

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission of Bangladesh:  
Services in Religion, Education and Humanity**

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A Thesis submitted to the University of Dhaka in fulfillment of requirement for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**Date : May, 2019**

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**Registration No. : 141  
Session : 2014-15**

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## **DECLARATION**

I do hereby declare that the thesis titled “Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission of Bangladesh: Services in Religion, Education and Humanity” submitted to the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, is entirely my own original work. It was completed under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Abu Md. Delwar Hossain and Prof. Dr. Syed Anwar Husain. For the purpose of research, I extensively used the resources of several RKM Libraries including the documents originating from the headquarters of the RKM. I also extensively interviewed monks and others who have actively participated in rendering services for the good of the world.

I further confirm that the research work has not previously been submitted anywhere for any degree.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that Milton Kumar Dev worked as a PhD fellow under our supervision. We are pleased to forward his thesis titled “Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission of Bangladesh: Services in Religion, Education and Humanity”. This work has not been submitted anywhere so far in part or full, for the award of any degree or diploma. It is further certified that the work is entirely original and ready for evaluation for awarding of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study looks into a twin institution of Bangladesh, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission which form the core of the worldwide Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement, which aims at the harmony of religions and all round progress of human faculties without any distinction of creed, gender, religion, race, block and nationality. It is known to us that as a religion Hinduism has gone through a phase of regeneration and reform through various movements. One of the foremost movement in breaking the caste system and educating the downtrodden was the Ramakrishna Movement initiated by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission have now 205 centers functioning across different parts of the world to carry on its work for the cause of humanity. In Bangladesh, there are 15 affiliated centers rendering services to religion, education and humanity.

Truly, we know very little about the public activities of these institutions. People read some commentaries in the Book, but which are not enough, when people get interested in the commentaries, they want to know more about the institutions and this is how they establish a relation with it. This study shows in detail, the services that the RKM, is providing to the society and the nation. In times of natural calamities it rushes aid by way of relief and rehabilitation. Its health care centres, dispensaries and mobile medical unit extend health care to all. Its schools and computer centres are a boon in the educational field.

It may be noted that, so far as the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is concerned, several studies have been conducted taking its philosophy as a whole and Vivekananda as a thinker. No study has hitherto been done highlighting the RKM as an institution and its services rendered to religion, education and humanity.

It discusses that some major personalities of the RKM initiated the Ramakrishna and Vivekananda movement in Bangladesh by their life and works, which is verily a movement of the divine in the world. And, being the movement of the divine, it concerns all. Its services are for the total regeneration of mankind. This movement brings home the most refreshing message of classical Vedanta in terms understandable and agreeable to everybody: “Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own.”

This study narrates how the RKM is serving for a harmonious Bangladesh and for a unity in diversity. Because the concept of living harmony is the need of the day when there is a trend to live in division and selfless motivation. Finally, this study shows if the concept of RKM *Jato Mat Tato Pat* (so many paths as there are views) can be set in practice, all the catastrophes will cease to happen and the earth will be calm and peaceful.

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## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table – 1.1	: Ramakrishna Mission’s Educational Services in Bangladesh
Table – 1.2	: List of Educational Institutions of RKM in Bangladesh as in the Year 2009
Table – 1.3	: Survey of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Book (RVB)
Table – 1.4	: Books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published from outside the RKM as in the year 2015
Table – 1.5	: Periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published by the centres of RKM as in the year-2015
Table – 1.6	: Primary Relief Service by the RKM in Bangladesh since its inception

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

COS	Charity Organization Society
CSWE	Council on Social Work Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
LIG	Low Income Group
M	Mahendranath Gupta
MLSS	Member of Lower Subordinate Service
NGO	Non-Government Organization
RKM	Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

## GLOSSARY

- Abhi : fearless
- Acharya : religious teacher
- Advaita : non-duality
- Ahimsa : non-injury
- AryaSamaj : a reformed Hindu Movement founded by Swami Dayananda (A.D. 1824-1883).
- Atman : the soul or self
- Ashramas : four stages in man's life (student, householder, anchorate and ascetic)
- Avatar : an Incarnation of God
- Bhagavad-Gita : lit, the 'song of God', one of the most important scriptures of the Vedanta philosophy
- Bhakta : a follower of the path of divine love
- Bhakti : alms; food or any kind of gift obtained by begging
- Brahmachari : a pious student devoted to the practice of spiritual discipline
- Brahmans : the highest of the four castes often serving as priests
- Chandala : untouchable
- Chinmaya : the embodiment of spirit
- Daridra-Narayan : the God in the poor and the miserable
- Fakir : a beggar, sometimes a religious mendicant
- Gadadhar : one of the 108 names of Sri Lord Krishna  
Ramakrishna was known by this name in his childhood

- Geruya : ochre colour, often the ochre-coloured cloth of a monk
- Ghat : bathing place with adjacent steps leading onto the bank of a river or lake
- Guru : a spiritual teacher
- Jiva : lit, a 'living being'; the individual soul
- Kali : a name of the divine mother
- Kalpataru : a wish fulfilling tree
- Kamini-kanchan : lit., woman and gold, but Ramakrishna used these words for lust and greed
- Khajanchi : manager of estate
- Kuthi : the bungalow in the Dakshineswar temple garden, where its owners and their guests stayed while visiting the kali temple
- Madhukari : begging from door to door like the bee gathering honey from flower to flower
- Maha-samadhi : lit., the highest state of God-consciousness, eternal sleep
- Mantra : the particular name of God, corresponding to the chosen deity of the disciple, with which one is initiated into spiritual life by his guru
- Math : monastery
- Nirakara : the supreme being without any form
- Paramhansa : lit., 'greatest-swan', the highest stage of a sannyasin or monk; an epithet of Sri Ramakrishna
- Parivarajaka : a wandering monk
- Pranami : a present or money given at the time of making obeisance

- Prasad : food or any other gift which has been ceremonially offered to God or to a saintly person; it is usually given to devotees, a recipient of Prasad considers himself blessed and purified
- Puja : ritualistic worship
- RKM : the Ramakrishna Math & Mission
- Sadhana : spiritual practice or discipline
- Samadhi : complete absorption in meditation
- Samaj : an organization or association
- Sannyasin : a monk
- Sattvic : the quality of purity, gladness and illumination
- Sufi : an Islamic mystic
- Swami : lord, master, spiritual teacher; a title of Hindu monk
- Upanishads : the philosophical scriptures of the ancient Hindus
- Vedanta : lit., ‘the end of the Vedas’, the highest wisdom
- Vedas : lit., ‘knowledge’; the most ancient and sacred of Hindu scriptures



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgement	vi
List of Tables	viii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Glossary	ix
Chapter I : Introduction	1
Chapter II : Foundation of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangladesh	69
Chapter III : Centers of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangladesh	104
Chapter IV : Services in Religion, Education and Humanity	148
Chapter V : Major Personalities of the RKM in Bangladesh	206
Chapter VI : Impact of the RKM on Bangladeshi Educators and World Thinkers	278
Chapter VII : Conclusion	324

# **Chapter One**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission (abbreviated as RKM) are a twin institution which aims at the harmony of the religions, harmony of the east and the west, harmony of the old and the new and all round progress of human beings without any distinction of creed, caste, gender, race, religion and nationality.<sup>1</sup> It is known to us that there were several traditional religious institutions during the colonial rule of the British in Bengal; among these institutions, the RKM was truly an epoch - making institution. Never before a similar religious institution was established which specifically set before itself the task of bringing socio-economic development of the weaker section of the society. So, as an institution the RKM is a phenomenon; but more important than the institution is its motto. The motto of this twin institution is *Atmano Mokshartham Jagad-hitya cha*<sup>2</sup> (for one's own salvation and for the good of the world). In Bangladesh, the RKM started its journey from the year 1899 when some monks deputed by Swami Vivekananda<sup>3</sup> (1863-1902) founded its first center in Dhaka, Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> Vivekananda, a major personality of the nineteenth century, regarded as a 'cyclonic monk' and one of the main moulders of the modern world' who went to America to preach universal humanism, became the centre of all attraction by giving his stunning speech in the Parliament of Religions, which took place in 1893 at Chicago. The RKM is

after the name of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa<sup>5</sup> (1836-1886), the great nineteenth century saint in Bengal who is regarded as the Master of Modern Age and the Prophet of the harmony of Religions.<sup>6</sup> In Bangladesh, the RKM has 15 affiliated centres to carry on its work for the cause of humanity.<sup>7</sup> Besides services, the RKM observes the Nabiday (Eid-e-Miladunnabi), Buddha Purnima, Christmas Eve, Janmastami etc to pay respect to other faiths creating a harmonious feeling among the followers of all religions.<sup>8</sup> It is notable to mention that the RKM, in Bangladesh, has been engaged in humanitarian and spiritual work to serve human beings as the embodiments of the Almighty. It bases its teaching on Vedanta which preaches, 'Each soul is potentially divine' and the divinity may be manifested through unselfish work, worship and philosophical discrimination.<sup>9</sup> All these centres of the RKM have been conducting extensive works and welfare services such as health care, disaster relief, rural management, operation of schools, orphanage, woman service and students home etc.<sup>10</sup>

So much for the spiritual role which is being played by the RKM; its social role is almost equally significant. One of the basic facts of our epoch is a profound change in relations between the East and the West in consequence of the colonial experience of the East. Much blood has been shed in the process, and much bitterness created. There are, however, forces at work to bring the East and the West on a new basis of equality, respect and understanding. One of

these forces is the RKM, and it is peculiarly well-fitted for the task because its founders intended, from the beginning, that it should serve the East and the West impartially.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna is the first great teacher to deliver a dual message, consciously addressed to the East and to the West as two separate though interrelated cultures. Vivekananda carried the master's message to America and Europe. He made no attempt to convert the Western peoples from Christianity to a cult of Ramakrishna; and this wise policy has been followed by the centres he founded in India, Bangladesh and abroad.

The RKM has been serving the society in Bangladesh. Its school and technical institutions are a boon in the educational field. It runs a large number of institutions, both for boys and girls; these institutions imparting education in general subjects, engineering, basic training, students' home all over the country. Besides the educational institutions, most centres of the RKM have organised libraries, which are proving to be of great help to a large number of school and university students. It has also provided facilities for research in philosophy, history, literature and religious studies.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the RKM's contribution in the growth of education and spread of knowledge in Bangladesh is great. Its vast literary output in the form of low-priced books, journals, audio and video cassettes, CD cater to the propagation of our cultural heritage. And,

its monks impart salutary counseling to those interested in the higher values of life.<sup>13</sup>

It goes to the credit of Swami Vivekananda that he was able to make a break with monastic tradition of Bengal which idolized renunciation. He saw no contradiction between spiritual upliftment and material prosperity. In fact, he looked upon the latter as essential for realizing the former. He was, therefore, to say, “We talk foolishly against material civilization. The grapes are sour...Material civilization, nay even luxury, is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven.”<sup>14</sup>

The Swamiji, did not of course advocate that a householder should regard material prosperity as the supreme objective of his life. He argued, every person was to strike a harmonious balance between demands of spiritualism and material progress. Vivekananda was always conscious of the economic background of civilization. He did hear from his Master, ‘An empty stomach is no good for religion’. But he also knew that the highest aim of human life is, as his Master used to say, - ‘Realization of God’.<sup>15</sup> So with all these spirit the RKM is Hinduism’s answer to the criticism which is often leveled against it—that it is a religion which is largely devoid of compassion and mercy.<sup>16</sup> It would be no exaggeration to say that it was Swami Vivekananda who gave a human

face to Hinduism. Establishment of the RKM was the last major event in Vivekananda's life. He did not live to see how from a humble beginning this institution was destined to expand into one of the major centres of philanthropy in Bengal. Swamiji died in 1902 when he was only 39 years old. Perhaps, here lies the justification of Rabindranath Tagore's comment to Romain Rolland that 'if you want to know India, study Vivekananda; in him everything is positive, nothing negative.'<sup>17</sup>

Vivekananda had great respect for other religions. He conceived Christ while he looked upon the Buddha as an incarnation of God and put him in the same category as Krishna. As regards Islam, he had profound admiration for its precept that all Muslims are equal in the eyes of God. Given below are a few quotations which clearly bring out Swami Vivekananda's unreserved acceptance of various religions and the catholicity of his outlook, "May he who is the Brahmin of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of Jews, the Father in heaven of Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea."<sup>18</sup> The spirit of democracy and equality in Islam appealed to Vivekananda's mind and he wanted to create a new Bengal with Vedantic brain and Islamic body.<sup>19</sup> Besides, we must recall Sri Ramakrishna who founded Ramakrishna Math. The remarkable achievement did not happen in a day. It is rock based on the long indefatigable striving of the pioneering monastics to translate into action the message given by Sri

Ramakrishna. In an ecstatic state the great Master had instructed *Siva jnane jiva seva* - 'Worship God by Seeing Him in His Children'. The Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda. This was open to both monks and house-holders. Its objectives encompassed the spiritual fields as well as humanitarian. As far as the former was concerned, the Ramakrishna Mission aimed at propagating Sri Ramakrishna's message and teachings. As regards the later, it aimed at welfare of the society and promotion of the well-being of the common man.<sup>20</sup>

Strictly speaking, Ramakrishna Math is a Monastic order brought into existence by Sri Ramakrishna and Ramakrishna Mission is a registered society in which monks of Ramakrishna Math and lay devotees cooperate in conducting various types of social service. It was founded by Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda. These twin institutions have set in motion a non-sectarian, universal spiritual Movement which has been silently working for more than hundred years to catalyze the spiritual regeneration of humanity.<sup>21</sup> From the beginning, RKM touched human life at many points. But its greatest service is in the field of religion in general. In particular, it is the most effective helper in modern people's spiritual quest. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, - for one's own salvation through the service of God in man.<sup>22</sup>

It needs to be clarified that the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission are apparently independent institutions, but they are inseparably related to each other ideologically and administratively.<sup>23</sup> They originated out of the same source and their growth and development were sustained by the same spirit. Moreover, there are several Ramakrishna Math centres which do the work of Ramakrishna Mission such as running hospitals, dispensaries, rural development centres etc. Therefore, in the present study of the Math and Mission are taken together in all the discussion. We all know it that an institution refers to a group of people, large or small, who share the same beliefs or ideals or who try to secure a common goal. A social or religious movement may thus gradually become a formal institution. Consequently, if and when the institution becomes characterized by the goal sought, it reaches the stage of institutionalization.<sup>24</sup> As an institution, the RKM initially had limited funds and very few active members. It grew and expanded rapidly. Today, one finds centres of the RKM in almost every major city and town of Bangladesh. The RKM has, to its enormous credit, always refused to become politically involved. This twin institution has always preserved a dual character of contemplative math and socially active Mission.

The above introduction shows briefly how all services of the Math and Mission are based on Swamiji's vision – 'Serve human as the embodiment of God'. This study highlights the following points:



i) how Ramakrishna Math and Mission have been contributing to the welfare and progress of humanity by serving the poor, the sick and the downtrodden for more than 117 years;

ii) how, in a region torn by religious, sectarian and ethnic conflicts, Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres remain as oases of peace, harmony and spiritual light;

iii) how the eternal, universal principles of the ancient philosophy known as Vedanta can be applied in practice to solve the difficulties of life at individual and social levels;

iv) how a handful educated young men, monks, devotees, householders, inspired by the ideals of renunciation, service and devotion to Sri Ramakrishna, preaches the truth – ‘Each soul is potentially divine’; and

v) how the Ramakrishna Movement originated from Sri Ramakrishna, an illiterate but spiritually enlightened Brahmin, who appeared on the scene in Calcutta, and captured the attention of people belonging to different religions, sects, castes and nationalities, whose lives and governed by noble principles such as morality, seeking God, service as worship and harmony of religions.

This study seeks to provide ample authentic material to understand the impact of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in respect of the upliftment of humanity, both materially and spiritually. The record of the history of the continuous

growth of the twin institutions in diverse directions and types of services, in response to the needs of the times, have all been touched upon.

It may be noted that the real history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is the untold story of the unending self-service and service rendered by the great persons associated with these two institutions. Holy mother Sarada Devi's life was a saga of self-sacrifice and service, the life of which the world has not seen. Swami Vivekananda too wore himself out by working incessantly for others, and his life was a sacrifice at the alter of love for humanity.

None can deny that the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, as an institution, has today become a real source of power and glory. It stands out as a symbol of living truth, of service and renunciation, of peace and harmony in a world torn by hatred and discard. Moreover, RKM is against conversion.<sup>25</sup> It believes the Christian or Muslim is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve one's individuality and grow accordingly to one's own religion.<sup>26</sup>

Above all, the RKM denies finality and absoluteness to any particular religion. Thus, RKM rightly puts emphasis on empathy and open mindness for understanding other faiths.

## 1.1. Sources of the RKM

The entire history of religion in Bengal, looked at from a certain angle, can be seen as a constant process of challenge and response. To each major crisis every religion reacted, first by briefly withdrawing into a shell and then, with their unparalleled capacity for assimilation and regeneration, by a new resurgence. This happened with the Jain and Buddhist movements, with the early Christian missionaries and, to a lesser extent, with the Muslim advent. But with the arrival of the British, first as traders, and, finally as imperial rulers, Hinduism was confronted with the most critical of all challenges it had ever faced in its long and eventful history.

However, once again the miracle of regeneration was witnessed and Hindu society produced a series of remarkable men who, by the sheer power of their spiritual illumination, rekindled the dying spark. It was in the great movement for social reform in Hinduism that the first creative reaction to British rule manifested itself, and it was Bengal, the first province in India to feel the brunt of the British conquest, that spearheaded this revival.

It is noteworthy to mention that the *Brahmo Samaj*, as well as its offshoots the *Adi Brahmo Samaj* led by Devendranath Tagore, the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal founded by Keshab Chandra Sen in 1868, and the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj* founded by some of his followers in 1878, all based themselves upon the

pristine authority of the Vedas, and strongly attacked idol-worship and undesirable social customs such as compulsory '*Sati*' immolation of widows upon their husbands' funeral pyres. The leaders of the movement, especially Sen, were considerably influenced by the style of Christian missionaries who had become active under British rule, and many of their prayer meetings were modeled upon Christian Church services. Besides, numerous other reform and educational movements in Hinduism developed in the second half of the nineteenth century Bengal. For purposes of this review, here it is mentioned of three outstanding figures who have left their indelible impress upon modern civilization and whose tremendous personalities have gone a long way in shaping the contours of the Hindu mind in our own century. These are Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada devi and Swami Vivekananda. Each of these personalities, drawn from the very heart of the Bengal heritage and Hindu tradition, reinterpreted its eternal truths in the light of their own extraordinary attainment. Between them they achieved nothing less than a comprehensive revival of the best in the religious tradition, and collectively represent a major force in the contemporary thought of services in the religion, education and humanity.

### **Sri Ramakrishna**

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa<sup>27</sup> was born as Gadadhar Chattapadhay on 18 February 1836, in Kamarpukur, a remote village, nearly 100 miles from

Cacutta.<sup>28</sup> Gadadhar was the youngest son of Kshudiram Chattopadhyay and Chandramani Devi, an ideal pious couple of old Brahminic tradition, was from his early childhood a seeker of God. He did not care for the money earning education (*'Chal Kala Bandha Vidya'*—in his own Bengali), and was not interested in business. He was a non-conformist and questioned existing beliefs and conventions. And as soon as chance came, in the form of a post of the priest of Kali (the female consort of Siva), at Dakshineswar, he devoted all his mind and energy to realize the Divine Mother.<sup>29</sup>

Before we take a detailed look at the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, let us make a quick review of the main events of his life. He had his first spiritual experience at the age of six when he became submerged in indescribable bliss while looking at the sky.<sup>30</sup> Gadadhar himself appears to have been greatly influenced by the playfulness of the child Krishna and also the mystical relationship between the Radha and Krishna-themes that were very important in popular Vaishnavism. It was perhaps to re-enact the mystical union of *Purusa* and *Prakriti* (the Male and Female manifestations of Cosmic Power) that Gadadhar first began to undergo the habit of dressing and behaving like a female. This masquerading was apparently so perfectly done that Gadadhar was unhesitatingly invited by the local village women into the inner sanctum of the Zenana.<sup>31</sup> In later life Ramakrishna was to interpret this as the *Madhur-bhava* (treating God as one's beloved) and such experiments in early life one feels,

may have eventually contributed towards his personal conquest of sex which he held to be so important to success in spiritual life.

Ramakrishna's spiritual experiments covered a period of roughly eleven years between 1855-66 of which at least six years relate to his tantric sadhana under the Bhairavi Jogeswari, reportedly a *sadhika* from East Bengal.<sup>32</sup> During this time he was also acquainted with Vedanta and also with Christianity and Islam. As is now commonplace of knowledge, his varied experiments led him to the conclusion that all religions were equally good paths to God-realization.

After the final realization, Sri Ramakrishna attained the state of Advaita, but unlike ordinary Advaitans he returned to this world to preach among humanity his gospel of God-realization.<sup>33</sup> And here Sri Ramakrishna went a step ahead. He became convinced through cognition acquired from his divine visions that the God of the Christians was none other than the Supreme Being of the Hindus. He once went into a trance while gazing at the picture of the Madonna and child. He began to study the Bible and had a vision of Christ walking towards him. He became convinced that Christ was an incarnation of God. In the same way he perceived that the God of Muslims was no different from Brahman of Hindus. He for a certain period dressed and behaved like a Muslim and forgot about Hindu gods and goddesses even about Kali.<sup>34</sup> Here again, he was vouchsafed a divine vision which convinced him of the unity of Godhead.

Sri Ramakrishna was betrothed to a five-year old girl called Sarada in 1858 when he was 22 years old. However, he never had any physical relationship with her even when she grew up. And this marriage turned to be a new form of companionship of the soul, in which these two partners helped each other in their way of supreme realization. They lived together as brother and sister, he used to look upon his wife as an incarnation of Divine Mother (Kali) and worship her. After the death of Master, Sarada devi, popularly called 'Mother' became the spiritual head of his disciples and guided them.

Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary piety, his total absorption in the worship of Divine Mother and his undergoing of divine visions all this began to attract attention. He had a childlike, guileless personality and an air of serenity and holiness. While he was in early twenties only, some of the well-respected religious personalities declared him to be an 'Incarnation of God'. It is difficult to recall any other Hindu Saint who was similarly acclaimed. And it is because, the Master became totally indifferent to his bodily needs and would prolonged hours in meditation. He describes his first spiritual experience as follows

Suddenly, the blessed Mother revealed herself. The building with their different parts, the temple and everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up. I

was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious. What was happening in the outside world I did not know; but within me there was steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of Divine Mother.<sup>35</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna represents the very core of the spiritual realizations of the seers and sages of Bengal. His Whole life was an uninterrupted contemplation of God. He reached a depth of God-consciousness that transcends all time and place and has a Universal appeal. Seekers of God of all religions feel irritably drawn to his life and teachings. He asserted again and again that God's realization was impossibility until even a trace of sensory passions or desires were retained in the aspirant's mind. A spirit of total detachment *vis-à-vis* worldly matters and intense craving for divine visions were, according to him, a *sine qua non* for this purpose. Let us review some of his sayings on this subject

No salvation is possible for a person as long as he has desire, as long as hankers for worldly things. Therefore fulfill all your desires regarding food, clothes and sex.<sup>36</sup>

Truthfulness is the *Tapasaya of Kaliyuga*. Truthfulness, Submission to God and looking on the wives of other men as one's own mother of these are the means to realize God."<sup>37</sup>



Sri Ramakrishna urged householders to lead their life with detachment. Every person was called upon to discharge his duties and fulfill his obligations. However, he stressed that while doing one's duty one should never forget the impermanence of the material universe and therefore should keep one's mind focused on God. Besides he constantly urged his followers to be wary of attachment to women and wealth. He looked upon lust as the mortal enemy of spirituality and exhorted his disciples to curb it to the Maximum extent possible.

