



# SAMVIT

[ Knowledge that leads to enlightenment ]



Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076  
Special Number : Dakshineswar  
No. 11, March 1985

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**COVER PHOTO :** The entire frontage of the Dakshineswar temple garden, from the *nahabat* in the extreme south to the pine grove at the northern end.

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# SAMVIT

स ती बुद्ध्या युजया संयुतव्तु ।

May He endow us with good thoughts.

*Shvetashvatara Upanishad III. 4*

## Universal Prayers

समच्छ्रयं सवदयं स वा समसि ज्ञाननाम् ।  
समातां मन्त्रं समितिं समानां समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम् ।  
समानां च प्राकृतिं समानां हृदयानि चः ।  
समानमस्तु वा मना यथा चः सुमहावति ॥

May you gather together; may you communicate with one another. Let your minds understand one another. Common be your prayer and common be the purpose of your assembly. May you have a common will and may your deliberations be common. May you be united in your intentions and feelings. May you have common thoughts so that there may be union amongst you.

*Rig Veda X.cant. 24.*



## REFLECTIONS

### An Intervention

IT WAS the year 1847. Rani Rasmani, a wealthy and powerful land-owner of Calcutta, who was deeply devoted to Mother Kali, decided to go on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. She had an intense desire to offer special devotions to Vishwanath Shiva and to the Divine Mother in the form of Annapurna.

In those days there was no railway between Calcutta and Varanasi and it was more comfortable for the rich to make the journey by boat. So the Rani planned to travel with her entourage by boat. We are told that her convoy of twenty-four boats got ready with provisions for six months. There were seven boats for food and other supplies, one for herself, three for her three daughters and their families, two for the guards, two for the servants, four for the other relatives and friends, two for her estate officials, one for the washerman, one for four cows, and one for fodder. So the Rani with her immediate family and distant relatives, cooks and servants got ready for the arduous voyage up the river Ganga. Now the arrangements were complete; early the next morning, at an auspicious moment, the pilgrims would start from Calcutta.

The devout Rani Rasmani's mind had reached a climax of fervour and delight at the prospect of the holy pilgrimage. But that night, the night before the journey, Mother Kali intervened. She appeared to the Rani in a dream. 'There is no need to go to Kashi', She said. 'Install my image in a beautiful spot on the bank of the Ganga and arrange for my daily worship and food offering; I shall manifest myself in the image and accept your worship daily.'

The next morning the Rani gave orders to cancel the pilgrimage. All the piled up food and provisions were distributed among the poor and needy. All the money meant for the journey was now put aside for the holy undertaking of building a temple. The inscrutable way of Providence was accepted by the Rani with full devotion and humility, for had not the intervention come from her Chosen Ideal, Mother Kali? Did she not engrave on the official seal of her estate, and thus proclaim to the world that she was श्रीरासमणिदासी-कालीपद-प्रभिलाषिणी 'Sri Rasmani Dasi whose only desire is to attain the feet of Kali'?

The *Brahma Sutras* of Sri Badarayana (III.ii. 1 and 5) tell us that in the dream state there is real creation and that some dreams have a prophetic quality. This is confirmed by the Upanishads as well as by

those who have mystical experiences, as in Rani Rasmani's case. Just as in the waking state a person is in actual contact with the material world of the senses, in the dream state mystics perceive Reality and experience the grace of God through the consciousness of their elevated minds.

#### A Dream Comes True

Accepting Mother Kali's instructions in the dream, the Rani started an intensive and extensive search for a place on the Ganga where a temple could be built. On the eastern bank of the Ganga, in the village of Dakshineswar, was found available a plot of land measuring twenty acres. To quote Sri Ramakrishna's words: 'A part of the piece of land selected by the Rani at Dakshineswar belonged to an Englishman. In the other part of the land there was an abandoned Muslim burial ground, associated with the memory of a Mohammedan holy man. The piece of land had the shape of the back of a tortoise. Such a burial ground, according to the Tantras, is very commendable for the installation of Shakti and Her *sadhana*. Therefore, as if guided by Providence, the Rani chose this piece of land.'

The construction of the temple started in 1847. The building of such a huge temple-complex would have taken years and years but the Rani felt compelled to install the image without delay. Every holy act is to be done with great piety and humility and the Rani personally underwent all austere rituals and spent her days in prayer and vigil to see her dream fulfilled. Again, quoting Sri Ramakrishna's words: 'The Rani practised severe austerities according to the Shastras from the day on which the making of the *devi's* image began; she bathed three times a day, ate Havishyanna, lay on the ground, practised *japa*, worship and so on, according to her capacity. When the temple was built and the image made, an auspicious day was going to be leisurely fixed for the installation; and the image was kept packed in a box lest it should be damaged. But it suddenly perspired for some reason or other and the Rani got the command in a dream, "How long will you keep me confined this way? I feel suffocated; install me as soon as possible." No sooner had she received that instruction than the Rani became flurried and had the almanac consulted to find an auspicious day. But, as no such day could be found before the Snanayatra, she resolved to perform the installation on that day.'

On Thursday, 31 May 1855, the day of the Snanayatra, the deity was installed. The Rani's austere *sadhana* ended; her Mother's



command had been obeyed. But her aspiration and Bhakti reached the highest culmination when a man of great devotion, learning and purity, Ramkumar Chattopadhyay, agreed to become the chief priest in the temple. The story that followed is well-known, how Ramkumar lived only a year more to serve the deity, how his mantle fell on his younger brother, Gadadhar, now known the world over as Sri Ramakrishna. In the course of time, Sri Sarada Devi, his wife and the first of his disciples, came to stay there. Due to the presence of these two unique souls in the Dakshineswar Kali temple, it afterwards became a famous place of pilgrimage.

It was in Dakshineswar that the flame of the Eternal Dharma was shielded from destructive winds by the vigilant hands of Sri Ramakrishna, and where, as Swami Vivekananda said, he lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence of India. We hope that through this effort in *Samvit* the people of today and tomorrow may see and know that here on earth is a spot where there was a full manifestation of the Divine in human form.



As *Samvit* enters its sixth year of publication, it dedicates this special issue to Dakshineswar. In it, a spot-light has been focussed on some important areas inside the temple-complex where Sri Ramakrishna spent thirty years of his life. Pen-pictures of special *pujas* in the different temples and other ritualistic activities that created the spiritual atmosphere at the temple are gleaned from M.'s writings. Through these descriptions one can spend a full day with Sri Ramakrishna there. The lives of the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda at Dakshineswar are described in their own words. Information about the *ghats*, temples, lanes and houses of Dakshineswar and Ariadaha associated with Sri Ramakrishna's life has been given. And before the ravages of time completely change the faces of these two towns, important landmarks are presented in photographs. We thank two devotees from New York, Dr. Betty Robinson and Dr. Shelley Brown, for making it possible to publish this special issue. We thank Dr. Shelley Brown for wandering through Dakshineswar and Ariadaha with us with her camera. Sri Sarada Math is grateful to these dedicated souls. We thank the Trustees of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple for their permission to take photographs in the premises of the Temple garden.

## The Dakshineswar Temple Garden

As Described by Mahendra Nath Gupta

*MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA first came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna on 26 February 1882 when he was the Headmaster of the Vidyasagar High School in Calcutta. Since then, whenever he had leisure from school, he visited Dakshineswar. He recorded Sri Ramakrishna's talks in his diary with stenographic exactitude. Though he intended to record these talks only for his own meditation, they were later published in Bengali under the pseudonym of 'M.', and translated into English as The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Having a humble disposition, he never used the personal pronoun when referring to himself in this work, but used instead, the names Mohini, Master or simply 'a devotee'. Thus he remained hidden while he vividly revealed the personality of Sri Ramakrishna.*

It was on a Sunday in spring, a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, that M. met him the first time. Sri Ramakrishna lived at the Kalibari, the temple garden of Mother Kali, on the bank of the Ganga at Dakshineswar. M., being at leisure on Sundays, had gone with his friend Sidhu to visit several gardens at Baranagore. As they were walking in Prasanna Bannerji's garden, Sidhu said: 'There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganga where a Paramahansa lives. Would you like to go there?' M. assented and they started immediately for the Dakshineswar temple garden. They arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. And there they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence.

M. stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup, and the other devotees. As he left the room with Sidhu he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum and cymbal. He could hear music from the *nahabat*, too, at the south end of the garden. The sounds travelled over the Ganga, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had

just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship. M. and Sidhu visited the twelve Shiva temples, the Radhakanta temple, and the temple of Bhavatarini. And as M. watched the services before the images his heart was filled with joy.

On the way back to Sri Ramakrishna's room the two friends talked. Sidhu told M. that the temple garden had been founded by Rani Rasmani. He said that God was worshipped there daily as Kali, Krishna and Shiva, and that within the gates many *sadhus* and beggars were fed. *[Sri Ramakrishna later told M.]* 'People say that Rani Rasmani built the Kali temple; but nobody says it was the work of God.'

*[Sri Ramakrishna walked with M. and other devotees to the Kali temple.]* He saluted the Divine Mother, touching the ground with his forehead.

Red hibiscus flowers and bel leaves adorned the Mother's feet. Her three eyes radiated love for Her devotees. Two of Her hands were raised as if to give them boons and reassurance; the other two hands held symbols of death. She was clothed in a sari of Benarasi silk and was decked with ornaments. (See photo on page i.)

Referring to the image, one of the party remarked, 'I heard it was made by the sculptor Nabin.' The Master answered: 'Yes, I know. But to me She is the embodiment of Spirit.'

*[In those days, as today, the Dakshineswar temple garden was often approached by boat.]* From the boat, the passengers saw in front of them the bathing *ghat* and the *chandni*.\* To their left, in the temple compound, stood six temples of Shiva, and to their right another group of six Shiva temples. The white steeple of the Kali temple, the treetops of the Panchavati, and the silhouette of pine trees stood high against the blue autumn sky. The gardens between the two *nahabats* were filled with fragrant flowers, and along the bank of the Ganga were rows of flowering plants. The blue sky was reflected in the brown water of the river, the sacred Ganga, associated with the most ancient traditions of Aryan civilization.

*[Sri Ramakrishna once said to a devotee,]* 'You have taken so much trouble to come here. You must be seeking God. But almost everyone is satisfied simply by seeing the garden. Only one or two look for its owner. People enjoy the beauty of the world; they do not

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\* The open portico in the temple garden with steps descending to the Ganga.



seek its Owner. The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness.'

*[Sri Ramakrishna dearly loved the Dakshineswar temple garden. When he invited someone he said,] 'Please visit the temple garden some time—I mean the garden of Rasmanl. It's a charming place.'* *[When away from Dakshineswar in Calcutta or elsewhere, he would be heard to say,] 'Mother, where have You brought me? I was much better off in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Here [at Raja Babu's house at Varanasi] I am in a place where I must hear about "woman and gold". But at Dakshineswar I could avoid it.'* *[Once, in Calcutta, he suddenly] said in a slightly raised voice: 'I have come from Dakshineswar. I am going Mother!'* It was as if a child had heard the call of its mother from a distance and was responding to it.

#### Glimpses of a Day at the Temple Garden

*[M.'s visits to the Dakshineswar temple garden became frequent and he sometimes spent several days at a stretch there. He describes it at all times of the day:]*

The temple garden was filled with the sweet music of the dawn service, which mingled with the morning melody from the *naubat*. Leaving his bed, Sri Ramakrishna chanted the names of God in sweet tones. Then he bowed before the pictures of the different deities in his room and went to the west porch to salute the Ganga.

It was winter. The sun had just risen. The river was flowing north with the tide. Not far off could be seen the *vilva* tree where the Master had practised great spiritual austerities. Sri Ramakrishna faced east as he talked to his disciple and told him about the Knowledge of Brahman.

At eight o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna and M. were talking together in the pine grove at the northern end of the temple garden.

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M. near the *vilva* tree at Dakshineswar. This tree, under which the Master had practised the most austere *sadhana*, stood in the northern end of the temple garden. Farther north ran a high wall, and just outside was the government magazine. West of the *vilva* tree was a row of tall pines that rustled in the wind. (See photos on pages vi and viii.) Below the trees flowed the Ganga, and to the south could be seen the

sacred grove of the Panchavati. The dense trees and underbrush hid the temples. No noise of the outside world reached the *vllva* tree.

Sri Ramakrishna was seated with M. on the semicircular porch of his room at about ten o'clock in the morning. The fragrance of gardenias, jasmines, oleanders, roses, and other flowers filled the air. The Master was singing.

Sri Ramakrishna was resting after his noon meal. The midday offering had been made in the temples, and the temple doors were closed. Narendra had his midday meal with Sri Ramakrishna. Afterwards a temporary bed was made on the floor of the Master's room so that the disciples might rest a while. A mat was spread, over which was placed a quilt covered with a white sheet. A few cushions and pillows completed the simple bed. Like a child, the Master sat near Narendranath on the bed. He talked with the devotees in great delight. With a radiant smile lighting his face, and his eyes fixed on Narendra, he was giving them various spiritual teachings, interspersing these with incidents from his own life.

About four o'clock the door of the Kali temple was opened, and the Master walked to the temple. Entering the inner chamber he looked at the image, took some sacred flowers from the feet of the Mother, and placed them on his head. He prostrated himself before the Mother and went round the image. He waved the *chamara*. He appeared ecstatic with divine fervour.

The Master returned to his room. After bowing to the Divine Mother, he clapped his hands and chanted the sweet names of God. A number of holy pictures hung on the walls of the room. Among others, there were pictures of Dhruva, Prahlada, Kali, Radha-Krishna, and the coronation of Rama. The Master bowed low before the pictures and repeated the holy names. (See photo on page iii.)

It was almost dusk when most of the devotees, including Narendra took leave of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna went out and looked at the Ganga for a few minutes from the west porch. Two priests were bathing in preparation for the evening worship. Young men of the village were strolling in the garden or standing on the concrete embankment, gazing at the murmuring river. Others, perhaps more thoughtful, were walking about in the solitude of the Panchavati.

It was evening. Lamps were lighted on the south and west verandahs. A lamp was lighted in the Master's room also, and incense

was burnt. He was repeating the name of the Divine Mother, absorbed in contemplation of Her. There was still some time before the evening worship in the temples.

The temples were lighted up. Sounds of conch-shells and gongs came floating on the air as the evening worship began in the temple of Kali. From outside one could hear the murmuring of the Ganga and the music of the evening worship in the temples of Kali, Vishnu, and Shiva. Through the door one could see the priest at a distance moving from one temple to another, a bell in his left hand and a light in his right, an attendant carrying the gong. The evening melody was in harmony with the spirit of the hour and place and with the innermost thoughts of the worshippers. For the time being the sordid things of daily life were forgotten.

It was now late in the evening. M. found the Master pacing alone in the *natmandir* in front of the Kali temple. A lamp was burning in the temple on either side of the image of the Divine Mother. The single lamp in the spacious *natmandir* blended light and darkness into a kind of mystic twilight, in which the figure of the Master could be dimly seen.

[Once] Narendra, M. and Priya were going to spend the night at the temple garden. This pleased the Master highly, especially since Narendra would be with him. The Holy Mother, who was in the *nahabat*, had prepared the supper. The meal was ready, and the plates were set out on the southeast verandah of the Master's room. The moon rose, flooding all the quarters with its silvery light. M. was walking alone in the garden of the temple. On one side of the path stood the Panchavati, the *bakul* grove, the *nahabat*, and the Master's room, and on the other side flowed the Ganga, reflecting millions of broken moons on its rippling surface.

Late at night M. sat alone in the *nahabat*. The sky, the river, the garden, the steeples of the temples, the trees, and the Panchavati were flooded with moonlight. Deep silence reigned everywhere, broken only by the melodious murmuring of the Ganga. M. was meditating on Sri Ramakrishna.

[Someone once heard Sri Ramakrishna] weeping and praying to the Mother in a voice choked with emotion. He prayed to Her with tearful eyes for the welfare of the devotees: 'Mother, may those who come to You have all their desires fulfilled!'

## My Life In Dakshineswar

In the Words of Sri Sarada Devi

THE VILLAGE people were saying all sorts of things about the Master—that he was insane, had gone fully mad, was wandering about naked, and so on. I told a friend, 'I shall go to Dakshineswar to see him,' and she communicated everything to my father. I, of course, could not speak of this to my father, because of fear and bashfulness.

My father said, 'Does she want to go? Very good.' He too accompanied us. On the way, I fell ill. I was lying unconscious owing to fever. Just then I saw a woman, jet black in complexion, sitting by my side, and stroking my head. She said, 'I come from Dakshineswar.' I said, 'I too am going to Dakshineswar. But how are you related to us?' She replied, 'I am your sister. Don't you worry! You will recover soon.'

The very next day the fever left me. My father got me a palanquin. We reached Dakshineswar at about nine p.m. I went straight to the Master's room, while the others went to the *nahabat* where my mother-in-law stayed. The Master said to me, 'Ah! You have come!' And he asked someone to spread a mat on the floor. Then he added, 'Alas! Would that my Mathur were alive now! By his death, my right hand, as it were, is broken!' Mathur had died a few months before. Had Mathur been alive, would I have been put up in that tiny inconvenient room (in the *nahabat*)? He would have built a mansion for me!

After seeing the Master, I wanted to go to the *nahabat*. (See photo on page vi.) But the Master said, 'No, no. Stay here. It would be inconvenient for the doctor to see you there.' I spent the night in his room. A woman companion slept beside me. Hriday gave us two or three baskets of puffed rice, for all had finished their supper when we arrived.

Have you seen the *nahabat* at Dakshineswar, where I used to stay? When I stayed there, my entire world consisted of that small room. Even the vessel containing fish was hung up in it. The room was so low that at first I would knock my head against the upper frame of the door. One day, I got a cut on the head. Then I became accustomed to it. My head bent of itself as soon as I approached the door. Many stout aristocratic women of Calcutta frequently came there. They never entered the room. They would stand at the door and lean forward holding the jambs. And peeping in they would remark, addressing me,



'Ah, what a tiny room for our good girl! She is, as it were, in exile, like Sita.' You won't be able to stay in such a room even for a day.

In Dakshineswar I lived very quietly and unobserved by people in general. The manager of the temple used to say, 'We have heard that she lives here, but we have never seen her.' I used to get up at three o'clock in the morning and sit in meditation. I often used to be totally absorbed in it. Once, on a moonlit night, I was performing *japa*, sitting near the steps of the *nahabat*. Everything was quiet. I did not even know when the Master passed that way. On other days I would hear the sound of his slippers, but on this day, I did not. I was totally absorbed in meditation. In those days I looked different. I used to put on ornaments and had a red bordered sari. On this day the cloth had slipped off from my back owing to the breeze, but I was unconscious of it. It seems 'son Yogen' (Swami Yogananda) went that way to give the water-jug to the Master and saw me in that condition. Ah! The ecstasy of those days! On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands, 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of yonder moon!' Or, 'Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!' If one is steady in meditation, one will clearly see the Lord in one's heart and hear His voice. The moment an idea flashes in the mind of such a person, it will be fulfilled then and there. You will be bathed in peace. Ah! What a mind I had at that time! Brinde, the maid-servant, one day dropped a metal plate in front of me with a bang. The sound penetrated into my heart. In the fullness of one's spiritual realization one will find that He who resides in one's heart, resides in the hearts of others as well—the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the outcast. This realization makes one truly humble. The problem was only regarding the morning ablutions. The want of proper toilet arrangements was another. It affected my health. And the fisherwomen were my companions. They came to bathe in the Ganga, and keeping their baskets on the verandah, would go into the water. How much they used to chat with me! And at the time of leaving, they would pick up their baskets and go. I used to hear the fishermen sing while catching fish at night. How many devotees used to come to the Master! How much singing! I used to hear it all and think, 'Were I one among those devotees, I too could have stayed very near the Master like them and how much more could I have listened to!' Yogin and



Golap know everything. They would come to me and sometimes stay with me. How blissful it was then!

