place in Simulia, and hold that it served as a prelude to the 'historic first meeting' of the two at Dakshineswar.

Narendranath was then preparing himself for the final F.A. Examination of Calcutta University. Surendranath Mitra had invited the saint of Dakshineswar to his residence at Simulia and organized a small festival in the evening. It was probably in the month of November, 1881.⁴ As no other good singer was available, Surendranath persuaded Narendra to treat the audience to devotional songs, Narendra's delightful voice charmed the ear of Sri Ramakrishna.

Very little is on record about this 'chance meeting' of Narendra with Sri Ramakrishna. He was not perhaps much impressed by the 'Paramahansa of Dakshineswar'. In fact to Narendranath, 'he looked just like an ordinary man with nothing remarkable about

3. See *Swami Brahmananda* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 2nd edition), p. 48.

4. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, tr. by Swami Jagadananda, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, p. 715. The claim by 'The Life' (1956 edition, p. 30) and Romain Rolland that the first meeting came off in November, 1880, does not fit into the circumstances. Like a few other biographers, Priyanath Sinha (his pen-name being Gurudas Burman), a classmate of Narendranath, does not at all mention of the meeting at Surendra's place in his '*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Charit*' (Bengali).

2. Dr. R. C. Majumdar, *Swami Vivekananda, a Historical Review*, published by General Printers and Publishers, Calcutta, 1965, p. 6.

him'.⁵ On the other hand, the piercing insight of Sri Ramakrishna, helped him discover in the tormented and storm-tossed youth, as Narendra then was, the apostle he had been waiting for. Evidently, he felt attracted towards the young man.⁶ He talked with Surendranath Mitra and then with Ramachandra Dutta, a relation of Narendranath,⁷ and collected relevant information about the young man. The singing over, Sri Ramakrishna came close to the singer, carefully studied his physical features and lovingly invited him to visit Dakshineswar temple at an early date.

However, Sri Ramakrishna had earlier seen Narendra in a mystic vision. In later years he described this vision to his close disciples. One day, absorbed in samādhi, he found his pure mind soaring high along a luminous path till it crossed the barrier between the phenomenal universe and the Absolute and entered finally the transcendental realm. There he saw seven sages, superior even to gods in wisdom and holiness, absorbed in meditation. While he was admiring their spiritual attainments, he noticed a portion of the undifferentiated Absolute becoming condensed, as it were, to take the form of a divine child. Sitting upon the lap of one of the sages and gently clasping his neck, the child whispered something into his ear. At this the sage awoke from meditation and looked upon the wondrous child. The child seemed to be the treasure of his heart and that their familiarity was of eternity. The child joyously

said to him, 'I am going to the earth; you must come with me'. The sage's tender look expressed his consent. Soon thereafter the sage was again immersed in samādhi. Sri Ramakrishna was astonished to observe that a part of the mind and body of the sage descended to earth where Narendra lived. When Sri Ramakrishna saw Narendra for the first time, he recognized him to be that sage. Subsequently on being asked, Sri Ramakrishna admitted that the divine child was none other than he.

It is now almost certain that the first real 'encounter' between the Master and the disciple took place someday in December, 1881.⁸ Soon after Narendra took his F.A.

8. Very rightly the new revised and enlarged edition of *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980), vol. 1, p. 60, holds that Narendra 'in the company of two of his friends went for the first time to Dakshineswar one day in December, 1881'. Swami Gambhirananda in his article on 'Tyāgi Bhaktader Sri Ramakrishna-Samīpe Agaman' (Udbodhan, B.S. 1357, Aswin and Kartik) puts December, 1881 as the time of first meeting. S. N. Dhar's assertion that 'the historic first meeting at Dakshineswar between Naren and Sri Ramakrishna took place on Sunday, January 15, 1882 and his arguments in favour of it (Ref. *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, published by the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyākumari, vol. 1, p. 110) are not tenable. For we find that Manomohan, Ramachandra, Surendranath, Narendra and Nityagopal—five of them visited Dakshineswar on Sunday, January 29, 1882. To the familiar audience Sri Ramakrishna gave a brilliant exposition on Mother Kali, (vide *Tattwamanjari*, vol. 9, no. 11, p. 200). By that time Narendra seemed to have become quite a familiar figure. According to S. N. Dhar, Narendra's second visit to Dakshineswar took place on February 5, 1882, and the third visit on February 12, 1882. Again we find Narendra present at Dakshineswar on Sunday, February 19, 1882, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna (vide *Tattwamanjari*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 11). But he was absent on Tuesday, February 7, 1882 when Ramachandra and Nitvagopal visited Dakshineswar. (vide *Tattwamanjari*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 3).

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial edition, vol. 4, p. 179.

6. *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 715. Swami Brahmananda said that they clearly felt that the Master was very much attracted towards Narendra as soon as he saw him that day.