He attached greatest importance to the company of holy men. He asked his followers to spend as much time as possible in proximity of such noble souls. The Master also urged his disciples that from time to time they should cut themselves off from the hustle and bustle of the surrounding world. He suggested that they should retire to a quiet place and meditate in solitude. Let us see in the Master's own words how he expected an ideal householder to conduct himself, Do all your duties but keep your mind on God. Live with all with wife and children, father and mother and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you".<sup>38</sup>

Devotee: Sir, is there no help, then, for such a worldly person?<sup>39</sup>

Master: Certainly there is From time to time he should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Perform your duties in an unselfish spirit. Always try to perform your duties without desiring any result.<sup>40</sup>

But it is not so harmful for a householder who follows the path of knowledge to enjoy conjugal happiness with his own wife now and then. He may satisfy his sexual impulse like any other natural impulse. Yes, you may enjoy a sweetmeat once in a while. It is not so harmful for a householder.<sup>41</sup>

Devotee: Sir, We are householders. How long should we perform our worldly duties?<sup>42</sup>

Master: Surly, you have duties to perform. You must bring up your children, support your wife and provide for her in case of your death. If you don't then I shall call you unkind. Sages like Sukadeva had compassion. He who has no compassion is no man.<sup>43</sup>

The cumulative effect of these extraordinary phenomena was immense. By the sheer force of his spiritual attainment, Sri Ramakrishna became a beacon-light in the encircling gloom of his time. Gradually the fame of this unlettered young priest began to spread far and wide throughout Bengal. The villager and the city dweller, the scholar and the poet, the educated and the illiterate, people from all walks of life began finding their way to dakshineswar. Among them were some of the greatest literary figures of contemporary Bengal, men like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore and Keshb Chandra Sen.<sup>44</sup>

To assess the reasons behind Ramakrishna's emerging success with certain social groups by the early 1880s, one must rely on an imaginative understanding of this many-layered personality and the diverse possibilities latent in his life and message. In him one finds the ingenious storyteller with fairly well-developed skills of communication; a man of amazing breadth of personality; a rustic, paternal figure distinctive for his kindness and compassion and greatly inspiring religious teacher apparently able to transform philosophical queries about God to fungible communication with God himself. Many aspects concerning his life or human qualities are capable of being interpreted in radically different ways. His visible incapacity to touch or carry on his person any metallic object (symbolizing material possessions),<sup>45</sup> the strange ability to detect moments of moral weakness in his devotees and admirers,<sup>46</sup> his claims to have developed physiological or anatomical changes in keeping with certain spiritual experiments<sup>47</sup> are facts that can presumably be explained through both sophisticated tools of para-psychology as well as the 'advanced' mental powers of the Yogi.

Ramakrishna stressed that the realization of the existence of God is the supreme goal of all living beings. For him, various religions were only a means to reach the absolute. The Master once said,

I have practiced all religions –Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and I have also followed Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must toy with all

beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. ... he who is called Krishna is called Siva and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus and Allah as well – the same Rama with a thousand names.<sup>48</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna is the emblem of Beauty, Power and Virtue. Rescuing religion from the traditional outlook of the masses, he restored it to its pristine glory of purity, virility and freedom. Religion concerns the inner evolution and spiritual enfoldment of seekers of truth. The true test of religion is experience that spirituality transforms personality. We find this emphasized in Sri Ramakrishna.

Mahatma Gandhi writes

The story of Ramakrishna Paramhansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His lives enable us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of skepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light.<sup>49</sup>

The universal principles of all the high religions found a happy synthesis in Sri Ramakrishna's noble life. In him we find a complete harmony of spiritual

disciplines. His spirit of universalism, his sympathy and his reverential attitude towards other faiths is a great landmark in the advancement of religious harmony. It paves the way towards true fellowship. His biographer Romain Rolland was deeply impressed by Master's spirit of universalism. He visualized a glorious future of our civilization based on the Master's idealism and deep sense of joy and hope for mankind. He writes

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the soul, the symphony of India bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown ... that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality concentrating in himself the diversity of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the labor of generations. And with his victorious sign he marks a new era.<sup>50</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna was born in the present age and there are certainly must be some significance attached to this event. This age has certain special features, which were not found in the previous age. The first remarkable feature is scientific thinking. Never before had science overpowered humanity as it has done now. In war or in peace, in medicine or in agriculture, in individual life or collective life, there is no field of activity in which science has not entered. Apart from the good that it has undoubtedly brought to humanity, these are certain of its side effects which appear to overshadow all the good that comes

from it. The wars of earlier centuries have become mockeries compared to the enormous power of destruction potentially present in modern weapons, which can bring an end to humanity in short times. On the other hand, we see the decline of morality is prevailing in modern society. And this has led to an enormous increase in violence, the breakdown of family life, mental disturbance, etc. As a result every society today has its own quota of evil to pour on the collective life of humanity.

The degradation in spiritual, moral, intellectual, cultural, social and other aspects of life had begun even in the nineteenth century. It was at this juncture that Sri Ramakrishna incarnated on the earth. The world famous historian Arnold Toynbee, who began his career as a critic of Indian culture, later on wrote

Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which he and his message were needed. ... it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by western technology. But this western skill has not only annihilated distance, it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power. ... at this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. ... to know this is good, but it is not enough. 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. 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.<sup>51</sup>

So, such a noble life and teaching as Sri Ramakrishna's cannot have significance for only one nation or region. The Master's life and teaching transcend the limitations of race, region and religion. He was indeed an apostle of divine realization, one of those rare souls whose coming heralds a spiritual revolution. To all who came Sri Ramakrishna gave the same message. He exhorted them not to waste their time squabbling over this or that creed of religion, but to seek God with a pure and dedicated heart. His teachings and the story of his life remain to this age a major source of religious inspiration. Swami Vivekananda was one of the first to understand the global significance of his Master's teaching. Sri Ramakrishna awakened the spiritual consciousness of humanity. He advocated that one has to serve human beings looking upon them as God himself. The greatest manifestation of God is in the human being.

Sri Ramakrishna's life and teaching have opened a new approach to human relationships. This approach is based upon on the true meaning of love as an expression of the spiritual oneness. The Master wanted to show that when one understand that it is God alone that dwells in others, then alone can one truly

love one's fellow-beings and serve them. This truth will build an ideal society and this view enables modern people to establish human relationships as a deeper spiritual level and make them stable, pure and enduring.

The Master's advice to renounce *Kamini* or woman has caused much misunderstanding. What he stressed was renunciation of attachment to woman as an object of pleasure. He had the highest regard for women whom he looked upon as manifestation of the Divine Mother. In the present world women are demanding equality and freedom. It is, however, seen that the acquisition of these rights does not always lead to the elevation of women. This is because of the materialistic view of life on which those rights are based and also because of the lack of satisfaction of motherhood. Motherhood stands for the highest form of love and respect unconditional, all forgiving, all forbearing, all-sacrificing love. Motherhood is indeed a divine attribute. The ideal of divine motherhood ennobles and elevates womanhood. By looking upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna has given a new ideal for both men and women in the modern time. In Holy Mother, Sri Saradadevi, this ideal of divine motherhood found its highest manifestation. The Master knew well that she was born to help him in establishing a new ideal for the modern time. He not only chose her as his better half but also trained and guided her, and shared his spiritual wealth her. The Holy Mother herself on one occasion stated, "My son, you know that the Master had the attitude of Mother towards



everybody. It is to propagate the ideal of the Motherhood of God that he has left me behind on earth”.<sup>52</sup>

The teaching for which Sri Ramakrishna is most well-known is the doctrine of harmony of religion. He did not start a new religion. There already existed several religions. The great need of the time was a principle of harmony, which would unite people instead of dividing them. It was this need that Sri Ramakrishna came to fulfill.

As the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 showed, the idea of the harmony of religions had already begun to engage the minds of many thoughtful people by the end of the nineteenth century. But nobody knew how to bring about this harmony. It is Sri Ramakrishna who has shown that the harmony of religions is not a matter of talk, scholarship or social adjustments, but a matter of direct experience. It is bound up with the nature of Reality. The Ultimate Reality is only one, but known in different religions by different names such as God, Allah, Bhagavan, Jehovah and so on, just as the same water is known as *vari, jal, aqua, pani*, etc. in different languages. And it is ignorance of this basic truth that is the root cause of all conflicts among the followers of religions. And it is this idea of transcendental experience as the basis of the harmony of religions that is the unique contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to modern thought.

It is in this light that Sri Ramakrishna's famous statement – 'As many faiths, so many paths' (yato mat tato path), is to be understood. He advocated that one should not criticize any religion, each person should stick to his own faith and must place respect to other faiths.

The Master set a new ideal for householders. He did not encourage his householder disciples to become sannyasins. He wanted householders to earn their living by honest means and maintain their families instead of depending on the charity of other people. Lastly, it should not be forgotten that the master was a great lover of humanity. His love knew no barriers of region, religion, race, or caste. It was unconditional. He did not like the word compassion (*daya*), because it implies a condescending attitude. He advised to render service. He did not make a show of his love and concern for suffering people, as many social leaders do. For his love and concern for people was of the nature of divine commitment.

This great saint passed away on 16 August 1886. A few days before his passing, he told his spiritual spouse that she had much work to do for suffering people. He trained a group of young men not only to lead intensely spiritual lives but also to work for the good of the world. It was only after the Master's death that, paradoxically enough, his teachings spread far and wide, both in Bangladesh, India and abroad. This happened because of Master's young dedicated disciple

who came together after his death and vigorously propagated his ideals. The foremost among them was Swami Vivekananda who established the famous RKM which has been carrying out services in the field education, religion, health, social welfare, etc. in different parts of Bangladesh, India as well as in other countries. Now a day the RKM is the concrete form of Sri Ramakrishna's love for humanity.

### **Swami Vivekananda**

Narendranath Dutta, who was to be distinguished later as Swami Vivekananda, was born on 12 January 1863. He was the son of a well-known lawyer in Calcutta, Biswanath Dutta and lady Bhuvaneshwari Devi.<sup>53</sup> Narendra learnt the Epics and Puranas from his mother, who was a good story teller. One unique feature of the boy was his habit of deep meditation even at the tender age of five or six. Narendra received a good education according to the standard of age. He passed Entrance Examination from the Metropolitan Institute and F.A and B.A Examinations from the General Assembly's Institution (now Scottish Church College).<sup>54</sup>

The nineteenth century witnessed a great transformation in the culture of Bengal. This was mainly due to English education, and the impact of western culture which resulted from it. Narendra was a renaissance man of the nineteenth century Bengal and was born at a time when Keshab Chandra Sen

was at the height of his power, and the Brahma Samaj exerted a potent influence on English-educated Bengalis. It was no wonder, therefore, that the rational mind of young Narendranath would be drawn to the Brahma Samaj. He became an initiated member of the Samaj.<sup>55</sup> But his enthusiasm was of short time. His favorite question during his college days to anyone credited with particular religious attainments was, ‘Sir, have you seen God?’<sup>56</sup> He was long disappointed in his quest. In this situation a mere chance brought him into contact with Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a priest in the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar, but whose name and fame as a great saint were gradually spreading. Narendranath first heard of him when he was a student of the General Assembly’s Institution. Professor Hastie, the then principal of the institution, once referred to Ramakrishna in the course of his lecture to the class. Thus the first encounter with Naren’s future Master and mentor was a memorable one. Naren put to him the crucial question, “Have you seen God”. “Yes”, was the prompt reply; “I have seen Him as I am seeing you.” What is more, Ramakrishna further said that he could make Naren see God.<sup>57</sup> This is how, Naren was being gradually attracted towards Ramakrishna, and accepted him as his Master.

It is worth mentioning that one has to go all the way back to Socrates and Plato to find a paralleled for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda relationship. Though apparently poles apart from the master, it was the student who spread his teachings far and wide until they encompassed almost the entire world.

Vivekananda was a man of remarkable qualities, gifted both with a powerful physique and out-standing intellect. Just before his death, Sri Ramakrishna designated Vivekananda his spiritual heir. After the death of Sri Ramakrishna, a group of his close disciples, who had renounced worldly life and had taken the vow of monasticism, came together and formed a new association. These monks had dedicated their lives to the realization of God. Vivekananda was their undisputed leader and fulfilled the last desire of his Master. Romain Rolland has described his role in the following words

He (Naren) Kept its members ever on the alert; he haired their minds without pity; he read them the great books of human thought, he explained to them the evolution of the universal mind; he forced them to dry and impassioned discussion of all the great philosophical and religious problems; he lead them indefatigably towards the wide horizons of boundless truth, which surpass all the limits of schools and races, and embrace and unify all particular truths. This synthesis of spirit achieved the promise of Sri Ramakrishna's message of love. The unseen Master presided over their meetings. They were able to place their intellectual labors at the service of his universal heart.<sup>58</sup>

Vivekananda travelled extensively through the length and breadth of Bengal. He was shocked to see the conditions of rural-people ignorant, superstitious, half-starved, and victims of caste-tyranny. If this shocked him, the callousness of the so-called educated upper classes shocked him still more. In the course of his travels he met some princes, city-based members of the intelligentsia-lawyers,

teachers, journalists and government officials. He appealed to all to do something for the masses. No one seemed to pay any heed to him — except the Maharaja of Khetri, the Maharaja of Mysore and a few young men of Madras.<sup>59</sup>

During his two years of significant travel a number of young people assembled round him drawn by his bright and inspiring talks. They begged him to go to the USA to attend the forthcoming Parliament of Religions. This Parliament of Religions was to be held in Chicago in 1893 in connection with the world fair. With considerable difficulty Vivekananda succeeded in getting a passage to USA, and after facing further hardships finally reached Chicago and enrolled himself as a delegate to the conference. His advent at the gathering had all the elements of high drama. He succeeded by the very force of his personality in dominating the whole concourse which today is remembered mainly because of him. A powerful speaker with a sonorous voice and a fine command of English, Vivekananda's famous address on the first day of the parliament created a sensation, and his subsequent speeches confirmed him as an outstanding preacher. Thus Swamij made a tremendous impression, first in the USA and then also in England. At the Parliament of Religions in response to welcome Vivekananda said,

Sister and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most

ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honor of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: *'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.'*

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine Preached in the Gita: *'Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever from, I*

*reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.'*

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now? But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.<sup>60</sup>

Thus in this discourse of the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda succinctly explained the main facets of Hinduism, highlighting at the same time the essential unity of all religions.

In his short life of thirty-nine years, Swami Vivekananda undertakes what was in effect a re-statement of religion in the light of the new situation that had developed during the nineteenth century. Besides some features of Vivekananda's ministry merit special mention, as they had an abiding influence upon the revival of contemporary religion in Bengal specially Hinduism. In 1897 he founded the RKM with headquarters at Belur near Calcutta. Although Bengal had a long and distinguished monastic tradition going back to Adi Shankaracharya, the RKM was a new order and its approach to the problems of



contemporary Bengal was based on a modern re-interpretation of the ancient doctrines. It had a special bias towards educational and medical service, and has distinguished itself in providing relief to the victims of natural calamities such as floods and famine. If one go through the minutes of the meeting, took place on 5 May 1897, will find that its objectives encompassed the spiritual field as well as humanitarian. The meeting was headed by Vivekananda and the following aims and objects were adopted.

“Its Method of Action are:

“(a) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses:

“(b) to provide and encourage arts and industries: and

“(c) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Shri Ramakrishna.

“Indian Work Department:

“The activities of the Mission should be directed to the establishment of Maths and Ashramas in different parts of India for the training of Sannyasins and such of the house-holders as may be willing to devote their lives to educate others, and to the finding of the means by which they would be enabled to educate the people, by going about from one province to another.

“Its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

“The aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.

“Anyone who believes in the mission of Shri Ramakrishna, or who sympathizes or is willing to co-operate with the above-mentioned aims and objects of the Association, is eligible for membership.”<sup>61</sup>

The RKM, founded by the Swamiji himself, has worked sincerely to implement his program of education. The greatest service to be done to the lower classes is to give them education which will regain their lost individuality and grant them liberty. Mass education, thus played the crucial role in his programme of national regeneration. It provided that thousands of young and honest men and women should go over to the various parts of the country, both towns and villages, and teach the poor ignorant mass lessons on “the necessities of life, and on trade, commerce, agriculture,”<sup>62</sup> and also preach them the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up — the gospel of equality”.<sup>63</sup>

Vivekananda's programme of education was both religious and secular in character. It also put emphasis upon vocational, physical and moral training. The religious aspect of the education emphasized the vedantic ideals of individuality, and equality, and aimed at freeing the common people from the priest craft, meaningless sacrifices, cumbrous rituals and age-old superstitions. He once angrily wrote that most of the so-called religious preachers in India were 'full of morbidity, cracked brains or fanatics,' who mislead the people through wrong interpretations. It is clear that he was hitting not only at the fake sadhus but also at the preponderance of the Brahanical orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup>

Another remarkable aspect of his education programmed was its 'modernising' objective. It gave great importance to the study of science and technology. While the Vedantic knowledge and philosophy is given prime importance as it will promote solidarity and integrity of the nation and foster human endeavor, the dissemination of scientific and technological knowledge of the west will assist its progress. He once said, "Imitate the virtues of other nations, cultivate their technical skill and qualities of life"<sup>65</sup> and at another place he said that not only scientific knowledge but several other great things we have to take from the west. "From the great dynamo of Europe, the electric flow of that tremendous love of independence that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirsts for improvement."<sup>66</sup> It was indeed a progressive and forward-looking attitude.

Through purposeful education on a large scale, Bengal one day would become a strong nation physically and morally, capable of competing with all other nations, including Britain, and eventually would gain freedom from alien rule, that is, in his words, would “unfasten the alien octopus hold on the citadel of Oriental Culture”.<sup>67</sup> From the quote above and his many other utterance, it is evident that though basically under Vedantic influence, he was also influenced, during his stay in England, by the utilitarian liberal philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and the evolutionary idea of Herbert Spencer. A good system of education, he believed, will create a better environment and the ideals of individuality, liberty and equality would be easily attained.

The other feature of Vivekananda’s life was great respect for other religions. Being a Universalist, his knowledge and understanding of spiritualism went beyond Hinduism. He was deeply familiar with the message of other religions. Swamiji laid down the foundation for harmony amongst religions and also harmony between religion and science. It is crucially important in this connection to notice that when Swamiji speaks of ‘universal religion’, he is not wishing for the triumph of any one of the particular religions so that it becomes the religion of all by vanquishing the others. Recall his Master’s words,

A man can reach the roof of a house by stone stairs or a ladder or a rope-ladder or even by a bamboo pole. But he cannot reach the roof if he sets foot now on one and now on another. He should firmly follow one path. Likewise,

in order to realize God a man must follow one path with all his strength. But you must regard other views as so many paths leading to God. You should not feel that your path is the only right path and that other paths are wrong. You must not malice toward others.<sup>68</sup>

This is of course an attitude that let the followers of any given path to continue their journey with veneration and confidence without coercing others to join the same.

Swami Vivekananda, like his Master, had also expressed his surprise that anyone should refuse to grant validity to religions that others adhere to. He said in one of his lectures, “I do not understand how people declare themselves to be believers in God, and at the same time think that God has handed over to a little body of men all truth, and they are the guardians of the rest of humanity.”<sup>69</sup>

Vivekananda was not a social reformer in the conventional sense of the term. He first thought of removing ignorance from men’s mind through education, and only after that the work of social reform could be taken up effectively. His spirit of social service too was inspired by the Vedantic philosophy and the teaching of Ramakrishna Paramhansa. It is noteworthy that the Master emphasized the fact that, ‘No one can be righteous with an empty stomach’ (*Khali pete dharma hoy na*). This is lesson that deeply influenced Swamiji to think for the cause of social-service. In fact, this idea gradually germinated in

swamiji's heart and grew into a thriving plant located in the very centre of the RKM that he founded. He established the RKM in 1897 to what he described as creating the machinery which will bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of even the poorest and the meanest. The RKM has since been at the service of the poor and needy, carrying out services for the good of the world. It has inspired other noble initiatives to come forward and contribute to social development in a meaningful way. Vivekananda's contribution in the domain of religion was immeasurable. He rejuvenated Vedanta, as he preferred to call it. Through the help of his Master, he saw perfect order in the apparent wilderness of its scriptures. "To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer, startling psychology a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task only those can understand who have attempted it,"<sup>70</sup> he wrote in 1890 to a disciple, and this is just what he accomplished to perfection. He found that, in Vedanta, the different philosophies, such as Dualism, Qualified Monism, and Monism, are presentations of the same truth looked at from different angles according to the temperament and capacity of the aspirant. There is no contradiction among them, just as there is none among the different stages of a man's life. To vary the metaphor, each religion is a language to express the highest truth. We travel not from error to truth, but from truth to truth at - best from lower truth to higher truth. So there is no need for fanatical quarrels over religion. They are all due to

ignorance, and must be treated as a disease. This harmony of all religions was the central theme of these teachings.

Swami Vivekananda's birth was for the uplift of humankind. He was an advocate of the enfranchisement of Bengal women, and regarded the downfall of this region. He came at a time when the status of women had fallen into the abyss of degeneration. His advent makes the turning point in their rise to attain new heights in independence and freedom. The degeneration that was seen in the status of women in the recent history of Bengal was owing to several social and political factors. The worst of its kind existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Child-marriage, polygamy, Sati, no right for a widow to remarry, no right to education, and a horde of other disabilities imposed on the womenfolk by the repressive patriarchy had stifled the very source of well-being of our society. And here Vivekananda's views on women have been of a revolutionary kind. Once Sister Nivedita said, "The two things that possessed Vivekananda's imagination was the uplift of women and the masses. Through his deep insight he saw that the success in the former was the key to the success in the latter."<sup>71</sup>

The ideal that men are superior to women was especially diabolical to Vivekananda. He said, "It is a wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any of you dares to say, 'I will work out the salvation of this woman or child'. ... who are

you to solve women's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems."<sup>72</sup>

This is how Vivekananda viewed women, not as subordinate to men, not as dependent on men, but as independent and strong enough to work out their own destinies. According him, the first step towards the attainment of a perfect state is, "To all women, every man save her husband, should be as her son. To all men, every woman save his own wife, should be as his mother."<sup>73</sup> This was the way of progress prescribed by Vivekananda. In a letter to Josephine Macleod, expressing the revival of the kind of the independent women of the past, Vivekananda wrote in 1901, "The natural ambition of woman is through marriage to climb up, leaning upon a man; but those days are gone. You shall be great without the help of any man ..."<sup>74</sup> When he wrote this, he was perhaps looking into the future institution of his dream, where women would be managing their own affairs absolutely independent of men. That would be the first nunnery in the world to be run solely by women. It would be a facility where women would be trained into the life of perfect renunciation. In his view these women would stand in society as the beacon for the rest to navigate their vessels in the right direction.