The Master performed the Shodashi Puja about a month and a half after my arrival at Dakshineswar (probably on the night of the Phalaharini Kali Puja, June 1872). I had then commenced my sixteenth [nineteenth] year. At about nine that night he sent for me. Hriday had made all the necessary arrangements for the worship. The Master asked me to be seated. I sat on the stool facing the jar of Ganga water which used to be kept at the north-western corner of the room. The Master sat near the western door and was facing eastward. All the doors were closed. The articles for worship were on my right. First he painted my feet with *a/ta* (liquid lac-dye) and put vermillion on my forehead. Then he clad me in a new cloth. He also fed me with sweets and betel-roll. I soon became semi-conscious due to spiritual fervour. Hence I do not know how exactly the worship proceeded. I saluted the Master mentally and came away.

I continued to stay at Dakshineswar for a year. Then I fell ill and returned to Jayrambati.

After I had visited Dakshineswar twice or thrice, Captain (Vishwanath Upadhyay) gave us Sal wood and Sambhu Babu constructed a cottage for me near the place where Ramlal now stays. At night, a high tide in the Ganga carried away one of the logs. Hriday scolded me saying, 'You are ill-starred!' and so on. The Captain, not minding the loss, sent another log.

I stayed in that cottage for some days. During the monsoon, once the Master came to this cottage. It rained so heavily that he was unable to return to his room that night. He finished his meal there and laid himself down for the night. He said to me jokingly, 'This is as though I have come home, like any other priest of the Kali temple going home at night!'

An aged woman from Varanasi at last persuaded me to move to the room in the *nahabat*. The Master was suffering then from a severe attack of dysentery. I began attending on him. I searched in vain for this woman when I visited Varanasi. We have often seen that whenever Sri Ramakrishna felt the need people would come of themselves to Dakshineswar and then disappear just as suddenly.

Ah! How kindly Sri Ramakrishna treated me! Not even one day did he utter a word to wound my feelings. He would tell me, 'One

should never be without work. For when one is idle, all sorts of bad thoughts crop up in one's mind.' One day he gave me some hemp and asked me to prepare some string suspenders with it. He said he wanted them to hang the pots of some sweets etc. for his young disciples. I made the suspenders accordingly, and with the fibre that was left, stuffed a pillow. I used to lie down on a stiff mat under which I spread some hessian, and placed that pillow under my head. Now you see all these beds and mattresses, but even at that time I used to sleep as well as I do now. I don't feel any difference. 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?

Once there was an old woman who came often. She had led an impure life. Now in old age, she had become religious. I was alone. So whenever she came, I would talk to her. One day the Master saw this and said, 'Why do you allow her here?' I said, 'Now she speaks of only good things, talks only of God. What is wrong with it?' One's mind cannot be coloured always by one's former condition. The Master said, 'No, no, she is a fallen woman. Why talk with her? However changed she may be, it is better to keep away.' He used to forbid me to even speak with such people lest their evil influence may affect me. Such was the extreme care he took of me. During my stay there the Master forbade even Ramlal to see me, although he was a nephew. During the Master's illness at Dakshineswar, I used to boil and condense milk for him and take to him two pounds of milk saying that it was one. I would not tell him the correct quantity. One day he came to know about it and said, 'What is this? Stick to the truth.'

I had to cook also for the devotees of the Master. Latu lived with him. Having had a difference with Ram Datta, he had come away. The Master said to me, 'He is a nice boy! He will knead flour for you.' Cooking went on day and night. For instance Ram Datta would come and would shout after getting out of the carriage, 'Today, I shall have *chapatis* and *dal*.' Then I would at once start cooking. I used to make *chapatis* out of three or four seers of flour. When Rakhal lived there, I often made *khichuri* for him. The Master one day asked me to cook nicely for Naren. I prepared some Mung *dal* and *chapatis*. When the meal was over, the Master one day asked Naren, 'How did you enjoy the meal?' 'Very well', he replied, 'but it tasted like a sick person's diet.' At this the Master said to me, 'What sort of stuff have you cooked

for him? You must prepare for him thick *dal* and *chapatis*.' Finally I prepared those things and Naren was very pleased. Suren Mitra gave ten rupees a month for the expenses of the devotees. Senior Gopal did the marketing. Dancing, devotional music, ecstasy and *samadhi* went on day and night. I made little holes in the bamboo mat screen, so that I could watch through it. As a result of standing there continually, I got this rheumatism at last.

One day the Master went to my room in the *nahabat*. He had no spices in his small bag. He used to chew them now and then. I gave him some to chew there, and also handed over to him a few packed in paper to take to his room. He proceeded; but instead of going to his room, he went straight to the embankment of the Ganga. He did not see the way, nor was he conscious of it. He was repeating, 'Mother, shall I drown myself?' I became restless with agony. The river was full to the brim. I was then a young woman and would not go out of my room. I could not see anyone about. Whom could I send to him? At last I found a brahmin belonging to the Kali temple coming in the direction of my room. Through him I called Hriday, who was then taking his meal. He left his plate, ran to the Master, caught hold of him, and brought him back to his room. A moment more, and he would have dropped into the Ganga! Because I put a few spices in his hand, he could not find his way. A holy man must not lay things by. The Master's renunciation was a hundred percent complete.

[At Udbodhan house a disciple asked if Sri Ramakrishna's photo which Mother worshipped was a good likeness of him. Mother answered:] 'Yes, that picture is very, very good. It originally belonged to a brahmin cook. Several prints were made of his first photograph. The brahmin took one of them. The picture was at first very dark, just like the image of Kali. Therefore it was given to the brahmin. When he left Dakshineswar for some place he gave it to me. I kept the photograph with the pictures of other gods and goddesses and worshipped it. At that time I lived on the ground floor of the *nahabat*. One day the Master came there and at the sight of the picture he said, 'Hello, what is all this?' Lakshmi and I had been cooking under the staircase. (See photo on page v.) Then I saw the Master take in his hand the bel leaves and flowers kept there for worship, and offer them to the photograph. He worshipped the picture. This is the same picture. That brahmin never returned; so the picture remained with me.

I always saw a smile on his face in his ecstatic mood. I have seen him smile in all states of *samadhi*. His complexion was like the colour of gold—like that of Harital (orpiment). His complexion blended with the colour of the golden amulet which he wore on his arm. When I used to rub him with oil, I could clearly see a lustre coming out of his entire body. A youth with a very fair complexion once came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. The Master said to me, 'Both of us (the man and the Master) will walk side by side in the Panchavati. You judge who is the fairer of the two.' They started walking and I observed that the youth was slightly fairer than the Master. He was nineteen or twenty years old.

When the Master would come out of his room in the temple, people used to stand in line and say to one another, 'Ah, there he goes!' He was fairly stout. Mathur Babu gave him a low stool to sit on. It was a rather wide stool, but it was not quite big enough to hold him comfortably when he would squat on it to take his meals. People would be wonder-struck when he went with slow, steady steps to the Ganga to take his bath.

What a wonderful mind I had at that time! Somebody used to play on the flute at Dakshineswar. As I listened to the sound, my mind would be extremely eager for the realization of God. I thought the sound was coming directly from God, and I would enter into *samadhi*.

Ah, my dear! Those were unforgettable days in Dakshineswar! Sri Ramakrishna would sing and I would stand for hours together and watch the scene through the hole in the screen of plaited bamboo strips that surrounded the verandah of the *nahabat*. I would also salute him with folded hands from afar. Those days were indeed full of bliss! People streamed in throughout the day, and religious talk went on continuously. How many kinds of people came to him! It was as if a mart of joy was set up at Dakshineswar.

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*How can one love another unless one sees him? You see, you have seen me. I am your Mother and you are my child.*

The Holy Mother



## In Dakshineswar

### In the Words of Swami Vivekananda

THERE IS the bond between the teacher and the taught—that is peculiar to India. The teacher is not a man who comes to teach me and I pay him so much and there it ends. In India it is really like an adoption. The teacher is more than my own father, and I am truly his child, his son in every respect.

Now, I happened to get an old man to teach me, and he was very peculiar. I remember vividly my first visit to him. It was at the temple garden at Dakshineswar in his own room. That day I sang two songs. He went into *samadhi*. He said to Ram Babu, 'Who is this boy? How well he sings!' He asked me to come again. I finished singing. Immediately afterwards the Master suddenly stood up and taking me by the hand, led me to the northern verandah. It was winter; so to protect the room against the north wind, the open pillars of the verandah were covered by mat screens. Therefore, when one entered the verandah and closed the door of the room, one could not be seen by any person within or without the room. I thought he might perhaps give me some instruction in private. But what he said and did was beyond imagination. He suddenly caught hold of my hand and shed profuse tears of joy. Addressing me affectionately like one already familiar, he said: 'Is it proper that you should come so late? Should you not have once thought how I was waiting for you? Having continually listened to the idle talk of worldly people, my ears are about to be scorched. Not having anyone to whom to communicate my innermost feelings, I am about to burst.' And so he went on talking and weeping. The next moment he stood before me with folded palms and, showing me the regard due to a god, went on saying, 'I know, my lord, you are that ancient *rishi* Nara, a part of Narayana, who has incarnated himself this time, to remove the miseries and sufferings of humanity.'

I was absolutely nonplussed and thought, 'Whom have I come to see? He is, I see, completely insane; why should he otherwise speak in this strain to me who am really the son of Vishwanath Datta?' However, I kept silent and the wonderful madman went on speaking about whatever he liked. The next moment he asked me to wait there and entered the room and bringing some butter, candy and *sandesh*, began to feed me with his own hands. He never gave ear to my repeated requests to



give me these, so that I might partake of them with my companions, saying, 'They will get them later. You take these yourself.' Saying so he fed me with all the sweets before he could rest content. He then caught hold of my hand and said, 'Promise you will soon come to me again and all alone.' Unable to evade that earnest request of his I had to say, 'I will' and then I entered the room with him and sat down beside my companions.

I went on observing him closely and could find no trace of madness in his deportment, conversation or behaviour towards others. Impressed by his fine talk and ecstasy, I thought that he was truly a man of renunciation who had given up his all for God and practised exactly what he said. '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 or property; but who does so because he cannot realize God? If any one is really equally anxious to see Him and calls on Him, He certainly reveals Himself to him.' When I heard these words of his, the impression grew on me that it was not mere poetry or imagination couched in fine figures of speech that he was expressing like other preachers of religion, but that he was talking about that of which he had immediate knowledge which he had obtained by renouncing everything and calling on God with his whole heart. Trying to harmonize these words with his behaviour towards me a little while previously, I remembered the examples of the monomaniacs mentioned by Abercrombie and other English philosophers and came to the sure conclusion that he belonged to that class. Although I came to that conclusion, I could not forget the greatness of his wonderful renunciation for God. Speechless, I thought, 'Well, he may be mad, but it is indeed a rare soul alone in the world who could undertake such renunciation. Yes, mad, but how pure! And what renunciation! He is truly worthy of reverence.' Thinking thus, I bowed at his feet, took leave of him and returned to Calcutta that day.

He said to me, 'I used to climb to the roof of the *Kuthi*, and cry, "O, Devotees where are you all? Come to me: O! Devotees, I am about to die. I shall certainly die if I do not see you."' (See photo on page iii.) The Divine Mother told me, "The devotees will come." You see, everything is turning out to be true.' What else could I say? I kept quiet.

I did not realize then that the temple garden of Dakshineswar was so far from Calcutta, as on the previous occasion I had gone there in a carriage. The road seemed to be so long as to be almost endless. However, I reached the garden somehow, and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. I found him sitting alone on the bedstead. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on his bed. But the next moment I found him overcome with a sort of emotion. Muttering something to himself, with his eyes fixed on me, he slowly drew near me. I thought he might do something queer as on the previous occasion. But in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls and everything in the room whirled rapidly and vanished into naught and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void! I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself I cried out, 'What is it that you are doing to me?—I have my parents at home.' He laughed at this and stroking my chest said, 'All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time.' The wonder of it was that no sooner had he said this than that strange experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before.

All this happened in less time than it takes me to narrate it, but it revolutionized my mind. Amazed, I thought, 'What could it possibly be? It came and went at the mere wish of this wonderful man.' I was determined, however to be on my guard and not to give him another chance to exert a similar influence over me. The next moment I thought, 'How can a man who shatters to pieces a resolute and strong mind like mine be dismissed as a lunatic?' Yet that was just the conclusion that one would arrive at judging from his effusiveness on our first meeting, unless he was an Incarnation of God. I was in a dilemma about the real nature of my experience, as well as the truth about this remarkable man, who was obviously pure and simple as a child. My rationalistic mind received an unpleasant rebuff at this failure in judging the true state of things. But I was determined to fathom this mystery somehow.

Thoughts like these occupied my mind during the whole of that

day. But he became quite another man after the incident, and as on the previous occasion treated me with great kindness and cordiality. His behaviour towards me was like that of a man who meets an old friend or relative after a long separation. He seemed not to be satisfied with taking all possible care of me and entertaining me. This remarkably loving treatment drew me all the more to him. At last, finding that the day was coming to a close, I asked his leave to go. He seemed very much dejected at this and gave me his permission only after I had promised to come again at my earliest convenience.

At first I did not accept most of what the Master said. One day he asked me, 'Then why do you come here?' I replied, 'I come here to see you, not to listen to you.' He was very much pleased.

One day at that time I spent a night with the Master at Dakshineswar. I was sitting quietly for some time under the Panchavati, when the Master suddenly came there and catching hold of my hand, said smiling, 'Your intellect and learning will be examined today; you have passed only two and a half examinations. A teacher who has passed three and a half has come today.\* Come, let me see how you fare in conversation with him'. Willy nilly, I had to go with the Master. When I reached his room and was introduced to M., I began to talk with him about various subjects. Having thus engaged us in a talk, the Master sat silently and went on listening to our words and observing us. Afterwards, when Sri M. took leave and went away, he said, 'What does it matter, even if he has passed those examinations? The teacher is womanish in character—shy. He cannot talk with emphasis.' Thus pitting me against others, the Master enjoyed the fun.

I did not hesitate to use harsh words for his (Sri Ramakrishna's) blind love for me. I used to warn him, saying that if he constantly thought of me he would become like me—just like King Bharata of the old legend who so doted upon his pet deer that even at the time of death he was unable to think of anything else, and as a result, was born as a deer in his next life. At these words, Sri Ramakrishna, simple as he was, became very nervous and said, 'What you say is quite true; what is to become of me, for I cannot bear to be separated from you?' Sadly dejected, he went to the Kali Temple, whence he returned in a

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\* Narendra Nath was then studying for his B.A. examination and M. had passed that examination and was studying Law.



few minutes smiling and said, 'You rogue, I will not listen to you any more. Mother says I love you because I see the Lord in you, and the day I shall no longer do so, I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you.'

Once I said to him, 'The forms of God and things like that which you see in your visions are figments of your imagination.' He had so much faith in my words that he went to the Divine Mother in the temple and told Her what I had said to him. He asked Her, 'Are these hallucinations then?' Afterwards he said to me, 'Mother told me that all these are real.'

Again, he said to me, 'When you sing, He who dwells here, (touching his heart) like a snake, hisses as it were, and then spreading his hood, quietly holds himself steady and listens to your music.'

One day during one of my early visits, the Master in an ecstatic mood said to me, 'You have come!' 'How amazing,' I said to myself, 'It is as if he had known me for a long time.' Then he said to me, 'Do you ever see light?' I replied, 'Yes, sir, before I fall asleep I feel something like a light revolving near my forehead.'

When he heard that a proposal had been made about my marriage, he wept, holding the feet of the image of Kali. With tears in his eyes he prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, please upset the whole thing, don't let Narendra be drowned.'

Then came a terrible time for me personally and for all the other boys as well who used to frequently visit Sri Ramakrishna. But to me came such misfortune! My father died at that time, and we were left poor.

I was convinced that I was not born like others to earn money and maintain my family much less to strive for sense pleasures. I began secretly to prepare to renounce the world like my grandfather. I fixed a day for the purpose and was glad to hear that the Master was to come to Calcutta that very day. 'It is lucky,' I thought, 'I shall leave the world with the blessing of my Guru.' As soon as I met the Master he pressed me hard to spend that night with him at Dakshineswar. I made various excuses, but to no purpose. I had to accompany him. There was not much talk in the carriage. Reaching Dakshineswar I was seated for some time in his room with others, when he went into a trance. Presently he drew near me and touching me with great tenderness, began to sing a song, with tears in his eyes. I had repressed my

feelings so long but they overflowed in tears. The meaning of the song was too apparent. He knew of my intentions. The audience marvelled at the exchange of feeling between us. When the Master regained his normal mood, some of them asked the reason for it, and he replied with a smile, 'Oh, it was something between him and me!' Then at night he dismissed the others and calling me to his side, said, 'I know you have come for the Mother's work and won't be able to remain in the world. But for my sake, stay as long as I live.' Saying this he burst into tears again. The next day, with his permission, I returned home. A thousand thoughts about the maintenance of the family assailed me. I began to look about again for a living.

One day the idea struck me that God listened to Sri Ramakrishna's prayers. So why should I not ask him to pray for me for the removal of my pecuniary wants, a favour the Master would never deny me. I hurried to Dakshineswar and insisted on his making an appeal on behalf of my starving family. He said, 'My boy, I can't make such demands. But why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her.' I said, 'I do not know the Mother; you speak to Her on my behalf. You must.' He replied tenderly, 'My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But you do not accept Her, so she does not grant my prayer. All right, it is Tuesday—go to the Kali temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother and ask her any boon you like. It shall be granted; She is Knowledge Absolute, the Inscrutable Power of Brahman and by Her mere [will She has given birth to this world. Everything is in Her power to give.' I believed every word and eagerly waited for the night.

About nine o'clock, the Master commanded me to go to the temple. As I went I was filled with a Divine intoxication. My feet were unsteady. My heart was leaping in anticipation of the joy of beholding the living Goddess and hearing Her words. I was full of the idea. Reaching the temple, as I cast my eyes upon the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the perennial fountain of divine love and beauty. I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In an ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself again and again before the Mother and prayed, 'Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation; give me knowledge and devotion; grant that I may have an uninterrupted vision of Thee!' A serene



peace reigned in my soul. The world was forgotten. Only the Divine Mother shone within my heart.

As soon as I returned, Sri Ramakrishna asked me if I had prayed to the Mother for the removal of my worldly wants. I was startled at this question and said, 'No, sir, I forgot all about it. But is there any remedy now?' 'Go again,' said he, 'and tell Her about your wants.' I again set out for the temple, but at the sight of the Mother forgot my mission, bowed to Her repeatedly and prayed only for knowledge and devotion. The Master asked if I had done it the second time. I told him what had happened. He said, 'How thoughtless! Couldn't you restrain yourself enough to say those few words? Well, try once more and make that prayer to Her. Quick!' I went for the third time, but on entering the temple a terrible shame overpowered me. I thought, 'What a trifle have I come to pray to the Mother for! It is like asking a gracious king for a few vegetables! What a fool I am! In shame and remorse I bowed to Her respectfully and said, 'Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion.' Coming out of the temple I understood that all this was due to Sri Ramakrishna's will. Otherwise how could I fail in my object three times? I came to him and said, 'Sir, it is you who have cast a charm over my mind and made me forgetful. Now please grant me the boon that my people at home may no longer suffer the pinch of poverty!' He said, 'Such a prayer never comes from my lips. I asked you to pray for yourself, but you couldn't do it. It appears that you are not destined to enjoy worldly happiness. Well, I can't help it.' But I wouldn't let him go. I insisted on his granting that prayer. At last he said, 'All right, your people at home will never be in want of plain food and clothing.'

It is impossible to give others even an idea of the ineffable joy we derived from the presence of the Master. It is really beyond our understanding how he would give us training through fun and play and thus mould our spiritual life though we would be unconscious of it. As the master athlete proceeds with great caution and restraint with the beginner, now overpowering him in the struggle with great difficulty, as it were, again owning defeat at his hands to strengthen his spirit of self-reliance, in exactly the same manner did Sri Ramakrishna treat us. Realizing that in all exists the Atman which is the source of infinite strength, in every individual, pigmy though he might be, he was able to see the potential giant. He could clearly discern

the latent spiritual power which would in the fullness of time manifest itself. Holding that bright picture before us, he would speak highly of us and encourage us. Again, he would warn us lest we should frustrate this future consummation by becoming entangled in worldly desires, and further, he would keep us under control by carefully observing even minute details of our life. All this was done silently and unobtrusively. That was the great secret of his training of the disciples and moulding of their lives. Once I felt that I could not practise deeper concentration in meditation. I told him of it and sought his advice and direction. He told me his personal experiences concerning this matter and gave me instructions. I remember that as I sat down to meditate during the early hours of the morning, my mind would be disturbed and diverted by the shrill note of the whistle of a neighbouring jute mill. I told him about it and he advised me to concentrate my mind on the very sound of the whistle. I followed his advice and derived much benefit from it. On another occasion I felt great difficulty in totally forgetting my body during meditation and concentrating the mind wholly on the ideal. I went to him for counsel and he gave me the very instruction which he himself had received from Tota Puri while practising *samadhi* at the time of his Vedantic *sadhana*.