7. According to Swami Gambhirananda, Ramachandra Dutta was the maternal uncle of Bhubaneswari Devi, and not a cousin as claimed by Mahendranath Dutta. (*Yuganayak Vivekananda*, [Bengali] 3rd edition, vol. 1, p. 94 F.N.).

examination,⁹ his father decided to give Narendra in marriage to a girl of his choice. There was also the tempting offer of a large dowry that might enable Narendra to go to England to take his I.C.S. Examination. Narendra stubbornly refused, for he apprehended that marriage might deter his spiritual progress. Since his adolescence two contrasting visions of life—one of the worldly life of comfort, ease and luxury, and the other of a mendicant's life of renunciation and pursuit of Truth tossed his mind, particularly before he went to sleep at night. The latter, however, used to dominate. It gradually formed into a strong urge in him for realizing the Truth, and he became restless to find out the way for the same. Ramachandra Dutta came to his help and suggested, 'If you have a real desire to realize God, then come to the Master at Dakshineswar instead of visiting the Brahmo Samaj and other places'.¹⁰

9. According to '*Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smriti Katha*' (Bengali), 2nd edition, p. 101, Narendra was visiting Dakshineswar frequently. Latu met Narendra at the latter's residence on the day following Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, i.e. on February 20, 1882. Latu said, 'Yesterday there was great festivity at Dakshineswar. Why did you not go, dear? He (Sri Ramakrishna) inquired of you repeatedly. Please accompany me to Dakshineswar. He wants to see you'.

Naren : 'I have no time to visit him now. The examination is knocking at the door. How can I spare time for the mad Brahmin?' Here the 'examination' perhaps refers to internal examination held at the college. By this time Narendra must have visited Dakshineswar several times. It also agrees with the fact that Narendra's first visit to Dakshineswar took place soon after the F.A. Examination. The examination was held for five days commencing from November 28, 1881.

10. *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 715. On hearing this persuasive advice, Narendra requested his uncle Jnan to visit the saint of Dakshineswar. The latter complied with his request and reported back to the effect that the so-called Paramahansa of Dakshineswar was but a mad-cap. This view of Akshay Kumar Sen

Whether it was Rev. Hastie, Ramachandra Dutta, Surendranath Mitra or some other person who urged Narendra to visit Dakshineswar, it was, nonetheless, the young man's spiritual fire, profound thirst for Truth and above all the chain of circumstances that drove him to take refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. According to Bhuvaneswari Devi 'it was Ramachandra who brought Naren to Ramakrishna'.¹¹ But some of his biographers hold that Surendranath invited Narendra to accompany him to Dakshineswar and the latter accepted the offer. One day he along with two or three friends of his accompanied Surendranath in his horse carriage to Dakshineswar.¹² What

in his '*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*', p. 328-29 does not find support from any other author.

11. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Swami Vivekananda, Patriot Prophet—A Study*, Calcutta, 1954, p. 155.

12. According to Gurudas Burman, Narendra went to Dakshineswar in the company of Ramachandra Dutta alone. Baikunthanath Sanyal, too, holds the same view (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* [Bengali], 2nd edition, p. 286). Girish Chandra Ghosh also holds this view (Girish Chandra Ghosh, '*Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda*', *Udbodhan*, vol. 7, 15 Magh, 1311 B.S.).

Bnt, Akshay Kumar Sen claims that Narendra went to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar in the company of Surendranath Mitra alone.

Manomohan Mitra wrote in *Tattwamanjari* (quoted in *Bhakta Manomohan*, Bengali, published by Udbodhan, Calcutta, p. 78) 'In the month of Pous (December-January) 1881, the devotees Ramachandra Dutta, Surendranath Mitra, Narendranath Dutta and this humble servant went to Dakshineswar in a carriage'. Thereafter he describes how Narendra was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna by Ramachandra Dutta.

Swami Suddhananda's diary, a major source material of Swami Vivekananda's biography, gives a completely different account. He writes that Narendra first visited Dakshineswar in the company of Hemali, a common acquaintance of his and Rakhal, and several other young men. They went in a hired boat. They paid the boatmen four annas as fare for the trip. Rakhal had already visited Sri Ramakrishna several times and he served as the guide of the party. According to this account, however, this was Narendra's

is definite is that the historic event took place one winter afternoon in the month of December, 1881.¹³

There was Sri Ramakrishna, 45, who had discovered through a series of intensive experiments the wonderful truth that the paths of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam lead to the same goal, God, who is called by different names in different religions. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that economic life, social life, or aesthetic life can be secured only when human life is anchored on the spiritual ideal. People were charmed at his simplicity of manners and humility. Such was his spiritual power that just by a touch, or simply by a look, by a

second meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, the first one being at Surendranath's. Again, this tallies satisfactorily with Swami Saradananda's description that the party entered Sri Ramakrishna's room through the western door. Those who used to come by carriage or on foot from Calcutta used to enter through the eastern door. The northern door was enclosed by bamboo screen against northern wind.

While Swami Saradananda holds the view that Narendranath's first visit to Dakshineswar was his second meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, 'M' (in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 981) records the following conversation :

'M': 'You must remember vividly your first visit to him'.

Narendranath : 'Yes, it was at the temple garden at Dakshineswar, in his own room. That day I sang two songs'.