Vivekananda further said,

It seems imperative to train some women up in the ideal of renunciation, so that they will take up the vow of lifelong virginity, fired with the strength of that virtue of charity which is innate in their life-blood from hoary antiquity. Along with that they should be taught sciences and other things which would be or benefit, not only to them but to others as well. ... our motherland requires for her well-being some of her children to become such pure-souled Brahmacharin and Brahmacharins.<sup>75</sup>

His view was to train girls in the practice of celibacy, to which was to be added the knowledge of empirical sciences. He said, “They must be given education and left to themselves. After that they will act as they think best. ...they would be free to decide whether they should marry or not. ... even after marriage and entering the world, the girls educated as above will inspire their husbands with noble ideas.”<sup>76</sup>

The institution of Vivekananda’s dream was meant for every woman who was devoted and dedicated to the ideal life as seen in the life of Sarada Devi. Though it was to be essentially a monastic institution, he clearly made provisions even for married women who were inclined to lead an ideal life. It is worth reproducing here Vivekananda’s plan and vision in his own words,

The Holy Mother will be the central figure and the wives and daughters of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna will be its first inmates. on the other side of the Ganga a big plot of land will be acquired, where unmarried girls or

Brahmacharini widows will live; devout married women will also be allowed to stay now and then. Men will have no concern with this Math. The elderly Sadhus of the Math will manage the affairs of this Math from a distance. There shall be a girl's school attached to this women's Math, in which religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar and even some amount of English should be taught. Other matters such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work, and upbringing of children, will also be taught while japa, worship, meditation, etc. shall form an indispensable part of the teaching. Those who will be able to live here permanently renouncing home and family ties, will be provided with food and clothing from the Math. Those who will not be able to do that will be allowed to study in this Math as day-scholars. With the permission of the head of the Math, the latter will be allowed even to stay in the Math occasionally. The elder Brahmacharinis will take charge of the training of the girl students in Brahmacharya. After five or six years, training in this Math, the guardians of the girls may marry them. If deemed fit for Yoga and religious life, with the permission of the guardians they will be allowed to stay in this Math, taking the vow of celibacy. These celibate nuns will in time be the teachers and preachers of the Math. In Villages and towns, they will open centres and strive for the spread of female education. Through such devout preachers of character there will be the real spread of female education in the country.<sup>77</sup>

This revolutionary institution of Vivekananda's dream finally actualised on 2 December 1954, fifty-two years after his passing away. In 1959 eight women were initiated into the vows of sannyasa by the president of RKM. In the same

year it became legally independent, with Pravrajika Bharatiprana as its first President.<sup>78</sup> For the first time in the history of the world a nunnery was born, fully managed by women. From that year onward the President of the Sarada Math began to confer sannyasa vows to deserving women. Today it stands as a monument of women's ultimate independence and glory. It is one-hundred and fifty-five years after Vivekananda's birth, and sixty years after the birth of the Women's Math in Calcutta.

It is a matter of joy that following the path of Sarada Math in Calcutta, a Ashrama named Sri Ma Sarada Ashrama has started to work in Khulna, Bangladesh, from the year 2015. The Principal of this Ashrama is Brahmacharini Srabanti. It is rendering several services for the cause of humanity.<sup>79</sup> To say about Sarada Math (Calcutta) and Srima Sarada Ashrama (Khulna), the span of time is too short to evaluate and quantify changes wrought by Vivekananda and his dream projects. Nevertheless, changes these have been, discernible for the watchful. After all, this is just the beginning. The ideal woman as envisaged by Vivekananda will become the pillar of the future society, and this only time will prove. We may also dream about more Women Math or Ashrama in Bangladesh which will cater exclusively to the needs of the women who have been left behind in the march of human progress.

## **Holy Mother Saradadevi**

Saradadevi was born on 22 December 1853 in a poor but righteous family of Bengal in the village of Jayrambati in the Bankura District, situated about sixty miles to the West of Calcutta.<sup>80</sup> Her father was Ramachandra Mukherjee and Mother was Shymasundari Devi. Saradadevi was the first child of her parents. She had five brothers and one sister.<sup>81</sup> At the age of five, Holy Mother was married to Sri Ramakrishna, who was twenty-three years of age. In 1867, when she was fourteen, she came to live with Ramakrishna at Kamarpukur and enjoyed the divine companionship of her husband. His selflessness in her care and the cordiality he bestowed upon her touched her heart. Recalling the inner feeling she experienced in these days, she used to tell her women disciples, “I then felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart. It was a constant experience with me then. It is very difficult to convey an idea of this experience to others”<sup>82</sup>

Saradadevi was the divine consort and first disciple of Ramakrishna and thus an integral part of his spiritual self and of the saving message he delivered unto mankind.

When Sarada was eighteen, there was a rumor that Ramakrishna had become mentally deranged. The villagers' gossip was very painful for the young Sarada and she expressed her wish that she should be with her husband during this critical period in his life. Therefore, Holy Mother and her father started the

arduous journey to reach Dakshineswar in order to meet Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna cordially accepted her and noticing her fevered condition, asked her to stay in his room for a few days. A female companion also remained with her in the room. He extended medical treatment and in every way behaved towards Saradadevi as a devoted husband should do.<sup>83</sup> Within three or four days she was all right. She spent nearly the whole of the Dakshineswar period of her life of thirteen years, extending from 1872 to 1855, except when she went to Jayrambati periodically, in a small room in the northern side of the temple compound, called the Nahabat, from where she could get a view of the room in which the Master lived.<sup>84</sup> The ground floor of the Nahabat or Concert House was a small low-roofed octagonal room of less than 50 sq. feet in area, its combined length and breadth was only 7' 9" and the height of its ceiling was 9 3".<sup>85</sup> Besides being her living room it served as her provision store, kitchen and reception room too — a surprising combination of functions for such a small enclosure. But so patient and long — suffering she was that what would have been impossible for others was no problem to her. Holy Mother later described 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 cut on the head. Then I became accustomed to it. The head bent of itself as soon as I approached the door. Many stout aristocratic women of Calcutta frequently came here. ... 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.'<sup>86</sup>

All through the day quite a large number of women devotees, who came to see the Master, made the Nahabat their first place of halt and spent much time in conversation. Some of them also stayed overnight with her in that small room. Besides attending to her household duties, she also spent hours in watching from the Nahabat the scenes of devotional fervor that went on in the Master's room. During nights she spent long hours in meditation. Her whole time was thus occupied with acts of service of the Master and his devotees and with the practice of devotional disciplines. It was an ideal way of living in which service and worship went hand in hand, and led to a harmonious development of personality.

The Master took great care to help her in the development of her talents both in the secular and the spiritual fields of life. One time the Master told, "She, Mother, is Sarada, Saraswati (Goddess of learning); she has come to impart knowledge. She is full of the rarest wisdom."<sup>87</sup> Saradadevi was a perennial source of inspiration to the monks of the RKM and played a significant role in the fulfillment of RKM's activities. The Holy Mother wanted the RKM to cherish the living personality of the Master in all its aspects. She gave the highest emphasis to the RKM as an entity of love, sympathy and affection, not

as an organization built of brick and mortar. It is on the bedrock of her motherliness that the RKM stands established. In 1899, when plague broke out in an epidemic form in Bengal, the magnitude of the people's suffering so moved Swamiji that he considered selling the RKM property to defray the costs of the plague relief service. But when the Holy Mother came to know about it, she cautioned Swamiji not to sell the RKM property because it would have greater and far-reaching consequences in the future by helping humanity in many diverse ways. Swamiji, realizing his emotional reaction, immediately accepted the Holy Mother's advice.

Sri Ramakrishna earmarked the role of Vivekananda as the great awakener of the people. Swamiji's new and bold orientation to monastic life was not relished by everyone at first. It is the Holy Mother, who understood the role of Vivekananda in spreading the Master's teachings and gave all his schemes her unqualified support. It was with her blessings that Swamiji went to the West to preach universal humanism. The monastic order of Sri Ramakrishna has been hailed as unique, containing within itself the energy and faith of both the East and the West. In its nascence, it battled with many internal and external forces. Swamiji had a dynamic philosophy of Practical Vedanta — the sublime philosophy of Vedanta must not be allowed to languish in mere speculation by the elite class of Brahmins; it must not remain unknown to the masses. His bold inspiration to press Vedanta into the service of the people initially encountered

resistance from his co-workers. They did not readily understand Swamiji's redeeming motive in waiting to transfer the emphasis in religion from metaphysics to practical righteousness, from individual salvation to the salvation of all beings.<sup>88</sup> Conservative societies do not easily accept new ideas. Even after many years of accepting Vivekananda's vision of Practical Vedanta as its creed, many devotees of the RKM, felt that social service represented a complete departure from Master's teachings. In this situation, the Holy Mother gave her instant support that the work started by Vivekananda was in complete conformity with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. She said, "It is far better to work than to let the mind be loose. ... my own Naren observed all this and so laid down the foundation of selfless work."<sup>89</sup> So, her defense of Vivekananda was not based on any preferred love for him but upon his attunement with the teachings of the Master.

A great soul manifests many qualities which are of benefit to society. The social necessity of religion and spirituality is beyond doubt. But these values and qualities are manifested in the persons like Holy Mother Saradadevi. It is known to us that social peace requires honesty and integrity in all dealings. Holy Mother showed utmost consideration in these matters. A society requires altruistic motivation without consideration of benefit for the self. An active desire to render service for the good of the people is essential. Holy Mother often supported relief service, though very strenuous. She gave initiation even to



undeserving people, out of mercy seeing their pitiable condition which often regenerated them and filled with courage and hope.”<sup>90</sup> Besides Holy Mother’s heart was always for the deprived and poor people. The sense of humility and modesty was automatic with her.

A naturally conscientious person must develop social responsibility. Social units make up the nation. So, services performed for a group ultimately benefits the nation. We know, Holy Mother was always engaged in sweeping, collecting vegetables, cooking, and such other chores involving physical labour. She advised her people to work because that keeps the mind free from idle thoughts. That is an antidote for sadness, solitary feeling, and even depression. Besides, Holy Mother kept a large number of women of different background and temperament together. She taught them how to work with others and also to introduce a division labour for smooth functioning of the team.<sup>91</sup> In Holy Mother were combined tradition and catholicity in light of the Master’s teachings. Although she was very punctilious about tradition, especially regarding food, she never offended anyone’s sentiments. She moved very intimately with Miss Josephine Macleod, Mrs Ole Bull, Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine and Sister Devamata and thus led the way for members of the society to absorb foreigners into their fold. Swamiji wrote charmingly about this, “Mother is here, and the European and the American ladies went the other day to see her. And what do you think? Mother even ate with them! Isn’t that

grand!”<sup>92</sup> And Sister Nivedita wrote, “This gave us all a dignity and made my future work possible in a way nothing else could have done.”<sup>93</sup>

Holy Mother had a far-reaching eye and we came to know from the history of the RKM that, some political revolutionaries who were dedicated to winning Bengal’s freedom and independence later joined the RKM with great sincerity and completely eschewed the path of politics. On 11 December 1916, Lord Carmichael, the then Governor of Bengal, gave a statement casting aspersion on the RKM. During that crucial period of Bengal’s history, the RKM’s devotees, well-wishers and other aspirants became alarmed at the sinister consequences that might follow the governor’s unfriendly opinion of the RKM. They suggested to the RKM authorities that they ask the revolutionaries to leave the RKM. At that Juncture, Swami Saradananda, the then Secretary of the RKM, discussed the matter with Holy Mother; She firmly rejected the idea and expressed her opinion that those who Joined the RKM in the name of Sri Ramakrishna should be allowed to remain, inspite of the government’s adverse remarks. She suggested that Swami Saradananda could meet personally with the governor and explain the RKM’s viewpoint. Accordingly, it was done and the result was that the governor finally exonerated the RKM and its members in his statement of 26 March 1917.<sup>94</sup>

The Holy Mother received her all devotees with motherly affection. She herself said, “I am the Mother of all. I am the Mother of the good. I am the Mother of

the bad, too.”<sup>95</sup> It has been well said that the Holy Mother, the high priestess of the power of Sri Ramakrishna, became the most potent instrument for imparting spiritual perfection among innumerable householders in a quite yet dynamic way. Swami Vivekananda spread the message of the Master far and wide; the Holy Mother sent it deep into the hearts of thousands, silently—Swamiji preached it horizontally and the Holy Mother, vertically. With all these considerations, it can conclude that the life of Holy Mother has a relevance to the national ideal and requirement. A great soul or an avatar just lives the life, the interpretation is for others, said Swami Vivekananda. Holy Mother just lived Vedanta, the essence of spiritual life and has great influence on a large number of people in the world and so her example can be placed before people young and old to be inspiring for the nation and the world. The Holy Mother died on 20 July 1920.<sup>96</sup> In Saradadevi, the world finds a unique figure in its history, which combined in herself the roles of a perfect wife, nun, mother and teacher at the same time. In the endless procession of the members of human species on this planet of ours, the Holy Mother stands out as a unique example, whose utter innocence could melt even the hardest of hearts, who never looked at the fault of others, whose love never made any distinction between the deserving and undeserving, in whose eyes the saint and the sinner were alike her precious children, whose wide heart all humanity in its maternal embrace, and who considered it a privilege to labour and to suffer for even the least of them.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

- a. Bringing firsthand detailed information behind the foundation and history of the RKM of Bangladesh.
- b. Focusing on the services (educational, social, healthcare, relief and rehabilitation, etc.) for the cause of humanity in Bangladesh. This study stresses, RKM's new look at the tradition of Hinduism which idolized renunciation and emphasis on empathy and open-mindedness for understanding other faiths.
- c. To highlight the idea of man-making education, emancipation of women and preaching universal humanity by the RKM which aims at welfare of the society and promotion of the wellbeing of the common man.
- d. Mentioning the major personalities (Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Srīma, Sister Nivedita, Aksharwananda) and their influence upon the devotees and aspirants in Bangladesh.
- e. Reviewing the harmonizing force of the RKM and its call to other faiths to cooperate in the humanitarian work of national regeneration and in building a better civilization in terms of universal, non-sectarian principles in the present context of Bangladesh.

### **1.3 Argument of the Study**

In founding the RKM, Swami Vivekananda said its purpose was twofold: First, attainment of salvation by its member; Second, service to humanity. So as an institution the RKM believes unselfishness is God and service to man is service to God. He who wants to serve the father must serve the children first. He who wants to serve shiva (Supreme Being) must serve his children (Human Being). The first of everything should go to the poor; we have only a right to what remains. The poor are God's representatives; any one that suffers is his representative.

The RKM preaches its teaching on Vedanta. According Vedanta each soul is potentially divine. It claims religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man. Man has an idea that there can be only one religion, one prophet and Incarnation, but that is not true. By studying the lives of all these great messengers, we find that each, as it were, was destined to play a part, and a part only; that the harmony consists in the sun total, and not in one note. As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked into the ocean – so, all these various creeds and religion, taking their start from different standpoints and running through crooked or straight courses, at last come unto thee.

By founding the RKM, Swamiji declared that it will work for renunciation and service. The work in the RKM ranges from the running of small monastic centres to the management of publishing houses, of schools and other educational institutions, of workshops and engineering institutions, of hospitals, orphanages and students' homes, of huge relief operations in famine and flood stricken areas, and so on. Side by side there is considerable preaching work by organizing and leading Vedanta Centres abroad in Asia, Europe, America and Russia. Besides discourses, seminars and talks on religion, value-oriented education and philosophy are regularly held throughout the year. At the observation of the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, learned and scholarly people of different faiths take part in the discussion on the life and teachings of prophet Mohammad, Jesus Christ, Sri Krishna, Lord Buddha, Sri Chaitanya and other great souls in their birthdays during the year as its special features. Its services are also open to all, irrespective of race and religion.

## 1.4 Literature Review

There is extensive literature analyzing the evolution of the RKM in India with reference to particular personalities such as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Sri Ma and so on. However, the historical study on the RKM should have gone further. In particular, the contention here is that, the existing scholarly works on the RKM have generally ignored many important aspects of services rendered by it in Bangladesh. There is no in-depth study with reference to Bangladesh. Moreover, the formation and evolution of the RKM have not been touched upon in any study. The aim of this study the RKM in the specific context of Bangladesh, in doing, so, the services of the RKM in religion, education and humanity have been highlighted.

The earliest author to write an authoritative treatise about the RKM, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were Romain Rolland (Calcutta, 1929) and Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta, 1957). Romain Rolland's book titled *The Life of Ramakrishna* published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, makes a review of Ramakrishna's idea of building unity. The author does not deal with the educational idea of Ramakrishna as such, and which is being investigated in the present study. Published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalaya's in 1957, Gambhirnanda's book titled *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* gives an insight into the formation of RKM in India. This book reveals that RKM were involved in services all over India. However these works do not

present the RKM of Bangladesh in a proper perspective which is being investigated in the present study.

Systematic research study on the RKM and Vivekananda in the recent times is traceable to four works: Swami Abjajananda, *Monastic Disciples of Swami Vivekananda*, Swami Vivekananda, *A Historical Review* by Dr. R. C. Majumdar, Swami Prabhananda's *The Early History of the Ramakrishna Movement* and of Advaita Ashram's publication *The Story of the Ramakrishna Mission*. Abjajananda's writing concentrates on thirteen short biographies and informs how two direct disciples of Swamiji deputed by him visited first time Dacca and took part in the formation of RKM in Bangladesh. The valuable study takes a Calcutta centric approach which becomes a problem for readers interested in Eastern Bengal. The gap created by this study was filled by a seminal work done by R. C. Majumder. His *Swami Vivekananda: A Historical Review* is certainly a historical work in its own right for RKM historians. Among the many biographies of Swami Vivekananda, this work has a place of special importance, as it is a historical review of the great life and contribution of Swamiji by one whose scrutiny of facts, analysis of events and unbiased search for truth won him a place of honour among the eminent historians of the twentieth century. His writing gives us authentic information about Swamiji's visit to Eastern Bengal (Dacca, Naryayanganj, Chittagong) in 1901. Swami Prabhanananda's book *The Early History of the Ramakrishna Movement*



embodies a more detailed study on the RKM than those of the early writers. This work is an honest attempt to briefly study how Sri Ramakrishna's mission proceeded particularly during its early years towards fulfillment, and in the process how the Ramakrishna –Vivekananda movement grew and developed in the early days. Moreover, we get photographic accounts, as it were, of the activities associated with the RKM. This will be discussed in the present thesis.

Another book written by Rabindra Kumar Dasgupta, former Tagore Professor of Delhi University, was one of the pioneers in the uncharted field of Ramakrishna–Vivekananda literature. His *Sri Ramakrishna's Religion*, published in Calcutta in 2001 was a milestone. He opines that Ramakrishna revalidated the authority and practicability of the spiritual traditions of Bengal. From this book, we came to understand the true import of Sri Ramakrishna's central teaching, *Ishvarlabh-i-manav Jivaner Uddeshya* [god realization alone is the great purpose of human life]. But what Ramakrishna exactly meant by God is not clear in this book. An important part of the present study is educational services rendered by the monks and other devotees of the RKM. Swami Vivekananda himself written a pioneering book about the education by title *Shikkha Prosonge* [about education], published from Udbodhan office, Calcutta in 1960. The book contains extensive ideas of Vivekananda on education where he argues, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man". Moreover, this book is an excellent work about the emancipation of women

education in Bengal. This book was an inspiration behind taking an unprecedented interest in finding ways to improve the condition of female education in this region which was later followed by many institutions in India, Bangladesh. As it is, the services of the RKM of Bangladesh went largely unnoticed. One of the recent studies on the RKM, *The Story of the Ramakrishna Mission* has been published by Advaita Asharam, Calcutta in 2006. This is a major attempt in the study of the RKM in particular, and Ramakrishna Mission in general. This book contains extensive information on all aspects of R.K. Mission with only brief mention of Bangladesh. In general, Bangladesh is absent in this work.

*Vivekananda the great spiritual teacher*, a compilation, published from Advaita Ashram in 1995, has contributed immensely to the historiography on the RKM. It helps in understanding public opinion about the RKM. This book, an anthology of forty articles collected from various sources, describes how Swamiji worked to awaken the spiritual consciousness of human beings all over the world, and how he brought about a new movement in human life and society.

Syed Anwar Husain has contributed immensely to the understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's ideas and other faiths by his scholarly writings. He has contributed many articles; one article titled "Sri Ramakrishna and World

Religion” published by the Vivekananda Shikha O Sanskriti Parishad, Bangladesh in 2013; and another article titled *Jata Mat Tata Path* (so many paths as there are views) published by *Uddipan Patrika* (Journal), RKM, Dhaka, 2007. His articles are highly informative for this study.

Among the recent scholarship that has grown in Bangladesh, we find Ph. D. thesis dealing on the with Vivekananda’s ideology and his social thinking. We can cite here the name of Md. Shafiul Majabin’s unpublished dissertation entitled “Swami Vivekananda and His Thinking for the Good of the World” covers whole of India. Another important work on Vivekananda has been done by Biswajit Bhaduri. His unpublished thesis titled “Swami Vivekananda’s Social Ideas: An Analysis and philosophy” deserve our attention.

But none of these research works has dealt with the RKM as an institution. The present work for the first time is an attempt to study the RKM exclusively and hopes to add a new dimension in the historiography of the RKM of East Bengal, now Bangladesh.

## **1.5 Rationale of the Study**

Currently, social and economic historians and social scientists are paying much attention to the role of RKM. Ramakrishna movement (or Vedanta movement), new orientation of monasticism, harmony of religions and religious sects, ideal of renunciation, national awakening and integration, divine humanism are some of the major areas of research which are drawing attention of scholars. Unending academic debates and disputations about the RKM lead us to believe that this institution has hitherto been inadequately studied. The present study is an addition to this literature.

In today's world, the RKM's ideals remain relevant in our attempts at building a truly better society. Universal brotherhood and tolerance for all religions are timeless principles which the RKM spread to the world. It accepts all religions as true. Swamiji's message and the services of the RKM, therefore, were not for one period of time, but for all times; not for one country, but for all countries.

Hence, in Bangladesh, many devotees and readers of the RKM, however, would like to know more about the activities rendered by it. And here lies the justification for selecting this topic for the study.

It is notable to mention, the RKM is involved in various kinds of educational and social welfare programmers such as building and maintaining schools,

colleges, orphanage and health care centres. Thus RKM is an effective institution to render spiritual, educational and humanitarian services. An institution such as this needs scholarly investigation.

### **1.6. Period of the Study**

We have not specified any dates for the beginning and the terminating the study, instead, indicating broadly the second half of the nineteenth and entire twentieth centuries as the period of study. The whole of the twentieth century was marked by gradual development and services in religion, education and humanity by the RKM. The years 1898-1899 feature prominently in the study, when the RKM started its journey in Bangladesh.

This study mainly deals with the services of the RKM as an institution which has ceaselessly worked for the good of all. The services of it and its influence on Bangladeshi society would be very good subject matter for a research-based study.

### **1.7. Research Methodology**

This work is based, so far as possible, on primary sources. The methodology followed is in the main that of traditional historiography *viz*, survey and analysis of textual sources (historical data). The sources have been mainly gathered from the rich collection of the Ramakrishna Math Library, Belur, Kolkata,

Ramakrishna Museum, Kolkata and Ramakrishna Math and Mission Library, Dhaka. The rare section of the Central Library of the University of Dhaka has provided access to contemporary newspapers, journals and periodicals. As materials have been collected from different sources, in the Bibliography that has been attached at the end, we give the locations of the sources used, in third bracket.

I have had to rely on some interview for chapter II in which, as a matter of course, published sources could not be expected. I have been compelled to base my analysis mostly upon the published biographies, which are, as usual for such publication of those days, not eager to care about chronological accuracy. I have tried my best to verify the chronological order out of the discrepancies and vagueness of those biographies.

The repositories for primary materials are the following:

Advaita Ashrama Library (Kolkata), Ramakrishna Math (Chennai), Udbodhan Office (Kolkata), Ramakrishna Vedanta Math (Kolkata).

The Proceedings, general reports of RKM and RKM have been invaluable and have provided exclusive insight into the data prepared specially for Eastern Bengal. The present study comprises the geographical area that is now Bangladesh, mentioned as Eastern Bengal in the early records. The spelling of the names of some districts has changed since the colonial time (for example,

Dacca is now spelled Dhaka). Some districts have new names altogether (a part of the Tipperah of Colonial times is now Comilla, Backergunge in Barisal and the Surma Valley region is Sylhet), The names and spelling mentioned in the then documents have been used.

## **1.8. Chapter Design**

The study has been divided into eight chapters. The first chapter titled “Introduction” gives an overview of the study plan of this thesis. It shows what the RKM preaches and does for the good of the world. And, it provides an introduction to Holy Trio (Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother) as the perennial source of inspiration. Chapter two titled “Foundation of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangladesh”. This chapter makes a humble attempt to give firsthand information and background behind the foundation of the RKM in Bangladesh. My attention has been drawn to the relation and additions between Belur Math and Dhaka Math under the peculiar circumstances of the period. These important phases, so far as I know, have not been discussed yet.

In chapter three titled “Centers of the RKM in Bangladesh”, I have described how many affiliated centers are running in Bangladesh. The nature of their activities has been discussed in this connection.