He sharply pressed between my two eyebrows with his fingernail and said, 'Now concentrate your mind on this painful sensation.' As a result I found I could concentrate my mind easily on that sensation as long as I liked during that period; I completely forgot the consciousness of other parts of my body, not to speak of their causing any distraction in the way of my meditation. The solitude of the Panchavati, associated with the various spiritual realizations of the Master, was also a suitable place for our meditation. Besides meditation and spiritual exercises, we used to spend a good deal of time there in sheer fun and merry-making. Sri Ramakrishna also joined us and by taking part enhanced our innocent pleasure. We used to run and skip about, climb on the trees, swing from the creepers and at times hold merry picnics.

On the first day of the picnic the Master noticed that I myself had cooked the food and he partook of it. I knew that he could not take food unless it was cooked by a brahmin, and therefore I had arranged for his meal at the Kali temple. But he said, 'It won't be wrong for me to take food from such a pure soul like yourself!' In spite of my

repeated remonstrations, he enjoyed the food cooked by me that day.

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I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature; works and activities, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions. Now I again hear his voice; the same old voice thrilling my soul. Bonds are breaking—love dying, work becoming tasteless—the glamour is off life. Now only the voice of the Master calling.—‘I come Lord, I come.’

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### The Dolyatra Festival

It was the day of the Dolyatra, a Hindu religious festival. Sri Krishna and Radha are the central figures of this celebration, their images being placed on a swing which is rocked now and then. A red powder is showered on the images. Later, friends and relatives throw the powder at one another. This festival is celebrated when winter passes into spring, on a full-moon day rendered doubly sacred by its association with the birth of Sri Chaitanya.

It was afternoon. The devotees were seated around the Master, listening to Nabai Chaitanya's singing. Suddenly the Master left the room, but the music continued. M. accompanied the Master. Sri Ramakrishna walked across the courtyard and entered the temple of Radhakanta. He bowed down before the images, M. following him. There was some red powder in a tray. The Master offered a little powder to the images and bowed down again. Next he proceeded to the Kali temple. Passing up the seven steps, he stood on the open porch and looked at the image. Then he entered the shrine and offered red powder to the Divine Mother, and saluted Her. Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room accompanied by M. and another devotee carrying the tray of red powder. He offered a little of it to all the pictures of gods and goddesses in his room, but not to those of Jesus Christ and himself. Then he threw the powder on the bodies of Narendra and the other devotees. They all took the dust of his feet.

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*



## Under the Sprawling Panchavati

PRAVRAJKA MOKSHAPRANA

THE SPIRITUAL-MINDED Indian has always been attracted towards nature and this attraction gradually grew into worship. Trees in particular became symbols of holiness to him. The following five kinds of trees, namely, *vata* (*Ficus Indica*), *ashvattha* or pipal (*Ficus Religiosa*), *amalaki* (*Emblic Myrobalan*), *ashoka* (*Jonesia Asoka Roxb.*) and *vilva* (*Aegle Marmelos*) were collectively called Panchavati. Rama and Sita lived during their exile in the Panchavati on the banks of the Godavari. Valmiki *rishi*, who wrote the epic, *Ramayana*, sat under the *vata* tree and practised penance. Heroes of the *Mahabharata*, during their forest life, met the *munis* and *rishis* who were immersed in meditation under these trees. Siddhartha, the royal prince who renounced kingship, sat under the *ashvattha* tree and attained enlightenment. The saplings of this tree were taken to different parts of India and worshipped as a symbol of his enlightenment. A sapling was also taken to Anuradhapuram in Sri Lanka, where it has been standing for more than two thousand years. In Navadvipa in Bengal, under the *ashvattha* tree which is popularly known there as 'Podam-tala', Sri Chaitanya sat and gave discourses on the Shastras. He sat under the *ashvattha* with Saint Nityananda in Panihati and discussed the Vaishnava scriptures. Ramprasad, the Tantric saint, attained perfection under the Panchavati in Halisahar.

The Panchavati in the Temple Garden of Dakshineswar.

One such Panchavati stands as a silent witness to the spiritual realizations of Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar. In the grove of the Panchavati he spent most of his time. We read in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*:

'The land surrounding the Panchavati was not plain then as it is now. It was full of pits, ditches, lowland, jungles and so on. There grew an *amalaki* tree among the wild trees and plants. It was a burial ground besides being a jungle. Therefore people hardly went there even in the daytime. If they went that way at all, they never entered the jungle. So, going there at night was out of the question. No one ventured there for fear of ghosts. The *amalaki* tree, we have heard from Hriday, grew on a low piece of land. So, anyone sitting under

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that tree could not be seen from the high land outside the jungle. The Master used to sit under it at night.'

Sri Ramakrishna once said to M., 'Where will you sleep? In the hut in the Panchavati . . . I suggested the Panchavati because so much contemplation and meditation have been practised there and the name of God has been chanted there so often. . . . What more shall I tell you? Spending my time in the Panchavati, I used to call on Mother. I told Her, "Mother, show me what the Karma-yogis attained through Karma-yoga, what the Raja-yogis saw as a result of practising Raja-yoga and what the Jnanis knew from their practice of Jnana-yoga."'

As Sri Ramakrishna loved nature, he was naturally attracted towards the Panchavati and other trees on the bank of the Ganga at Dakshineswar. The first day he entered the temple complex he stayed with his brother but, as his nephew, Hriday Mukhopadhyay, said later, 'He took the food provisions supplied by the temple store to the Panchavati and cooked food for himself there.'

The garden situated on the bank of the beautiful Ganga, the Panchavati full of chirping birds, the spacious temple where service to the Universal Mother was performed by a devout *sadhaka*, the presence of his affectionate eldest brother Ramkumar, and the faith and devotion of the virtuous Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law Mathur Nath, all very soon made the Dakshineswar temple garden immensely attractive to the Master, who gradually made it his own home.

At that time, the only companion of the nineteen-year-old Ramakrishna was his nephew Hriday. Hriday knew that Sri Ramakrishna loved him dearly but he seemed to elude him. For instance, when Hriday went to assist his uncle Ramkumar, or went for a rest after his midday meal, or went to attend the evening *aratrika*, Sri Ramakrishna disappeared for some time. Hriday did not know where. He could not find him even after searching for a long time. Asked about it on his return, Sri Ramakrishna did not give a clear reply. He said, 'I was just near this place.' Sometimes when Hriday went in search of him he found him returning from the direction of the Panchavati. He thought he had perhaps gone there to answer the call of nature and so did not ask him anything.

It can be easily inferred from this that Sri Ramakrishna moved about and sat in meditation in the grove of the Panchavati. While strolling near the Panchavati one day, Mathur Nath saw Sri Ramakrishna

worshipping a beautiful image of Shiva. He was surprised to know that the image was made from the clay of the Ganga by Sri Ramakrishna himself.

After accepting the job of the priest of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, Ramkumar was relieved financially but he was worried about another thing. . . . 'He noticed in his young brother a fondness for solitude and a queer mood of indifference to worldly affairs. He found in him a complete lack of interest in everything. Ramkumar at first thought the boy was perhaps anxious to return to his mother at Kamarpukur and was always thinking of her. He saw the boy sitting quietly under the Panchavati or taking strolls on the bank of the Ganga, away from the temple, morning and evening. Or he saw him spending long hours in the jungle all round the Panchavati and then coming out of it. Time passed but the boy expressed no wish to return home.'

#### Visions in the Panchavati

Shortly after, due to the sudden death of Ramkumar, Sri Ramakrishna was obliged to take up the job of priest. He worshipped Mother Kali with intense devotion and never wasted a minute in useless talk. 'And when the door of the temple was closed at midday and at night, he left people's company, entered the jungle round the Panchavati and spent his time in the thought and meditation of the Mother of the Universe.'

When the desire to have the vision of the Universal Mother became painfully intense, he rubbed his face in the sand on the bank of the Ganga or on the ground of the Panchavati, crying, 'O Mother! Show Yourself to me!' Even after Her beatific vision, it was under the Panchavati that he saw his Mother in so many different forms.

In order to reach the state of equability, he took a clod of earth in one hand and a nugget of gold in the other and considered both the same. He said: 'Sitting on the bank of the Ganga in front of the Panchavati I used to say, "Rupee is clay and clay is rupee". Then I threw both into the Ganga.'

At one stage during his *sadhanas*, for six months Sri Ramakrishna experienced a terrible burning sensation in his body. Medical treatment did not help. One day when he was sitting in the Panchavati, he saw two men emerging from his body; one had red eyes and was terrible looking; the other was a gentle-looking man in ochre clothes with a trident in his hand. When the gentle-looking man attacked the



terrible-looking man with his trident and killed him the burning sensation of his body disappeared.

During his spiritual disciplines done in the attitude of a servant of God he had a wonderful vision. A beautiful and radiant woman slowly walked up to him and graciously looked at him. At that moment Hanuman appeared from somewhere and fell at her feet and the thought came to Sri Ramakrishna that this was Sita Devi to whom Rama was her very life. Sita Devi in an instant entered into Sri Ramakrishna's body and in wonder and joy he lost outward consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna was to preach in the future that all religions are true and there are as many paths as there are opinions. To realize this he started practising different kinds of *sadhana*. For this intense *sadhana* he himself planted a sapling of an *aswattha* tree to the west of the room in which he had attained *nirvikalpa samadhi*. The saplings of the *vata*, the *ashwattha*, the *ashoka*, the *vilva* and *amalaki* were planted by him. He said later, 'In order to meditate and repeat God's name I had made a hedge of *tulsi* plants in the Panchavati. I had a great desire to make a bamboo fence around it. Soon after, I saw that on the incoming tide in the Ganga some bamboo poles and rope came floating just in front of the Panchavati.'

At the invitation of Sri Ramakrishna, Bhairavi Brahmani, his Tantric Guru, stayed in the precincts of the Kali temple. He said, 'The Brahmani used to accept food provisions from the temple's store in order to offer food to the Raghuvir-Shila hung around her neck. Under the Panchavati she would cook.' One day after the food was cooked, the Brahmani offered it to her Chosen Deity and became deeply immersed in meditation. At that time, in a semi-conscious state, Sri Ramakrishna went to the Panchavati and ate the offered food. On seeing that, the Brahmani was full of joy and became convinced that he was an incarnation of God. Under the Panchavati, he had long discussions with the Brahmani. He asked her many questions about his spiritual visions. She quoted extensively from the Shastras and cleared his doubts. Thus the 'stream of divine joy' flowed under the Panchavati for days together. With the permission of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna engaged himself in Tantric *sadhana* from 1861 to 1863. Under the Panchavati planted by him five skulls were interred in the ground, according to the instructions of the Brahmani. On the seat over them, Sri Ramakrishna spent many months absorbed

in various Tantric *sadhanas*. He had wonderful visions at this time. One day he desired to have the vision of the Universal Mother's Power of Maya. He saw that a beautiful woman emerged from the Ganga and came to the Panchavati in front of him. She gave birth to a child, caressed it like a mother and the very next moment took the form of a terrible demoness, devoured the child and entered the waters of the Ganga again.

Only one hundred and twenty-nine years ago, under this Panchavati, how many wonderful incidents, divine visions, *bhava samadhi*, *nirvikalpa samadhi* and conversations with the Universal Mother took place! Sri Ramakrishna's mind was so absorbed in *sadhana* that he was not conscious of the external world. We have only a few glimpses of those amazing experiences. The intensity of his *sadhanas* and their results were later made known to the devotees and disciples by him according to their ability to understand.

As the news about the new temple and the munificence of the Rani spread everywhere, many *sadhus* and *sannyasis*, going on pilgrimage to Ganga Sagar or Jagannath Puri came to Dakshineswar and accepted the Rani's hospitality. Most of them stayed under the sprawling Panchavati. Probably in 1863, Jatadhari, a *sannyasi* of the Ramayat sect, came and stayed there. Through his contact with Sri Ramakrishna Jatadhari reached his highest ideal and when he departed, left his small image of Ramlala with Sri Ramakrishna. In the Panchavati grove groups of *sadhus* sang the glory of God or meditated. The sound of their chanting was echoed over the waters of the Ganga.

#### Advaitic Sadhana

It was under the Panchavati that the highest *sadhana* of Advaita was practised by Sri Ramakrishna with the permission of the Divine Mother. An Advaitic *sannyasi* named Totapuri came in 1865 to Dakshineswar. He was happy to get a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna's calibre. These *sannyasis* do not stay in a place for more than three nights. He therefore took shelter in the Panchavati, thinking that after initiating his disciple he would move on. In the early hours of the morning the Guru initiated his disciple into *sannyasa* in the small room under the Panchavati. The traditional *sannyasa mantras* were uttered in that solitary corner and the aged, silent Panchavati was the only witness. (See photo on page iv.) The Guru was astonished to see his disciple immersed in *samadhi* in just one day. After this, for eleven long

months, for long hours, the Guru and the disciple discussed the Vedantic Shastras in the Panchavati.

#### Other Sadhanas

After the Vedantic *sadhana*, Sri Ramakrishna took up the practice of Islamic principles. He himself said, 'I was meditating under the banyan tree. The Mother showed me that there is only one Reality, not two. *Satchidananda* has taken different forms. It has become the world and all beings.' His teacher of Islam was the Sufi, Govinda Rai, who also stayed in the Panchavati. In the Kali temple of Rani Rasmani not only Hindu *sadhus* but Mohammedan *fakirs* and all those who renounced the world, irrespective of their creed, were shown hospitality.

Jadu Mallick's garden house is just to the south of the Kali temple. Sri Ramakrishna used to walk there and rest in the parlour. One of the pictures hanging on the wall there was of the child Jesus on his mother's lap. That picture impressed Sri Ramakrishna so much that he became eager to know about Jesus and he was soon constantly absorbed in the thought of Jesus. He was absorbed thus for three days. At the end of the third day he was walking in the Panchavati when the handsome figure of the Christ, the Son of God, appeared before him, embraced him, and disappeared into his body.

While Sri Ramakrishna was in the Kali temple, many spiritual aspirants, realized souls and *paramahansas* came and stayed in the Panchavati. As it is recorded, lovers of God were attracted to this place and by their contact with the loving personality of Sri Ramakrishna they all gained impetus in their spiritual strivings. At first, Sri Ramakrishna took refuge in the Panchavati to avoid the curious eyes of people. Even the priests and other officials of the Kali temple and the ordinary public who came to bathe in the Ganga did not dare to enter the dense growth of the Panchavati, even during the daytime. They said, 'That is the place of the mad priest.' Therefore it was easy for Sri Ramakrishna to find solitude in the Panchavati. It is doubtful whether his various *sadhanas* could have been practised in the grove of the Panchavati had it been as sparse as it is today.

There was no limit to the vastness of the mind of this wonderful man. Due to science the world is becoming small and in the future it will become still smaller. Distance is no longer an obstacle. It seems that Sri Ramakrishna invoked the Divine Mother under the Panchavati to make it a place of pilgrimage for earnest spiritual aspirants of the whole world.



## In and Around Dakshineswar

### PRAVRAJIKA ATMAPRANA

DAKSHINESWAR IS on the Ganga, and is an outlying suburb of Calcutta. The whole of Bengal is strewn with Kali temples, but the Dakshineswar Kali temple is one of the *maha-tirthas*, great places of pilgrimage, because of Sri Ramakrishna. Today, people of all kinds, from all parts of India and the world, flock to the Kali temple to see Sri Ramakrishna's *Jagrata-Ma*, the Awakened Mother. Alas! To our gross eyes she may be only a stone image. But she was not so to him, as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* clearly shows.

It is not only the precincts of the temple that have become hallowed. The town of Dakshineswar and the adjoining suburb of Ariadaha have also become hallowed. The sanctity of a pilgrimage lies in its holy associations and during his long stay in Dakshineswar (1855-85), Sri Ramakrishna often trod the pathways of these two villages which they were then. He says: 'After I had experienced *samadhi*, my mind craved intensely to hear only about God. I would always search for places where they were reciting or explaining the sacred books, such as the *Bhagavata*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Adhyatma Ramayana*.' No one can give an exhaustive list of the persons and places he visited. But a few pen-pictures and photos of those which are definitely known can be given.

Devotees bear a deep and conscious love for the places visited by their Chosen Ideal because they identify themselves with him and his *Lila*. As Nanda says to Uddhava in the *Bhagavata*:

'My dear, when we remember Krishna and his playfulness, his loving glances, his smile and his words, all our interest in work slackens. One's mind gets absorbed in Krishna when one sees the places associated with him, the river, the mountain, the forest and places of his sport, which are adorned with his footprints.'\*

### History and Tradition

In an effort to trace the footprints of Sri Ramakrishna as he wandered through Dakshineswar and Ariadaha, interesting historical

\* स्मरतां कृष्णदीर्घाणि लीलापाङ्गनिरोक्षितम् । हसितं भाषितं चाङ्ग सर्वा नः शिषिलाः क्रियाः ॥

सरिच्छैलवनोद्देशान् मुकुन्दपदमूपितान् । प्राञ्चीकानीक्षमाणानां मनो याति तदारमताम् ॥ X.46.21, 22.

records and anecdotes brought out facts from the far distant past.\*

A thousand years ago, King Bana lived in a grand palace in Deulpota, the name by which a part of Dakshineswar is still known. This king worshipped a Shiva-*linga* which had a peculiar shape. Tradition says that since then a Shiva-*linga* of that shape has been called Bana-*linga* or Baneshwara Shiva. The Bana-*linga* that King Bana worshipped is still in existence on the bank of the Ganga on the border of Dakshineswar and Ariadaha. There is an interesting story which tells how the Shiva-*linga* worshipped in Deulpota came to be there.

A poor brahmin had a cow but she never gave any milk. She used to graze in Deulpota, which had by then become a jungle, and when she returned from grazing she was always dry. One day the brahmin followed her into the jungle and watched her. To his astonishment he saw the cow go to a Shiva-*linga* there, stand over it, and let down her milk. That night he had a dream in which Shiva said to him, 'I cannot see the Ganga from here. Therefore I will go and stay on the bank of the Ganga near the cremation ground. Make arrangements for my worship there.' The next day the brahmin went to the bank of the Ganga and sure enough, there near the cremation ground, he saw a natural, that is, *svayambhu* Shiva-*linga*. He then started worshipping it. This Shiva is called the Dakshineswar Shiva or the Buro (Ancient) Shiva even now.† (See photo on page ix.)

#### The Name of Dakshineswar

The ancient name of Dakshineswar was Shonitpur or Sambalpur. It is believed that the town got its present name from the Dakshineswar Shiva worshipped there. How did this particular Shiva get this name? The one historically proper reason seems to be, according to Sri Subodh Ray, that when Bana Raja worshipped the Shiva-*linga* there this was the only Shiva temple in the southern part of Bengal, hence this Shiva was called Dakshineswar, the Lord of the South.

\* Commendable efforts have been made by historians like Sri Subodh Ray of Ariadaha to present the history of these twin towns. *Vide* his book in Bengali, *Itivritta-Ariadaha, Dakshineswar* (Calcutta 1971). The narration of anecdotes and historical facts, given here is solely based on his book. The kind permission given by his family to use its contents is thankfully acknowledged.

† In the 'List of Ancient Monuments of Bengal', printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press in 1896 and published by the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal this story is also given.

There are two other interesting anecdotes about this name. One is that King Bana's queen was Dakshina Devi, hence their Chosen Deity was given this name. The second is that in the middle of the sixteenth century there was a powerful and adventurous ruler of the Sundarban region called Dakshin Ray. He used to come to worship this Shiva and since then it became well-known as Dakshineswar, the Lord of Dakshin.