However, the statement found in the *Bengali Gospel*, vol. 5, Appendix 1, that 'Three years earlier (1882) Narendranath in the company of a few Brahmo friends of his came to see Sri Ramakrishna and stayed there overnight', perhaps refers to some subsequent visit. Nonetheless, it is evident that 'M' was not present on the occasion of Narendranath's first meeting.

13. *The Gospel*, p. 1017, mentions that Narendranath, Rakhal, Kedar joined in the annual festival of Simla Brahmo Samaj, held on January 1, 1882 at the house of Jnan Chowdhury. It has been recorded also 'Narendranath had met the Master only a few days before at the temple garden at Dakshineswar. He used to participate now and then in the worship at the Simla Brahmo Samaj and sing for the congregation'.

word or by a wish he could transform their lives. His method of unfolding individual aspirant's religious potential along the path best suited for him was unique. About him Narendranath said later, 'All my life I have not seen another man like that, and I have travelled all over the world. When I think of that man, I feel like a fool, because I want to read books and he never did. He never wanted to lick the plates after other people had eaten. That is why he was his own book'.¹⁴ In another context he said, 'Those lips never cursed anyone, never even criticized anyone. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil, that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good'. To him 'Sri Ramakrishna is a force. You should not think that his doctrine is this or that. But he is a power ... working in the world'.¹⁵ This was the person that young Narendranath came to meet.

It may be presumed that Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the small couch in his room. He was dressed in a red-bordered ordinary dhoti. Very likely he had put on his usual winter garment, a green coloured moleskin shawl bordered with red. A man of medium height, he was thin to emaciation and of extremely delicate health. The slightly veiled eyes and the short beard he wore could hardly give a visitor the impression that an extraordinary personality lay hidden behind them. He had a bewitching smile. His rustic Bengali spoken with a slight though delightful stammer held his listeners spell-bound.

Sri Ramakrishna recounted Narendranath's visit in the following words.

Naren entered this room on the first day through the western door (facing the Ganga). I noticed that he took no care of his body; the hair of his head and his dress were not at all trim; like

14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 6, p. 64.

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5, p. 269.

others, he had no desire at all for any external objects; he was, as it were, unattached to anything. His eyes indicated that a major part of his mind was perforce drawn ever inward. When I saw all these, I wondered, 'Is it possible that such a great spiritual aspirant possessing a superabundance of *Sattva*, should live in Calcutta, the home of worldly people? There was a mat spread on the floor; I asked him to sit down. He sat down near the jar of Ganga water. A few acquaintances of his also came with him that day.... On enquiry, I came to know that he learnt two or three Bengali songs only. I asked him to sing them. He began singing the Brahmo song, 'O mind, come, let us go home' ¹⁶

16. According to Swami Suddhananda's diary, Sri Ramakrishna recognized Narendra to have seen him at Surendra Mitra's. He said to Narendra, 'I wish much to hear you sing. That day you sang. They were pleasant to listen to'. In those days he knew classical songs in Hindi and a few devotional songs composed by the Brahmos.

Swami Nikhilananda's translation of the Bengali song composed by Ayodhyanath Pakrashi runs like this :

Let us go back, once more, O, mind, to our own abode !

Here in this foreign land of earth

Why should we wonder aimlessly in stranger's guise?

These living beings round about, and the five elements,

Are strangers to you, all of them; none is your own.

Why do you thus forget yourself,

In love with strangers, O my mind?

Why do you thus forget your own ! etc.
(vide, *The Gospel*, p. 981).

According to Narendra's own narration as found in the *Gospel*, p. 982, he also sang another song composed by Becharam Chatterjee. It runs as follows :

O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?

Down the path of hope I gaze with longing, day and night.

Thou art the Lord of all the worlds, and I but a beggar here.

How can I ask of Thee to come and dwell within my heart?

My poor heart's humble cottage door is standing open wide;

Be gracious, Lord, and enter there but once, and quench its thirst !

As if in meditation he sang it with the whole of his mind and heart. When I heard it, I could not control myself and was in ecstasy.¹⁷

As his mind descended to normal consciousness Sri Ramakrishna with a radiant smile lighting his face, said, 'Behold ! how Naren beams with the light of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning !'¹⁸ Those present in the room were surprised at these words but could hardly appreciate their import. On being questioned by the Master, Narendra replied that every night as he closed his eyes to sleep he saw a ball of light between his eye-brows. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted and observed that it indicated Narendra's inborn capacity for meditation on the transcendental Self.

Here is Swami Vivekananda's own account of what happened then.

Shortly after, he suddenly stood up, and taking me by the hand, led me on to the northern verandah. It was winter and the open spaces between the pillars were covered with bamboo mat screens to keep out the cold northern wind. Therefore, on entering the covered verandah, when the door leading to the verandah was closed, he could not be seen by anyone from within the room or from the other side of the verandah. As soon as the Master entered the covered verandah he closed the door behind us. I thought he might perhaps give me some instruction in private. But what he said and did next was beyond my comprehension. All on a sudden he caught hold of my hand and began shedding

17. From *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 716.

18. The 'Life of Swami Vivekananda' has put this episode after Sri Ramakrishna had fed Narendra sweets, etc. We have followed here the sequence followed in the diary of Swami Suddhananda.