Chapter four on “Services in Religion, Education and Humanity” deals with the all services of the RKM rendered without any distinction of creed, caste, race or nationality. This chapter deals with the role of the RKM, especially to the distressed during the birth of Bangladesh and aftermath has to be discussed. Thus the hitherto less noticed services of the RKM for human faculties, particularly in Bangladesh are examined. Here, I have attempted to explain how and why the RKM takes service as a way of life.

In chapter five titled “Major Personalities of the RKM in Bangladesh” provides an introduction to the major personalities of the RKM in Bangladesh. The religious thoughts, educational ideas and humanitarian approaches of these personalities have been reviewed in this respect. This chapter deals with the strength of the Ramakrishna - Vivekananda movement. Here we take up the question of this movement which has become an effective instrument of Hindu Counter-Reformation in Bangladesh and India. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology in the establishment of institutions that are still extant today are shown here.

Chapter six on “Impact of RKM on Bangladeshi Educators and World Thinkers” deals with the RKM and Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, who attracted the attention of the thinkers in Bangladesh and in the West with their purity of life and nobility of thought, self-sacrifice and service to humanity.



Throughout the last century we find a gradual increase in the number of scholars entering into the stream of RKM services. So there has been an urgent need to bring these thinkers together and this chapter document information about them.

The concluding chapter titled “Conclusion” sums-up the whole study.

## Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup>. *The General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* for the year 2012, Howrah, West Bengal, RKM, p. 1 [Henceforth General Report]

<sup>2</sup>. *The General Report, 2012*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>. Swami Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna’s most prominent disciple and the architect of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He became more widely known for his attempts to defend and propagate Hindu ideas and universal humanism in the West.

<sup>4</sup>. Physically, East Bengal is a low-lying riverine country in South Asia with a largely marshy jungle coastline of 710km (441 mile) on the northern littoral of the Bay of Bengal. Surrounding its rim to the west, north, and east are disconnected hill system, out of which flow some of the largest rivers in Southern Asia-the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna. East Bengal’s alluvial soil is highly fertile, but vulnerable to flood and drought. Politically, the region was dominated by several foreign powers. However, after the defeat of Nawab Siraj Uddaulah at Palassey in 1757 the British East India Company slowly took complete control of the Indian subcontinent. With the decolonization in 1947 India was divided into Pakistan and India on the basis of religion. East Bengal became a part of Pakistan and came to be known as East Pakistan while West Bengal remained a province of the Indian Republic. In December 1969, at the height of the movement for regional autonomy against the Pakistani military regime, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Father of the nation, Bangladesh) declared that hereafter the Eastern region of Pakistan would be called Bangladesh instead of East Pakistan. Finally, Because of the discriminatory policy of the West wing of Pakistan, East Pakistan fought a Liberation War in 1971 and became Bangladesh.

<sup>5</sup>. The name of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa has become associated with a message of tolerance towards all religions. A Bengali rural brahman and religious ecstatic devoted to kali, Ramakrishna gathered a core of young disciples and urban householders as disciples. After his death, these followers under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission to perpetuate a philosophy of service to humanity and tolerance of all religions.

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- <sup>6</sup>. *The General Report*, 2015, p. 8.
- <sup>7</sup>. *Uddipan*, Swami Vivekananda's 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary commemorative Volume (in Bengali), (Dhaka: RKM, 2015) p. 233.
- <sup>8</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Dhruveshananda, the Principal, Dhaka Ramakrishna Math and Mission, May 10, 2015.
- <sup>9</sup>. R.K. Panda, ed., *Studies in Vedanta philosophy* (Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashn, 2002) pp.1-14.
- <sup>10</sup>. Swami Lokeshwarananda, *et. al.*, *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Fulfilment* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006) p. preface. [Hereafter *The Story of RKM*].
- <sup>11</sup>. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta: AdvaitaAshrna, 1957) p. vii. [Hereafter *History of RKM*]
- <sup>12</sup>. Madhu Sen, ed., *Studies in Religion and Change* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1983) p.235.
- <sup>13</sup>. Swami Prabhananda, *The Early History of the Ramakrishna Movement* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2005) p. 4. [Henceforth *The Early History*]
- <sup>14</sup>. P. V. Joshi, *Saga of Hinduism* (New Delhi: M D publications Pvt Ltd., 1997) pp. 345-46. [Hereafter *Saga of Hinduism*]
- <sup>15</sup>. S. P. Sen, ed., *Social Contents of Indian Religious Reform Movements* (Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1978) pp. 356-91. [Hereafter *Social Contents*]
- <sup>16</sup>. *Saga of Hinduism*, p. 347.
- <sup>17</sup>. S. Radhakrishnan, *Swami Vivekananda and Kerala* (Chennai: Vivekananda Kendra Prekashan Trust, 2012) p. Preface.
- <sup>18</sup>. *Saga of Hinduism*, p. 349.
- <sup>19</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
- <sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
- <sup>21</sup>. *Ramakrishna math and Ramakrishna Mission, their History, Ideals and Activities*, office of General Secretary (Howrah, West Bengal, India: 2014) p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup>. *The Early History of the Ramakrishna Movement*, p. 5.

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- <sup>23</sup>. *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission*, p. preface.
- <sup>24</sup>. *The Early History of the Ramakrishna Movement*, p. 1-6.
- <sup>25</sup>. *Vedanta Kesari*, Monthly Periodical in English (Chennai), August 1963, p. 17.
- <sup>26</sup>. Syed Anwar Husain, *Sri Ramakrishna's Ideas and Islam Today* (Paper delivered at the seminar organized by the RKM Vidyamandir, Belur Math, India, January 19-21, 2012) p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup>. The word 'Paramhansa' is a honorific term which connotes a supreme sage.
- <sup>28</sup>. Mohit Ranjan Das, *Sri Ramakrishna on Himself* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2014) p. 259.
- <sup>29</sup>. *Social Contents of Indian Religious Reform Movements* (Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1978) p.24.
- <sup>30</sup>. *Saga of Hinduism*, p. 326.
- <sup>31</sup>. Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal, 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- <sup>32</sup>. Swami Sradananda, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Leelaprosongo* (A Biography) Part1, Vol. 3, pp. 228-229. [hereafter *Leelaprosongo*]
- <sup>33</sup>. *Social Contents*, p.24.
- <sup>34</sup>. *Saga of Hinduism*, p. 328.
- <sup>35</sup>. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Vol. 1. Original in Bengali by Mahendranath Gupta (M). Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. RKM, Mylapore, Madras. Kali was usually addressed by Sri Ramakrishna as 'Mother' or 'Divine Mother'. [hereafter *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*]
- <sup>36</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol.2, p. 534.
- <sup>37</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 844.
- <sup>38</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol.1, p. 81.
- <sup>39</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 87.
- <sup>40</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 113.
- <sup>41</sup>. *Ibid*, p.387.
- <sup>42</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 628.
- <sup>43</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 80.

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- <sup>44</sup>. Karan Singh, *Religions of India* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1983) p. 58.
- <sup>45</sup>. Mahendranath Gupta (M), *Kathamrita*, Vol. 3, pp. 179-80. Ramakrishna was also reluctant to carry any gifts (of money or food) back to Dakshineswar from bhadrakalok homes he visited.
- <sup>46</sup>. This is testified to also by Vivekananda, otherwise quite skeptical of the Master's 'supernatural' powers. *Ibid*, Vol.7. p. 179; Vol. 3. p.393. Ramakrishna would refuse to drink water/food served by people whose moral antecedents were later proved to be somewhat suspicious. One such instance is recorded in *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 179.
- <sup>47</sup>. *Leelaprosongo*, Vol. 2, p. 274.
- <sup>48</sup>. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 35.
- <sup>49</sup>. Swami Tathagatananda, *Essays for The 175<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Vedanta Society of New York, 2011) p. 46. [hereafter *Essays of Sri Ramakrishna*]
- <sup>50</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 47.
- <sup>51</sup>. Arnold Toynbee, foreword to *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message*, by Swami Gahananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970) p. 8.
- <sup>52</sup>. *Mayer Katha* (Calcutta: Udbodhan office, B. E. 1380) p. 283.
- <sup>53</sup>. R. C. Majumdar, *Swami Vivekananda-A Historical Review* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1965) p. 9. [hereafter *Swami Vivekananda*]
- <sup>54</sup>. Rajeev Verma, *Faith and Philosophy of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2009) pp. 182-183. [hereafter *Faith and Philosophy*]
- <sup>55</sup>. *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 13.
- <sup>56</sup>. *Vivekananda The Great Spiritual Teacher, A compilation* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1995) p.1. [hereafter *Vivekananda The Great*]
- <sup>57</sup>. *Saga of Hinduism*, p. 340.
- <sup>58</sup>. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Almora: 1931...) p. 12.
- <sup>59</sup>. *Faith and Philosophy*, p183.
- <sup>60</sup>. Gwilym Beckerlegge, ed., *The World Religions Reader* (London: The Open University, 1998) p. 294.
- <sup>61</sup>. *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* p. 94.
- <sup>62</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

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- <sup>63</sup>. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Vol. V, 1971) pp. 296-299.
- <sup>64</sup>. *Ibid*, p. Vol. IV, p. 180.
- <sup>65</sup>. Madhu Sen, ed., *Studies in Religion and Change* (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1983) p.234.
- <sup>66</sup>. Quoted in Binoy K. Roy, *Socio-Political Views of Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Anwesha, 1970) p. 54.
- <sup>67</sup>. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 404.
- <sup>68</sup>. The Memorandum of Association of the R. K. Mission was seen at the Mission's Ashrama at Ramakrishna Avenue, Patna.
- <sup>69</sup>. Anindita N. Balslev, ed., *On World Religions: Diversity, Not Dissension* (New Delhi: SAGA, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2014) p. 12.
- <sup>70</sup>. *The Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 4.
- <sup>71</sup>. Quoted in *Vivekananda The Great*, p. 9.
- <sup>72</sup>. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Kolkata: Udbodhan office, 9<sup>th</sup> ed, 1992) p. 137.
- <sup>73</sup>. *The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 246.
- <sup>74</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol. V, p. 412.
- <sup>75</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol. V, p. 163.
- <sup>76</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol. V, p. 343.
- <sup>77</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol. VII, p. 218.
- <sup>78</sup>. *Ibid*, Vol. VII, pp. 216-217.
- <sup>79</sup>. *Introduction to Sri Ma Sarada Ashrama*, office of the Principal (Khulna: SriMa Sarada Ashrama, 2015) p. 1.
- <sup>80</sup>. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, A compilation* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984) p.7. [hereafter *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*]
- <sup>81</sup>. *Essays of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 86.
- <sup>82</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 87.
- <sup>83</sup>. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 9.
- <sup>84</sup>. *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

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- <sup>85</sup>. *Essays of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 90-91.
- <sup>86</sup>. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2012), pp. 44-45.
- <sup>87</sup>. *Essays of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 97.
- <sup>88</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- <sup>89</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- <sup>90</sup>. Swami Swahananda, *Vedanta and Holy Mother* (Kolkata: AdvaitaAshrama, 2013) p. 97.
- <sup>91</sup>. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-93.
- <sup>92</sup>. *Essays of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 108.
- <sup>93</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- <sup>94</sup>. *History of Ramakrishna Mission*, p. 218.
- <sup>95</sup>. *Essays of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 110.
- <sup>96</sup>. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 38.
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## **Chapter Two**

### **2.1 Foundation of the RKM in Bangladesh**

Ramakrishna Math is a monastic order brought into existence by Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna Mission is a registered society in which monks of Ramakrishna Math, lay devotees and other aspirants cooperate in conducting various types of social services. It was founded by Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple and cyclonic monk, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902).<sup>1</sup>

In East Bengal, now Bangladesh, the first centre of RKM was founded at Dhaka in 1899 and affiliated in 1916 as a combined branch of the worldwide spiritual and philanthropic twin organizations Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda.<sup>2</sup>

About the foundation of the first RKM centre in Bangladesh, a brief information is mentioned in a report published in 1919.<sup>3</sup> This report states: "This branch of the RKM was started as early in 1899, when Swamis Virajananda and Prakashananda, deputed by Swami Vivekananda, visited these parts and by lectures and religious discourses created an interest in the message of Sri Ramakrishna and sowed the first seeds of the work. Under their auspices a society was started in which religious sitting were regularly held."<sup>4</sup>

So, from this report, we came to know that it is Swami Virajananda and Prakashananda, the two direct disciples of Swami Vivekananda, first came to Dhaka to start the Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Movement in East Bengal, now Bangladesh.

This report also informed that after the departure of Virajananda and Prakashananda from Dhaka, another monk named Swami Abhyananda, an American disciple of Swamiji, came to the town and under the auspices of the newly started Dhaka Ramakrishna Mission spoke in five public meetings on the message of Vedanta. For about a month he delivered lectures on religion and philosophy and met the local people religious conversations.<sup>5</sup> This spirit was kept up by occasional visits of other swamis but the appearance of Swami Vivekananda with his team in 1901 stirred the imagination of the Dhaka public, which gave the Society a greater co-operation.

This report further states, “All these sporadic visits were crowned by the visit of the Swami Vivekananda himself accompanied by a party of disciples in the year 1901, whose presence created a great enthusiasm. Though in failing health, he delivered two impressive lectures on the Hindu religion and philosophy to vast audiences and also held conversations with many local people.”<sup>6</sup>



Here it is most noteworthy to mention that the great personality of Swamiji attracted each and everyone in Dhaka very deeply and dearly. In the year 1904 from Dacca centre of RKM, a short biography of Swami Vivekananda was published which was the pioneer attempt in the direction. After this and before 1908 the main work of the Mission here consisted of regular Saturday religious sitting and did its work of preaching and propagating the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna as best as it could at the house of Babu Mohini Mohan Das at Dacca (now in old Dhaka).<sup>7</sup> In 1908, a Seva Department was organised in connection with the Mission which nursed sick and diseased persons according to its capacity.<sup>8</sup>

It may be noted that the Nawab family in then Dacca had a good relationship with the RKM. The second general report of the RKM give us more information about this, from where we learn, “By the end of 1913, the activities of the Mission took a new development when Hon’ble Nawab Khawja Salimullah Bahadur helped the institution with a house free of rent and also with monthly donations. This was utilised for the housing of an indoor hospital within the town.”<sup>9</sup>

So from the above mentioned information, we learn that the Dhaka centre, after its inception in the days of Swami Vivekananda, carried on its activities in the house of Mohini Mohan Das at Sabjimahal. These were mainly religious till

March, 1908, when a department of social service was added. In 1911, a library was opened. Besides in November, 1913, the service activities initiated by the Mission, rendering medical aid with the help of Nawab Khaja Salimullah Bahadur.

Swami Gambhirananda, a prominent scholar on the Ramakrishna movement wrote that the Belur authorities accepted Dhaka centres' responsibility of management from 1914, although formal affiliation had to wait till 1916. From October, 1914, the Dhaka centre of the Mission was located in three rented houses at Wari and South Maishandi. In 1915, this centre got a gift of about 1.7 acre of land – three fifths of it for the Mission and the rest for the Math – on which formations of the first Math and Mission buildings, consisting of the monks' buildings and an indoor ward, were laid by Swamis Brahmananda and Premananda respectively during their visit on 13 February 1916.<sup>10</sup> The Mission hospital with 20 beds was started on 24 August 1916, and another structures were successively put up. In the same year, the centre also acquired a second contiguous plot slightly larger than the first.<sup>11</sup> After the construction of Math building in Dhaka branch, on 29 May 1916, the Dhaka RKM centre finally shifted to the present permanent premises. And after eight months to inception of the RKM hospitals, the Governor of Bengal in Council, Thomas David B Carmichael, formally opened it.<sup>12</sup> However, at the beginning, the RK Mission used to be governed by an executive committee. Monks were not always

associated with such a committee, they rather entitled as supervisor and treasurer of the committee.<sup>13</sup> The services of the Mission vested upon the lay devotees and other aspirants.

## **2.2 Ramakrishna Math and the beginning of the Ramakrishna Order**

The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission is established after the name of Sri Ramakrishna, who is regarded as the Avatar of the present age by millions of People. He came with a message, a new set of ideas suited to the needs of the present time. He first applied it in his own life. He trained a group of young disciples to be the torch bearers of his message<sup>14</sup> and through them laid the foundation of a new monastic order, which came to be known later as the Ramakrishna Math. The spiritual power generated by Sri Ramakrishna through his unprecedented *sadhanas* and prayers got transmitted to different parts of Bengal and the world through his direct disciples. Subsequently, through the disciples of those direct disciples and through successive generations of disciples, the message and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna have been spreading in ever widening circles to form what may be termed the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. It is in this context that Swami Vivekananda has called Sri Ramakrishna *Avataravaristha* – the greatest of all incarnations.<sup>15</sup>

By the time the British arrived in Bengal, Hinduism along with other religion had reached perhaps its lowest ebb. All sorts of superstitions and undesirable practices flourished in the name of ritual. The inspiration of the medieval saint – singers, while still prevalent, had begun to fade in the face of the political turmoil and widespread anarchy that followed the collapse of Mughal power. Indeed, it was one of darkest periods in Bengal history.<sup>16</sup> However, once again the miracle of regeneration was witnessed, and the Bengal society produced a series of remarkable personalities, who by the sheer power of their spiritual illumination, rekindled the dying spark. Sri Ramakrishna was one of them.

By the middle of the year 1872, Sri Ramakrishna's *sadhanas*, the practices of the various systems of spiritual disciplines were all completed. All through these years, starting from the year 1855, possessed as it were by an insatiable hunger for God, he went on practicing one sadhana after another, in the precincts of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Kolkata. In the course of these *sadhanas*, he acquired such a variety of spiritual experiences and encounters with God, as is to be found nowhere else in the story of man's religion. About his own great experience of this period, he said later on, "I had to practice the various religions once, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and I have walked the paths of the different sects of Hinduisms again – the Shakta, The Vaishnava, the Vedanta and other. And I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are travelling, only they are come through diverse ways."<sup>17</sup>

Earlier it was mentioned that the Ramakrishna Math and Mission originated from Sri Ramakrishna, an illiterate but spiritually enlightened Brahmin, who appeared on the scene in Kolkata, the then capital of British India, and captured the attention of people who mattered. Swami Vivekananda pleaded, “It does not matter whether someone considers him a man or a spiritual teacher or a God-man, but let all pay attention to his teachings which were but a commentary on the unique life that he lived.”<sup>18</sup>

Ramakrishna had a following of monks who dedicated themselves to realizing his teachings for the welfare of the world at large. Householder devotees joined them too and together they tried to implement the Master’s mission through an institution that formed the core of the worldwide Ramakrishna – Vivekananda movement. Though subsequently the institution became two legal entities and assumed the names, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, they sprang from the one source and their growth and development were sustained by the same spirit. The Headquarter of the Ramakrishna math and Ramakrishna Mission is now located at Belur, a small village on the river Ganges near Calcutta.

The history of Ramakrishna Math began when Sri Ramakrishna climbed the terrace of the house in Dakshineswar and called out, “O my children, wherever you are, come to me. My heart yearns to see you.”<sup>19</sup>

And, here we may recall a homely scene at Dakshineswar. One-day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room after his midday meal, with M. (Mahendra), Hazra and others near about him. It was 5 October 1884. M. Held the belief that Sri Ramakrishna was an Incarnation of God like Sri Chaitanya. Now M. said: “It will be fine if a current flows from this place. Everything will be carried away by its force. Nothing that comes out of this place will be monotonous.”<sup>20</sup>

In response Sri Ramakrishna gave a smile of approval. In response to the mystic call of Sri Ramakrishna young spiritual seekers, most of whom were school or college going, began to gather around him. Under his guidance they practised intense spiritual discipline. During his last illness, these young man nursed him day and night. Lying in his sick-bed at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna did quite a few significant things – the meaning of which became clear only later on – in training Narendranath for the great mission of his life. For instance, one day he expressly commissioned Naren to be the leader of the group of young disciples and asked him to look after them, “I leave them to your care. See that they practise spiritual disciplines and work for the good of the world.”<sup>21</sup>

To these young disciples, who afterwards became the first monks of the Ramakrishna Math, Sri Ramakrishna one day gave ochre cloth and rudraksha beads and sent them out to beg food from door to door after having gone

through a particular ceremony. Thus it was that the disciples were initiated into monastic order by the Master himself, and the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Math was laid.<sup>22</sup> Another day when he was in great physical pain, the Master called Narendra by his side, and wrote on a piece of paper, “Narandra will teach others”.<sup>23</sup> When the disciple objected saying, “I won’t do that”, Master said with all his authority, in all firmness and finality. “Your very bones will do it.”<sup>24</sup>

Thus Sri Ramakrishna gave the mandate to Narendra to render service which he had earlier mentioned. In fact, even at their first meeting at Dakshineswar the Master had said that Narendra would remove the miseries of mankind. Indeed, Sri Ramakrishna lived a unique life the world famous historian Arnold Toynbee observed, “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.”<sup>25</sup>

It is true that the degradation in spiritual, moral, intellectual, cultural, social and other aspects of life had continued even in the nineteenth century Bengal. It was at this Juncture that Sri Ramakrishna appeared incarnated. Arnold Toynbee, who began his career as a critic of Indian culture later on wrote:

Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which he and his message were needed. ... To day we are still

living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self – destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by western technology. But this western skill has not only annihilated distance, it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power .... At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way.<sup>26</sup>

Swami Vivekananda had some reservations at first about the need for an institution and about its nature and scope.<sup>27</sup> His ideas in this regard crystallized only after his visit to the America. The power, institution, material prosperity, as well as the spirit of democracy, individual freedom and social justice in western society dearly impressed him. During that period he had, as he said, ‘the greatest temptation in his life in America,’ by which he meant no other than organization.’<sup>28</sup> Vivekananda wrote to his brother disciples in 1894, “What is wanted is a power of organization – do you understand me?”<sup>29</sup>

And, again, in another letter to his foremost lay disciple Alasinga, Swamiji wrote, “The grass when made into a rope by being joined together can ever chain a mad elephant.”<sup>30</sup>



Later Swamiji was to declare, “To make a great future, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation to power, coordination of wills. Organization alone is the primary means for all progress and the only way for the conservation of energy.”<sup>31</sup>

He wanted a vibrant institution or organization for the distribution and propagation of Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings, which he believed to be the modern gospel for humanity, now almost drowned in rank materialism. Nonetheless, Swamiji took pains to convert his brother – disciples, clinging to the tradition followed concept of self-realization and *Mukti*, to the revolutionary new concept of organized religious life dedicated to the service of fellow humanity while seeing God in it. However, after Swamiji’s return from the America in 1897, a meeting was called by him at the Calcutta residence of Balaram Basu on 1 May 1897. Hitherto the Ramakrishna Order was more or less an informal institution. It was first started at Barahnagar, Kolkata, in September 1886, then the monastery moved to nearby Alambazar area in November 1891, and from there it was finally moved to its own permanent premises at Belur in Howrah District, on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1898. In the meeting of 1897 the following were the main points stressed by Vivekananda,

1. an association is to be founded under the name of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission;

2. its aim is to preach the truths which Ramakrishna, for the good of humanity, preached and taught by the example of his own life, and to help others to put them into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual benefit;
3. its duty is to direct in a fitting spirit the activities of this movement, inaugurated by Ramakrishna “for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be only so many forms of one undying Eternal Religion;”
4. its methods of action are : (i) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses; (ii) to promote and encourage arts and industries; and (iii) to introduce among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas as elucidated in the life of Ramakrishna;
5. it was to have two branches of action; The first was to be Indian *Maths* (Monasteries) and *Ashrama* (Convents for retreat) which were to be established in the different parts of India for the education of Sannyasins and lay brethren (householders) “as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others”. The second was to send members of the Order to countries outside India for founding spiritual centres and for creating a close relationship and spirit of mutual help between the foreign and Indian centres;
6. the Aims and Ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it would have no connection with politics.<sup>32</sup>

By pointing these provisions Swamiji took steps to form an institution after his Masters' name.