Whatever the truth, one thing is certain, that the village got the name of Dakshineswar because its presiding deity was Dakshineswar Shiva.

#### Within the Modern Period of History

During Akbar's reign the Governor of Bengal was Mansingh. Mansingh's Guru was a recluse named Kamadeva, who had been famous as Pundit Kamadeva Ganguly. He lived in Varanasi. Because of his veneration for his Guru, Mansingh acquired a vast area of land, called 'Kali-kshetra' from Akbar for his Guru's son, Lakshmikanta Ganguly and also conferred on him the title, Chowdhury. Lakshmikanta's great grandson, Keshab Majumdar, who had settled in Badisha, got the title of Ray Chowdhury from the Nawab of Bengal, Murshidkuli Khan.

In 1696, two descendants of this family, Durga Prasad Ray Chowdhury and Bhawani Prasad Ray Chowdhury sold Gobindpur, Sutanuti and Calcutta to the English. They left Badisha and went to settle in Dakshineswar which was then an uninhabited dense forest. These people were worshippers of Sri Krishna. Their most popular festival was the Dol, the Spring Festival. The place where the festivities were held was called Dol-piri, by which name the Dakshineswar market is even now known.

The local tradition is that these two wealthy landlords had taken with them thirty-six families following various vocations, from pundits to cobblers, washermen and potters. The descendants of these families still live in Dakshineswar, and *ghats*, landings with steps leading down into a river, ponds, lanes and localities are known by these family names, such as Vachaspati-para, Bhattacharya-para, Mandal Pukur, (pond), Deb Mandal Ghat, Dewan Deb Mandal Road, (D.D. Mandal Road), and so on. Therefore there is a link between the Dakshineswar of yesterday and today.

Within forty to fifty years from the time these first settlers went



to stay in this jungle region. Dakshineswar became a well-established prosperous village. Sri Ramakrishna, who went there in 1855, refers to his visits to the village of Dakshineswar. Hence we can imagine dusty roads thickly shaded by abundant trees, and mud cottages with thatched roofs. The cottages were interspersed with a few brick-built houses belonging to landlords and other important people.

#### Houses Sri Ramakrishna Visited

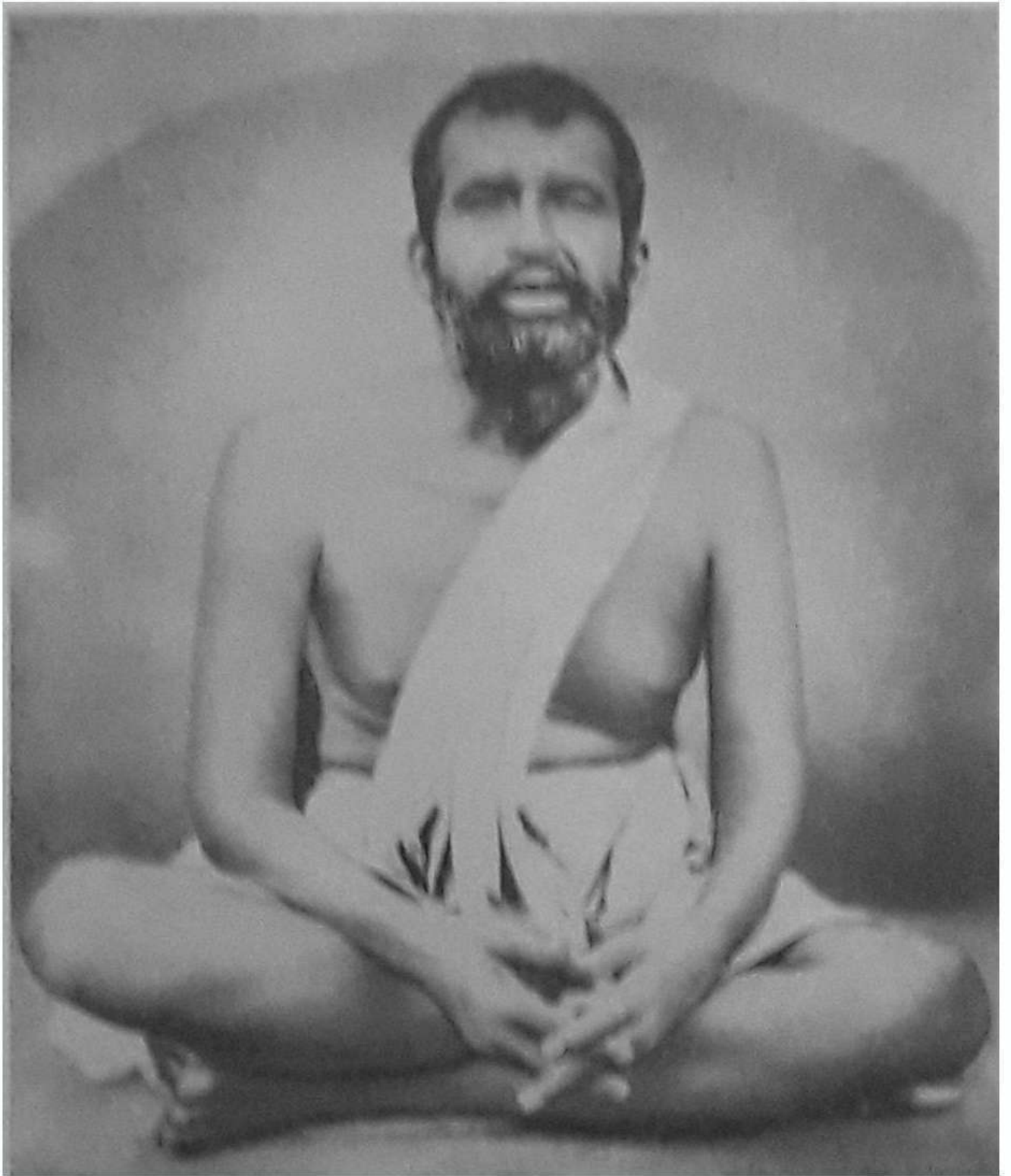
One of the direct descendants of the Ray Chowdhurys was Nabin Chandra Ray Chowdhury. He was an orthodox brahmin and though he was no longer wealthy, many religious festivals were held in his house. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes attended these festivals and was thus known to the family.

Nabin Chandra Ray Chowdhury's son, Yogindra Nath, was not born when Sri Ramakrishna used to visit his parents' house. When Yogindra was sixteen years old, he went one day to the Kali temple to collect flowers. Seeing an ordinary-looking person and taking him to be a gardener, Yogindra asked him to pick some flowers for him. The man obliged him. But another day, when he went to the Kali temple again, he saw the same person sitting in his room and talking to a number of people. Then he knew that his 'gardener' was none other than Sri Ramakrishna, about whom the famous Keshab Chandra Sen had written. In great embarrassment, Yogindra stood outside the room. But Sri Ramakrishna saw him and asked him to come inside. When all the visitors had left Sri Ramakrishna lovingly talked to him, and from Sri Ramakrishna Yogindra came to know that his father was an old acquaintance of his. Yogindra became an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and later took the monastic vows and became known as Swami Yoga-nanda. A photograph of the room in which he lived is given on page x.

A resident of Ariadaha whom Sri Ramakrishna visited often was Krishna Kishore. 'I used to go to Krishna Kishore to hear him read the *Adhyatma Ramayana*,' Sri Ramakrishna said. Krishna Kishore Bhattacharya's house is shown in a photo on page viii. His great grandfather, Rajendra Nath Bhattacharya was a pundit in the court of King Krishna Chandra of Krishnanagar. His grandfather's name was Ramacharan and his father's name was Ramalochana. They were all deeply devoted to Sri Ramachandra. While discussing the importance of faith, Sri Ramakrishna spoke often about Krishna Kishore. 'What tremendous faith Krishna Kishore had! He used to say, "I have spoken the name of God

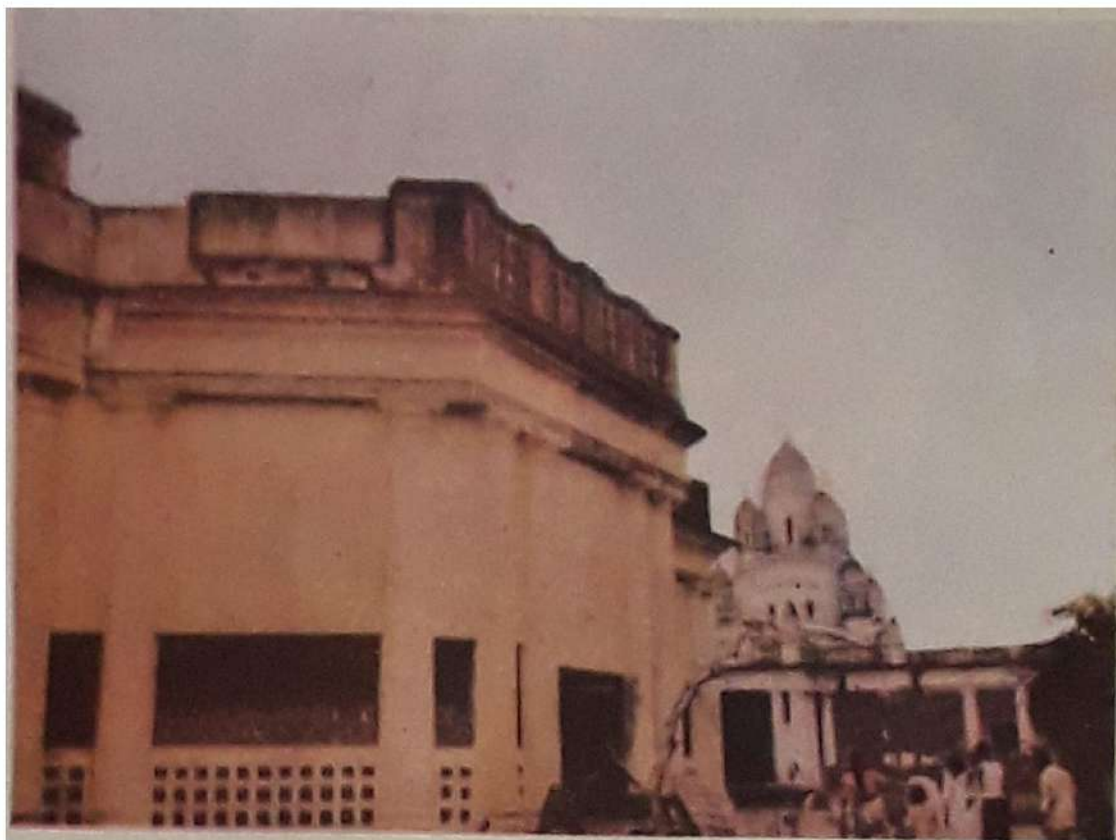


The image of 'Bhavatarini' Kali of the Dakshineswar temple.

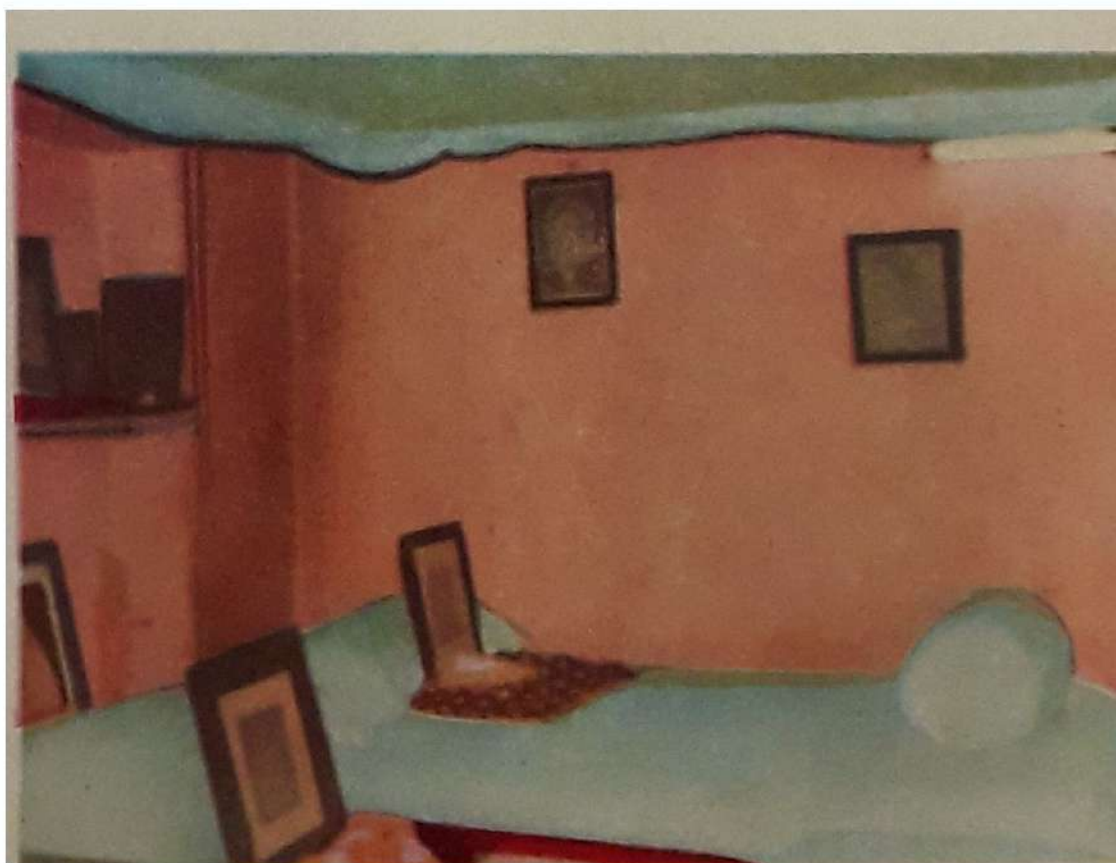


Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86). This photo was taken in 1883.

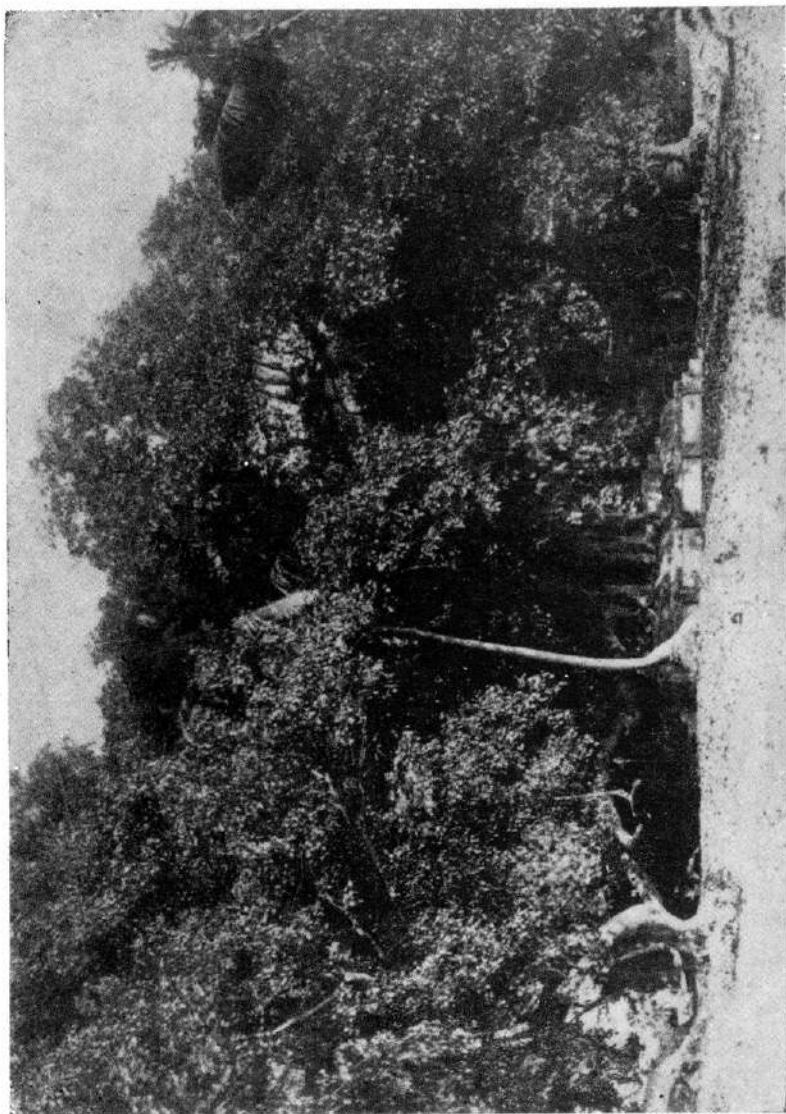




The Kuthi Bari where Rani Rasmani, Mathur Nath and others stayed when they visited the temple. Sri Ramakrishna lived there for sixteen years before he moved to his own room. The steeples of the Kali temple are seen on the right.



Sri Ramakrishna's room with his two bedsteads and pictures on its western wall.



An old photo of the Panchavati which during Sri Ramakrishna's *sadhanas* was a dense jungle where the sunshine hardly penetrated. On the right is seen the mud house where Sri Ramakrishna performed his Advaita *sadhana*. In its place today is a brick-built room.





The steps in the *nahabat* at the rear right corner of the lower room in which the Holy Mother lived. She cooked under the staircase.

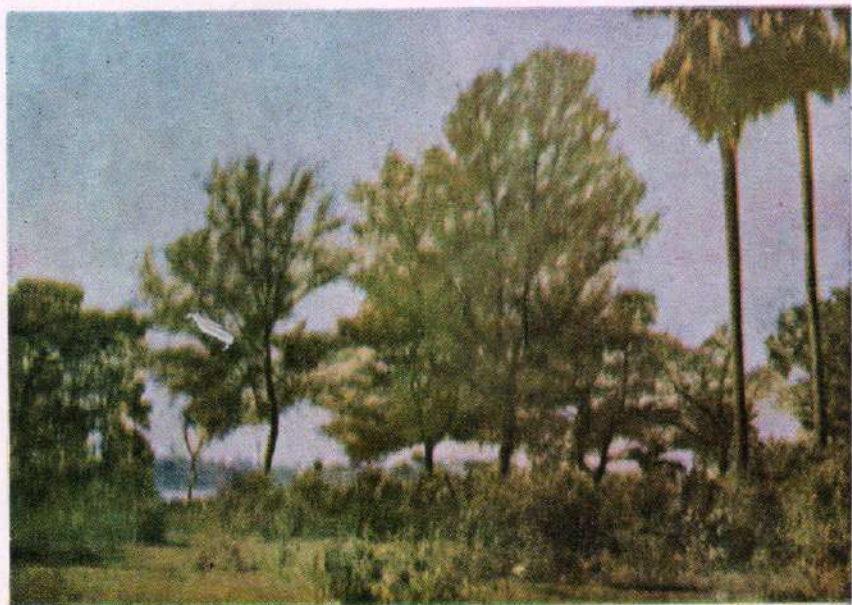


The spacious *natmandir*, the terrace of which is supported by stately pillars and surrounded by decorated arches. It faces Mother Kali's temple.





The north-western side of the *nahabat* which is opposite Sri Ramakrishna's room.



A few of the trees of the pine grove where Sri Ramakrishna often went.