According to Manomohan Mitra's account in *Tattwamanjari*, Narendra sang only the song, 'Fix your mind in the One Ancient Person without blemish', etc. The song transported Sri Ramakrishna into ecstasy and his face beamed with joy. The *Gospel*, p. 535, however, corroborates the fact that Narendra sang the two above quoted songs.

profuse tears of joy. He addressed me very tenderly, as if I were somebody familiar to him for a long time, 'Ah! is it nice that you should come so late? Why have you been so unkind as to make me wait all these days? My ears are tired of hearing the futile talks of worldly people. Oh, I thought I would burst, not having found anyone to whom I could communicate my inner experiences.' And so he went like that all the time raving and weeping. The next moment he stood before me with folded palms showing me the respect due to a divine being and addressed me, 'Lord, I know that you are the ancient sage Nara,¹⁹ the incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to take away the sufferings and sorrows of mankind'.²⁰

I was altogether taken aback by his conduct—I was startled. 'What is this I have come to see', I thought, 'He must be stark mad! Why, I am but the son of Viswanath Dutta, and yet he dares address me thus!' However, I kept quiet and then let the madman talk. The next moment he asked me to wait there and brought some butter, candy and sandesh from the room and began to feed me with his own hand. He paid no heed to my repeated requests to give them to me so that I might share them with my companions saying, 'They will get some later. You

please eat these yourself.' Saying so he fed me all these delicacies and said, 'Promise me that you will come back soon to see me alone'. Unable to evade his importune request, I had to say, 'Yes'. I returned with Sri Ramakrishna to the common parlour and sat down beside my companions.²¹

Narendra quietly sat watching Sri Ramakrishna minutely but could not find anything abnormal in Sri Ramakrishna's words, demeanour or behaviour towards others. On the other hand, his illuminative talk and ecstasy suggested that he was truly a man of renunciation and there was a marked consistency between precept and practice in his life. He spoke lucidly about renunciation.

Suddenly it struck Narendra, 'Can this man be a great teacher?' He crept near to Sri Ramakrishna and asked him the challenging question which he had already asked various religious men.

'Do you believe in God, Sir?'

'Yes'.

'Have you seen God, Sir?'

'Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in an intenser sense. And if you want to see, you too can see Him.'^{21a}

Sri Ramakrishna continued,

God can be seen and spoken with, just as I am seeing you and speaking with you, but who wants to do so? People grieve and shed potfuls of tears at the death of their wives and sons and behave in the same way for the sake of money and property, but who does so because he cannot realize God? If anyone is really equally anxious to see Him and calls on Him, He will certainly reveal Himself to him.²²

Narendra could not but believe that Sri Ramakrishna was saying then like a divinely

¹⁹. During Narendra's third visit to Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance and touched Narendra and the latter lost all outward consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'When Narendra had lost his normal consciousness I asked him that day many questions, such as who he was, where he came from, why he was born, how long he would be in this world and so on and so forth. Entering into the depth of his being, he gave proper answers to all these questions. These answers of his confirmed what I thought and saw and knew in my vision about him. It is forbidden to say all these things'. (*Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 736).

²⁰. Truly Romain Rolland comments that in the first few words Sri Ramakrishna spoke to Narendra 'he settled for Vivekananda the duty of social service, to which he was to devote his life'. (*The Life of Ramakrishna*, by Romain Rolland, footnote on p. 250).

According to the *Gospel*, p. 981, Sri Ramakrishna during the third meeting with Narendra and Narendra's second visit to Dakshineswar praised him as if he were God. He said to him, 'O Narayana, you have assumed this body for my sake', etc.

²¹. *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Līlāprasāṅga*, vol. 5, pp. 68-70.

^{21a}. Swami Vivekananda's lecture on 'My Master', vide *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 4, p. 179. The last portion of this dialogue is from Gurudas Burman, p. 212.

²². *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 718.

inspired man from the depths of his realization. Recounting later its impact he said,

That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality, to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world.²³

Nevertheless, Naren could hardly reconcile the picture before his eyes of this unostentatiously simple and serene man with his strange conduct he had just witnessed. He was tempted to conclude that Sri Ramakrishna must be a monomaniac, and even thought that perhaps he himself had been subjected to a trick of hypnotism or mesmerism by the old man. However, he said to himself, 'He may be a madman but only a fortunate few can have such renunciation. Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverential homage of mankind'. Nursing such conflicting thoughts, he managed to bow before Sri Ramakrishna and begged his leave to return to Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna took hold of him and said endearingly, 'Come again, won't you, please? I feel greatly anxious for you. Will you come again?' Narendra could not resist saying 'I shall try, sir'.