One of the significant achievements of Swami Vivekananda was the rejuvenation and modernization of Hindu monasticism. As mentioned earlier, under the guidance and blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, monastic brotherhood by name Ramakrishna Math was formed at a dilapidated building in Baranagore, in north Kolkata in 1886. It was later moved to a good buildig in Alambazar, Kolkata. With the financial donation provided by a Western follower of Swami Vivekananda, a big plot of land was acquired on the western bank of the river Ganga at a place called Belur, and after a few shifts in location the monastery was finally moved there on 2 January 1899.

It became a registered institution by the name 'Ramakrishna Math' when, on 30 January 1901, Swamiji executed a Deed of Trust, and vested the power of its administration in a Board of Trustees consisting entirely of monks. Branches centre of Ramakrishna Math soon came to be formed in several parts of Bengal and abroad. Although rooted in the three-thousand-year-old monastic tradition of Bengal, and forming a part of the ten orders (*dashanami*) started by Shankaracharya in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Ramakrishna Math represents a new pattern of monastic life which combines some of the best elements of the

monastic traditions of the East and the West. One of the foremost features of this new pattern of monastic life is emphasis on service. All monks when they are ordained as *Brahmacharis* take, apart from the vows of chastity and poverty, a vow of service to the poor, the sick and the ignorant. The Ramakrishna Math centres are meant not only for the dwelling of monks but also for service to the society. Another feature of new pattern of monastic life is its modern outlook. The emphasis is on inner purity and detachment rather than on outer show. The monks wore tailored garments, live in homes with modern amenities and use modern modes of communication and travel.

Thirdly, the life of the monks, both individual and collective, is governed by definite rules and regulations originally framed by Swami Vivekananda. At present only unmarried young man in the age-group 18-30 are admitted as preprobationers. After one year of preprobationership and four years of probationership, the seeker is ordained a Brahmacharin and, after a further period of four years, if found fit, he is ordained a Sannyasis and receives a new monastic name.

Another prominent feature of Ramakrishna Math is its universal outlook. It admits into its monastic fold not only people belonging to different castes of Hinduism but also people belonging to other religions. Not only Bangladeshi and Indians from various regions speaking different languages, but also

Americans, South Americans, Russians, Japanese and people of other nationalities – all live together in peace in Ramakrishna monasteries like children of the same parents.

This is the miracle that Sri Ramakrishna has brought about. He was a great lover of mankind. His love knew no distinctions of castes, creed or race. It is his love that is holding the whole monastic order together. People join Ramakrishna Math not merely because of their attraction for monastic vocation but also because of their love for Sri Ramakrishna. Devotion to Sri Ramakrishna is yet another distinctive feature of the new type of monasticism of Ramakrishna Math.

### **2.3 Ramakrishna Mission**

Unlike the Ramakrishna Math which is a purely monastic institution, the Ramakrishna Mission is a public association or social service society open to monks as well as lay people. Any person who has faith in Sri Ramakrishna and his message and is in sympathy with the ideals and activities of the Ramakrishna Mission is eligible for its membership. Lay people and other aspirants cooperate with the monks in running educational, medical and other types of institutions. It was founded by Swami Vivekananda on May 1897. After his return from the West where in 1893 he had delivered in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, the spiritual message with love and authority, Swamiji

with the help of his brother monks and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna formed this association. Seven years after the passing away of Swami Vivekananda this association came to be registered in May 1909 under the Act xxi of 1860.<sup>33</sup>

The objectives of the Ramakrishna Mission as a registered body, were declared as follows :

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

g) to carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on in connection with, and calculated directly or indirectly to promote any of the before mentioned objects.<sup>34</sup>

And, all these works were to be done as worship of the Divine manifested in living beings for, as in the case of the Math the ultimate end also of the Mission was the liberation of the self and the good of the world.

It is necessary, moreover, to point out that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not necessarily imply that it is a branch of either Ramakrishna Math or Ramakrishna Mission. The Math and the Mission have own separate funds and keep separate accounts of them. The accounts of both the Math and the Mission are annually audited by qualified auditors.<sup>35</sup>

## **2.4 Administration of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission**

The Ramakrishna Math was registered as a Trust in 1899, and since then it is being administered by a Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees has an elected President, one or more Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, one or more Assistant Secretaries and a Treasurer.

The Ramakrishna Mission was registered as a charitable society on May 1909. It also has branches all over India, Bangladesh and in some other countries. The Ramakrishna Mission is administered by a Governing Body, which is composed of the Trustees of Ramakrishna Math. The headquarters of Ramakrishna Math at Belur (popularly known as Belur Math), itself serves as the headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission.

All letters regarding administrative affairs of the Math or Mission are to be addressed to the General Secretary, who functions as the chief executive.

A branch centre of Ramakrishna Math has an *Adhyaksha* (head) appointed by the Trustees. A branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission is governed by a Managing Committee appointed by the Governing Body of Ramakrishna Mission. The Secretary of this committee functions as the head of that branch-centre.<sup>36</sup>

## **2.5 Ideology of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission**

The ideology of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission consists of the eternal principles of Vedanta as lived and experienced by Sri Ramakrishna and expounded by Swami Vivekananda. This ideology has three characteristics: it is modern in the sense that ancient principles of Vedanta have been expressed



in the modern idiom; it is universal, that is, it is meant for the whole humanity, it is practical in the sense that its principles can be applied in day-to-day life to solve the problems of life. The basic principles of this ideology are:

1. God realization is the ultimate goal of life
2. Potential divinity of the soul
3. Synthesis of Yoga's
4. Morality based on strength
5. Harmony of Religions
  - Harmony within Hinduism
  - Harmony among world religions
6. *Avatarhood* of Sri Ramakrishna
7. A New Philosophy of work<sup>37</sup>

## **2.6 Motto of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission**

This two-fold aim of service activities, indeed the whole ideology of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has been put in a nutshell in the MOTTO of the twin institutions, *Atmano mokshartham Jagad Hitya cha* – ‘For one’s own salvation and for the good of the world’, formulated by Swami Vivekananda.<sup>38</sup>

## **2.7 Emblem of the twin institutions**

The emblem of the twin institutions was designed by Swamiji himself. The ideal of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission finds expression in this emblem which is to be understood as follows

The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma, lotus of Bhakti (devotion) and the rising sun, of *Jnana* (knowledge). The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and awakened *Kundalini Shakti* (the cosmic power residing hidden in every individual), while the Swan in the picture stands for the *Paramatman* (Supreme Spirit). Therefore the idea of the picture is that by the union of *Karma*, *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Yoga*, the vision of the *Paramatman* is obtained.<sup>39</sup>

## **2.8 Two Monks during the Foundation of RKM in Bangladesh**

Earlier it was mentioned that, in 1899 Swamis Virajananda and Prakashananda, deputed by Swami Vivekananda visited Bangladesh (Then East Bengal) and sowed the first seeds of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. So, here lies the justification to know more about these two monks and their activities which accelerated the blow of the Ramakrishna order in Bangladesh and other parts of world.

## **Swami Virajananda**

Swami Virajananda's pre-monastic name was Kalikrishna Bose. His father, Trailokyanath Bose, was a renowned physician of Kolkata. Kalikrishna's mother, Nishadkali Devi, was an extremely devoted and religious-minded lady, and she was a great influence on her son's character.<sup>40</sup> It was on 10 June 1873, Kalikrishna was born and it was the day of Lord Jagannatha's *Snan Yatra* (bathing festival), an auspicious day.

Kalikrishna had his early education at Hembabu's Training Academy, located in Cornwallis Street, Kolkata, which was run by a friend of his father. He studied there till the sixth standard and at the age of nine he joined Ripon School, from which he passed his matriculation in 1890. Kalikrishna was a very hard-working student and his education was not limited to what was taught within the walls of his classroom. He had a natural flair for handicrafts, fine arts, cooking, gardening, etc., and he became quite adept in all these at an early age.<sup>41</sup> Later he would sometimes recall: "I was always very practical. I would see to the end of whatever I would decide to do."<sup>42</sup>

Besides, one of the most striking qualities of Kalikrishna's was his modest and dignified behavior; his classmates could not help loving this amiable and gentle boy.

Meanwhile, in the boyhood, certain books in his father's library caught the attention of Kalikrishna. Among these were *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, compiled by Sureshchandra Dutta, and *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Tattwaprakashika* by Ramachandra Dutta. By reading these books he became deeply attracted to Sri Ramakrishna and he tried to follow his teachings by practising meditation and other spiritual disciplines.

At that time 'M.', or Mahendranath Gupta, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was a faculty of English department at Ripon College. Kalikrishna was immediately drawn to this calm and quiet professor. M. would often go to an attic room on the roof of the college building, consult his diary, and write the *Gospel*. One day Kalikrishna went alone to Master Mahashay's house. Master Mahashay affectionately met Kalikrishna and talked of religious life. Once, coming to know that Kalikrishna and his friends were visiting the Kankurgachi Yogodyan, he said to them,

Look here, Sri Ramakrishna completely renounced *Kamini-Kanchan* (Woman and Gold) if you really wish to understand what he was like, you must seek the company of these disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who have renounced the world. If you want to see living examples of this ideal, go to the Baranagore Monastery, where the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna stay.<sup>43</sup>

Kalikrishna now found it difficult to continue his studies with attention. He felt very restless at home, and lost interest in all worldly actions. At last he set up a good touch with the direct-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and was eagerly waiting to meet Swamiji. Finally, Kalikrishna was about to see the person whom he had been constantly thinking to talk. Swamiji also had heard about Kalikrishna from his brother-disciples. It was March 1897, when Kalikrishna came and touched his feet, Swamiji looked at him affectionately and turning to his brother-disciples, asked, 'Is this the boy?' About his first impression of Swamiji, Kalikrishna later wrote in his memories, "His eyes were captivating, just as the American newspapers had said. Light appeared to emanate from his entire body. What a charming figure—combining beauty and power, a nonchalant air, and a dazzling personality! My first reactions were love, devotion, and a sense of awe."<sup>44</sup>

Within a few days Swamiji took decision to grant sannyasa to Kalikrishna and three other *brahmacharis*.<sup>45</sup> And, in a ceremony Swamiji gave Kalikrishna the name Virajananda after an ordination. It was indeed a fine name, for Virajananda means free from 'Bejar'.<sup>46</sup>

Swamiji blessed the four new monks with all his heart and said, "You have the zeal to embrace the loftiest vow of human life. Blessed indeed is your birth,

blessed your family, blessed indeed the mothers who held you in their wombs!  
Shining now in the glory of Brahman, you will live like blazing fires.”<sup>47</sup>

Later, in early 1899, Swamiji asked Virajananda and Prakashananda to go to Dhaka to give lectures. Prakashananda agreed to go, but Virajananda protested and said that he does not know much to deliver lectures. The conversation that took place on this occasion between the Master and the disciple is very enlightening,

Master : Go to Dacca, and deliver lectures.

Disciple : but what do I know that I can speak of ?

Master : All right. stand up and say that you do not know anything. To admit that you do not know anything is itself a great teaching. The feeling that I know everything comes from ignorance.<sup>48</sup>

But still the young disciple did not feel strong enough to carry out his Master’s instruction. The teacher continued, “Look here, if you seek your own salvation, you will surely go to hell, but if you work for the salvation of others, you will become liberated this moment.”<sup>49</sup>

Disciple : I have not practised any austeries and have not been able to realize God – so what can I preach?

Master : You will not have to speak as a teacher. Lecture with the attitude of rendering service.<sup>50</sup>

Thus the Virajananda's fear and doubts disappeared. In the beginning he was extremely unwilling to go, but at last he had to accede to his Master's instruction.

Prior to Virajananda's and Prakashnanda's departure for Dhaka, Swamiji went to the monastery shrine and meditated there for a long time. Then he called his two disciples and blessed them over and over again by keeping hand on their heads. He said to them, "Believe that His power has descended on you. Know that the Ramakrishna Order is Sri Ramakrishna's collective body."<sup>51</sup>

Virajananda's account of the day's event in his diary is very inspiring. Strengthened by Swamiji's blessing of *Abhi*, the two brother – disciples left for Bangladesh (then East Bengal) on 4 February 1899. Within a few days, however, Swamiji, recalled Prakashnanda, and Virajananda remained in Bangladesh alone to preach the message of Sri Ramakrishna in Dhaka, Mymensingh and Barisal. At all these places, he won the hearts of all who came in contact with him. And, in Barisal, he stayed with the prominent scholar Ashwinikumer Dutta, who had met Sri Ramakrishna. During this time many young man came to receive guidance and advice from him. Before Prakashananda returned to Belur Math, Virajananda and he went to Deobhog (Narayanganj) to meet the great devotee, Nag Mahashay.<sup>52</sup>

After returning from Bangladesh, Virajananda devoted himself heart and soul to Swamiji's service. Because Swamiji's health was not going well due to overwork. In conformity with Swamiji's instruction's Virajananda was now sent to Mayavati. *Prabuddha Bharata*, the English Journal of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, was published from here. From 1906 to 1913 Virajananda was the president of *Advaita Ashrama* in Mayavati. This was indeed a memorable period for the *Ashrama*. Under his right guidance the ashrama gradually became self-supporting and the circulation of *Prabuddha Bharata* increased. Meanwhile, he was appointed a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission on 26 September 1906.<sup>53</sup>

A convention of the monks of the Ramakrishna order took place at Belur Math in April 1926, after which a 'Working Committee' was formed to assist the twin institutions, which was continually expanding in numerous branches. Virajaanda was unanimously nominated the secretary of the committee. Everyone had trust in Virajananda because of his introspective and calm nature. In this context, an extract from Swami Gambhirananda's *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* may be quoted, "Swami Virajananda was chosen as Secretary for his great seniority and efficiency as also for the suavity of his temper and his detached outlook ... For his past career he commanded everybody's respect."<sup>54</sup>



In 1938, Virajananda was elected Vice-President of the Order. But when Swami Sudhananda expired on 23 October of the same year, he was unanimously elected the next runner of Sudhananda as the highest office of the order. Virajananda shouldered the great responsibility of being President for the last twelve years of his life. During his presidential tenure the nation faced many social, economical and communal upheavals. During such a period the leadership of a calm and collected personality like Swami Virajananda was indeed God's special blessing to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.<sup>55</sup>

The principal aim of Virajananda's life was to follow his Master's commands. Therefore, all his actions were aimed solely at fulfilling Swamiji's Mission. He was a great advocate of rules and regulations that Swamiji had introduced for the monastery. Swamiji's dream of the future Bengal would also appear before his mental vision. Even at that time he dreamt of a 'Vivekananda University' that would be founded at Belur Math. He said in one of his lectures,

I am sanguine enough to hope that before long my beloved Master's dream of a rejuvenated India will be fulfilled. A few years back, no one could think that a magnificent temple in memory of Sri Ramakrishna would quickly rise on the bank of the Ganga at Belur as directed by Swamiji. And the Mission is taking steps to establish a residential college there – perhaps as the nucleus of the University-foreshadowed by his prophetic vision.<sup>56</sup>

Swami Virajananda wrote in his diary on 4 February 1898, the day he started for Dhaka,

In the Shrine he (Swamiji) advised us to look upon the order collectively as Sri Ramakrishna. He has entered into our Order. Virajananda used to recall always these words of Vivekananda and would also try to engrave them on the minds of others. He firmly believed that the mighty tree of the Ramakrishna Order, with its several centres, drew its sustenance from Sri Ramakrishna, who was its very root, its very life. He would often compare the Ramakrishna order to a tree with its roots at the top and branches at the bottom.<sup>57</sup>

During the last three weeks of his life the Swami Virajananda was preparing for the end. In his last moments he indicated to his attendants that the end was approaching. Finally, on 30 May 1951, in the holy hours of the morning, this monk attained final refuge at Sri Ramakrishna's feet. Swami Shuddhanda has given a very touching account of this great life in an article which was published in the *Udbodham*. An excerpt from this article on Swami Virajananda may be reproduced,

Holy mother, Swamiji, and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna played such an important role in the formation of Virajananda's character that it appeared as if he were also a direct disciple of the Master. Virajananda was the last lamp that had been kindled with the spiritual fire which had burned at the monastery. When it was

extinguished, all the hearts on which it had shed its glow felt forlorn and distressed.<sup>58</sup>

Thus Swami Virajananda's life and activities came to an end, who along with Swami Prakashnanda, deputed by Swamiji, visited Bangladesh in the year 1899 for the first time to form Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka.

### **Swami Prakashananda**

Swami Prakashananda was one of the two monks who first visited Dhaka in the year 1899 to establish Ramakrishna Math and Mission. His Pre-monastic name was Sushil Chakraborty. He was born on 8 July 1874 in Kolkata. His father, Ashutush Chakraborty was a pious brahmin. It is worth to mention that both the sons of Ashutush Babu later became distinguished bearers of Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's message of harmony. Sushil's elder brother, Sudhir, became known as Swami Shuddhananda and was the fifth president of the Ramakrishna order. Sushil's mother sowed the seeds of spirituality in him and his elder brother had a considerable impact on him. Thus, as the brothers grew up, their lives came to have a common aim. Such instances are indeed rare.<sup>59</sup>

During his studentship in College, Sushil became deeply interested in Eastern and Western Philosophy. Sometime in 1891 or 1892, he went to Jayrambati

with some of his friend and there he had the good luck of receiving Holy Mother's blessing. He said later days, "We received our first initiation from Holy Mother and our last initiation – Sannyasa – from Swami Vivekananda."<sup>60</sup>

After his joining the monastery, Prakashananda was involved in serving the famine-stricken people of Dakshineswar for about three months. Meanwhile, The Ramakrishna Mission started its relief work in 1897 in accordance with the will of Swami Vivekananda.<sup>61</sup>

In the beginning of 1899, Swamiji took decision to send Prakashnanda and Virajananda to Dhaka to preach the message of Vedanta – Each soul is potentially divine. Prakashananda and Virajananda left for Dhaka on 4 February 1899. Due to their sincere works, the message of Sri Ramakrishna spread throughout the length and breadth of East Bengal (present day Bangladesh), and the foundation of a centre of the Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka was eventually made possible. This incident is acknowledged in the General Report of the Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, where it is stated, "This branch of the Mission was started as early as 1899, when Swamis Virajananda and Prakashananda, deputed by Swami Vivekananda, visited these parts and by lectures and religious discourses created an interest in the message of Sri Ramakrishna and sowed the first seeds of the work. Under this auspices a society was started, in which religious sittings were regularly held."<sup>62</sup>

During their stay in Dhaka, Prakashananda and Virajananda visited the village of Deobhog (Narayangonj) to place their respects to Nag Mahashay, the great devotee of Master. Nag Mahashay was immensely happy that they had come to see him and the monks too felt blessed to meet this great devotee and have his holy company.

After Prakashananda had done some good activities at Dhaka, Swamiji called him back to Kolkata. He was then involved in varieties of work pertaining to the Bengali Magazine of the Ramakrishna order *Udbodhan* and the public welfare programmes started by Ramakrishna Mission. In the later half of 1902 he was sent as an activist to Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. Till 1906, when he started for America, prakashananda stayed in the snow-clad lap of Himalayas, where he assisted in editing *Prabuddha Bharata* as well as in the administration of Advaita Ashrana.

In April 1906 Prakashananda was sent to assist in conducting the activities of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco. Here, he also worked as a helping – hand in bringing out a monthly magazine by name *Voice of Freedom*. The respect given to the activities of this monk can be inferred from the way they were honoured by the State University of California in April 1909. Welcoming Swami Prakashananda, the chancellor of the University said : “We are just

beginning to acknowledge the gratitude we owe to the East and to appreciate the hitherto underestimated influence of India on Western Civilization.”<sup>63</sup>

No doubt, such appreciation may be considered as a landmark in the history of the Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Movement in the West. However, for too much hard work, his health gradually failed under the constant strain. Diabetes weakened him day by day. Till the last day, his thoughts were on his Master and the work which entrusted to him. Lastly, on Sunday, 13 February 1927, at about 5.30 p.m., Swami Prakasananda left this world to join his Master. He was then fifty three. At last, we can only recite the fitting tribute which the *Prabuddha Bharate* of April 1927 paid to him : “May rest and eternal place be the reward of him who on earth worked untiringly, unselfishly; who served God man as his Master would have it. We are reminded of Swami Vivekananda’s words. ‘Our salutation goes to all those God – like men who worked to help humanity.’”<sup>64</sup>

Finally, we can say Swami Prakashananda was an ideal worker. His devotion to service and his compassion for others during his visit to Bangladesh, will always serve as an example for all. He was a glowing mark of how to work in country and abroad. Swami Virajananda and Prakashananda left this mortal plane, but the monument of their great achievement, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission of Dhaka, will stand for many years to come to bear witness to their

arduous spiritual practice and its realization to all those who will take up service as the mission of their lives.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>6</sup>. *The GR*, 1919, p. 14.
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- <sup>43</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.59.
- <sup>44</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.75.



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- <sup>45</sup>. Sushil (Prakashananda), Kanai (Nirbhayananda), and Yogen (Nityananda).
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- <sup>52</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.78.
- <sup>53</sup>. *Ibid.*, pp.90-92.
- <sup>54</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.94.
- <sup>55</sup>. *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, p.277-278.
- <sup>56</sup>. *Monastic Disciples*, pp. 98-99.
- <sup>57</sup>. The mighty tree of the Ramakrishna Order, which we of this generation have been privileged to watch grow under our eyes and which in our own way have been privileged to water and nourish, is putting forth new shoots, day after day, in the shape of increasingly useful institutions for service of man. ... It is the cherished aim of the Ramakrishna Mission to serve humanity like the tree... a tree with its root at the top and branches at the bottom. These various institutions bearing the name of Ramakrishna, which, we see sprouting up and nourishing around us, have their roots all above in Him, and so long as they draw sustenance from that source, they are sure to prosper and grow form more to more.
- <sup>58</sup>. *Monastic Disciples*, pp. 105-106.
- <sup>59</sup>. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.
- <sup>60</sup>. *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1927.
- <sup>61</sup>. *Monastic Disciples*, p. 147.
- <sup>62</sup>. *The General Report*, 1919, p.13.
- <sup>63</sup>. *Monastic Disciples*, p. 150.
- <sup>64</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

## **Chapter Three**

### **3.1 Centres of the RKM in Bangladesh**

It is an indisputable fact that the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, brought into existence by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, serve as the main channel for the propagation of their teaching and message. While consecrating the Belur Math premises on 9 December 1898, Swamiji made this prophetic statement: “From this centre of universal toleration will go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the whole world”.<sup>1</sup> This statement of Swamiji is being proved to be true. At present the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have an active presence in twenty countries, across six continents through 205 centres including the Headquarters. The Ramakrishna Math consists of monks only, while the Ramakrishna Mission comprises both monks and lay members. The centres of the RKM are a power which give expression to the message of the Holy Trio (Sri Ramakrishna, Holy ma and Swami Vivekananda).

### **3.2 Centres and Activities**

The work in the RKM ranges from the running of small monastic centres to the management of big publishing houses, of schools and other educational institutions, of workshops and IT institutions, of hospitals and invalids' homes,

of huge relief operations in famine and flood stricken areas, and so on. Side by side, there is considerable preaching work, involving the production of books and periodicals, lecturing to audiences of learned and cultured persons as well as common people, and organizing and leading Vedanta Centres abroad in Asia, Europe, America and Russia. To give some idea of the type and volume of work undertaken by the RKM the following abstract from the General Report of the Math and Mission published in April 2010, is given.<sup>2</sup>

### **Centres**

Beside the Headquarters, the number of branch-centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in India and abroad is altogether 171. Of these, 75 are Mission centres, 68 are Math centres and 28 are combined Math and Mission Centres. These 171 centres are distributed in India and in foreign countries as follows-

### **In India**

Andaman 1, Andra Pradesh 5, Arunachal Pradesh 3, Assam 3, Bihar 4, Chandigarh 1, Chattishgarh 2, Delhi 1, Gujrat 4, Jammu & Kashmir 2, Jharkhand 6, Karnataka 7, Kerala 9, Madhya Pradesh 2, Maharashtra 4, Meghalaya 2, Orissa 4, Rajasthan 2, Tamil Nadu 14, Tripura 1, Uttar Pradesh 6, Uttarakhand 5, West Bengal 40.