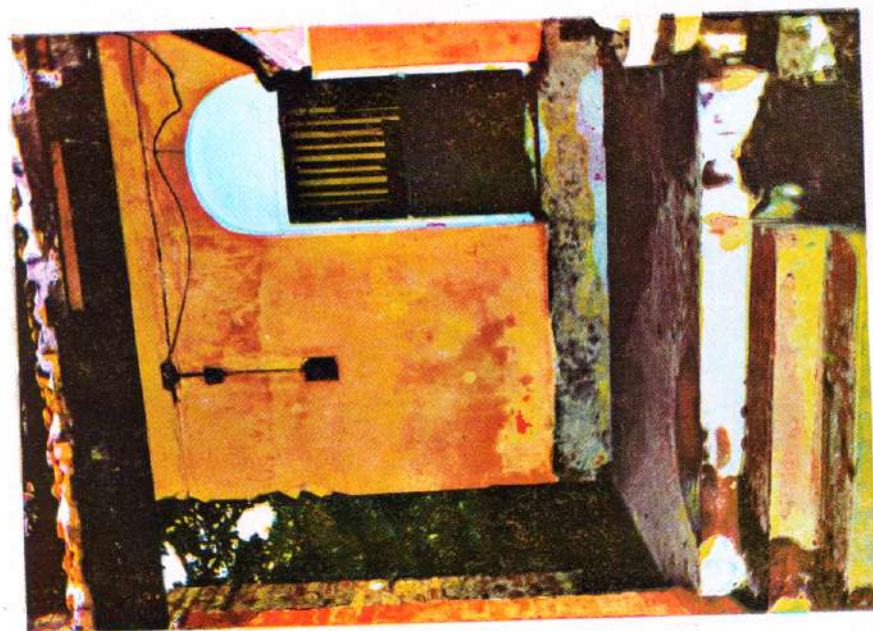


Jadu Mallik's house in the close vicinity of the Kali temple, with Sri Ramakrishna's temple built later in the righthand corner.

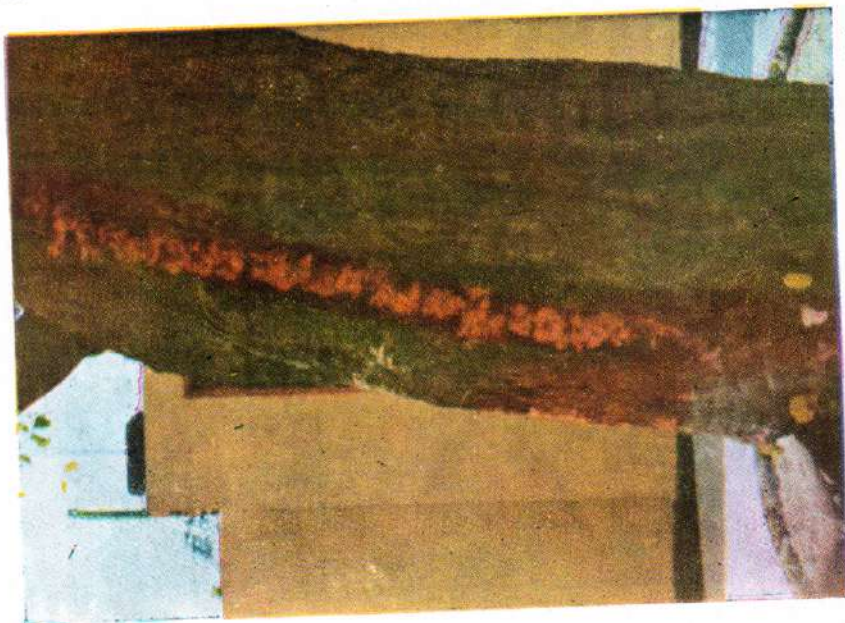


The majestic Deb Mandal Ghat with its spacious portico.  
As Bhairavi Brahmani stayed in rooms which were  
above the portico, he visited the place often.



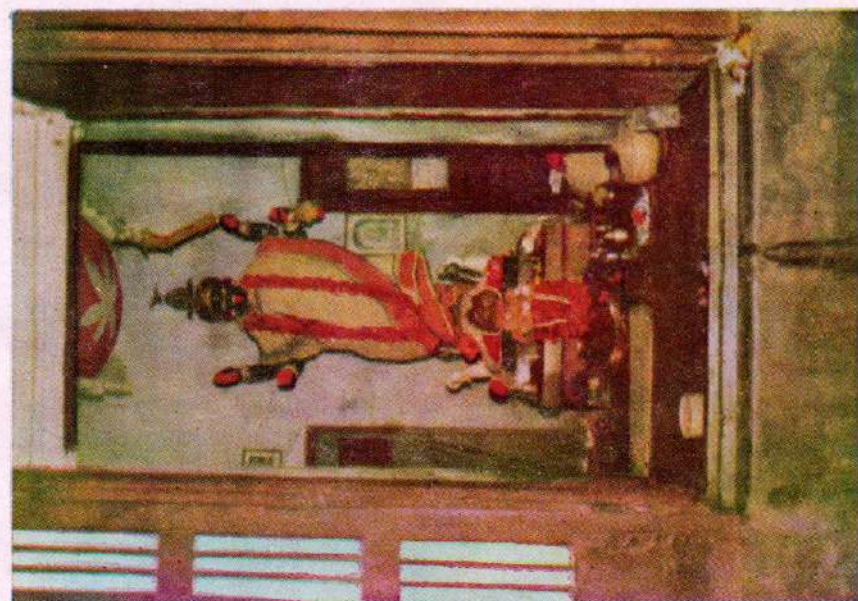


The verandah outside the room of Krishna Kishore's house where, according to the present members of his family, Sri Ramakrishna sometimes rested during the daytime.



The *vilva* tree with the platform around which Sri Ramakrishna performed Tantric *sadhana*s.





Muktakeshi'. The Kali temple opposite the temple of Dakshineswar Shiva, built in c. 1810.



The Ancient Dakshineswar Shiva.





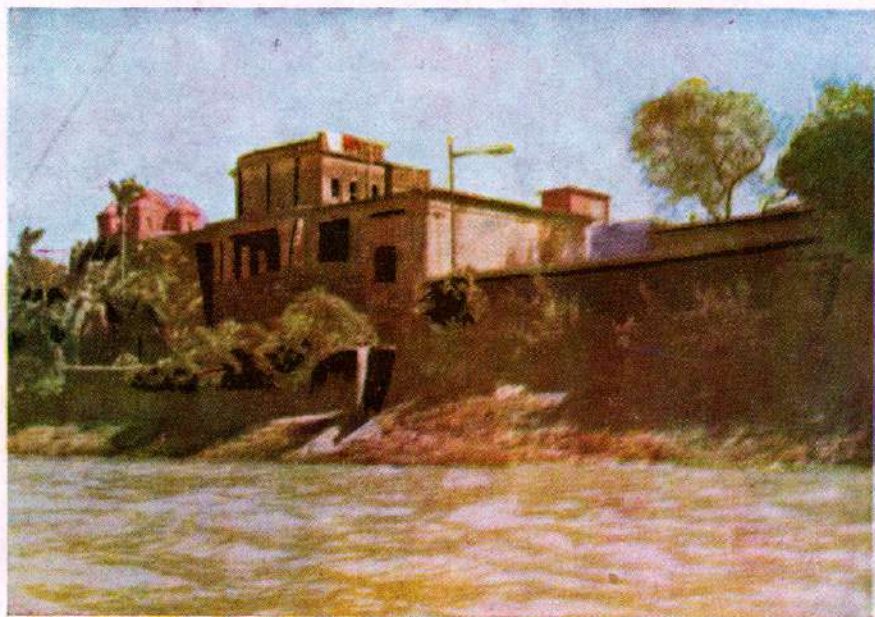
Swami Yogananda's room in his parental home.



Nabin Niyogi's house visited by Sri Ramakrishna often during religious festivals and dramatic performances.



The courtyard of the Gadadhar 'Pat-bari' with the shrine at the farther end.



The Ariadaha *Smashan*.





The ruins of the *puja* pavilion in Kshetra Mohan Chattopadhyay's estate which Sri Ramakrishna visited during the Durga Puja.

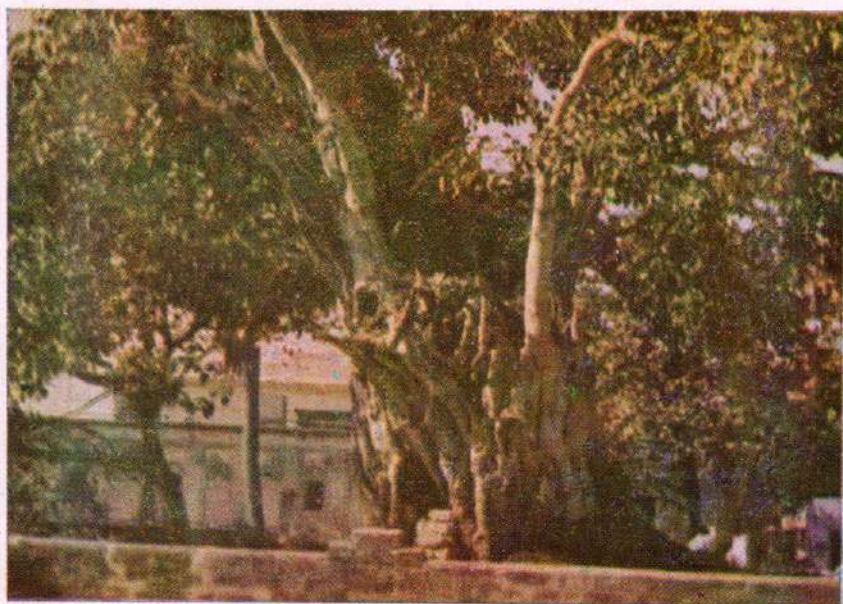


The *puja* pavilion of Ramgati Sinha, built in 1802. Sri Ramakrishna visited it during religious festivals.



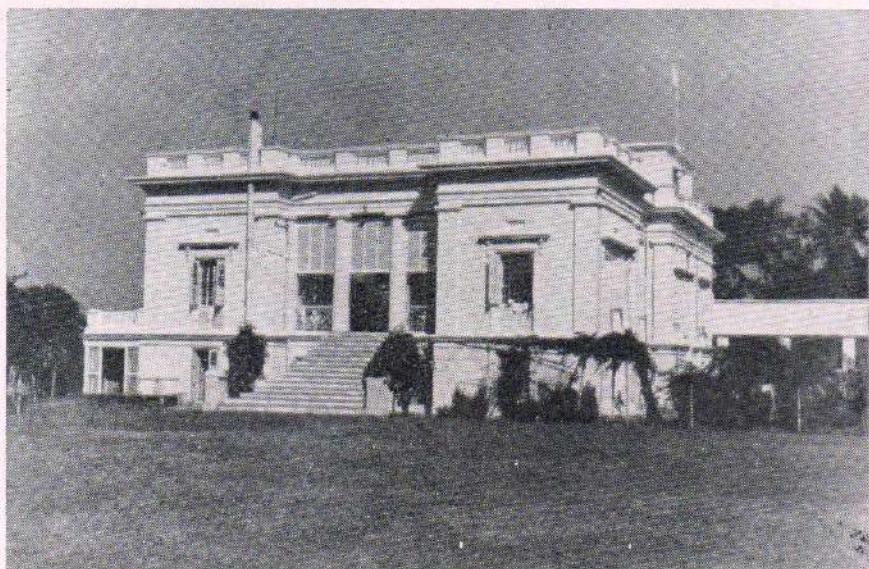


The mosque of Mollapara which, it is said, was visited by Sri Ramakrishna.



The pipal tree round which Rani Rasmani built a protective platform at the command given to her in a dream by the Gazi Pir.





'Suradhuni-Kanan' built in 1840 in the vicinity of the Deb Mandal Ghat. Sri Sarada Math first occupied it in 1954. It had a small shrine which was used until 1981.



The new temple of Sri Sarada Math consecrated on 6 November 1981.



once. That is enough. How can I remain a sinner? I have become pure and stainless.”

Krishna Kishore's wife was also very devoted to Sri Ramakrishna. When Krishna Kishore argued with Sri Ramakrishna on one occasion, she reprimanded him saying, 'What have you said to Sri Ramakrishna? You don't know how to talk to people.'

In whatever affluent circumstances its ancestors had lived, during Sri Ramakrishna's time this family lived in straitened circumstances. Sri Ramakrishna refers to this saying, 'One day I visited him at his home and found him worried. He wouldn't talk to me freely. I asked him, "What's the matter? Why are you brooding like this?" Krishna Kishore said, "The tax-collector came today. He said my pots and pans would be sold at an auction if I didn't pay my taxes. That's what I am worrying about."'

His youngest son, Ramaprasanna visited Sri Ramakrishna often. Though Sri Ramakrishna was fond of him he did not like his wandering about aimlessly. Once a Hatha yogi came to the Kali temple. Ramaprasanna admired and served him, neglecting his mother. Annoyed, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Ramaprasanna is constantly busy procuring opium and milk for the Hatha yogi. He says that Manu enjoins it upon man to serve *sadhus*. But his old mother hasn't enough to eat. She walks to the market to buy her own groceries. It makes me very angry.'

On 5 October 1884, after his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna sat talking to his devotees, 'Today I went to the village to see Nilkantha's theatrical performance. It was given at Nabin Niyogi's house.' About three o'clock in the afternoon Nilkantha with his companions went to meet Sri Ramakrishna, who said to him, 'I had already planned to hear your music. Later on, Niyogi, too, came here to invite me. . . . I love that song of yours about aspiring to reach the lotus feet of the Divine Mother. It is enough to know that everything depends on the grace of God. But one must pray to God; it will not do to remain inactive. The lawyer gives all the arguments and finishes his pleading by saying to the judge, "I have said all I have to say. Now the decision rests with Your Honour." ' Sri Ramakrishna was delighted with Nilkantha and blessed him. Moreover, he sang a song to please Nilkantha. Then he said to the devotees, 'I feel very much like laughing. Just fancy, I am singing for these musicians!' Nilkantha said, 'We go about singing; but today we have had our reward.' Sri Ramakrishna, the bestower of

grace upon earnest people, said smiling, 'When a shopkeeper sells an article, he sometimes gives a little extra something to the buyer. You sang at Nabin's house and have given the extra something here.'

Sri Ramakrishna visited Nabin's home during other religious festivals such as the Durga Puja and the Lakshmi Puja. When Sri Ramakrishna's Guru, Bhairavi Brahmani, went to stay at the Deb Mandal Ghat, it was the pious wife of Nabin Niyogi who opened the rooms for her and sent her a bedstead and some provisions.

Nabin Niyogi was a rich merchant engaged in the castor oil business and ran a mill. He built the beautiful building in front of the Mandal pond in 1853. The photo on page x shows the grand facade of the building; the inside is at present in a dilapidated condition.

In 1855, when Rani Rasmani built the temple, her son-in-law Mathur Nath Biswas became the manager of the Temple Trust. He looked after Sri Ramakrishna's needs and fulfilled his smallest wish. He died in 1871. In 1874 stepped in another *rasaddar*, supplier of provisions, for Sri Ramakrishna. He was Shambhu Charan Mallick of Sinduriapati in Calcutta. He had a garden house in Dakshineswar. At present, beyond the Vivekananda bridge, as the road takes a turn towards Alambazar, there is a mansion called 'Shambhu Villa'. Maybe that was his house as the boundary of his garden, which is described as being adjacent to Jadu Mallick's garden house, was said to be in Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna often visited him, and he too, frequently went to the temple and met Sri Ramakrishna. In the course of time, he started addressing Sri Ramakrishna as 'Guruji'. His wife had great reverence for Sri Ramakrishna and for the Holy Mother as well. On every auspicious Tuesday, she would take the Holy Mother to their house and worship her with a special *puja*, offering sixteen articles. It was Shambhu Charan who saw the hardship the Holy Mother had to face in her very small room in the music tower. He therefore built a cottage for her outside the compound of the temple garden on a plot of land bought for the purpose.

Shambhu Charan was large-hearted and generous in spending money. He told Sri Ramakrishna often about his desire to spend his money for welfare work such as establishing hospitals and dispensaries, starting schools, making roads, digging public reservoirs, and so forth. Sri Ramakrishna appreciated his good intentions but



with a keen eye on his disciple's spiritual welfare, Sri Ramakrishna said to him, 'Don't go out of your way to look for such works. Undertake only those works that present themselves to you and are of pressing necessity—and those also in a spirit of detachment. It is not good to become involved in many activities. That makes one forget God. Going to the Kalighat temple, some, perhaps, spend their whole time in giving alms to the poor. They have no time to see the Mother in the inner shrine! First of all manage somehow to see the image of the Divine Mother, even by pushing through the crowd. Then you may or may not give alms, as you wish. You may give to the poor to your heart's content, if you feel that way. Work is only a means to the realization of God. . . . Suppose God appears before you; then will you ask Him to build hospitals and dispensaries for you? A lover of God never says that. He will rather say, "O Lord, give me a place at Thy Lotus Feet. Keep me always in Thy company. Give me sincere and pure love for Thee."'

After serving his Guruji and the Holy Mother for four years, Shambhu Charan Mallick died in 1877. He sometimes read the *Bible* to Sri Ramakrishna and it was through him that Sri Ramakrishna first became acquainted with Christ and Christianity. This brings us to the house of another devotee whom Sri Ramakrishna often visited. He was the wealthy Jadu Nath Mallick of Pathuriaghata, Calcutta. His garden house was adjacent to the Kali temple in Dakshineswar, so Sri Ramakrishna often went there. The gate-keeper of Jadu Nath's estate had standing instructions to allow Sri Ramakrishna to visit his garden and house whenever he desired, even in the absence of the owner. The affectionate ties of friendship that bound Jadu Nath to Sri Ramakrishna made him take his Master to his Calcutta home also, and all the members of his family were attached to Sri Ramakrishna. Being a wealthy man, he was always surrounded by his admirers and flatterers, and Sri Ramakrishna never hesitated to chide him for this. The Master smilingly said one day: 'Why do you keep so many clowns and flatterers with you?' Jadu Nath's clever retort was, 'So that you may liberate them.' But the Master warned him, 'Flatterers think that the rich man will loosen his purse-strings for them. But it is very difficult to get anything from him.' It is clear, however, that worldliness did not leave Jadu Nath for Sri Ramakrishna said to others in 1885, 'Formerly Jadu Mallick enjoyed spiritual talk; he liked to engage in it himself. But



nowadays he doesn't show that much interest. He surrounds himself with flatterers day and night and indulges in worldly talk.'

At the present time, in the garden house of Jadu Nath Mallick in Dakshineswar there is a primary school on the ground floor and an International Guest House on the first floor. This building appears in a photo on page vii. On the right side is seen a temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna which was built within the last few decades. To devotees this house is important because of two great incidents in Sri Ramakrishna's life. One day, Sri Ramakrishna went to the house and was sitting in the parlour where hung a beautiful picture of the child Christ in the arms of the Madonna. As Sri Ramakrishna was attentively looking at it, he felt as if rays of light emanated from the picture and entered into his body. Then love for Christ filled his heart, and he had a vision of Christians devotedly worshipping Jesus in a church. Sri Ramakrishna's mind was so filled with devotion towards Jesus that for three days he did not even look at pictures of Hindu gods. On the fourth day, when he was in the Panchavati he saw that Christ slowly approached him, embraced him and merged in him. This led the Prophet of the New Age to experience Brahman with attributes (Saguna Brahman) by this new path, namely, the path of Jesus.

On a second occasion, Sri Ramakrishna walked to Jadu Nath's house with Narendra and they sat in the parlour. The Master suddenly touched Narendra. Overwhelmed by this touch, Narendra lost external consciousness. Then Sri Ramakrishna asked him many questions, and the answers Narendra gave confirmed Sri Ramakrishna's visions about him and his future work.

It cannot be said that Sri Ramakrishna visited only the houses of wealthy landlords. Havildar Kuar Singh was one of the guards at the Government's Magazine Gun Factory which was next to the northern boundary of the Kali temple garden. Many Sikh soldiers went often to talk to him about God and religion. Kuar Singh greatly admired Sri Ramakrishna and discussed high philosophy with him. He told him once, 'I have never before seen a person who has returned from the plane of *samadhi*. You are none other than Nanak.'

One day Kuar Singh gave a feast for *sadhus*, and Sri Ramakrishna was also invited. Talking about his state of mind during that period, Sri Ramakrishna said later: 'I found a great many holy men assembled



there. When I sat down for the meal, several *sadhus* asked me about myself. At once I felt like leaving them and sitting alone. I wondered why they should bother about all that. The *sadhus* took their seats. I began to eat before they had started. I heard several of them remark, "Oh! What sort of man is this?"

Rasik Hadi was a sweeper; he cleaned the pathways and toilets in the Kali temple complex. Sri Ramakrishna called him Rashke. For four years, Rasik had watched Sri Ramakrishna but only from a distance. One day he could not restrain himself any longer. As Sri Ramakrishna was returning from the pine grove, Rasik dashed out from behind a tree and fell at Sri Ramakrishna's feet. 'You have not been gracious to me. What will become of me?', he cried. Sri Ramakrishna was taken aback for a moment but soon his mind soared into *śamadhī*. Rasik's tears washed the feet of his Chosen One, whom he called Baba, father. Coming down from the plane of *śamadhī* to normal consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Do not fear. You will attain the Highest. You will see me at the end.'