Sri Ramakrishna had already made an assessment of Narendranath. He later described Narendra as a *nityasiddha*, *Iśwara-koti*, etc. In his characteristic way he spoke of Narendra as a thousand-petalled lotus. 'Others are pots and jugs. Narendra is a huge water-barrel. Among fishes he is the huge, red-eyed carp, others are small varieties of fish.... He is like the male pigeon who, if held by its beaks, forcibly breaks away from you.... I feel strong, when he is with me in a gathering'. He was never tired of pointing out the superiority of his gen-

ius, nor of foretelling his great future. He himself used to test his disciples through secular and spiritual means and would ask them, 'Test me as money-lenders test their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly'. As Sri Ramakrishna saw in him the 'future great man', he accorded him the highest place among his disciples.²⁴ He publicly placed the recognized fame of Keshab Chandra Sen below the potential greatness of Narendra, who had accomplished nothing as yet. Narendra however, did not feel flattered by what he regarded as the saint's exaggerated estimate of his potentialities.

Narendra returned home but was at a loss to make a definite estimate of Sri Ramakrishna. His philosophical and scientific thinking had received a severe jolt. In his next visit to the saint, which took place almost a month later, Narendra was determined to assess the 'real nature and power of the strange individual'. However, as Sri Ramakrishna drew near him in an ecstatic mood, muttered some words and placed his right foot on his body, he was swept off by a powerful spiritual experience. He saw 'with eyes open, that all the things of the room together with the walls were rapidly whirling and receding into an unknown region and my I-ness together with the whole universe was, as it were, going to vanish in an all-devouring great void'.²⁵ He cried out in consternation. Sri Ramakrishna laughed, stroked his chest and brought him back to normal consciousness. On his way to his home Narendra mused, 'How can a man who shatters to pieces a resolute and strong mind like mine be dismissed as a lunatic?' He determined to be more careful next time.

But he did not fare better even during his

²³. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5, p. 179.

²⁴. Swami Ramakrishnananda: *Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission*, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1955, p. 46.

²⁵. *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 737.

third visit. Sri Ramakrishna walked with Narendra for some time in the adjacent garden of Jadunath Mallick. In the parlour Sri Ramakrishna went into an ecstatic trance and touched him. Narendra completely lost his external consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna asked him many questions regarding Narendra's past, his mission in the world, his span of life in the world. About this incident Sri Ramakrishna later on said, 'Entering into depth of his being he gave proper answers to all these questions. These answers of his proved what I thought and saw and knew in my visions about him'.²⁶ He learnt also that Narendra was a great sage who had attained perfection in meditation, and the day he recognized his true self he would give up his body through yoga. The effect of this mystic experience lingered with him almost for a month, like an intoxication.

What, however, drew Narendra irresistibly to the Master was the latter's unbounded love. He later admitted that Sri Ramakrishna had bound him over to him by his love. His intense love for others and deep concern for others' welfare distinguished all his activities and to Narendra he appeared as love personified. After the Master's passing Swami Vivekananda once wrote: 'Sri Ramakrishna has no peer; nowhere else in this world exists that unprecedented perfection, that wonderful kindness for all that does not stop to justify itself, that intense sympathy for men in bondage'.²⁷ So overjoyed Sri Ramakrishna used to be at times at the sight of Narendra that he would pass into *samadhi*, saying 'There he is—Na—'. Sri Ramakrishna would feed him with his own hands. Sri Ramakrishna lovingly called

him 'Śukadeva'.²⁸ Anxious to bequeath his own spiritual treasure to his heir-elect as early as possible, Sri Ramakrishna trained him in many ways and granted him several deep spiritual experiences.

However, despite these convincing experiences and demonstration of the incomprehensible power of Sri Ramakrishna, and in spite of the Master's immeasurable love for him, Narendra had considerable difficulty in fully accepting him as a world teacher. He never abdicated his reason for a moment. He would accept nothing that could not be rigorously tested by reason. When asked by the Master, Narendra would bluntly say, 'A thousand persons may look upon you as an *avatāra*, but I will refuse to do so until I am convinced about it'. Sri Ramakrishna was not annoyed in the least for he knew truth will triumph in the end.

The transformation of Narendranath from an apparently unbelieving youth into an ardent believer in the prophethood of Sri Ramakrishna and the torch-bearer of his master's message to the world is, according to his biographers, a guarded secret of Swami Vivekananda's inner life. It no doubt involved stupendous spiritual struggles and manifold spiritual experiences. The outcome of this transformation was a new revelation to the world, the dawn of a new Age. So closely connected are the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna with those of Swami Vivekananda that Sister Nivedita wrote about them in her book *The Master as I saw Him*:

It was said to me lately by one of the older generation that 'Ramakrishna had lived for the making of Vivekananda'. Is it indeed so? Or is it not rather impossible to distinguish with such fixity between one part and another, in a single mighty utterances of the Divine Mother—

26. *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 740.

27. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 6, p. 231.