### **In Foreign Countries**

1 each in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Russia and UK, 13 in USA, 1 each in Fiji, France, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Switzerland and 15 in Bangladesh.

### **Activities**

Besides the general work of preaching in India, Bangladesh and other countries, the item of service done are –

#### **a. Spiritual and Cultural**

Dissemination of spiritual and cultural ideas is part and parcel of the ideology of the Math and Mission. These centres are real points of contact for people of different faith through ritualistic worship, festivals, public celebrations, meetings, classes, personal interviews etc.

#### **b. Publication**

The RKM publishes spiritual, religious and cultural literature in several Indian and foreign languages like English, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Sanskrit, Dutch, Japanese, French, Spanish, Portuguese etc. The vast of Ramakrishna –Vivekananda literature and scriptural translations which the RKM has produced, has become an integral part of the literature of modern renaissance in Bengal.

#### **c. Medical**

(i) Indoor Hospitals : 15

Cases treated during 2007-2008

In-patients – 89,358

Out-patients – 29, 67,130

(ii) Outdoor dispensaries : 124

Cases treated during 2007-2008 : 35,93,535

(iii) Mobile dispensaries : 53; Cases treated during 2007-2008 : 10,63,340.

Besides these, several camps are conducted for the treatment of eyes, dental ailments etc.

**d. Educational**

Various types of institutions like degree colleges, Sanskrit college, teachers' training colleges, colleges of physical education, junior basic training institutes, higher secondary and secondary schools, polytechnics, students' homes, orphanages, agricultural institutes, schools of languages, computer training centres, blind boys' academy, centres for the disabled, vocational training centres, librarianship training centres, rural development training institutes, non-formal education centres like night school, open school centres, Sanskrit Chatuspathis, coaching centres, cultural centres like Balak Sangha, Jnana Vahini, institute of human excellence etc. totaling to 1506, with more than 4 lakh students getting the benefit of various types of education. More than 175 libraries are run by the Math and Mission.

**e. Activities for Youngsters**

Most of the centres conduct special programmes for youth. Here they listen to discourse on spiritual matters, take part in discussions on social problems, and strengthen their own inner potential. They are helped to build their character and become responsible citizens.

**f. Relief and Rehabilitation Work**

This is another important sphere of work. The RKM is always in the forefront in rendering help during natural calamities like flood, cyclone, earth – quake, drought, fire, etc. The total expenditure incurred in the current year on relief work is 1.48 crores.

Apart from the above categories, work for women and work in rural and tribal areas need special mention. This brief survey of the work will show the extent and variety of service rendered. While there is also a large body of lay workers, honorary and paid, available for running these institutions, the main responsibility of management and of raising the necessary funds falls on the monastic members. To cope with it, a successful member of the RKM is required to combine in himself many-sided abilities. He must have the capacity of an efficient civil servant, the erudition and expressiveness of a learned professor, the sociability and attractiveness of a genuine humanitarian, and above all the spirit of renunciation, devotion and serenity of a true philosopher

and lover of God. To be a combination of Jnana, Bkakti, Yoga and Karma Which Swamiji expected his monks to be, is the ideal pursued.

In Bangladesh, there are 15 affiliated centres working for the cause of humanity and the good of the world.

### **3.3 Life in the RKM**

In monastic life, as in any community life, the individual is participating in the general group consciousness and is therefore propped up or pulled down by that consciousness as the case may be, according to the standard of excellence prevailing in the group. The new self-consciousness of being the member of a group of elite, together with a host of inhibitions like vows, traditions, dress, association and so on, raises a solid barrier of protection behind which even one comparatively weak can operate with sure chances of success, provided one is sincere.

As pointed out earlier, *Bhakti, Jnana, Yoga and Karma* all form the recognized *Sadhanas* of the RKM. But work has special importance, because according to the rules laid down by Swami Vivekananda, every member, whatever his predictions, must do some work in the service of the Master. Work cannot therefore be avoided in the name of a pseudo – spirituality, and those who are of that mentality will find themselves misfits in the RKM.

An organization, like a state, however, requires not only geniuses but ordinary folks, not only leaders but followers also. In the RKM, all are therefore welcome, but they are requested to be talented and highly qualified persons as also mediocres, provided they are attracted by the idea of living a life of renunciation and service. Renunciation implies the eschewal of personal ambitions, family relations, possessions, luxury and sex. An individual can practice renunciation only if the urges mentioned before find fulfillment in the higher satisfaction which devotional life offers.

Service implies the dedication of one's energies and capacities to the works of the RKM conceiving it as a symbol of the Master. Spiritual talents are therefore more important than worldly abilities, but by the very nature and object of the RKM a harmonious combination of both is the ideal.

Monastic life, therefore, offers to persons having the required temperament, the best opportunity of developing their capacities and of living their lives in a way that will be of maximum benefit to themselves and the world at large. The conditions of life in the RKM are such that anyone with the right temperament can easily adjust himself to them.

In the matter of food, clothing and housing, no doubt, simplicity is the rule, but conditions are not prohibitively austere. Middle class standards obtaining in the



country are generally observed in these matters in the Math. Though the monks have no salaries or any other kind of personal income, all their legitimate needs are met by the institution. The monastic vow of poverty therefore does not mean penury and indigence. So also obedience and discipline, while being fundamental in the monastic code of conduct, are not allowed to degenerate into servility and abjectness. While personal ambition has no place, scope for great achievements are open to persons of ability and courage.

Swami Vivekananda lived and preached at a time when Bengal was in political bondage. Young men were, therefore, naturally engaged in the struggle for political freedom in the belief that it would solve all our problems. After political independence was attained, we have now come to understand that it has no meaning without economic independence, and the country is, therefore, struggling for that through planning and industrialization. But sooner or later it will be realized that without moral, religious and spiritual freedom – freedom from the animal in man – even economic freedom can offer no solace to the people. It is desirable that at least the more thoughtful sections in the country are prepared to face this disillusionment sufficiently early.

For the attainment of this spiritual freedom the country requires a huge army of workers cast in the mould that Swamiji has prepared through the harmonious combination of *Jnana*, *Bhakti*, *Yoga* and *Karma*. The monastic Order is the great legacy he has left to posterity for accomplishing this purpose. Now that

the country is independent, these are no patriotic inhibitions standing in the way of the youth taking to a spiritual life and service. It is up to them to harken to the call of Swami Vivekananda, join the Order in large numbers and get their lives moulded for spiritual service in Bangladesh and abroad.

In Bangladesh there are 15 affiliated centres working for the cause of humanity and the good of the world.

### **3.4 Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka**

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, started in 1899 by the devotees<sup>3</sup> and affiliated to Belur Math, West Bengal in 1916, as a combined branch centre of worldwide spiritual and philanthropic twin organizations Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.<sup>4</sup> This twin organization in Dhaka has been engaged in different fields of work in the spirit of: ‘Serve humans as God’ and ‘The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body’ as propagated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda for the good of mankind irrespective of caste, creed and nationality.<sup>5</sup>

About the foundation of the Dhaka centre a report (published in 1919) states,

This branch of the RKM was started as early in 1899, when Swamis Virajananda and Prakashananda, deputed by Swami Vivekananda, visited these parts and by lectures and religious discourses created an interest in the

message of Sri Ramakrishna and sowed the first seeds of the work. Under their auspices a society was started in which religious sittings were regularly held.<sup>6</sup>

Dhaka centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has been engaged in different fields of services – humanitarian, spiritual, educational and socio - cultural works since its inception. The main activities of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are as follows:

### **Spiritual Service**

With a view to developing the human inner faculties the stress has been given here to the studies of scriptures, practices of spiritual disciplines, chanting hymns, prayers, meditation etc. every day. And discourses, seminars on different topics like religions, philosophy, education, culture are regularly held throughout the year. Besides observation of the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda learned and scholarly persons of different faiths take part in the discussion on the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, Jesus Christ, Sri Krishna, Lord Buddha, Sri Chaitanya and other great souls on their birthdays during the year as its special features.<sup>7</sup>

A magnificent temple of Sri Ramakrishna stands in the campus as a symbol of religious plurality and harmony propagating the idea: ‘As many faiths, so many paths’. It is noteworthy mentioning that six principal symbols of world religions

are set up on the temple to show respect to other faiths. The symbols of it Hinduism – ‘Om or Aum’, Islam – ‘The Crescent and the Star’, Buddhism – ‘Dharmachakra’, Sikhism – ‘Swords, Dagger and Shield’, Christianity – ‘The Cross’, Zoroastrianism – ‘The cauldron of Fire’ are set up here in the temple.<sup>8</sup> To rouse divine feelings among the people of different temperaments, various puja festivals, which include Durga puja, Shyama puja, Saraswati puja along with cultural functions are performed here. All its celebrations and programmes are attended by a large number of people comprising devotees, distinguished scholar, friends and admirers of all communities.

### **High School**

Holding the ideal of Swami Vivekananda – ‘Man making and Character-building’, Ramakrishna Mission High School was established as a junior High School in 1914. In its journey of more than hundred years many are now at the service of the society as high officials being educated from this institution. Being a Govt. registered Secondary School, here the syllabus of Dhaka Education Board has been followed. Apart from the regular classes, sports, physical exercise, dramas, musical performances are hold and all about 300 students from different communities are studying in this school in a peaceful and serene atmosphere. Among them many students are given the facility of studying at partial cost and a number are given the facility of full-free studentship.<sup>9</sup>

### **Students' Home**

The Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka runs a students' home named 'Vivekananda Bidyarthi Bhavan' to accommodate 50 college students coming from different parts of the country desiring to study in the Higher Secondary course, with minimum expenses and an opportunity of studying and leading a life in a quiet and tranquil environment, fostering their mind and soul who are facing difficulties in the acute scarcity of accommodation in a city like Dhaka. A few students here have been provided with full free-studentship and concession in various forms. Every year students are showing their brilliance in the Higher Secondary Examinations securing distinction marks and attaining high positions; and most of them get chance in Engineering Universities, Government Medical Colleges and the prominent universities of the country for their higher education. During their stay here they have the privilege of participating in spiritual and welfare activities stimulating their inherent qualities and service-spirit.<sup>10</sup>

### **Computer Training Centre**

The Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka is running a computer training centre with a view to helping the underprivileged young people to earn their livelihood by providing them with modern practical education with minimum expenses. Every year about 300 students receive training in various courses like:<sup>11</sup>

- a. Certificate in computer office application,
- b. Certificate in Database Programming,
- c. Certificate in Computer Programming,
- d. Certificate in Hardware & Networking,
- e. Certificate in Graphics & Multimedia and
- f. Certificate in Computer application.

### **Kindergarten School**

A Kindergarten School named 'Sarada Shishu Niketan' has been started from 2 January 2016. The scholar female devotees of Sarada Sangha, Dhaka voluntarily have taken responsibility of teaching the Children with motherly care. The classes are of Play, Nursery and KG.<sup>12</sup>

### **Education Stipend**

Many poverties stricken young men living in the cities or villages, find it difficult to meet their basic needs, educational expenses etc. While studying they are to depend on financial support or stipend. They can hardly afford to buy books and other educational requisites where there is a problem of lodging and other maintenance which is usually done on payment. Ramakrishna mission, Dhaka has been trying to provide some stipend to the needy students out of its resources collected from the generous public. In 2015-16 a one-time stipend named 'Vivekananda Education Stipend' has been given to 20 poor and meritorious students with the help from Vivekananda Study & Philanthropic

Centre, USA. Besides, about 50 students are served with monthly and one-time stipend every year.<sup>13</sup>

### **A Free Library and Reading Room**

The Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, has a free library with a large reading room equipped with individual desk enabling the readers to study quietly and peacefully. Here books are available for common readers as well as students studying in School, Colleges, Universities and also research scholars. It has a collection of over 13000 books; with 50 periodicals. Every year about 35000 readers use the library.<sup>14</sup>

### **Pecuniary Help**

The centre is trying to help the downtrodden section of the society who are facing financial difficulties to meet their basic needs and need help to meet their social commitments and to stand on their own feet for the time being. Every year about 100 families, as mentioned above, are served in the form of pecuniary help.<sup>15</sup>

### **Publication**

It has a publication section with 40 publications in circulation. A quarterly named '*PRABODHAN*' is being published from this centre. Besides, to

commemorate the special occasions a special volume named '*UDDIPAN*' has been publishing for some years from 1980.<sup>16</sup>

### **Medical Service**

It runs a medical project (Allopathy) with facilities for treatment in ENT, X-Ray, Dental care, Pathology, Ultra Sonogram and Ophthalmology etc. Patients enjoy all such treatments at a very nominal fee. Hundreds of patients gather at the medical centre for treatment everyday who are examined by qualified doctors and provided with free medicines. The medical unit as a whole has been treating over 90,000 cases yearly. Its service is extended to the urban and rural poor people through an occasional free mobile unit. During natural calamities its mobile medical service resumes its work effectively. Besides, blood donation programme is conducted every year during the period of Ramadan month when there is a scarcity of blood due to religious restriction regarding blood. About 50-60 bags of blood are collected in it.<sup>17</sup>

### **Relief and Rehabilitation in Natural Calamities**

The Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, plays a great role in its relief and rehabilitation work during the natural calamities and epidemics. To run this work it always depends on the funds contributed by the generous people and the fund giving agencies. Here is a glimpse of a few of memorable relief and rehabilitation works conducted in the past few years.<sup>18</sup>



- a. Flood relief: Distribution of food, clothing's, utensils, medicines etc. among thousands of affected people in 1988-89; distribution of 50 metric tons of foodstuff and thousands of packets of oral saline and water purifying tablets along with medicines, clothing's etc. among about 20000 affected families in 1998; construction of 200 houses with C.I. sheets and distribution of foodstuffs in 1999 and 2004; distribution of 2000 metric tons of rice in 2008.
- b. Tornado (1989-90) and Tidal Surge relief (1990-91) : Distribution of food, clothing's, utensils, medicines etc. among thousands of affected people and construction of 1500 dwelling houses for the homeless families in the preceding years.
- c. Cyclone relief (1997-98) : Construction of 300 houses for the severely affected people and distribution of relief articles like clothing's, foods etc. among the victims.
- d. Cyclone (SIDR & AILA) relief (2007-08) : Sinking of tubewells in the affected coastal areas, distribution of fishing boat and net among the affected fisherman, renovation of houses, mosques and temples with C.I. sheets and distribution of food, clothing's, utensils, medicines etc. among thousands of affected people.

About Ten crores of taka had been spent for all its work conducted as above.

### **Winter and Festival Relief**

Besides the relief operations conducted during natural calamities every year, Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka distributes a good number of blankets all over the country among the needy people suffering from cold. In 2015-2016 the number of the distributed blankets was 3700. To uplift the motto 'Serve Man as God' every year on the festivals of Durga Puja and Eid-ul-Fitar the centre tries to serve a few poor and under-privileged people with new cloths and food-stuff.<sup>19</sup>

### **Slum service**

Service as distribution of reading materials, religious and personality development classes, coaching for primary students in co-operation with Vivekananda Shiksha O Sangskriti Parishad, Dhaka are being rendered to develop the literary and cultural condition of the people living in the Slum areas in and around Dhaka city.<sup>20</sup>

### **Observation**

The monks, devotees and other aspirants of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka recall gratefully the visits of respectable personalities like the prime Minister of Bangladesh, Prime Minister of India, Ministers and Religious Leaders, Revered monks of the Ramakrishna Order and delegates from different faiths, making a mark of sympathy and respect. Every year a good number of visitors comprising foreign dignitaries, diplomats,

scholars etc. have been visiting the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka.<sup>21</sup>

### **Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Concept**

It is a new concept propagated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda which gives a beautiful idea of living in harmony. Based on the concept – ‘Serve man as God’ and ‘each soul is potentially divine’ all the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission centres in Bangladesh viz., Dhaka, Barisal, Bagerhat, Dinajpur, Baliati, Habigonj, Faridpur, Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Sylhet, Jessore, Comilla, Rangpur and Chandpur have been carrying on all their activities for the good of humanity. Having infused into the ideals as above more and more people are taking interest in the Ramakrishna Mission work.

Meanwhile a good number of private centres (non-affiliated) after the name of Ramakrishna – Vivekananda with efforts taken by devotees and like-minded people have been established. About eighty such centres are working in different places in Bangladesh known as Ramakrishna Ashrama, Vivekananda Sangha, Vivekananda Educational and Cultural Centres etc. All the centres are basically managed by the experienced devotees and young men. Of these the Vivekananda Educational and Cultural Centre which was established at the instance of some senior students of Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University seems

to be working as a pioneer in the spirit of selfless service as propagated by Swami Vivekananda – ‘You can’t help you can serve only’. A few more centres alike have been founded abroad viz., Vivekananda Human Centre, U.K., Vivekananda Study and Philanthropic Centre, USA, etc. working in the same footing.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.5 Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Faridpur**

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Faridpur started in 1921 and was made a branch-centre of Ramakrishna Mission in 1934.<sup>23</sup> A well-known, distinguished lawyer of the Faridpur District Bar Association, late Advocate Prakash Chandra Ghosh founded the first Ramakrishna Ashrama in his own house at Faridpur.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Activities**

1. A Primary School with 50 students.
2. A Chatuspathi (school for learning Sanskrit) with 137 students.
3. A Homeopathic Dispensary which treated 1050 patients.
4. A Students’ Home with 92 college students
5. Daily Worship, morning and evening prayer and bhajans.
6. Celebration of the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda are arranged. Puja, Christmas Eve, Buddha Purnima and other festivals take place here.
7. Weekly religious classes and discourses inside the Ashrama.

8. Welfare work by way of providing pecuniary help and scholarships to poor and meritorious students and food, clothing, financial help etc. to the poor and needy.
9. A Library with 1150 books, 2 Newspapers and 2 periodicals.<sup>25</sup>

### **3.6 Ramakrishna Ashrama, Jessore**

The founder of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Jessore, is Baidyanath (later known as Swami Sudhananda)<sup>26</sup>. In 1936 Baidyanath bought one acre and 55 decimal land in Jessore and established 'Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama'. In 1940 he started 'Ramakrishna Ashrama Govt. Primary School'.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Brief activities of the Ramakrishna Ashrama and Mission, Jessore, Bangladesh**

The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Jessore started in the year 1936 and affiliated by Belur Math, West Bengal, India in 2012. From the beginning it has been engaged in practicing religious and spiritual works by its Monks, devotees and other aspirants. Here more emphasis has been given to lead a life of sacrifice and spiritual disciplines through worship, prayer, meditation, selfless work etc.

#### **Spiritual work:**

- 1) Daily worship and *bhajan* are presented to develop spiritual life for the devotees and aspirants.

- 2) Weekly classes and religious discourses are held to create awareness among all for the betterment of integrated life.
- 3) Observe birthday of Holy trinity.
- 4) Celebrate Kali puja, Durgapuja, Saraswati puja, Guru purnima and other religious festival like Buddha Purnima, Krishna Janmastami, Rathayatra etc.
- 5) A good number of seminars and discussion meetings on Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and talks on different topics are regularly held.<sup>28</sup>

### **Free Library Reading Room**

The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Jessore has a free library with a large reading room, equipped with individual desk, enabling the reader to study quietly and peacefully. Here books are available for common readers as well as students studying in schools, colleges, and university. It has a collection of over 2000 books and periodicals. Every year about 1800 readers use the library.

### **Students Home**

To ease the scarcity of accommodation in the town, like Jessore, it has been possible on the part of the *ashrama*, to provide seats for 30 students. At a minimum expenditure they are getting the opportunity of studying and leading a life in a quiet and disciplined environment, developing their mind and soul.

During their stay here, they have a privilege of participating in spiritual and welfare related activities, stimulating their inherent qualities of rendering services to the people.

### **Education Section**

1) The Ramakrishna Ashrama & Mission Jessore runs three schools, one of these is Vivekananda Vidyapith, Narail. Ramakrishna Ashrama Narail was established in 1928. From very beginning this Vidyapith was run by Ashrama for downtrodden children. The students studying here are mainly live in the slum. The number of students of this school is 80 and teachers are three.

2) The Swami Vivekananda Grameen Education centre, Hogladanga, Monirampur, Jessore. This centre was established in 2014. The students studying here are coming from very poor section of the society. Their parents live by making and mending shoes. Students are getting both spiritual and general education here. The number of pupil studying here is 120. Three teachers are giving lessons to them.

(3) The Swami Vivekananda Vidya Niketon, Taherpur, Monirampur, Jessore was established in the year 2010. At present forty students are studying and the number of teachers are four. Teachers conduct classes here from 1 to V.<sup>29</sup>

### **Education Support**

Students, who are facing difficulties to continue their studies due to financial crisis, get support from this centre. About one hundred & fifty students have been given financial support. From the beginning this Ashrama expended 600000.00 (six Lac) taka for this purpose.

### **Medical service**

The Ramakrishna Mission Jessore runs a medical project having both Allopathic and Homeopathic form of treatment. These service is extended mainly for the urban poor. This service entirely depends on the benevolent donors. There are 6 doctors and 2 assistants in the medical branc of the Jessore Ashrama.

### **Relief Work**

The Ramakrishna Ashrama & Mission, Jessore plays important role in the field of relief and rehabilitation work. In the past three years it had distributed food, clothing, utensils among several hundreds of people, affected by political disturbance and cold weather during winter season. Ashrama distributed Blanket – 1200, Sweater – 1000, Sari – 180, Lungi – 200, Vessel – 150, Sewing machine – 1, CI sheet – 14pcs, Land – 9 decimals. The number of beneficiaries are about – 3000.<sup>30</sup>



### **3.7 Ramakrishna Mission, Barisal**

The Ramakrishna Mission, Barisal started its journey in 1904 in a small building near Sadar Road.<sup>31</sup> Later it was shifted in D.D.P.I office land in Alekanda. At present it is situated near New Market on the B M College Road. In 1911, The Head Quarter of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Kolkata, gave recognition to the Ramakrishna Ashram, Barisal. It is noteworthy to mention that being inspired by the Ramakrishnadev's ideologies Mahatma Ashmini Kumar Dutt and Acharja Jagadish, from the beginning worked hard to establish monastery in Barisal.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Activities**

1. A hostel with 80 students.
2. A library and a reading room (with 4400 books) and a bookstall.
3. A charitable homeopathic dispensary, which treated 5500 cases.
4. A computer training centre with 120 students.
5. Daily worship, religious festivals, and celebration of the birthdays of Holy trinity and other religious personalities.
6. Weekly religious classes and occasional discourses in and outside the centre.
7. Relief and welfare work.<sup>33</sup>

### **3.7 Rangpur Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission**

A Homeopath doctor named Hari Sadhan Rakshit is the founder of Rangpur Ramakrishna Ashrama.<sup>34</sup> He donated his house in the name of Lord Sri Ramakrishna Dev in 1996 and he left the world in 1997.<sup>35</sup> On 4 April 2001, the then Vice President of the Ramakrishna order Swami Gahanandaji inaugurated the construction of Sri Ramakrishna Dev's temple in the mentioned property.<sup>36</sup>

The present principal of the Dhaka RKM, Swami Dhruveshanandaji has put many efforts to make the Ramakrishna Ashrama of Rangpur, a centre of Belur Math. By his effort in March 2015 the Ashrama got full recognition from Belur Math. Belur Math officials appointed Swami Sanatanandaji as the principal of Ashrama.<sup>37</sup> Besides daily prayer, every year during Sri Sri Durga Puja, Cloths and blankets are distributed among the distressed.

In the *Ashrama*, there is a Homeopathic Free Care Centre where a doctor provides treatment daily. Moreover, some students of Begum Rokeya University also stay there.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.8 Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narayanganj**

With the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, Narayanganj Ramakrishna Mission *Ashrama* has passed 100 years. Though the age of Narayanganj city is not so

long, thana Sonargaon of present Narayanganj district was an ancient *Janapada*. It's previous name was Subarnagram. Narayanganj city has started its journey since 1763.<sup>39</sup> It is one of the most omnipotent river-port of Bangladesh.