During Sri Ramakrishna's austere *sādhana*s this Rasik had been an instrument in Sri Ramakrishna's overcoming the vanity of noble birth and the feeling of aversion. Sri Ramakrishna went at dead of night to Rasik's house when all were sleeping. He knew that no one would give him a broom. So with his long unkempt hair he would clean dirty places, praying to the Divine Mother to remove the last trace of pride of noble birth in him. Rasik lived in a bylane on the T. N. Biswas Road where the Vanaprastha Ashrama is now situated. Talking to his devotees one day about Mahamaya, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The *chitśakti*, Mahamaya, has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. One day as I was meditating, my mind wandered away to Rashke's house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, "Stay there, you rogue!" The Divine Mother revealed to me that the men and women in this house were mere masks; inside them was the same Divine Power, *kundalīnī*, that rises up through the six spiritual centres of the body.'

A Brahmo devotee once asked Sri Ramakrishna a question about his views on caste-distinctions. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'There is only one way to remove them, and that is by love of God. Lovers of God have no caste. Through this divine love the untouchable becomes pure, the *pariah* no longer remains a *pariah*.' By his pure devotion



Rasik acquired the status of a pure devotee. He died two years after Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi*. He was old and did his *sadhana* near an altar around a tulsi plant in his compound. One day he told his family to take him to the tulsi-altar. After a few minutes his face beamed with joy and he said, 'See, Father has come, Father has come,' and breathed his last.

There are two more persons whose homes Sri Ramakrishna visited, one in Dakshineswar and the other in Ariadaha. But the exact location of the houses cannot be ascertained. On 5 October 1884 he told the devotees:

'I met Bamandas of Ulo at the Biswas's house. I said to him, "I have come to see you." As I was leaving the place I heard him say, "Goodness gracious! The Divine Mother has caught hold of him like a tiger seizing a man." At that time I was a young man, very stout, and always in ecstasy.'

Sri Ramakrishna went to meet scholars and devotees of God whenever he could and wherever they were. His ideas of practical spirituality were thus spread amongst people with whom he came in contact. Pundit Padmalochana Tarkalankar was the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. When Sri Ramakrishna heard that the pundit was in Ariadaha, he expressed a desire to meet him. On the appointed day in 1864, as the house was quite far away, Sri Ramakrishna went with Hriday in a boat to meet him. This meeting ended with the pundit completely surrendering himself to Sri Ramakrishna. At that time the pundit was unwell, so he said, 'As soon as I recover, I shall have all the scholars summoned to a meeting where I shall declare you to be an Incarnation. I should like to see anyone with the boldness to challenge my statement.' But the pundit's health gradually deteriorated. He went to Varanasi and died there shortly afterwards.

#### Places Sri Ramakrishna Visited

Sri Ramakrishna usually visited places where religious festivals or discourses were held. According to local people, the Durga Puja was held in many families. One such *puja* was held at Kshetra Mohan Chattopadhyay's house at Vachaspati-para. The old pavilion where the *puja* was held, which is now in ruins, is shown in a photo on page xii.

Another place Sri Ramakrishna visited was the house of Ramgati Sinha. According to one of the present owners, Sri Sanat Kumar Sinha, his ancestor, Ramgati Sinha built the house in 1802. Ramgati Sinha was



working in the Treasury of King Krishna Chandra but on retirement settled in Dakshineswar. His vast estate and building is at present at 39 A. C. Banerjee Road in Dakshineswar. From the spacious five-arched *puja* pavilion, two arches of which are still standing, the grandeur of the original structure can be imagined. The photo is given on page xii.

Sri Ramakrishna visited Gadadhar's 'Pat-bari' in Ariadaha. Talking about Pundit Vaishnava Charan, Sri Ramakrishna once said: 'Once he accompanied me to Gadadhar's 'Pat-bari'. I pointed out the place where Gadadhar used to meditate. At once Vijay prostrated himself there. Again he fell prostrate before the picture of Chaitanya Deva.'

It was during the reign of Hussain Shah, the King of Gouda, that Sri Gadadhar Das, one of the chief disciples of Sri Chaitanya Deva, built this 'Pat-bari' in Ariadaha. It is said that Sri Nityananda also visited it once and danced in ecstasy with the child Gopala in his hands. As it is one of the sacred spots of the Vaishnavas it is very well kept, as the photo on page xi shows.

The Deb Mandal Ghat was built by Dewan Dataram Mandal, a very generous man. Now only the steps leading to the Ganga and the spacious portico can be seen. The rooms on top of the portico referred to above are no longer there as the photo on page vii shows. Sri Ramakrishna frequented this *ghat* as his Guru, Bhairavi Brahmani stayed there. He also met her two disciples, Girija and Chandra there.

The narration of Sri Ramakrishna's wanderings in and around Dakshineswar cannot be brought to an end without a reference to the ancient cremation ground of Ariadaha, adjacent to the Dakshineswar Shiva Temple. (See photo on page xi.) It is said that Chandramani Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's mother, was cremated there. A marble plaque on the *smashan* wall corroborates this. But the plaque was put there much later, so whether this was a fact or a conjecture remains to be discovered because there was at that time another cremation ground, which was known as the Dakshineswar *smashan*, to the north of the Deb Mandal Ghat and south of Sri Sarada Math. The temple of the Smashaneshwar Shiva still stands there. One would wonder why from the Dakshineswar temple, the body of Chandramani Devi should have been taken all the way to the Ariadaha *smashan*, when the Dakshineswar *smashan* was near at hand. Even if Chandramani Devi was not cremated at the Ariadaha cremation ground, it can be safely assumed that Sri Ramakrishna did visit it, as also the Dakshineswar

Shiva temple and the Muktakeshi Kali temple opposite it. The latter was built in *circa* 1810. (See photo on page ix.)

The whole adult life of Sri Ramakrishna, until nearly the very end, was spent in Dakshineswar. In 1855 he went to stay at Dakshineswar. Exactly a hundred years ago, in 1885, he left it. So much has changed in these hundred years! It is true that paths are made by the feet of men, but the footprints of the Divine make them hallowed; hence Dakshineswar has become a place of passionate adoration for devotees the world over.

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*Everything in Dakshineswar, even the trees and creepers should be seen minutely. The whole picture should get impressed on the mind. Then only that image would arise in the mind at the time of meditation. Even if a small flowering tree is remembered the whole picture would come to the mind along with it. Then gradually the thought of the Master would come, and also of Mother Kali. Those who are unable to make it convenient to go there daily or often enough should see them all carefully. They will be able to send their mind easily to all these holy places. We ourselves do so. The Master's great saying is, 'mana jekhane tumi o shekhane'—where the mind is there you too are.*

Mahendra Nath Gupta

## A Mosque in Dakshineswar

BRAHMACHARINI SUTAPA

ON THE road which goes north from the Kali temple in Dakshineswar there is a masjid, its front gate facing the road. Many and different anecdotes connect this mosque with Sri Ramakrishna. Akshay Kumar Sen, a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote that one day Sri Ramakrishna went alone, without his usual attendant, his nephew Hriday, to the mosque and stood there for some time. He was wearing a dhoti without folds in the back in the Muslim fashion. He was then thirty years old. According to Swami Vivekananda's disciple, Priya Nath Sinha, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, Ramlal, said that some Muslims came and saw someone standing at the mosque. When they asked, 'Who are you? Where do you live?', the answer came from one among them, 'He lives in the temple and does the *puja*.' Sri Ramakrishna expressed to them his great desire to do the *namaz*. Impressed by the sincerity of his faith and charmed by his personality, they welcomed him inside and with them he performed the *namaz*.

Not finding Sri Ramakrishna in the Kali temple, relates Akshay Kumar, Hriday went running here and there in search of him and finally found him in the masjid. To his horror, he saw that his uncle had taken off his Brahmanic sacred thread and, dressed like a Muslim, was doing the *namaz*. Out of fear and respect, he coaxed him outside. Then taking his hand, he led him away from the mosque as one would a naughty child. After they had walked a safe distance along the road to the temple, Hriday let fly and scolded him sharply, 'What will people say, seeing an orthodox brahmin dressed like this and behaving in this outrageous manner?' But Sri Ramakrishna would not go with him inside the compound of the Kali temple garden. For three days he did not even enter the courtyard but lived outside in the mansion of Mathur Nath, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, the foundress of the temple. He intensively practised Islamic *sadhana*, leaving aside all Hindu ideas and customs.

Another contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna, Vaikuntha Nath Sannyal, says that during the days of Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic *sadhana*, Sri Ramakrishna stayed near the main gate where under a tree is a Pir's grave.

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There he did the *namaz* five (*sic*) times, ate Muslim food and followed the habits of the Muslims in everything he did. Sashi Bhushan Samanta, the son of the storekeeper of the Dakshineswar temple, said that when Rani Rasmani was supervising the construction of the temple she had a dream in which a Muslim saint, known as Gazi Pir said to her, 'I live under the shade of the pipal tree on the north-eastern bank of the pond of Gazi. Pave my place with bricks and arrange to offer me *sinni* and a lamp every evening. I shall bless you.' The Rani engaged a Muslim caretaker to carry out this request. (See photo on page xlii.) When Sashi Bhushan was a boy he saw Sri Ramakrishna going to that pipal tree of the Gazi Pir and making salutations there every morning and occasionally in the afternoon. He also offered *sinni* to the Gazi Pir. A few Bengali sources claim that Sri Ramakrishna's nephews, Hriday and Ramlal, say that Sri Ramakrishna went to the nearby mosque to do *namaz*, though Swami Saradananda does not mention this in his authoritative biography. Nor does he mention the Gazi Pir. Today the tree with its paved platform is marked by a sign which reads, 'Sri Ramakrishna practised his Pir *sadhana* here'.

### Islamic Sadhana

The following incidents, recorded by Swami Saradananda, were heard from Sri Ramakrishna himself. He said,

'I then devotedly repeated the *mantra* 'Allah', wore my cloth like the Arab Muslims, said the *namaz* thrice daily\* and felt disinclined even to see Hindu *devas* and *devils*, not to speak of saluting them, inasmuch as the Hindu mode of thought vanished altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood, and I had the full realization of the result of *sadhana* according to that faith.'

A short time previously, a devout Sufi named Govinda Rai of Dumdum had come to the Kali temple garden. Muslim *fakirs* as well as Hindu *sadhus* were welcome at Rani Rasmani's Kali temple and the hospitality of the temple was equally extended to both. Govinda happily began doing his devotions under the shelter of the Panchavati trees and taking his food from the temple kitchen; he did not have to go out for alms so he could abandon himself to his devotions. Hriday said that Govinda was of the Kshatriya caste by birth and had been

\* The *namaz* is usually done five times a day by Muslims; however, Sufis differ in that they do it three times daily.

formally initiated into the Islamic faith. Sitting in the Panchavati he used to become absorbed in reading the *Quran* and practised *sadhana* according to the teachings of the Sufis.

Sri Ramakrishna was attracted to Govinda, charmed by his sincerity and love for God. He thought, 'I shall be initiated by Govinda and shall engage myself in the practices of that spiritual mood.' Sri Ramakrishna's thoughts were always immediately followed up in action because with him understanding meant actual experience. He always advised: *बन बुद्ध एक करो*—'Make your actions and thoughts one'. He would not give recognition to any obstacles for he was overwhelmed by passion for his ideal. Whatever spiritual attitude he assumed toward God: Shiva, Radha or Hanuman, he would dress according to the role he would play and pay attention to every detail of the part as an expert dramatist would. So he immersed himself in the mood of each religious path he followed and what would take an ordinary man a lifetime to realize he would realize in a few days.

Accordingly, he wanted to eat Muslim food, but as such food is forbidden to orthodox Hindus, Mathur Nath begged him to refrain from doing so. Sri Ramakrishna insisted, he *must* have Muslim food. Mathur came up with a solution, he engaged a Muslim cook, under whose instruction a Brahmin cook prepared food in the 'Muslim manner'. For some days from thereabout came the smell of cooking with onion and garlic. During this period Sri Ramakrishna followed whatever other Muslim customs and manners he was able. He intensely practised Islamic *sadhana* day and night for three days.

According to Akshay Kumar Sen, on the very first night, when Sri Ramakrishna sat for meditation in the Panchavati facing the Ganga, he had an amazing vision. He saw the carcass of a cow floating on the incoming tide. As it was being washed up to the nearby bank by the thrust of the waves, a dog began to eat it. Sri Ramakrishna became absorbed in *samadhi*, the trance in which his mind merged in the consciousness of all beings. He identified with the dog he saw before him and, in that state, mentally ate food forbidden to Hindus. Then he had the vision of a wonderful, radiant person with all white hair, flowing beard and moustache, wearing an *alkhalla* and with a necklace of glass beads around his neck, the kind of *mala* typically worn by *fakirs*. In his hand was a staff. Smiling, he stood in front of Sri Ramakrishna and said, 'You have come; good, good', and made a

gesture of blessing with his hand. Sri Ramakrishna's mind soared from this vision of a divine person to the impersonal aspect of God and he realized that this, as all other religious paths he had travelled, led him to the highest experience of one God in all. This was in 1866.

The name of this area near the Kali temple was then called 'Mollapara'. There were many Muslims there and the 200-250 year old mosque probably visited by Sri Ramakrishna was called the Mollapara Masjid. Today there is a banyan tree on one side and an *ashwattha* tree on the other, growing into the ruins of the graceful minarets which tower above them. Now the *namaz* is no longer performed in it and the call to prayer is no longer heard. In the 1950 riots the Muslim inhabitants abandoned the area. The people now living in the neighbourhood ignore it as a once sacred structure. They do not notice that over its walls bright coloured saris are spread to dry; saris of the women of a few destitute families who have taken refuge within its crumbling walls. A photo of the mosque in its present condition is on page xiii.

In the 1952 inspection report of the Wakf Commissioner of West Bengal, who was in charge of the property, it is written in one place:

'The Wakf estate mosque is associated with the hallowed memory of the great saint Rama Krishna Param Hamsa Deb and it is reported that he used to cry Azan in it.'\*

The 1976 Inspection Report mentions:

'The Mollapara Mosque, Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna Deb used to perform Namaz and cry Azan and also listen to the Holy Quran from a Moulvi for sometime. The mosque is in a very deplorable condition.'

Today, if one comes out of the main gate of the Dakshineswar Kali temple and proceeds along Rani Rasmani Road in an eastern direction, one comes to a road on the left which now has the name Trailokyanath Biswas Road. Following this road north a hundred metres on the west side is the ruined masjid. On the opposite side of the road, No. 5 T. B. Road, is a bicycle shop. The owner of the shop, Samiran Palit, says that it is our duty to restore this masjid to its former glory as a memorial to Sri Ramakrishna lest his vast spiritual experiences of all religious paths, his faith, his assimilation of all religions be in some

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\* There is no authoritative, written record that he cried azan, the call to prayer.



way neglected, and so that it may become a holy place for pilgrims of all religions.

### God is One

Sri Ramakrishna had contact with *sadhakas* of various religions who came to the Kali temple and at other places of pilgrimage when he travelled with Mathur Nath and others. He realized that all religions are valid means to the aim of life which is the realization of God. Thus he was cut to the quick whenever he came across one-sidedness in religion and tried in every way to remove such a narrow attitude. He warned a disciple: 'Never for a moment think that your belief alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.' And he said: 'God can be realized through all paths. It is like your coming to Dakshineswar by carriage, by boat, by steamer, or on foot. You have chosen the way according to your convenience and taste; but the destination is the same. Some of them have arrived earlier than others; but all have arrived.'

'I have practised', he said, 'all religions—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity—and I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. . . . Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Shiva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus and Allah as well—the same Rama with a thousand names. A lake has several *ghats*. At one the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it "jal"; at another the Muslims take water in leather bags and call it "pani"; at a third the Christians call it "water". Can we imagine that it is not "jal", but only "pani" or "water"? How ridiculous! The substance is one under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance: only climate, temperament, and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him.'

Swami Saradananda writes, 'By having faith in the Vedantic knowledge alone, the Hindus and the Mohammedans of India may become sympathetic towards one another and develop a brotherly feeling. Otherwise, as the Master used to say, "There is, as it were, a mountain of difference between them; their thoughts and faiths, actions, and behaviour have remained quite unintelligible to one another in spite of

their living together for so long a time." ' Swami Saradananda conjectures: Does the practice of Islam by Sri Ramakrishna, the divine incarnation of the age, indicate that this mountain would some day disappear and Hindus and Muslims would embrace one another in love?

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### The Vilva Tree

THE LEAVES of the *vilva* tree are necessary for the worship of Shiva. They are also offered to the Divine Mother. The *vilva* tree, or wood apple, which is at the very limit of the northern compound wall of the Dakshineswar temple garden is now surrounded by a cement enclosure. One can easily walk to it as there is no longer any jungle surrounding it as there was in Sri Ramakrishna's time. Looking through the gate of the enclosure one can see a cement altar which encircles the tree and a cement slab which marks the spot where Sri Ramakrishna sat for his Tantric *sadhana*. Under the altar were interred, according to scriptural injunction, three human skulls. Sitting there, for months, Sri Ramakrishna spent his days and nights in *japa*, meditation and other spiritual practices. He said,

'In the daytime the Brahmani went to various places far away from the temple garden and collected and brought various rare articles prescribed by the Tantras. Placing them under the *vilva* tree or under the Panchavati at night, she called me, taught me how to make use of those things, and helped me in the performance of the worship of the Divine Mother according to the prescribed rules with their aid, asking me at last to merge in *japa* and meditation. I acted accordingly. But I had to perform almost no *japa*; for, hardly did I turn the rosary once

when I merged completely in *samadhi* and realized the results proper to those rites. There was thus no limit to my visions and experiences, all very extraordinary. The Brahmani made me undertake, one by one, all the disciplines prescribed in the sixty-four main Tantras, all difficult to accomplish, in trying to practise which most of the *sadhakas* go astray; but all of which I got through successfully by Mother's grace.'

Of those experiences which he had under the *vilva* tree, we know little; but once, when Swami Vivekananda sat to meditate, he saw a very large and wonderful triangle of light which he felt was living. One day, when he went to Dakshineswar, he told Sri Ramakrishna about this experience. Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'Very good; you have seen the Brahmayoni; while practising *sadhana* under the *vilva* tree, I also saw it; what was more I observed it giving birth to innumerable worlds every moment.'

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### The Natmandir, the Music Hall

IN THE inner quadrangle of the Kali temple, regarding us in mute eloquence is a massive stone structure. It is called the *natmandir*, the music hall. It stands to the south of the Kali temple, the deity, Bhavatarini, looking directly into its vast empty space. It has no walls, but huge pillars, running north to south, support its roof. (See the photo on page v.) In the centre of the parapets in all the four directions, is seated Bhairava, eternally saying his *japa-mala*. Whenever Sri Ramakrishna went up to the inner shrine, he stood at its first landing and looked up at Bhairava with folded hands, as if to ask permission to go in to see his Mother.

Today the *natmandir* is used just as it was in Sri Ramakrishna's time. Strains of devotional music float through the temple garden from this music hall. Recitals and concerts are held and dramas are enacted for the Mother to see and hear. But the grandest of all meetings held in the hall were those in 1861 when two scriptural debates were organized by Mathur Nath. The object of the debates was to prove the truth or otherwise of Bhairavi Brahmani's assertion that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God.

The intensity of Sri Ramakrishna's love for God made him act abnormally, and that state even brought about extraordinary changes in



his body. These apparent ailments worried Mathur and he wanted Sri Ramakrishna to be treated by a doctor. At this time Bhairavi Brahmani, a learned Yogini, came to Dakshineswar. Her *sadhana*s and scholarship gave her the understanding that Sri Ramakrishna was neither mad nor sick. She saw that he manifested the experience known as *mahabhava*,\* a rare form of love for God, like that experienced by Radha or Chaitanya. It was a state which none but a divinity on earth could manifest. She made efforts to persuade Mathur and others to accept her opinion, but she failed. Therefore she said one day, 'Please bring Pundits, well-versed in the Shastras. I am ready to convince them of the truth of my words.' The worldly-wise Mathur would not accept her proposition. At this stage, however, like an importunate child, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Great scholars must be brought and what the Brahmani says must be tested.' Because Sri Ramakrishna had said it, Mathur had to agree. Inwardly, however, he felt sure that in the scriptural debate the Brahmani would be defeated, and he would then be free to take Sri Ramakrishna to a doctor for treatment.