28. Mahendranath Dutta, *Sri Sri Ramakrishner Anudhyāna* (Bengali), published by Mahendra Publication Committee, Calcutta 700 006, 1st Edition, p. 83.

heart? Often it appears to me, in studying all these lives, that there has been with us a soul named Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, and that, in the penumbra of his being, appear many forms, some of which are with us still, and of more of whom it could be said with entire truth that here

ends, in relation to him, the sphere of those of others, or that there begins his own.²⁹

29. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1967), vol. 1, p. 68.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF A JUST SOCIETY

SWAMI SIDDHINATHANANDA

The word 'Society' may mean a human community or the entire body of mankind. Either way, society is composed of men. Man is the primary unit of society. But any collection of individuals does not make a society. It must have a set pattern and a code of conduct to regulate the relation among its members. Here comes the question of justice. Justice means righteousness, uprightness, fairness, etc. So a just society is one wherein the mutual relations of its members are guided and regulated by justice. In a small group, this may be practicable to some extent; but in the vast mass of mankind is it a practicable proposition? Is it not Utopian? It may be Utopian, but it is worthwhile to have it, for mankind must have a noble ideal to strive for. If no such ideal is kept in view, it will be the jungle law, and not human law, that will prevail among mankind. Trains may run late, but can any train run without a timetable? Rules may be observed more in their breach, yet society cannot survive without certain regulatory rules. So, even as a Utopian ideal there must be the conception of a just society. The point of our discussion here is, what could be the true foundation of a just society?

Where do we begin, at the individual end or the social end? Evidently at the individual end, because the individual is the starting point. The personality of man has three levels: the animal, the human and the

divine. In common with the sub-human creatures, man is naturally interested in preserving and perpetuating his life. At this level, he is not far removed from the quadrupeds. But endowed as he is with the power of thinking, he soon finds that for his very survival he has to depend on others. He learns that unbridled selfishness is suicidal. He has certain basic needs like food, clothes, shelter and family to live and multiply. The objects of enjoyment exist in limited quantities but man's greed is unlimited. Therefore a workable adjustment with other individuals becomes indispensable. At least a sort of non-aggression pact must prevail in society for each individual's survival. The posture of confrontation cannot continue for long, for it causes constant anxiety. So men developed certain social rules. These social rules are only a form of organized selfishness. They cannot withstand the stress and strain of self-interest. It is only the fear of retaliation that actually keeps each man in check. Prison, police, and penal codes are only the organized forms of collective retaliation. Governments function at this level.

However, this is not the whole truth about human society. Man has a spiritual dimension too. He has an innate conception of goodness and freedom. This he derives from his divine essence. Only when he becomes aware of his true spiritual essence does he deserve to be called man. Every-

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: BALARAM BOSE

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Balaram Bose (1842-1890) came of a wealthy family of devout Vaiṣṇavas. His father, Radharaman Bose, used to spend most of his time in the repetition of God's name. He owned much property in Orissa and had built temples to Radhakrishna in Kothar, Vrindavan, and other places, establishing free guest-houses as well. Balaram inherited his father's devotion to God and dispassion towards worldly life. He entrusted the management of his estate and other property to his cousins and remained satisfied with what they gave him as monthly allowance. Prior to his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna he had been at Puri, where he had lived more than eleven years, spending his time, despite the responsibilities to his wife and children, in the repetition of God's name and in holy company, and visiting daily the temple of Jagannāth. His father and cousins had become greatly concerned lest Balaram should renounce worldly life, and had persuaded him to live in the house at 57, Ramkanta Basu Street, Calcutta, purchased by his cousin Hariballav.

The thought of being deprived of the company of holy men and of his daily visit to the temple of Jagannāth made him feel dejected, no doubt.¹ Nevertheless he accepted the proposal, for it suited his predilection at the time. While in Puri he had read in the papers conducted by Keshab Chandra Sen about Ramakrishna Paramahansa and felt a desire to see him. Having written to Ramdayal, a young Brahmin who lived at the Boses' Calcutta residence and who had

visited Sri Ramakrishna several times, he received a reply after ten weeks.² The picture of the Saint of Dakshineswar given by Ramdayal fascinated Balaram so much that he readily accepted the former's suggestion of visiting the Saint soon. He hurried to Calcutta and started for Dakshineswar the very next day. It seems he had intended to go back to Puri after a short stay. But he did not return, or rather he could not. That however is a later part of the story, the beginning of which we are going to narrate here.

It was very probably the first day of the year of 1881.³ Balaram left for Dakshineswar in the company of Ramdayal.⁴ When they reached Dakshineswar it was late afternoon. It was not difficult to find out Sri Ramakrishna for he was then playing host, entertaining Keshab Chandra Sen and a large number of Brahmo devotees.

Keshab had arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon. A *kīrtan* (devotional singing) was arranged. Keshab and others joined it. No doubt Sri Ramakrishna was the centre of attraction. The party started from the

² Akshay Kumar Sen : *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Punthi* (Bengali), p. 272.

³ If we scrutinize the conversation between Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab as recorded in *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Punthi* (5th Ed.), p. 273, particularly the story of the 'fish-wife in a flower garden', we find its close similarity with the proceedings of January 1, 1881, as recorded in: 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1947) pp. 1003-06. If we accept these records of *Punthi* and the *Gospel* (appendix) as dependable, we can safely conclude that Balaram's first visit took place on January 1, 1881.