The major personality of RKM in Narayanganj was Sri Durgacharon Nag, popularly known as Sadhu Nag. Sri Ramakrishna had ordered him to stay in the worldly life so that the common people could learn the aspects of the ideal of worldly life from him. Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna touched Sadhu Nag very deeply and dearly. Later Sadhu Nag became the emblem of Sri Ramakrishna's 'Nahang Nahang, Tuhi Tuhi' (Not me but you) devotion.<sup>40</sup>

### **Ramakrishna Order in Naryangonj**

Ramakrishna Order started in Naryangonj, centering Sadhu Nag at Nag house. This Nag house of Deobhog became the centre of preaching Ramakrishna's life and sayings in Narayanganj.

Swami Vivekananda's fellow brother Swami Turiyananda along with Swami Gyanananda came to Naghouse of Dewbhog in Narayanganj in 1895. This was the first time Swami Turiyananda visited Bangladesh. This is a very historical event. Centering this event in Naghouse, Ramakrishna Sangha began to work.<sup>41</sup>

The Ashrama (Math centre) was started in 1909.

### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. Daily worship, bhajans and weekly classes.
2. Celebration of the birthdays of the Holy Trinity as also Durga Puja, Kali Puja, etc.

The Mission centre was started in 1909 and made a branch in 1922.

### **Activities of the Mission centre**

1. A student's home with 30 boys.
2. A Library with 1500 books.
3. A computer training unit with 25 students.
4. An allopathic dispensary, which treated 12,149 cases.
5. Welfare work by way of distribution of clothes, blankets, etc.<sup>42</sup>

## **3.9 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission**

### **Sevashrama, Baliati**

The Ashrama (Math centre) was started in 1910.<sup>43</sup> Sri Radhika Charan Adhikary and Haribola Nath Roy Chowdhury and other devotees put their all effort to establish this Ashrama in Baliati.<sup>44</sup>

### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. Daily worship, parayers and bhajans

2. Celebration of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, as also Durg Puja, Kali Puja, Janmastami, Nabi day, Christmas Eve, etc.
3. Religious discourses in and outside the Ashrama.<sup>45</sup>

The Sevashrama (Mission Centre) was made a branch in 1925.

### **Activities of the Mission Centre**

1. A library with 425 books, 6 periodicals and newspapers.
2. Maintaining three educational institutes named Vivekananda School, Saradmoni Girls School and Ramakrishna Chatuspathi.
3. A homeopathic dispensary, which treated 4343 cases during the year 2014-2015.
4. Welfare works by way of distributing food, cloth, etc and providing pecuniary help.<sup>46</sup>

### **3.10 Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Chittagong**

The founder of the Ramakrishna Sevashrama in Chittagong is Devendra Das Chowdhury.<sup>47</sup> This centre, started in 1921, was made a branch of Ramakrishna Mission in 2002.<sup>48</sup>

### **Activities**

1. A students' home with 62 students.

2. A library with 2425 books.
3. A charitable allopathic dispensary, which treated 2338 cases.
4. Welfare work by way of providing pecuniary help and scholarships to poor and meritorious students, and food, clothing, blankets, medical help, etc to the poor and needy.
5. Daily worship, prayers and bhajans, weekly religious classes and discourses in and outside the Ashrama.
6. Celebration of the birth anniversaries of Holy trinity, and also, puja, Christmas Eve, Buddha Purnima, etc.
7. A sub-centre at Fatyabad with the following activities.
  - a. A students' home with 37 students.
  - b. A library with 500 books.
  - c. Welfare work by way of providing food, clothing, and pecuniary and medical help to the needy and scholarships to poor students.
  - d. Daily worship, prayers, bhajans and weekly religious classes. Celebration of the birth anniversaries of Holy trinity and also Annapurna Puja, Kalpataru Utsav, etc.
8. Another sub-centre at Dhorla with the following activities:
  - a. Monthly and annual medical camps (825 patients treated).
  - b. Welfare work by way of providing food, clothing and pecuniary help to poor and needy.

- c. Daily worship celebration of the birth anniversaries of Holy trio, and also Kali Puja, etc.<sup>49</sup>

### **3.11 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Comilla**

This centre, started in 1936, was made a branch of Ramakrishna Mission in 2007. A branch of Ramakrishna Math was started there in March 2013.<sup>50</sup>

#### **Activities of the Mission centre**

1. An orphanage with 60 orphans and a students' home with 50 college students.
2. A charitable allopathic dispensary with specialist doctors' services.
3. A library with 620 books and 5 periodicals.
4. An audio-visual unit which screened religious and educative films.
5. Welfare work by way of providing pecuniary help and scholarships to poor and meritorious students, and food, clothing, etc to the poor and needy.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. Daily worship, prayers and bhajans, weekly religious classes and discourses in and outside the Ashrama.
2. Celebration of the birth anniversaries of Holy trio, and other religious festivals.<sup>52</sup>

### **3.12 Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama, Sylhet**

In Sylhet Ramakrishna Mission was first established by Indradayal Bhattacharjee.<sup>53</sup> In 1909, Indradayal met the author of Kathamrita, Sri “M”, Akshay Kumar Sen and Sharatchandra Chakraborty at Dakshineswar, Calcutta.<sup>54</sup> The Ashrama (Math Centre) was started in 1916.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. Daily worship, weekly religious classes and occasional lectures, as also seminars and other cultural programmes.
2. Celebration of the birth anniversaries of Holy trio, and also Durga Puja, Kali Puja, etc.
3. Welfare work involving distribution of clothes, blankets, food, etc.

The Mission centre was started in 1916 and made a branch in 1926.<sup>56</sup>

#### **Activities of the Mission Centre**

1. A library and a reading room with 4050 books.
2. A students' home with 48 books.
3. A three month course in computer operations, affiliated to Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), with 23 students.
4. A charitable allopathic-cum-homeopathic dispensary, which treated 21,950 patients.



### **3.13 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Habiganj**

Ramakrishna Ashrama in Habiganj was established in 1921 with the effort of some young devotees, inspired by the ideology of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.<sup>57</sup>

#### **Activities of the Ashrama (Math Centre)**

1. Regular worship, bhajans and religious classes.
2. Celebration of the birthdays of Holy trinity as also Kali Puja, Durga Puja, etc.

The Seva Samiti (Mission Centre) was made a branch in 1926.<sup>58</sup>

#### **Activities of the Mission Centre**

1. A students' home with 35 boys.
2. A library with 2600 books.
3. A charitable allopathic dispensary, which treated 2205 patients.
4. Welfare work providing pecuniary help to the poor and also scholarships to meritorious students.

### **3.14 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Mymensingh**

This branch of Ramakrishna Math was started in 1922 and a branch of Ramakrishna Mission was started there in February 2013.<sup>59</sup>

### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. Daily worship, bhajans, and weekly discourses.
2. Celebration of the birthdays of Holy trinity, and some other festivals.

### **Activities of the Mission Centre**

1. A library with 1060 books.
2. A students' home with 49 students.
3. a computer training centre, affiliated to Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), with 113 students.
4. A homeopathic dispensary, which treated 10,904 patients and conducted a blood donation camp.
5. Welfare work by way of providing clothes, blankets, etc to the needy and pecuniary help to students.<sup>60</sup>

## **3.15 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur**

The Ashrama (Math Centre) was started in 1923 and made a branch of Ramakrishna Math a few years later.<sup>61</sup>

### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. A students' home with 38 boys.

2. A library with 3300 books and 21 periodicals.
3. The ashrama has published 25 books so far.
4. A computer training centre with 97 students.
5. A charitable allopathic-cum-homeopathic dispensary including two mobile units. 10,545 cases were treated.
6. Yuvak Sangha, a cultural centre for residential students.
7. Daily worship, bhajans, fortnightly Ramnam Sankirtan, weekly religious classes and occasional discourses in and around the city.
8. Celebration of the birthdays of Holy trinity, as well as other religious festivals.

The Mission centre was started in 1990.

### **Activities of the Mission Centre**

1. A junior high school with 114 students.
2. Two primary schools with 172 students.
3. Under Grameen Shiksha Prakalpa 160 coaching centres were helped to conduct their activities, which benefited 6175 primary students.
4. Relief and welfare work by way of giving food, clothing, blankets and pecuniary help to poor and needy people.<sup>62</sup>

### **3.16 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Bagerhat**

The ashrama (Math Centre) was started in 1926, and the Mission centre in December 2012.<sup>63</sup>

#### **Activities of the Math Centre**

1. Daily worship prayers and bhajans.
2. Celebration of the birthdays of Holy trio, as also Puja and other religious personages.
3. Religious discourses in and outside the ashrama.

#### **Activities of the Mission Centre**

1. A students' home with 53 students.
2. A computer training centre with 60 students.
3. A library with 4044 books and 8 periodicals.
4. A charitable allopathic-cum-homeopathic dispensary, which treated 39,410 cases.
5. A publication department.
6. Welfare work by way of providing pecuniary and educational aid.<sup>64</sup>

### **3.17 Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Chandpur**

The Ashrama was started in 1920 and made a branch in 2017.

#### **Activities of the Math centre**

1. Daily worship and bhajans
2. Celebration of the kalpataru utsav and some other festivals.

#### **Activities of the Mission centre**

1. A student's home with 42 boys
2. A Homeopathic dispensary is going to start very soon
3. Welfare work involving distribution clothes, blankets, food, etc.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.18 Non-Affiliated Centres of the RKM**

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna, we find that disciples began to gather around him from the latter part of 1870s. Even in those early years it was seen that the disciples belonged to two fairly distinct groups. One group consisted of young men, most of whom were unmarried and studying in educational institutions. The other group consisted of householders following different walks of life. Sri Ramakrishna trained and bonded the two groups together with the unbreakable

ties of his eternal love. It may be mentioned that both the group produced men of outstanding spiritual caliber.<sup>66</sup>

It is known to us that the message of holy trinity is very universal and it cannot be confined to only one channel, one tradition or one institution. It needs multifarious channels, to suit the needs of diverse cultures, societies and human temperaments. To fulfil this diversity of needs, hundreds of small and big Ashrams, Parishad, Fund and other types of organizations have sprung all over Bangladesh, which function independently of the administrative control of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

These ‘non-affiliated centres’, which are sometimes referred to as ‘private centres’, are found in almost every part in Bangladesh. The total number of non-affiliated centres in Bangladesh is more than a hundred.

### **3.19 Origin of Non-Affiliated Centres**

The non-affiliated centres originate in different ways. The most common way is through a group of devotees of a locality who are inspired by the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda or by the books on Sri Ramakrishna. Many of these devotees may have already come into contact with the RKM, and some of them may have taken initiation from the President or Vice President of the order.

During the early years of Ramakrishna Movement, several non-affiliated centres were started under the influence of the direct disciples who visited the places and inspired the people there to form groups and take up various activities. The visit of Swamiji, Swami Saradananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Subodhananda, Swami Virajananda, Swami Prakashananda to several places in the erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh) created a tremendous impact in the minds of the people there. Wherever these great souls went, they created a great stir. Under their influence in Dhaka, Barisal and other places. Some of these centres later got affiliation to the RKM.

### **3.20 Significance of Non-Affiliated Centers**

For the limited number of their members, the RKM is not in a position to establish branch centres in all the places where there is great need and scope for spreading the message of Holy Trinity. This need can be met only by non-affiliated centres, in many of these places.

One of the main functions of these centres is a balanced monastic life. If a spiritual or message or path is monopolized by monks, if spiritual power gets concentrated only in monasteries, that movement will show imbalance and will soon become weak and unstable. This is what the history of Buddhism in Bengal has taught. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out that one of the

drawbacks of early Buddhism in Bengal was that it tried to make everyone a monk or a nun.<sup>67</sup> Monks provide the forward thrust to a movement and protect the purity of a message, but it is the laity that provides the support and base. Thus the non-affiliated centres, most of which are managed by lay devotees, have an important part to play in the sustained progress of the RKM.

### **3.21 Activities of the Non – Affiliated Centres**

All the RKM centres are inspired by the motto – Atmano Mokshartham Jagad hitya cha, ‘For ones own salvation and for the welfare of the world’ – and also by the ideal of Siva – jnane jiva seva, ‘service to man as service to God’. It is therefore only natural that these centres also undertake various service activities on the same lines as RKM.

Some of the main activities of non – affiliated centres are briefly mentioned below:

1. Most of the centres have a temple or a seperate shrine and prayer hall in which Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped as the main Deity along with Holy Mother and Swamiji. In many of the centres there is regular arrangement for the ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Almost all the centres conduct arati and bhajan at dusk. And all the centres celebrate the birthdays of Holy Trinity on a large scale.



2. Almost all the non – affiliated centres conduct readings, classes and discourses on the scriptures and Ramakrishna – Vivekananda literature, either on a daily basis or at least once or twice every week. Most of these centres have libraries and bookstalls or sales sections of selling books etc. They invite swamis of Ramakrishna order and scholars to give discourse at their centres.
  3. Many of these centres have Charitable dispensaries which visit surrounding villages once or more every week. They also conduct eye – camps, dental camps, etc.
  4. Some of the centres manage schools (mostly at the primary level) and hostels for students. Vocational training, handicrafts training, value education, etc. are also given by many centres.
  5. During natural calamities like cyclones, earth quakes, etc. most of these centres conduct relief operations either independently or in collaboration with the relief department of the RKM. Even when there are no natural calamities, many centres distribute food, clothing, etc. to destitute people.
- The above discussion makes it clear that right from the beginning of the Ramakrishna Movement, there has been a close rapport between the householder devotees and monks, and that non – affiliated centres have played an important role in authenticating and making available the message of the Holy Trinity to common people, especially the poor and neglected sections of society in villages. Swami Vivekananda never

wanted to flood the country with monks. On the contrary, he wanted that there should be a healthy balance between lay devotees and monks – numerically and functionally.

We are now living in a rapidly changing world in which individual life, family life and social life and values are undergoing radical changes. The present indications are that the significance of lay devotees and the role of non – affiliated centres in the expansion of Ramakrishna Movement will grow all the more in future.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>2</sup>. Swami Atmapriyananda (ed.), *Ramakrishna Mission: A Saga of Service* (Kolkata: Belur Math, 2010) pp. 45-47.
- <sup>3</sup>. *Uddipan*, Sri Ramakrishna temple consecration Ceremony Commemorative Volume (Dhaka: RKM, 2007) p. 223.
- <sup>4</sup>. Though the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission came into existence in 1886 and 1897 respectively, they acquired the status of legally distinct organizations much later under the laws of the country. The Ramakrishna Math was registered as a Religious Trust on 6 February 1901, while the Ramakrishna Mission (Formerly Ramakrishna Mission Association) was registered as a Society on 4 May 1909 under Act XXI of 1860 of the Govt. of India.
- <sup>5</sup>. *Uddipan* (Dhaka: RKM, 2007) p. 223.
- <sup>6</sup>. *The General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* for the year 1919, Howrah, West Bengal, RKM, p. 13. [Henceforth *The General Report*]
- <sup>7</sup>. *Uddipan* (Dhaka: RKM, 2007) p. 224.

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- <sup>8</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Dhruveshananda, the Principal, Dhaka Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, June 11, 2015.
- <sup>9</sup>. *Activities of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, office of Secretary (Dhaka: RKM, 2016) p. 3 [Hence forth *Activities of RKM*]
- <sup>10</sup>. *Activities of RKM*, 2016, p. 3.
- <sup>11</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>12</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Dhruveshananda, June 11, 2015.
- <sup>14</sup>. *Uddipan* (Dhaka: RKM, 2007) p. 226.
- <sup>15</sup>. *Activities of RKM* (Dhaka: 2016) p. 5.
- <sup>16</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Dhruveshananda, June 11, 2015.
- <sup>17</sup>. *Activities of RKM* (Dhaka: 2016) p. 5.
- <sup>18</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>19</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>21</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>22</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Dhruveshananda, June 11, 2015.
- <sup>23</sup>. *Short Report of the Activities for the Year 2015-2016*, office of Secretary (Faridpur: RKM, 2016) p.1.
- <sup>24</sup>. Sachindranath Dey *et. al.*, *A short History of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Faridpur* (Faridpur: RKM, 1979) p. 1.
- <sup>25</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Shivapriyananda, the Secretary, Faridpur Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, May 7, 2015.
- <sup>26</sup>. Govinda Lal Saha, *History of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Jessore.*
- <sup>27</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>28</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Janaprakashananda, the Secretary, Jessore Ramakrishna Ashrama, May 15, 2015.
- <sup>29</sup>. *Interview* with Swami Janaprakashananda, May 15, 2015.

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- <sup>30</sup>. *Brief Activities of the Ramakrishna Ashrama and Mission*, Office of the Secretary (Jessore: RKM, 2016) pp. 1-2.
- <sup>31</sup>. *A short History of the Ramakrishna Mission, Barisal*, office of the Secretary (Barisal: RKM, 2015) p. 1.
- <sup>32</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>33</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, p. 140.
- <sup>34</sup>. *A short History of the Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Rangpur*, Office of the Secretary (Rangpur: RKM, 2016) p. 1.
- <sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>36</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
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- <sup>38</sup>. *Interview with Swami Santananda*, June 17, 2015.
- <sup>39</sup>. Swami Eknathananda, *ed.*, *Bibek* (Narayanganj: RKM, 2014) p. 35.
- <sup>40</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- <sup>41</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>42</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, p. 145.
- <sup>43</sup>. *Ibid.*, 2013-2014, p. 139.
- <sup>44</sup>. *A Short History of the Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Baliati*, Office of the Secretary (Baliati: RKM, 2016) p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, p. 140.
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- <sup>47</sup>. *Dibyaon*, Commemoration Volume of the 100 Years of Swami Vivekanandas Chicago Speech (Chittagong: Ramakrishna Sevashrama, 1996) p. 372.
- <sup>48</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, p. 140.
- <sup>49</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- <sup>50</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- <sup>51</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

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- <sup>52</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
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- <sup>54</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>55</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, p. 144.
- <sup>56</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- <sup>57</sup>. *Bibekanjali* (Habigonj: RKM, 2004) p. 157.
- <sup>58</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, p. 145.
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- <sup>61</sup>. Shantinaraayan Ghosh, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Dinajpur* (Dinajpur, RKM, 2007)p.1.
- <sup>62</sup>. *The General Report*, 2013-2014, pp. 142-143.
- <sup>63</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- <sup>64</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- <sup>65</sup>. *Interview with Swami Sthiratmananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Ashram and Ramakrishna Mission, Chandpur, November 30, 2017.*
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## **Chapter Four**

### **4.1 Services in Religion, Education and Humanity**

The ideology of the RKM finds expression through their multifarious services. These services cover different areas of human need and social welfare such as education, health, rural development, self-employment, women's welfare, interfaith understanding, moral life, spiritual guidance, and relief to victims of calamities. All these activities are conducted as service, service to God in man.

In the RKM, service is not restricted to a particular type of activity conducted at a particular time, but is a way of life. Even when the monks are not rendering any service to the society, they do the same within the monastic community. And, there is no time limit or age limit for this. The monks continue to engage themselves in various service activities until they are incapacitated by illness or extreme old age.<sup>1</sup>

Service as a way of life followed in the RKM has certain distinctive features. Some of these features are as follows:<sup>2</sup>

**a. Selflessness, Sacrifice, Love:** The principle of selflessness or unselfishness is an important teaching of the Holy trio, and constitutes the very first step in the three main spiritual paths of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana. Monks, devotees and other aspirants of the RKM look upon their institution (RKM) as the mystical body of Sri Ramakrishna, and they bear to merge their individual egos in the

collective will of the institution. Furthermore, all their services and its fruits are offered as worship to the Almighty. Individual members of the RKM do not claim credit for their services; all credit goes to the institution, the RKM.

As already mentioned, the ideal of service followed in the RKM is based on the principle *Siva-Jnane Jiva-seva*, to serve man as potentially Divine. It is not, however, easy to serve all, especially the poor and the sick, in a spirit of worship. This ideal is based on sacrifice, sacrifice of one's time, energy, comforts, etc. It is these sacrifices which the members of the RKM render, without any expectation of reward, recognition or fame, that make their ideal of service authentic.

The motivation for service and sacrifice is love. The love that flows through the RKM is Divine Love – the pure, imperishable love of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda for humanity. This Divine love is the force holding together the institution, unifying monastic brothers and lay devotees.

**b. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity:** These three great ideals of democracy, about which humanity has been dreaming and talking for centuries, are becoming a social reality, in a silent and unobtrusive way, in the RKM circles. Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly stated, 'Liberty is the first condition of growth'.<sup>3</sup> Freedom from religious bigotry, intolerance, hatred and superstitions, freedom

from religious, social and racial prejudices, in a word, freedom of thought and belief this is a central fact in the RKM. RKM's services aim at the welfare of all people without any distinctions of caste, creed or race. The rich and the poor, the Brahman and the Harijan, Hindus, Muslims, Christians – all are treated as children of the same Divine parents. These institutions follow Vivekananda's view that social equality is to be brought about, not by a process of 'levelling down', but by 'levelling up', that is, not by pulling down those who are already up but by raising up those who are down.

**C. Excellence, Efficiency, Teamwork:** These three qualities are generally associated with business enterprises, but they are the governing principles in all activities undertaken by the RKM. Since all service is rendered as worship, and only the best things are offered to the Lord, the members of the RKM try to do their allotted work in the best way possible. Care is taken to avoid waste or loss of any kind. Other than the minimum necessary for the maintenance of the institutions and their inmates, all the resources are used for the welfare of society. Again, as the monks are united by the strong bond of monastic brotherhood, they find it easy and natural to work as a team, and this has contributed much to the success of the twin organizations.

**d. Truthfulness, Honesty, Transparency:** RKM scrupulously follow all statutory and contingent rules and conditions with regard to receiving and spending



funds, which come mostly through public donations and government grants. Their accounts are regularly audited and made available to the public. Transparency in financial matters is a hallmark of the RKM.

e. Social commitment without politics: In a democratic country which follows the principle of 'Welfare State' any kind of social service necessarily involves interaction with the Government. However, being a spiritual organization which aims at the spiritual regeneration of humanity, the RKM maintain their position above active politics and political affiliations

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It is notable to mention that the Ramakrishna Mission as an institution was formally established in Calcutta on 1 May 1897 by the lay and monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, under the initiative of Swami Vivekananda.<sup>4</sup> And, the Ramakrishna Math had been established earlier, in late September 1886, by the monastic disciples of the Master, headed by Swami Vivekananda, in pursuance of the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna himself.<sup>5</sup>

Here, it must also be borne in mind that the genesis of these two organizations has to be studied jointly, and not separately, since from the very start they both have been inseparably interlinked, and both stemmed from the same source, the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna. The above mentioned ideals and services of the twin organizations are like the 'two facets of the same coin'.<sup>6</sup> The

programmes of services of both are controlled and supervised by the monks of the RKM who are dedicated to the same ideals.

## **4.2 Services in Religion**

With a view to developing the human inner faculties more stress has been given here to the studies of scriptures, practices of various spiritual disciplines, meditation, chanting hymns, prayers etc. every day. Discourses, seminars and talks on religion and philosophy are regularly held throughout the year. Besides observation of the birth anniversaries of the holy trinity, learned and scholarly people of different faiths take part in the discussion on the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, Jesus Christ, Sri Krishna, Lord Buddha and other great souls on their birthdays during the year.

Magnificent temples of Sri Ramakrishna stands in the campus of the RKM as a symbol of religious plurality and harmony propagating the idea: 'As many faiths, so many paths'. All the celebrations of the RKM are attended by a large number of people comprising devotees, distinguished people, friends and admirers of all communities.<sup>7</sup>

Spiritual services followed in the RKM has certain distinctive features. Some of those features are mentioned below.

### **a. Worshipping God by Serving Humanity – Practical Vedanta**

The different spiritual services of the RKM aim at the total uplift of humanity without any discrimination of caste, creed, race or nationality. By total uplift it means the development of body, mind, and soul. It means the fulfillment of all physical, mental, and spiritual requirements. A person is not a lump of flesh alone; he or she has a mind and a soul also. Total upliftment means to fulfill the requirements of these three.