#### The First Scriptural Debate

As we have said, the venue of the meeting was the *natmandir*. Pundit Vaishnava Charan, a learned scholar and leader of the Vaishnava community, was invited to give his opinion. He came with a distinguished company of scholars and devout aspirants and sat on one side. On the other side was the Brahmani, an adept in the Tantric and Vaishnava scriptures. Mathur and his party were also there. The Brahmani proclaimed her view that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation, *avatara*, and supported her contention with quotations from the Shastras. Vaishnava Charan and the others discussed at length the abstruse theological points.

In between sat Sri Ramakrishna, the high spiritual state of whose experiences they were discussing, to decide whether his *mahabhava* was a sure sign of the rare manifestation of God in man. He was sitting there, sometimes immersed in his own thoughts, sometimes attentively listening to what was being said around him—but seemingly unconcerned. Chewing a pinch of spices from his pouch, he sometimes sat there smiling like a child, for 'the play' was now reaching a climax.

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\* In the devotional scriptures the coexistence of all the signs of the nineteen kinds of main spiritual moods is called *mahabhava*.

While the Shastras were discussed, he now and then nudged Vaishnava Charan and said, 'Look here, it sometimes happens like this.'

At the conclusion of the debate, Vaishnava Charan said he agreed with the Brahmani's view that in Sri Ramakrishna was manifest the *mahabhava*—a state which only incarnations of God experience. Sri Ramakrishna, his face beaming with joy, said to Mathur, 'Just fancy, he too says so! Well, I am glad to learn that after all it is not a disease.'

### The Second Debate

But Mathur was not satisfied. A few days later he convened another meeting. This time he invited Gauri Pundit of the village of Indes. As he was an eminent Tantric *sadhaka*, he would certainly be able to ascertain Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual status. Gauri Pundit was not only a learned man, he had a miraculous power acquired through austerities. He defeated his adversaries with this power. Whenever he was invited to such meetings, he would loudly say the *mantra*: 'O Mother of Ganesha, whom else shall I, a helpless one, have for refuge but Thee!' He would derive great strength from this utterance and the people in the assembly would be startled by some indescribable fright by his heroic attitude and half the victory would already be won.

Sri Ramakrishna did not know about this power of Gauri Pundit. But when the Pundit reached the Kali Temple and loudly uttered the *mantra* Sri Ramakrishna pushed himself forward and repeated the *mantra* more loudly. Gauri was taken aback—but in a still louder voice he again repeated the *mantra*. Again Sri Ramakrishna repeated it, raising his voice louder still. And this went on till Gauri was subdued and unable to raise the pitch of his voice any further. Vaishnava Charan and other *sadhakas* too were present at this meeting. Gauri discussed the whole question with them and in the end came to agree with their views.

While the assembled people looked on, awed and wonderstruck, this divine child remained unchanged as if unconcerned. He said to Gauri, 'Look here, Vaishnava Charan calls this (pointing to himself) an incarnation of God; can this be so? Please tell me what you think.' Gauri Pundit seriously replied, 'Is that all he has to say about you? Then he has said very little. I am fully convinced that you are that fountain of spiritual power, only a particle of which descends on earth from time to time in the form of an Incarnation.' Sri Ramakrishna was himself enjoying 'the play'. With great delight he said, 'Ah, you seem

to have quite ousted Vaishnava Charan in this matter. What have you found in me that makes you entertain such an idea?' Gauri humbly said, 'I feel it in my heart and I have the scriptures on my side. I am ready to prove it to anyone who challenges me.' And the playful child said, 'Well, it is you who say so; but believe me, I know nothing about it.' The Pundit replied, 'Quite right. The Shastras also say, "Thou dost not know Thyself"'. So, please tell us how others can know you. If you have compassion for anyone, and let him know the truth, then he can know you.' Sri Ramakrishna smiled. That smile expressed his joy in not being *caught* in 'the play'. Not a ripple was caused in the deep inscrutable mind of the divine child.

The message of the two debates reverberates even now from the stone structure of the music hall.

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### The Ramayat Sadhu's Child

A LARGE number of *sadhus* of the Ramayat sect came to Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna on different occasions. They were known as Babajis and were men of fervent renunciation. It was by one of them that the divine child Ramachandra, who was affectionately called Ramlala, was brought to Dakshineswar. The sadhu served him tenderly for a long time in a small image consisting of eight metals.\* He took his Ramlala with him wherever he went, cooked whatever he received as alms and offered food to him. Sri Ramakrishna observed them day and night and understood that the Babaji knew every nuance of the divine child's moods, what he wanted to eat and what he wanted to do. With Ramlala for his companion the *sadhu*, who was called Jata-dhari, was always intoxicated with bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna had, in his village, performed the worship of his family deity, Raghuvir, a stone emblem of Rama, so he was initiated into Lord Rama's worship with a *mantra*. But now he saw Rama, not as his Lord but as a dear child who elicited from him maternal love. He became anxious to realize God in this new mood that came over him and wanted to be initiated into a *mantra* of the divine child.

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\* Gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, brass, iron and mercury.



Jatadhari came to know of Sri Ramakrishna's desire and initiated him into the *sadhana* of that *mantra*. Within a few days Sri Ramakrishna succeeded in getting the constant vision of the child Rama. Celebrating his realization, he recited this couplet which he used to repeat in later years to his disciples:

Rama who is Dasharatha's son is in every being;

The same Rama is immanent in the universe and yet transcends it.

Sri Ramakrishna at first forbade the divine child to come to him. But the child's attraction for him increased day by day. As long as Ramakrishna remained with the Babaji, Ramlala was happy and played and ran about. But as soon as Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room, Ramlala followed him. Sri Ramakrishna saw, as clearly as he saw another person, that Ramlala accompanied him, dancing before him and behind him. He insisted on being carried by Sri Ramakrishna but when he took him upon his lap he would not stay there for a single moment but get down, run here and there, collect flowers in the thorny jungle or go into the water. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him time and again, saying, 'My dear, don't do that; you will get blisters on your feet if you run in the sun. Do not stay in the water so long; you will catch cold and get fever.' But the child would not listen.

The child ignored him as though he was talking to someone else. He would sometimes grin at him and his large eyes, as beautiful as the petals of a lotus, would gleam and he would carry on without stopping. He used to pout and grimace at Sri Ramakrishna which made Sri Ramakrishna scold him all the more saying, 'You rascal, wait, I'll give you a sound beating today and pound your bones into powder.' Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna would drag him away from the sun or water and coax him by giving him something and ask him to play in his room. On occasion Sri Ramakrishna, finding no other recourse, slapped him which made the child sob. Then Sri Ramakrishna found it unbearably painful to see the child looking at him with tears in his eyes. Then he would take him on his lap and console him. He said,

'On some days the Babaji would cook food and offer it to Ramlala but could not find him. Wounded at heart, he would then come here and find him playing in my room. With his feelings wounded, he would then scold him saying, "I took so much trouble to cook food for you and am searching for you hither and thither; and free from care and forgetful of everything, you are here! That has ever been your way. You

do as you fancy. You have no kindness or affection. You left your father behind and went to the forest; your poor father died of weeping but still you did not return to show yourself to him." With these and similar words he used to drag Ramlala to his place and feed him.

'One day I was going to bathe when he took an obstinate fancy to go with me. What could I do? I took him with me. Then he would not come out of the water. He turned a deaf ear to all my pleading. At last I became angry, immersed him in the water and said, "Now stay in the water as long as you like"; and I actually saw that he panted and writhed under the water. Seeing him suffer thus and thinking to myself, "What have I done?" I took him out of the water onto my lap.

'It cannot be described how much I felt pained for him on another occasion and how much I wept. That day Ramlala was obstinately demanding something to eat, and I gave him some parched paddy not properly husked, in order to pacify him. I then found that his soft and delicate tongue was lacerated by the husk of the paddy as he was eating it. Dear me! What a great pain I felt then! I took him on my lap, wept loudly and taking hold of his chin, sobbed out the words, "I was so rash and foolish that I did not at all hesitate to put such contemptible food into the mouth which mother Kausalya used to feed solicitously with such soft delicacies as butter, thickened milk and cream, lest they should hurt him".'

Many days passed like this. Jatadhari stayed on for a long time in Dakshineswar. Ramlala did not want to leave Sri Ramakrishna, and the Ramayat *sadhu* could not leave his beloved child. One day, crying profusely, the Babaji came to Sri Ramakrishna and said,

'Ramlala has shown himself to me in the way I wanted to have his vision and has thus quenched the thirst of my life. Moreover, he said he would not go from here; he does not like to leave you behind and go away. My mind is now free from sorrow and pain. He lives happily with you and plays and sports; I feel beside myself with bliss to see it. I am now in such a state that I feel happy at his happiness. Therefore I can now leave him with you and go elsewhere. Thinking he is happy with you, I will be happy.' Saying this, he put Ramlala in the hands of Sri Ramakrishna and took his leave. The divine child remained in Dakshineswar from then on.

## बोलो बोलो मुरघुनी

जितेन्द्र नाथ सरकार

बोलो बोलो मुरघुनी  
तोमार बेलाय की सीला घोटिलो  
अबाक होईया धुनि ।  
कोषा कोन देशे कामारपुकुर  
जयरामबाटी शे बा कत्तो दूर  
के बा खुदिराम के बा गदाधर  
के देवी चन्द्रमनि ।  
कोन देवतार भिक्खाजननी  
कामार कन्या धनी ॥  
बिषालाकखीर पथ कोन दिके  
कोथाय भूतिर खाल,  
कृष्ण मेघेर कोले कोषा चले  
स्वेत बलाकार पाल ॥  
के शे उन्माद साधक महान  
संचार करे पापाने परान  
तन्ने बीक्खा कारे करे दान  
भैरवी ब्राह्मनी ।  
शिशु रामलाला खेले कार शने  
के बा शे परम गुनी ॥  
कहो जाह्नवी तोतार काहिनी  
कहो केशवेर कथा  
मधूर केमने अर्घ्य रचिलो  
राशमनी शेबारता ।  
शे दिन काहारा गेयेछिलो गान  
कारा एशेछिलो शोंपिया परान  
जेलेछिलो कारा पागलेर पारा  
महा साधनार धुनि  
कारे बिरि आई नीला अभिनय  
के बा शे मध्यमनि ॥\*

\* This song in the Bengali language by Jitendra Nath Sarkar is transcribed in Nagari script with spelling according to Bengali pronunciation.



## Tell Me, O Ganga, Suradhuni

SHIV DHAWAN\*

O Mother Ganga, reservoir of purity supreme, glory to Thee  
accept my humble entreaty, O supreme bestower of immortality.  
Ganga, Thou art the sole witness to that which made Dakshineswar  
bright,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

Come, O Mother, take me Thy child on a long pilgrimage,  
show me Kamarpukur, home of Ramakrishna, spiritual beacon of our age.  
Who indeed were Khudiram and Devi Chandramani, the divine parents  
now lost to sight,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

Tell me of his childhood antics, tell me about his play,  
tell me about the blacksmith's daughter Dhani, who offered alms one  
day.  
The one whom Bhairavi Brahmani initiated, tell me about that luminary  
bright,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

Tell me, O Ganga with whom Ramlala played in fun,  
tell me tales of Totapuri, Keshab, Rasmani, Mathur and the Holy One.  
Tell me, dearest Ganga, about the one to whom people offer flowers  
bright,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

Tell me where a flock of white cranes flew against dark clouds above,  
tell me about the *sadhaka* who worshipped Kali with unparalleled love.  
Where is Jayrambati, Vishalakshi, and where is Bhutir Khal, speak, O  
River bright,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

Tell me, O Holy Ganga, of the temple in Dakshineswar Garden,  
tell me about those who sang along melodiously with the Holy One.  
Tell me, O Ganga, about those few who enkindled the fire of  
renunciation bright,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

Not having seen the glory of the Holy One myself, despondent I grow,  
therefore, O Ganga, give me strength by telling me all you know.  
Hide nothing, O Holy River, speak about Him, whose inspiration still  
burns bright,  
reveal the drama enacted on your banks—I will listen with wondrous  
delight.

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\* Based on the Bengali song by Jitendra Nath Sarkar.

## Sri Ramakrishna

### PRAVRAJIKA AJAYAPRANA

IT WAS Mahendra Nath Gupta's third visit to Dakshineswar. Narendra was also present in the Paramahansa's room which was full of devotees from Calcutta and other places. The devotees were conversing with Sri Ramakrishna. He interspersed the conversation with songs in his melodious voice. Narendra also sang with a voice no less captivating than the Paramahansa's. Mahendra Nath Gupta or M., as he calls himself in his epic composition, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, had never before witnessed such a mart of joy. He was fortunate to see the state of *samadhi* of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. One by one the devotees left the place. Only M. remained. He stayed in the temple garden till late in the evening. Being reluctant to return to his humdrum worldly life, he asked Sri Ramakrishna if there would be more singing. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No', but told M. that he would be going to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta where M. could hear him sing. M. was hesitant. The house was probably a rich man's. Would he be allowed to enter? Then Sri Ramakrishna made a very, very significant remark; one which promised hope, encouragement, solace and salvation not only to M. but to posterity. The great Master said, 'Just mention *my* name. *Say that you want to see me; then someone will take you to me.*'

In these two simple sentences lies the whole gamut of spiritual disciplines, experiences, realizations and ecstasies. Self-effort and divine grace are the two extremes in spiritual life. Many argue that self-effort and grace are diametrically opposed to each other. But here we see that the great Master, the latest incarnation, has so easily fused the two together that they complement and supplement each other. The devotee should take the first step forward towards the Lord then He will take a hundred strides towards him. Any aspirant of eternal life should call or chant His name earnestly and yearn for his direct vision. This is within the aspirant's self-effort. Then, from an unexpected direction the Guru appears, lending a helping hand. This forms the Lord's part of the contract, that is, the bestowal of divine grace. The Master's sacred name is the name of the dual personalities

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of Rama and Krishna combined into 'Ramakrishna'. The repetition of the sacred name is intensified with the ever-increasing desire to have his direct vision; it becomes the 'open sesame' to the door of ultimate liberation. And Sri Ramakrishna promised that proper help and guidance will be accorded at the appropriate hour.

#### Infinite Aspects

Once, at Dakshineswar, M. told Sri Ramakrishna: 'You are as infinite as He of whom we have been talking (that is, the Supreme God-head). . . . Truly, no one can fathom your depth.' The Master said smiling: 'Ah! I see you have found it out.' The aspects of his personality are as infinite as a million-faceted gem. Hence, there are a great many interpretations of his life, none comprehending him completely. He was unfathomable, as the *Taittiriya Upanishad* declares: 'From where words return along with the mind, defeated in the attempt to fathom'.\*

The life of an incarnation is a reference book for us to turn to for guidance and help when passing through the multifarious vicissitudes of life. 'They are the signposts,' says Swamiji, 'here and there, directing the march of humanity.' Sri Ramakrishna's short life of fifty years was an epitome of the lives and teachings of all the great incarnations of the past as also those who are yet to assume human bodies on this earth.

The most important aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's life is his renunciation. The Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, says: 'It seems to me, my child, that the special feature of the Master's life is his renunciation. Has anyone ever seen such a natural renunciation?' And she is the person who had the authority to say this because in the Master's practice of renunciation she, as his wife, had an equal part to play. Young Sarada, living in the quiet village of Jayrambati, was troubled by persistent rumours of her husband's madness. She felt intuitively that these rumours were concocted by malicious minds and that her saintly husband was completely sane. Yet, fearing that he would be harassed by ignorant people, she decided that her place was to be near him, so she went to him in Dakshineswar, walking all the way.

What occurred when she entered his room is told by Swamiji: 'When at last she stood in her husband's presence, he at once admitted

\* वतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अत्राप्य मनसा सह ॥ ॥.४.



her right to his life, although in India any person, man or woman, who embraces a religious life, is thereby freed from all other obligations. The young man said to his wife, "As for me, the Mother has shown me that She resides in every woman, and so I have learnt to look upon every woman as Mother. That is the one idea I can have about you; but if you wish to drag me into the world, as I have been married to you, I am at your service."

'The maiden was a pure and noble soul and was able to understand her husband's aspirations and sympathize with them. She quickly told him that she had no wish to drag him down to a life of worldliness; but that all she desired was to remain near him, to serve him, and to learn from him. . . . Thus through his wife's consent the last barrier was removed, and he was free to lead the life he had chosen.'

Though living in a room in the precincts of the beautiful temple near one of the biggest cities of the world, looked after by one of the wealthiest citizens of Calcutta, Sri Ramakrishna remained till the end the Eternal Child, the epitome of purity, innocence and bliss. He nestled in the loving palm of the Divine Mother of the Universe, as Edwin Markham sings:

At the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky  
And flinging the clouds and the towers by,  
Is a place of central calm;  
So here, in the rear of mortal things,  
I have a place where my spirit sings,  
In the hollow of God's palm.

Singing, dancing, frolicking with the youngsters, he always swam and revelled in the ocean of heavenly bliss, the Child of Eternity, 'ever-untainted' (निरुद्ध-निरुद्धन) by anything worldly.

Sri Ramakrishna's intense renunciation was successful because of his total allegiance to truth. Truth was a passion for him. 'His allegiance to truth took the form of a literalness whereby he immediately gave up whatever he reasoned would not bring him a step closer to God-realization.' This 'literalness' was a special characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna, expressed through every spiritual discipline he went through. When he practised detachment from gold (काचन), he kept a nugget of gold in one hand and a clod of earth in the other and he literally saw both as two clods of earth. He attained the state of same-sightedness of gold and clay (समलोष्टाश्मकाचन) as the *Gita* says. Again,

he had complete control over lust (काम). That helped him to identify his young wife with both his earthly mother and the Divine Mother. While he himself remained a child of the Infinite, he raised his wife to the stature of the Mother of all humanity.

### Spiritual Experiments and Attainments

Sri Ramakrishna's experiments and explorations in the realm of spirituality were unique. He practised the disciplines enjoined by all the diverse sects of Hinduism and also other major religions of the world. Many wonder about the need and significance of this laborious task. Why did an incarnation, perfect as he was from birth, undergo such arduous disciplines and try to reach the goal through so many paths? Did he wish to enlist followers from all sects and religions? Did he wish to demonstrate before a scientific age that all the paths were equally true and would lead to the same goal if strictly followed? Within his short span of life, by living the truths of all religions, did he desire to teach the world that all religions are true and authentic? Or, did he want to establish the harmony of religions? This aspect of Sri Ramakrishna is expressed in the hymns of devotion written by his disciples. Swami Vivekananda sings:

O Ramakrishna, salutations to you who are the establisher of dharma, the embodiment of all dharmas and also the greatest of divine incarnations.\*

Again, Swami Saradananda lauds the Master in a hymn:

Salutations to you, O Ramakrishna. You are the establisher of all dharmas, and also the embodied form of all dharmas. You are the great teacher of all teachers.†

A simple statement made by the Holy Mother answers all these questions. She observes: 'It never seemed to me that he had practised the different religions with any definite motive of preaching the harmony of religions. Day and night he remained overwhelmed with the ecstatic thought of God. He enjoyed the sport of the Divine by practising spiritual disciplines, following the paths of the Vaishnavas, Christians, Mussalmans and the rest.'

\* स्वाधिकाय च धर्मस्य सर्वधर्मस्वरूपिणे । अवतारवरिष्ठाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

† सर्वधर्मस्वाधिकायस्य सर्वधर्मस्वरूपकः । आचार्याणां महाचार्यो रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

Sri Ramakrishna did not like to remain confined to the narrow groove of one path, 'single track' (এক পথে), as he termed it in Bengali. He wanted to eat the cake and enjoy its sweetness, tasting it from all sides.