⁴ Gurudas Burman : *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇacarit* (Bengali), p. 264.

¹ Swami Saradananda : *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (tr. by Swami Jagadananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 4, 1956), p. 859; and Baikunthanath Sanyal : *Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Līlāmṛita* (Bengali), p. 355.

Panchavati and soon moved towards Sri Ramakrishna's room. Hriday blew the horn, Gopidas played the drum, and two devotees played the cymbals. Sri Ramakrishna danced vigorously and went into *samādhi*. Regaining consciousness of the outer world, he sat down in his room and began to talk with Keshab and others. The audience heard with rapt attention the Master's words :

'One should cry for God that way, like a child. That is what it means to be restless for God. One doesn't enjoy play or food any longer. After one's experiences of the world are over, one feels this restlessness and weeps for God.'⁵

It was about this time, or perhaps a little earlier, that Balaram and his companion entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. It was twilight. The room was crowded, and some people were standing outside. Balaram bowed low to the ground, and took the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet. Sri Ramakrishna returned his visitor's greeting. Of fair complexion and medium stature, Balaram had a beard and wore his clothes like a Bengali, but on his head was a white turban tied after the fashion of the Sikhs.⁶ He was about thirtynine. His great humility, sweet manners, and smiling face were indicative of the rich qualities of his heart. As was his nature,⁷ he quietly seated himself in one corner of the room. It is very likely that Ramdayal introduced Balaram to Sri Ramakrishna at some opportune moment.

Sri Ramakrishna at once recognized him as a person destined by the Divine Mother to be a close devotee whose arrival he was long awaiting. Later Sri Ramakrishna said

⁵ *The Gospel*, p. 1005.

⁶ *Punthi*, p. 271.

⁷ A typical picture of Balaram has been painted by M' in the *Gospel*, p. 18: 'When the music was over, the devotees sat down for their meal. Balaram stood there humbly, like a servant. Nobody would have taken him for the master of the house,'

about Balaram, 'He is a devotee of the inner circle of the great lord, Sri Chaitanya. He belongs to this place (meaning himself). I witnessed in ecstasy how the great lord Chaitanya, together with the revered souls Advaita and Nityananda, brought about a flood of Hari's name in the country and inebriated a number of men, women and children by means of Sankirtan sung by a wonderful party in which I saw him (Balaram).'⁸ Since this vision Balaram's face, serenely bright with the light of devotion, was imprinted for ever on Sri Ramakrishna's memory.⁸ Therefore it was not difficult for him to recognize Balaram now.⁹

Sri Ramakrishna was then about fortyfive years old. With his smiling face, beaming with the joy of God-inebriation, he stole Balaram's heart at first sight, causing in it a strong stir, the reason for which Balaram hardly knew. He instinctively felt Sri Ramakrishna to be his very own. His sweet words fascinated him tremendously. In the meantime Balaram took some time off to look at the famous Brahmo leader Keshab, whom he found sitting quietly, listening to the words of Sri Ramakrishna with wonder in his eyes.

After a while Hridayram announced that it was time for the guests to partake of the *prasāda* (consecrated food) of the Goddess Kālī. Sri Ramakrishna, too, requested Keshab and others to take their seats which

⁸ *The Great Master*, pp. 813-4, 645.

⁹ On Balaram's second visit to Dakshineswar, which took place the next morning, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Well, the Mother told me that you are my own, that you are one of the suppliers of needs (*rasaddārs*) of the Mother. Many things for this place are stored up there at your house. Purchase some things and send them here.' (Gurudas Burman : op. cit., p. 197.) Swami Saradananda remarked, 'We do not remember the Master to have ever mentioned Balaram to be one of the suppliers of his provision. But the privilege of his service which we have seen appeared to us to be very extraordinary.' (*The Great Master*, p. 646).

had been placed on the eastern veranda adjacent to the Master's room. Keshab and other invitees gradually went there.

Now Sri Ramakrishna beckoned Balaram to come close to him and said, 'Now tell me what you have to say.'

Balaram asked, 'Sir, does God exist?'

'Surely, God does exist,' came the prompt reply.

'Then, can one have His vision?'

'God reveals Himself to the devotee who thinks of Him as his nearest and dearest. Because you do not get response by praying to Him once, you must not conclude that He does not exist. Because stars cannot be seen in sunlight, would you say that no stars exist during the day?'

Balaram humbly submitted, 'Why do I not find Him then, even after so much of prayer?'

Sri Ramakrishna smilingly said, 'Well, do you pray to God with the same kind of intimate relationship with Him, as one has with one's children and grandchildren?'

The simple-minded Balaram confessed, 'No, sir, I don't think I have ever taken Him as my nearest and dearest.'

Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Pray to God, thinking of Him as dearer than your very self. I assure you, He is much attached to His devotees. He comes to a man even before He is sought. If the devotee goes one step towards Him, He advances towards the devotee by ten steps. There is none more intimate and affectionate than God.'¹⁰

Balaram had never before heard God spoken of so convincingly. Every word of Sri Ramakrishna seemed true to him. Though he had done spiritual practices for many years, he had not done them with any such intensity of feeling. Balaram saw a new light in Sri Ramakrishna's words.

Spiritual life of a new dimension dawned on him.

Balaram along with others sat for the feast given by Sri Ramakrishna. The guests were served on leaf-plates, first with puffed rice, coconut, ginger etc.; then with *luchi* and various kinds of curries; and finally with curd and sweets. Sri Ramakrishna himself supervised the sumptuous dinner to the great merriment of all. Jadu Mallick, one of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees, bore the expenses.¹¹

Dinner over, Sri Ramakrishna went to the Panchavati with Keshab and other devotees and engaged himself again in religious discourses. About eleven o'clock the Brahmo devotees became anxious to go home, and, after a little more conversation, took leave of Sri Ramakrishna.

Balaram prostrated himself at Sri Ramakrishna's feet before he took leave. Sri Ramakrishna told him endearingly, 'Come again, please.' Balaram left for home, but left behind his mind, as it were, at Dakshineswar. So much enchanted was he with the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna that he hurried back to Dakshineswar the very next morning.

Balaram soon became absorbed with thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna:

'Keeping the Master's company, Balaram underwent wonderful transformations as he went forward in the spiritual realm with a rapid step. Going beyond the limit of external worship and other kinds of ritualistic devotion enjoined by the scriptures, he could, in a short time, live in the world completely reliant on God and able to discriminate the Real from the unreal. Offering his all—his own life, his wife, son, wealth, etc., at His lotus feet and living like a servant of His in His world, ever ready to carry out His commands, Balaram came to have

(Continued on p. 273)

¹⁰ This dialogue is after Gurudas Burman: op. cit., pp. 195-6.

¹¹ Punthi, p. 273.

will understand? Only Sri Ramakrishna understood. Glory to Ramakrishna!

Swamiji: All at the *Math* take great care of me.

Nag Mahashaya: It will be to their good if they do it, whether they know it or not. If proper attention is not paid to your body, then the chances are that it will fall off.

Swamiji: Nag Mahashaya, I do not fully understand whether what I am doing is right or not. At particular times I feel a great inclination to work in a certain direction, and I work according to that. Whether it is for good or evil, I cannot understand.

Nag Mahashaya: Well, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The treasure is now locked.'—Therefore he does not let you know fully. The moment you know it, your play of human life will be at an end.

Swamiji was pondering something with steadfast gaze. Then Swami Premananda brought some *prasāda* for Nag Mahashaya who was ecstatic with joy.

Shortly after, Nag Mahashaya found Swamiji slowly digging the ground with a spade near the pond, and held him by the hand saying, 'When we are present, why should you do that?' Swamiji, leaving the spade, walked about the garden talking the while, and began to narrate to a disciple:

'After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away we heard one day that Nag Mahashaya lay fasting in his humble tiled lodgings in Calcutta. Swami Turiyananda, I, and another went together and appeared at Nag Mahashaya's cottage. Seeing us he rose from his bed. We said, "We shall have our *bhikṣā* (food) here today." At once Nag Mahashaya brought rice, cooking pot, fuel, etc. from the bazaar and began to cook. We thought that we would eat and make Nag Mahashaya also eat. Cooking over, he gave the food to us; we set apart something for him and then sat down to eat. After this, we requested him to take food; he at once broke the pot of rice and striking his forehead began to say, "Shall I give food to the body in which God has not been realized?" Seeing this we were struck with amazement. Later on after much persuasion we induced him to take some food and then returned.'

Swamiji: Will Nag Mahashaya stay in the *Math* tonight?

Disciple: No, he has some work; he must return today.

Swamiji: Then look for a boat. It is getting dark.

When the boat came, the disciple and Nag Mahashaya saluted Swamiji and started for Calcutta.

(Continued from p. 270)

only one aim in life, namely, to live in the holy company of the Master as much as possible.¹²

Sri Ramakrishna visited his house at 57, Ramkanta Basu Street, more than one hundred times.¹³ This was definitely more than he visited any other house in Calcutta. If Dakshineswar temple could be called the

'fort of Kali the Mother', as Sri Ramakrishna sometimes jokingly called it, Balaram's residence could be called 'Her second fort'. Not only Balaram but all the members of his family were 'strung to the same tune', according to Sri Ramakrishna.¹⁴

the chief centre of the Master's ministration! What a number of devotees he has attracted here and with what love he has tied them together. And how he dances and sings with them as did Sri Chaitanya, who opened a veritable fair of love in the courtyard of Srivasa.'

¹⁴ *The Great Master*, p. 648.

¹² *The Great Master*, p. 814

¹³ Balaram Bose recorded the visits on the pages of the almanac; see Baikunthanath Sanyal: op. cit., p. 358. 'M' in *The Gospel*, p. 700, has observed, 'Blessed is Balaram! Your home has today become