### His Power to Transform

Sri Ramakrishna, at the age of twenty-five, performed all the sixty-four *sadhanas* laid down by the Tantric scriptures under the able guidance of a woman, a brilliant yogini, the Bhairavi Brahmani. But through his spiritual disciplines he became a *sparshamani*, a touchstone, which transformed each person who came into contact with him into a finer and better individual. The first instance of his transforming power we see in the life of his Guru, the Bhairavi Brahmani. She led Sri Ramakrishna step by step through the difficult path of Tantric *sadhana* till he reached perfection in it. Before leaving him, she was freed of her haughtiness and became humble. Tota Puri was his second Guru and in his case too, a transformation occurred. He was a stern ascetic, who always dwelt on the Advaitic level of consciousness. He did not think his existence was confined within a mere bodily form and a rational mind, both of which are under the power of Mahamaya, the Shakti which causes the illusion of the world. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Though you reason all your life, unless you are established in *samadhi*, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Shakti. Even when you say, "I am meditating", or "I am contemplating", you are moving in the realm of Shakti, within Its Power.' However, arguments could not shake the firm stand of the austere monk or make him accept the reality of Shakti. In the end, as a result of his eleven months' stay in the proximity of his disciple, his reasoning and intellectual bravado were mellowed. He accepted the theory of Maya, reconciling the Advaitic Reality with the play of creation, the Nitya with the Lila. Narendra, the Calcutta boy, proud of his lineage and intellect, was the third to come under Sri Ramakrishna's transforming power. He was firm in his convictions, scholarly and wonderfully talented. But he was transformed into the yogi Vivekananda, the universally known spiritual leader and guide.

### The Son of Woman

Muhammad Daud Rahbar, in his article on 'Sri Ramakrishna, the Son of Woman', makes a novel remark: 'Jesus is remembered as the



Son of Man. In the recorded history of religion, Sri Ramakrishna shines as a devotee of the Divine Mother. He should, therefore, be remembered as the Son of Woman.' From his childhood to the time he left his body, Sri Ramakrishna gave great respect to women. He accepted his first alms after his *upāṇayana*, sacred-thread ceremony, from the hands of a low-caste woman. His first Guru was a woman. He loved and looked on his wife as his helpmate in his spiritual ministrations, and led her by gradual steps till she reached perfection. Then, he knelt down before her, worshipped her and proclaiming her as the Mother of the Universe, surrendered his all at her feet. Even after leaving his mortal frame he assured her that she was not a widow, he had only shifted his residence from one room to the other.

Such was the wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna, which enables us to be convinced that God alone is real, and all else is false. To quote the words of the great historian, Arnold Toynbee:

'Religion is not just a matter for study; it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness. He practised successively almost every form of Indian religion and philosophy, and he went on to practise Islam and Christianity as well. His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere.'

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## Kali Puja Day at Dakshineswar

Recorded by Mahendra Nath Gupta

IT WAS the day of the worship of Kali, the Divine Mother. [Saturday, 18 October 1884]. The worship was to begin at eleven o'clock at night. Several devotees arrived at the temple garden early in the evening. They wanted to visit Sri Ramakrishna during the holy hours of the night of the new moon.

M. came alone to the garden about eight o'clock in the evening. The great religious festival had already begun. Lamps had been lighted here and there in the garden, and the temples were brightly illuminated. Music could be heard in the *nahabat*. The temple officers were moving about hurriedly. There was to be a theatrical performance in the early hours of the morning. The villagers had heard of the festive occasion, and a large crowd of men and women, young and old, was streaming in.

In the afternoon there had been a musical recital of the *Chandi* by Rajnarayan. Sri Ramakrishna had been present with the devotees and had enjoyed the recital immensely. As the time for the worship approached, he was overwhelmed with ecstasy.

Some of the devotees went to the temple to salute the image of the Divine Mother. Others sat quietly performing *japa* on the steps leading to the Ganga. It was about eleven o'clock, the most auspicious time for contemplation of the Divine Mother. The flood-tide was rising in the Ganga, and the lights on its banks were reflected here and there in its dark waters.

From outside the shrine M. was looking wistfully at the image. Ramlal came to the temple with a book in his hand containing the rules of the worship. He asked M. if he wanted to come in. M. felt highly favoured and entered the shrine. He saw that the Divine Mother was profusely decorated. The room was brilliantly illuminated by a large chandelier that hung from the ceiling. Two candles were burning in front of the image. On the floor there were trays full of offerings. Red hibiscus flowers and bet leaves adorned Her feet. She wore garlands around Her neck. M.'s eyes fell on the *chamara*. Suddenly he remembered that Sri Ramakrishna often fanned the Divine Mother with it. With some hesitation he asked Ramlal if he might fan the image. The priest gave his permission. M. joyously fanned the image. The

regular worship had not yet begun.

It was the awe-inspiring night of the new moon. The worship of the Divine Mother added to its solemnity. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the couch, leaning against a pillow. His mind was indrawn. Ramlal entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna, touching the ground with his forehead. Then with great respect he touched the Master's feet. He was ready to worship the Divine Mother in the temple.

*Ramlal:* 'Please, may I go to the shrine.'

The Master twice uttered the words 'Om Kali' and said: 'Perform the worship carefully. There is also a sheep to be slaughtered.'

It was midnight. The worship began in the Kali temple. The Master went to watch the ceremony. During the worship he stood near the image. Now the sheep was going to be slaughtered. The animal was consecrated before the Deity. People stood in line watching the ceremony. While the sheep was being taken to the block Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room. He could not bear the sight.

Several devotees remained in the temple till two o'clock in the morning. Haripada came and asked them to take the *prasad* to the Master's room. After finishing their meal they lay down wherever they could for the remainder of the night.

It was morning. The dawn service in the temples was over and the theatrical performance was going on in the open hall in front of the shrine. M. was coming through the courtyard with Sri Ramakrishna. He wanted to take leave of the Master.

*Master:* 'Why should you go now?'

M. 'You are going to Sinthi in the afternoon. I too intend to be there. So I should like to go home for a few hours.'

They came to the Kali temple. At the foot of the steps M. saluted the Master.

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*Each particle of dust in Dakshineswar is holy, animate and living because of the touch of Sri Bhagavan's holy feet. The trees, creepers, deva-ris and Bhaktas of his place are all standing to witness and enjoy the nectar of the play of Sri Bhagavan. They are all witnesses to the play of the avatara.*

Mahendra Nath Gupta



## Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya of Sri Shankaracharya

M. R. YARDI

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### Brahman as Existence

THE ULTIMATE goal of human life is the realization of Brahman as the source of our universe. The question arises, how can one realize the essential nature (स्वरूपलक्षण) of Brahman? For this it is necessary to understand the theory of causation as explained by Badarayana in his three *sutras* II.i.15, II.i.18 and II.ii.28.

In his *sutra* II.ii.28 (नामाव उपलब्धेः), Badarayana seems to subscribe to the doctrine of the reality of the external world. He states in this *sutra* that since a thing is perceived, it is not non-existent. Here he examines the view that the thing, such as a pot, that we perceive does not exist, as we do not perceive anything apart from perception. Those who hold this view argue as follows: The entire process constituting the act of perception, the object of perception and the result of perception, is an internal one and so our ideas constitute the only reality. As we become aware of an object in the form of an idea and of the object itself simultaneously, they must be one and the same. If they were different, we should become aware of one without becoming aware of the other. Sri Shankara explains this *sutra* as follows: The presence of the external thing cannot be gainsaid, because it is perceived. As a matter of fact with each act of cognition a thing is perceived, as a pillar, a wall, a pot, or cloth. Can we trust a person who, while eating food and enjoying it says, 'I am not eating, I only think I am eating?' In the same way, how can one trust a person who, while perceiving an external object through contact with his senses, still says, 'What I perceive is an idea, the external object does not exist'.

Sri Shankara further argues that it is not the case that someone or other cognizes the object of perception as a pillar, a wall, and so on. All people present there without exception perceive it to be a pillar, a wall, and so on, as the case may be. Moreover, every cognition is

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seen to have the likeness of some object and so likeness of an object perceived in cognition is not possible unless the object itself be there, and also because the awareness that the object cognized is outside the mind is also a part of this cognition. We have also to admit that there is a regularity in the simultaneous appearance of the cognition and the object, but this is not due to their identity but their causal connection. Again, when we have such forms of awareness as 'knowledge of a pot' and 'knowledge of cloth' we discern a difference between the two qualifying parts, namely 'pot' and 'cloth' but not in the substantive part 'knowledge'. Further, when we see a white cow and a black cow, we find that only whiteness and blackness differ, the cowhood being the same in both the cases. Therefore an object and its knowledge differ. This *sutra* of Sri Badarayana, as interpreted by Sri Shankara himself, maintains the reality of the external world, in contradistinction from the latter's view that the world is illusory (मायावाद).

In the *sutra* II.i.15 (भावे चोपलब्धेः) Sri Badarayana states very clearly that only when the cause exists, the effect is perceived and not otherwise. We can have a pot only from clay, cloth only from yarn. The effect cannot be independent of the cause or different from it. It is an invariable rule that we do not perceive a thing when something else is there. For instance we do not see a cow when looking at a horse; nor do we see a pot when looking at a potter, even though the potter is the causal agent of the pot. It may be objected that we see smoke where there is fire and yet they are two different things. However, the relation between the fire and the smoke is not invariably true, as it is possible to collect the smoke in a vessel and to perceive it even after the fire is extinguished. So the fire cannot be said to be the material cause of the smoke, which results from damp fuel when joined with fire. Sri Badarayana says further in his *sutra* II.i.16 (सत्त्वाज्वाहरेण) that because of the existence of what is posterior (i.e., the effect in the cause), the cause and effect are non-different. That which is posterior in time is the effect and that effect is already present in the cause even before its appearance. If a particular effect is not already present in the cause and identical with it, it cannot originate from that cause, as oil from sand. Since the effect is non-different from the cause before its manifestation, it follows that it must be non-different from its cause after its manifestation also. The *sutrakara* elucidates this view

further in his *sutra* II.1.18. He says from reasoning (तर्कः) it can be ascertained that the effect exists in the cause and is non-different from it. This is known as the doctrine of the existence of the effect in the cause (सत्कारणत्वम्). In everyday life we find that if we want curds, earthen pots, or gold ornaments, we must use milk, clay, or gold. No one employs clay to get curds or milk for making pots. If the effect were non-existent in the cause, then all this should become possible. If it is argued that there is some special quality (गुणः) in milk which produces the curds, then it negates the view that the effect is non-existent in the cause before its origination. If the effect already exists in the cause, the question may be asked as to what purpose a causal agent such as the potter can serve. The answer is that the causal agent arranges the cause in the form of the effect. However, a mere change in form does not transform that thing into something else. Even when we see a man in different moods or in different situations, we recognize him to be the same person. Although the positions of a father and his son do not remain the same all along, still they continue to be recognized as father and son throughout their lives. If it is argued that they are recognized as such only until death parts them, then in truth there is no such thing as birth or death. It is true that when the seed becomes transformed into a plant through the multiplication of its cells, we do say that the plant is 'born' after the 'destruction' of the seed. But what has taken place is only a change of form and not a change in substance.

From such reasoning it becomes known that effect exists in the cause before its manifestation and is non-different from it. Likewise Brahman as the primary cause, evolves like an actor into the different products that make up the world and becomes the object of all empirical dealings.

The *sutrakara* gives the analogies of, first, a piece of cloth and then the vital breaths in support of his reasoning. In *sutra* II.1.19 (तद्वत्), he says that this is on the analogy of a piece of cloth. When a piece of cloth is rolled up, its length and breadth are not known, but become manifest immediately after it is spread out. Likewise a piece of cloth which was not manifest in threads becomes manifest owing to the causal agents such as the shuttle, the loom, and the weaver. Thus when the threads are joined in a special arrangement of warp and woof, they acquire a new form and function and become known by a different name, a piece of cloth. So, too, the universe which lies latent



in Brahman before creation becomes manifest and assumes name and form after creation.

In his *sutra* II.i.20 (यथा च प्राणदि), Sri Badarayana argues from the analogy of the five vital airs. He says that this is so as in the case of the outgoing breath and so on. Thus when all the five vital airs are restrained from functioning by practising breath-control, they remain in the causal form and only keep the body alive. But when they start functioning, they manifest themselves as separate from one another and additionally perform other functions such as bending and stretching of limbs. But these five vital airs are not different from the vital breath itself, inasmuch as they all partake of the nature of air. So also the whole world is a creation of, and not different from, its primary cause, Brahman.

The *sutrakara* has examined in three *sutras* whether the Vedic texts support his thesis. In *sutra* II.i.14 (तदन्यत्वमारम्भणशब्दादिभ्यः) he says that there is non-difference between Brahman as the cause and the world as its effect because of the Vedic texts about beginning and so on. Here he obviously refers to a passage in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, which states, 'Just as, my dear, by a lump of clay everything made of clay is known, the effect being merely a name arising from speech, while it is truly just clay. . .'. Sri Shankara utilizes this text to support his doctrine that Brahman alone is real, the world being unreal and illusory. He obviously interprets वाचारेण as that which 'has speech for its beginning' and explains that since the effect has speech for its beginning and exists only in name, such effects of clay as a pot, a shallow dish, or a bucket are mere names originating in speech. Hence according to him in so far as they are effects they are untrue and as clay alone they are true. Srikantha gives another interpretation of the phrase वाचारेण as 'that which is the beginning i.e., the cause of speech and practical activity'. According to this interpretation the text means that an effect (विकार) is just the object of such expressions as 'this is a pot', i.e., it is a form which the clay has assumed for practical purposes. Sri Badarayana seems to favour this latter interpretation, as he clearly states in *sutra* II.ii.28 that all the external objects are real. In fact the tenor of his whole argument seems to be that since the world is real, Brahman as its cause is non-different from it and so must be real.

There are, however, some Vedic texts which declare that there

was non-existence in the beginning and so seem to support the opposite theory that the effect is non-existent before its creation (असत्कार्यवाद). The *sutrakara* considers this objection and rebuts it in his *sutra* II.i.17 (असद्व्यपदेशाच्चेति चेन्न धर्मान्तरेण नावयशेषात्). The meaning of this *sutra* is as follows: 'If it be said this is not so because of the Vedic statements of non-existence (before creation), (we say) this is not so (true) because non-existence means here another quality on account of later statements.' Now an objection is raised that this is not so as there are Vedic texts such as, 'In the beginning this was only non-existence (*Chhandogya*, III.xix.1), 'Non-existent, indeed, this was in the beginning' (*Taittiriya* II.7). These passages seem to express the view that the effect was non-existent before its production. Here the *sutrakara* replies that non-existence in the present context does not mean absolute non-existence but a different quality or condition of the effect before its production. Since in the state anterior to its production the name and form were not manifest, the effect is said to be non-existent. That absolute non-existence was not meant in these passages is made clear later by those passages which state 'That was existence itself' or 'That created itself'. These passages can be harmonized only if we take *asat* to mean that the effect was manifest in the cause in a different, i.e. unmanifested condition (धर्मान्तरेण). A thing is said to exist in common parlance too, after it manifests in name and form. And so the universe is said to be non-existent until it evolves itself in name and form.

The *sutrakara* further points out that there is another Vedic passage which clearly establishes that the universe is non-different from its cause. Thus in *sutra* II.i.18 (युक्तैः शब्दान्तराच्च), he says, 'This is so from reasoning and another Vedic text'. The arguments adduced by way of reasoning have been mentioned before. As regards the Vedic text referred to here, there is a passage in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, which says, 'In the beginning, dear one, all this was but existence, one without a second', (VI.ii.1). The next passage, 'How can existence come out of non-existence? (VI.ii.2), clearly repudiates the view of non-existence as the source of the world. It is thus established by the three means of knowledge: reasoning, analogy, and Vedic texts, that the universe existed in an unmanifest state before creation in its cause, Brahman, and became known as the universe after it acquired name and form. Brahman is therefore, Existence, (सत्), and is non-different from the universe.

## **SRI SARADA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA SARADA MISSION**

**'SURADHUNI-KANAN'**

**1954-1985**

THE HEADQUARTERS of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission are located in Dakshineswar at the garden house called 'Suradhuni-Kanan'. If you sail down the Ganga in a country boat, a little north of the Kali temple, you see a *ghat*, or landing, on its eastern bank, protected by a huge gate. As you enter the gate you see on two sides, two beautiful marble platforms and, in front, a flight of ten widely spaced steps. Above the terrace, across the steps, is a low iron gate with iron railings running along both sides from north to south. The gate is surmounted by a high iron arch on which are beautifully wrought the words in Bengali script—'Suradhuni-Kanan'—'A Garden on the Bank of the Heavenly River'. The extent of the estate approached by this *ghat* is more than six acres.

This land belonged to the prosperous Mandals of Dakshineswar from whom Tarini Basu of Palkpara, Calcutta, bought it and some time in the 1840s built a spacious, majestic mansion, just behind the iron gate, having a panoramic view of the river. A photo of the mansion is shown on page xiv. The land is bordered by two lanes leading to the Deb Mandal Ghat and the Bhatti Ghat on the south and north respectively. On the riverside, between the Dakshineswar Kali temple and 'Suradhuni-Kanan' are only two pieces of land: that of the Wimco Match Factory and that of the Inland Water Transport, under military command. The Wimco Match Factory is now situated where the Magazine Gun Factory was established by the British in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century.

The property called 'Suradhuni-Kanan' changed hands often. Tarini Basu did not live long enough to enjoy the place and it was bought by Jatindra Mohan Tagore of Pathurlaghata in 1891. It may be noted that Maharaja Bahadur Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore met Sri Ramakrishna in Jadu Nath Mallick's home once. An interesting conversation took place there. Sri Ramakrishna, when requested to speak, said: 'You may repeat the name of God day and night, but if your mind be engrossed in the objects of the world, you won't gain anything thereby.' Jatindra Mohan remarked: 'Sir, is it possible for worldly people to pray to God in right earnest? Even a pious soul like King Yudhishtira had to tell a lie.' This irritated Sri Ramakrishna, who replied, 'See, you



have remembered that one act of Yudhishtira's life and forgotten his usual unflinching adherence to truth, his innumerable acts of kindness, and his high regard for the injunctions of the scriptures! Shame on you!' After some time, Jatindra Mohan said, 'I have other work to do' and left the house. But, it is said, Sri Ramakrishna went to his house in Pathuriaghata to meet him with Captain Vihva Nath Upadhyay. But he sent word that he had a sore throat and did not come down to meet Sri Ramakrishna.

The estate was in the possession of the Tagores till 1913, when, with a little extension of the land, it was sold to Arun Chandra Sinha of Paikpara. In 1922, Arun Chandra Sinha sold it to a rich Marwari businessman named Ramdeo Santhalia. In 1930, Motilal Nehru stayed there. His wife, Swaruprani Nehru, mother of Jawaharlal Nehru, used to go from there by boat to meet Swami Shivananda when he was President of the Ramakrishna Math.

In 1940, during the second world war, the army requisitioned not only 'Suradhuni-Kanan' but also a large part of the Dakshineswar village. The British made 'Suradhuni-Kanan' a training centre for the officers to learn languages. In 1951, the Hindustan Co-operative Insurance Society Limited bought it from Mohallram Santhalia and in 1954 it, in turn, sold it to the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur. Sri Sarada Math was started on 4 December the same year. The property then had two buildings on it. In 1959 the President of the Ramakrishna Math handed over this estate, by means of a Trust Deed, to the President of Sri Sarada Math. From that time Sri Sarada Math has been legally and financially independent of the Ramakrishna Math. The two organizations are parallel in their spiritual and missionary aims and objects. Since 1959 four more buildings and a temple have been built on the land. A photo of the new Temple consecrated in 1981 is on page xlv.

In and around the area of 'Suradhuni-Kanan' are lanes and houses which Sri Ramakrishna often visited. During his visits his gracious eyes must have fallen on this garden and its house too. Thus it is most fitting that this place became the fulfilment of Swami Vivekananda's vision of a women's *math* about which, he wrote to Swami Shivananda as early as 1894, 'Without Shakti there is no regeneration for the world. . . . Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India. . . . Hence we must first build a Math for Mother.