Sri Ramakrishna, though always absorbed in *Samadhi*, was pained to see the condition of hungry poor Santals of Deoghar and Kalaighat. The RKM has been carrying out the wish of Sri Ramakrishna for the last one hundred and twenty years. And, this spiritual organization is expected to serve humanity for hundreds of years to come in accordance with the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. The RKM is an organization which is essentially spiritual in character. The work done by the RKM is really Seva, Worship of humanity. It is Ramakrishna who taught Vivekananda to render service to the needy with an attitude of worship – *Puja*. Service to the Jiva (an individual) is worship of Shiva in the eyes of the monks and devotees of the RKM.

The RKM stands for the universal ideal of Vedanta. According to advaita Vedanta, each soul is potentially divine. This realization and the unity of the universe through service is called Practical Vedanta. To a monastic or a lay

follower of the RKM, service is accepted as a *sadhana* for realizing the highest spiritual truth. Here lies the difference between the service activities conducted by other organizations, during the past hundred years, have accepted this philosophy of service as one of their *sadhanas*.

#### **b. Mass contact through Spiritual and Cultural service**

Through the years the RKM has maintained contact with the masses through its various centres spread all over the Bangladesh. People become closely related with the RKM when they are involved in different projects of service, either as workers or as beneficiaries. During the birthday celebrations of the holy trinity, and on other religious and festive occasions, people become acquainted with liberal ideas of religion, culture and human values. Different publications and periodicals of the RKM also help in this project. Moreover, special projects of mass contact, like the seminars and lectures conducted by the RKM, also have proved to be a great success. These services contribute a great deal towards the development of noble ideas and better understanding of philosophical and spiritual truths. Organizing regular study circles, work camps, supply of religious and cultural books to remote areas through mobile libraries, slide shows, film shows, songs, dances and dramas, etc. are normal features of the RKM. These cultural programmes are as important for the spiritual revival of the masses of our country. The above are but a few examples of the nature and strength of the programmes being organized by the RKM.

### **c. The Two Extraordinary Spiritual Teachers and Preaching Harmony of Religious Faiths.**

Sri Ramakrishna desired that his mission of uplifting humanity be propagated in its true spirit by two chosen persons — the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna gave special training to both of them so that they might ‘teach the world’ to realize his ideal of ‘realization of the self and service to the world’ through the spirit of ‘renunciation and service’. Besides these two, Sri Ramakrishna also trained his other sannyasi and a few lay disciples to live up to his ideals and propagate the same as far as practicable. Thus, both Holy Mother and Swamiji were the main caretakers of the mission of Sri Ramakrishna — the uplift of humanity spiritually and materially.

One of the greatest achievements of the RKM during a century of its existence is the preaching of the harmony of religious faiths. The message of Sri Ramakrishna on the harmony of religious faiths pronounced by Swami Vivekananda in Chicago has now been accepted by almost all the faiths of the world. Now few religious missionaries dare to speak ill of other faiths. Rather, previous approaches to establish the superiority of one’s own religion are nowadays directed instead towards establishing the spirit of harmony, and acceptance.

Harmony of religious faiths should also be distinguished from religious toleration. Toleration implies a certain degree of condescension and refraining from doing something worse. What Swami Vivekananda said on this point is worth mentioning here, “Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live”<sup>8</sup>

In discussion on harmony of religions we tend to treat each religion as if it were a monolith. But the truth is each religion is vertically divided into several major sects and a large number of minor sects in Hinduism; Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Churches in Christianity; Sunni, Shia and Wahhabi sects in Islam; Mahayana, Vajrayana and Theravada in Buddhism. Very often these sects have greater animosity towards one another than towards other religions. Discussion on harmony of religious faiths should include harmony within each religion — intrareligions harmony, as well as harmony among religions — interreligions harmony.

Conflicts among followers of different religions are caused by wrong attitudes towards religions other than one’s own. A person’s attitude towards other religions depends upon several factors. In the recent years most of the religious

studies have centred on interreligious attitudes taking care from the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

Western scholars have recognized three main interreligious attitudes: Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism.<sup>9</sup> To this we may add swami Vivekananda's concept of universalism as a fourth attitude which is preached by the RKM.

### **1. Exclusivism**

Exclusivism is the view that one's own religion alone is true and all other religions are false. According to this view, there can be only one true revelation, and only one true way to salvation.

This was the view that prevailed in the West till the World Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago in 1893. It is still held by some groups in other religions. In Christianity this view found expression in the dogma. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, 'outside the church no salvation'. In the early decades of the last century the exclusivist position was strongly advocated by Karl Barth, Emile Brunner and Hendrik Kraener.<sup>10</sup> After the second Vatican council and the formation of the World Council of Churches, this view seems to be no longer popular in Christianity. Liberal minded people in all religions have given up this view.

When exclusivism finds aggressive social expression, it becomes extremism. The rise of extremist in several religions, and the adaptation of extremist and terrorist tactics by some extremist groups, constitute the main threat to global peace, friendship and prosperity in the present-day world.

## **2. Inclusivism**

Inclusivism also holds that one's own religion alone is true, but it does not hold that other religions are false, for they are all included in one's own religion. Revelation in one's own religion is full, perfect and final, whereas revelation in other religions is partial, imperfect or preliminary. Other religions are only preparations to understand and accept one's own religion.

In modern time inclusivism as a distinct interreligious attitude was first formulated by the German Catholic theologian Karl Rahner in 1961. According to him, Christ works through all religions, and it is Christ that the followers of other religions worship through their sacraments, without being aware of the fact. Rahner therefore called the followers of other religions 'anonymous Christians'. This line of thinking was supported by Hans Kung, Henri le Saux, Dom Bede Griffiths, Klaus Klostemaier and other theologians and thinkers.<sup>11</sup>



### **3. Pluralism**

Pluralism holds that all world are true, revelations are many, and there are several paths to salvation. Pluralism is a philosophical term which means that truth has ultimately more than one valid construction and that human thinking can approach those constructions in quite different ways. In the context of world religions, Pluralism means in the words of Professor John Hick, “The great religious traditions are to be regarded as alternative soteriological spaces within which, or ways along which, men and women find salvation/liberation/fulfillment.”<sup>12</sup>

Pluralism is a way of establishing understanding and harmony among religions without ignoring the uniqueness of each. This recognizes the independence, dignity and validity of each religion. As professor James Michael Lee has pointed out,

“Genuine religious pluralism is not a melting pot in which all diverse religions are liquefied into sameness. On the contrary, genuine religious Pluralism is a mosaic in which all religions occupy privileged, autonomous and interactive positions, thus revealing a picture which displays the full reality of God less inadequately than any single religion, however objectively great, is able to do by itself.”<sup>13</sup>

The idea of religious pluralism was introduced in Western thought mainly by Arnold Toynbee, W. E. Hocking and John Hick. The present pluralist

movement in the West owes much to the bold advocacy of religious pluralism by Professor Hick. He terms his pluralist scheme ‘a Copernican revolution’. He stated, “And we have to realize the universe of faiths centres upon God, and not upon Christianity or upon any other religion. He is the Sun, The originative source of life and light, whom all the religions reflect in their own way”.<sup>14</sup>

No doubt, Sri Ramakrishna is the first great prophet of religious pluralism in the modern world. The pluralism that he advocated was not the Western analytical model but the holistic model of Bengal. What Sri Ramakrishna did was to reestablish Bengal the view of religious harmony by adapting it to the needs of modern society.

#### **4. Universalism**

We have discussed three interreligious attitudes, namely, Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism. We now come to the fourth one: Universalism. Universalism is the view that there exists a set of universally valid religious principles common to or unifying all religions. Whereas pluralism emphasizes the differences among religions, Universalism emphasizes the common ground among religions.

Sri Ramakrishna laid the foundations of pluralism, and Swami Vivekananda took pluralism one step further by showing that pluralism must culminate in

Universalism. Universalism is one of Swamiji's great contributions to the modern world. Before Swamiji came, the term 'Universal Religion' meant any religion which was not limited to a particular nation, race or caste, but was open to all people all over the world. Regarding this, Swami Vivekananda said

We find then that if by the idea of a universal religion it is meant that one set of doctrines should be believed in by all mankind, it is wholly impossible. It can never be, these can never be a time when all faces will be the same. Again if we expect that there will be one universal mythology, that is also impossible; it cannot be Neither can there be one universal ritual. Such a state of things can never come into existence; if it ever did, the world would be destroyed, because variety is the first principle of life.<sup>15</sup>

Swamiji's concept of universal religion is a broad and truly universal concept. His concept embraces all the religions of the world. It is based on universal principles and reconciles the contradictions found among religions.

For Swami Vivekananda religion is the conversion of every thought, feeling, and action into a spiritual discipline. It is the conversion of one's whole life into unbroken yoga, and the deification of man; this deified life can be seen in the lives of great saints and mystics in all religions.

This is Swamiji's concept of Universal Religion which is followed by the RKM. In these days when science, technology, commerce, political strategies and other

forces of globalization are bringing people all over the world closer together, this kind of enlightened Universal Religion assumes great importance.

#### **d. Bhakta – Sammelans**

A Bhakta-Sammelan is a convention of Devotees. It is generally organized by the lay devotees, although occasionally a centre of the RKM may also organize it. A Bhakta-Sammelan is a get-together of devotees from all over the state. The main aim of this get together is to express their solidarity with the Holy Trio, their message and institutions. It also enables the devotees to exchange views with one another and benefit from the spiritual discourses, *bhajans*, etc. arranged on the occasion. It is a joyful occasion when all the participants feel happy, feel spiritual kinship, and also feel spiritually uplifted. Such spiritual congregation, mostly under the guidance of the monks of the RKM, have been helping to create a deeper understanding of the unity of human souls.

#### **e. Worship of God in Human Beings**

When Ramakrishna's period of *sadhana* was over, it culminated in the worship of the divine in a woman – in Holy Mother. This was beginning of his worship of human beings. There are several instances where Ramakrishna speaks of his worshipping human beings as manifestations of the divine. Sister Nivedita gives an interesting story in *The Master as I Saw Him*

There are many stories current among the monks of persons who had come to Dakshineswar during the lifetime of their Master, and being touched by his hand, went immediately into *samadhi*. In many cases nothing more was known of his visitants than this. This was notably true of a certain woman, who had driven to the temple and of whom Sri Ramakrishna had said at once that she was 'a fragment of the Madonna hood of the worlds'. He had offered salutation to this guest, in the name of the Mother, throwing flowers on her feet and burning incense before her, and she, as was not perhaps surprising, had passed immediately into the deepest *samadhi*. From this, however, to everyone's surprise, it had proved most difficult to recall her. It was two or three hours before she awoke from her ecstasy, and when this happened her whole appearance, it is said, was as that of one who had been intoxicated. Much relieved that all was ending thus well, however for it had been feared that her *samadhi* might last much longer, and her family, wherever they were, feel justly disturbed all lent their aid to the departure of the stranger from the temple, and none had the forethought to make a single enquiry as to her name or abode. She never came again. Thus her memory became like some beautiful legend, treasure in the order as witness to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna for gracious and noble wifehood and motherhood. Had he not said of this woman, 'a fragment of the eternal Madonna hood'.<sup>16</sup>

On more than one occasion Ramakrishna said people who were greatly attached to someone in their family to meditate on that person as a form of God. And, in

at least one case, we are told, the devotee actually attained *samadhi* through this *sadhana*.<sup>17</sup>

And, thus we see the similarity between Ramakrishna's teachings and the philosophy of the RKM's service to God in human beings – provided the service is done in the right spirit of worship. Swami Vivekananda once said to Swami Kalyanananda

Look here, Kalyan, do you know how I feel about it? My idea is, one side there should be a temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna for the Sannyasins and Brahmacharins working in the Sevashrama to meditate and pray; and on other, revolving round it, should go on the other activities of public utility in a worshipful spirit. That is, on the one hand, deep absorption in the thought of our Lord in silence, away from the disturbances of the outside world; on the other, the fruit of this meditation and contemplation flowing out spontaneously in acts of love and compassion for everything on earth, proving the truth of the oneness of the transcendent and immanent aspects of God as our Lord realized and preached in his life, 'It is the same Lord I see when I close my eyes and when I keep my eyes open.' This practical Vedanta is what we want; not more theoretical Vedanta, which is of no use unless it is brought into effect in our everyday life.<sup>18</sup>

So we have seen an important spiritual truth that has shaped the thinking and guided the working of the RKM: God can be perceived here and now in every living being and worshipped through selfless service.

#### **f. Harmony of Religions: A Living tradition in the RKM**

Harmony of religions is a living tradition in the RKM. Sri Ramakrishna and swami Vivekananda's principles of harmony which we outlined above are being put into practice in more than 205 centres of the RKM in Bangladesh and other parts of the world.

Harmony of religions finds expression in the RKM in several ways, some of which are discussed below.

In the first place, the monks of RKM admit people belonging to different religions, castes and races. Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists, hailing from different countries, live together in mutual love and cooperation like children of the same parents in the monasteries of the RKM.

The lay devotees of the RKM, who belong to various religious denominations and countries, also live in peace with their neighbors observing the principles of harmony of religions. They are not required to give up their allegiance to their respective religions, and are free to visit the places of worship and follow the rites and customs of those religions.

In all the centres of the RKM the birthdays of the great founders of world religions are celebrated. Novices of the RKM are taught comparative religion

and the scriptures of different religions. The monks of The RKM have the freedom to study and derive benefit from the works of the saints and sages of all religion.

Furthermore, speaking ill of other religions and religious leaders is not allowed within the bounds of the RKM. Organizing interfaith conferences in which representatives of different religions speak about their own religions is another way RKM promote the ideal of harmony of religions.

Lastly, members of RKM keep themselves aloof from religious fanatic groups and from involvement in political activity of any kind. This is how the ideal of harmony of religions is put into practice in the RKM. No one who studies this RKM can fail to notice these certain unique features.

In the first place, it is not a new thing. Owing to various causes such as the influence of mass media, globalization, the presence of large religious minorities, etc., there is now a growing awareness of the importance of following a pluralistic approach to religion and culture. Modern youths are developing a multi religious, multi-cultural and even a multinational outlook. The practice of harmony of religions in the RKM has nothing to do with these recent trends. It has been in vogue in the RKM for more than one hundred years.



Another characteristic feature of the practice of harmony of religions in the RKM is authenticity. The practices in the RKM are not a show. It is not a stratagem to attract more people. It is a natural way of life for the monks and the laity. It is followed because of the faith that it is the right and true path for the modern people shown by Sri Ramakrishna.

Thirdly, practice of harmony in the RKM is an expression of Sri Ramakrishna's love for humanity. Sri Ramakrishna is one of the greatest lovers of humanity that the world has ever seen. His love knew no bounds of caste, creed or race. He loved the founders of world religions – Krishna, Buddha, Mohammad, Jesus, Chaitanya and others – as if they were his own kith and kin. Naturally, he loved the followers of these great founders. Sri Ramakrishna's universal, unconditional love for all people is one of the two primary forces bonding together the members of the RKM.

The other force is the equally universal, all – forgiving, all – forbearing love of Sri Sarada Devi, known as the Holy Mother, who was the spouse of Sri Ramakrishna. She embodied in herself universal motherhood. By her immaculate purity, selfless love, endless patience and by her Divine realizations, she transformed herself from an illiterate village maiden to the mother of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Persians – indeed the mother of all humanity. The success that RKM has achieved in putting into practice the ideal

of harmony of religions in its monastic order and among the laity is in no small measure due to the benign, integrating and protective influence that Sri Sarada Devi exerted, and still continues to exert, on the members of the RKM.

Although it is difficult to predict the future of humanity, there are enough indications to believe that the relevance and influence of the message of Sri Ramakrishna are likely to increase in the coming decades and centuries.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the divine voice of Sri Ramakrishna reminded people that realization of the ultimate Reality, known by different names, is the ultimate meaning and purpose of human life and though it alone can attain everlasting fulfillment and peace. Furthermore, Sri Ramakrishna taught that spiritual life is the essential core of all religions. These ideas are now spreading all over the world like a groundswell.

Swami Vivekananda believed that Sri Ramakrishna has awakened the spiritual consciousness of humanity through his intense spiritual practices and fervent prayers. Swamiji foresaw a future period when humanity as a whole would have attained such a high level of consciousness that ordinary human life would be transmuted into spiritual life or divine life. Swamiji stated

Religious ideas will have to become universal, vast and infinite; and then alone we shall have the fullest play of religion, for the power of religion has

only just begun to manifest in the world. It is sometimes said that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out of the world. To me it seems that they have just begun to grow. The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life. So long as religion was in the hands of a chosen few or of a body of priests, it was in temples, churches, books, dogmas, ceremonials, forms, and rituals. But when we come to the real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in our every movement, penetrate every pore of our society, and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before.<sup>19</sup>

These prophetic words of a great teacher may not go in vain. They may become a reality, if not in the coming decades, at least in the coming centuries. And we can be sure that the universal message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, followed by the RKM, would play a dominant role in bringing about this glorious spiritual transformation of humankind.

### **4.3 Services in Education**

We are all aware of the inadequacy of the present-day system of education. Educationists — Eastern and Western are engaged for decades, in devising better methods of imparting knowledge and improving the morale of the student community. Despite their best efforts, we are, unfortunately, left in the same deplorable condition as we were before, and much worse, as is generally felt, there is growing degeneration. It is a matter of joy and hope that, in Bangladesh,

the RKM centres following the instructions of Swami Vivekananda, has putting focus on man-making and character-building education. And this is a major service of the RKM in Bangladesh in the field of education. Here we must recall that a regal, majestic figure of commanding presence, vast learning and deep insight, Swami Vivekananda was barely 30 years old when he created a stir at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Three and a half years later, when he returned to his homeland, he was a colossus of strength, courage, confidence, love, and manliness – the embodiment of the ideal of the 'man-making and character-building' education he propagated.

### **RKM and the meaning of Education**

It is known to us that, the method and process by which knowledge is traditionally acquired by a disciple from a teacher is called education. The main cause of misery is ignorance. Ignorance is proverbially figured as darkness, and knowledge as light. The light of knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance. RKM's aim in operating and starting various educational institutions to teach the so-called secular subjects like modern sciences, arts, English, etc. on the one hand, and the so-called spiritual subjects like the ancient Upanishads, Sanskrit, Vedic literature, etc. on the other, was to create a complete human being, all-round and fully developed in the three 'h' s — heart, head, and hand. The entire history of the RKM's educational endeavor should be studied and comprehended against this idea of Swamiji.

Swamiji knew that education plays a vital role in curing the evils in society, and is critical in shaping the future of humanity. Although Vivekananda did not write any book on education, he contributed valuable thoughts on the subject that are relevant and viable today. In order to understand his thoughts, we should first consider his oft-quoted definition of education, 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.'<sup>20</sup> This definition of education is one of remarkable insight. First of all, the word 'manifestation' implies that something already exists and is waiting to be expressed. The main focus in learning is to make the hidden ability of a learner manifest. As Vivekananda said, 'What a man "learns" is really what he "discovers", by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge.'<sup>21</sup> According to Vedanta philosophy, knowledge is inherent in a human being, like a spark in a piece of flint, and all that is needed is the strike of suggestion to bring it out. 'Manifestation' indicates spontaneous growth, provided the impediments, if any, are removed.

Next in importance in the Vivekananda's definition of education is the expression 'already in man'. This refers to a human being's potential, which is the range of the abilities and talents, known or unknown that he is born with. 'Potential' speaks of the possibility of awakening something that is lying dormant. The word 'perfection' in the Swamiji's definition of education is also very significant. We can see that every act connected with learning, training,

etc., is part of a process directed towards an end. The English word 'perfect' implies completion, or something being made whole. The Greek word *telic* is translated as 'perfect', and suggests the idea of attaining a goal or an end. Drawing on these meanings, one may conclude that perfection in the educational parlance is the goal of actualizing the highest human potential.

#### **4.5 Types of Educational Institution's started by The RKM**

The following are the major types of institutions started at different times during the 118 years of Ramakrishna Mission's existence in Bangladesh to actualize Swamiji's educational vision as described above:

1. Schools: pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary levels, imparting general education.
2. Sanskrit Schools: imparting knowledge of the Sanskrit language and literature at the secondary level.
3. Junior technical schools: imparting technical and vocational education at the secondary level.
4. Polytechnics: imparting technical education in various branches of engineering at the diploma level.
5. Student's Homes and Hostels: attached to residential schools/ institutes run by the Ramakrishna Mission as well as by others, attempted to be model on the *guru-griha-vasa* system.

6. Orphanages: housing destitute children and grown-up students, attempted to be modeled on the *guru-griha-vasa* system.
7. Computer Training Centers: imparting computer education and training to school and college students.
8. Rural Development/Social Workers' Training Institutes: imparting education for rural development work.
9. Non-formal Education Centers: imparting literacy and adult education.<sup>22</sup>

A few thousands of students (children, men, women) are being benefited every year through a few hundred institutions belonging to the above mentioned categories. The main inspiration behind all of these is the educational vision of Swami Vivekananda. One of the main characteristics of the RKM institutions imparting education, which in fact forms the very backbone of these institutions, is the active involvement and dedicated service of a large number of the monks, devotees and other aspirants of the Ramakrishna order.

#### **4.6 RKM and the Goal of Education**

RKM believes that the goal of education general or ultimate-is essentially laid down by society and varies form society to society. Even as every society tries to keep peace with the contemporary world, societies with a stable and older tradition cherish some higher goals of everlasting value. About the aim of education Swami Vivekananda said,

The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion – is it worth the name? Real education is that which enables one to stand on one's own legs.<sup>23</sup>

Education, he said, must provide 'life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas.'<sup>24</sup> The ideal of this type of education would be to produce an integrated person—one who has learned how to improve his intellect, purify his emotions, and stand firm on moral virtues and unselfishness.

There are two levels of values designated by the ancient Bengal scriptures, *Para vidya* (spiritual values) and *Apara vidya* (secular values). This division, however, does not imply superiority or inferiority of value, but is a way of denoting objective and subjective contents. *Apara vidya* is value or knowledge of the objective universe, whereas *Para vidya* is value or knowledge of the subject- the knower, not as an agent of the process of knowing but as the eternal subject, the veritable embodiment of knowledge as Awareness or consciousness. So, this division is merely for practical convenience; otherwise *vidya*, or learning, is a continuum, leading one towards the ultimate goal which according to Vivekananda is complete freedom of the soul. As an institution the RKM concurred with contemporary thinkers when it asserted that the mind – the chief instrument of learning – deserves more attention than it had earlier received.



Training the mind should be a student's highest priority, and not simply the accumulation, the memorizing and the repeating of facts. Yet training of the mind in all its aspects is conspicuously absent in today's education. Learning to concentrate the mind was the focus in the RKM's scheme. And Vivekananda said, "To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts."<sup>25</sup>

#### **4.7 RKM and the Character Education, Universal Values**

A major personality of the RKM, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say that *manush* needs to become *man-hush* – that is, a man needs to become a true man. 'He alone is a man', he said, 'whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened.'<sup>26</sup> Following Ramakrishna, Vivekananda emphasized that the ideal of all education, all training should be this man-making. Lamenting over the prevailing system of education, he said, '... we are always trying to polish up the outside. What use in polishing up the outside when there is no inside? The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow.'<sup>27</sup>

Character-building is fundamental in RKM's educational scheme, as against career-orientation, which occupies centre-stage in today's education. A person is what his thoughts have made him. Explaining this the Swamiji said, Each thought is a little hammer blow on the lump of iron which our bodies are, manufacturing out of it what we want it to be.<sup>28</sup> That is why one finds that the

focus of the RKM's educational programmes was on assimilation of man-making, character-building ideas.

Everything a person does, every thought, every move, leaves an impression on the mind. Even when it is not out-worldly apparent, it is strong enough to work beneath the surface. A person's character is determined by the sum total of these impressions. When a large number of these impressions come together, they form a habit. This then becomes a powerful force through which one's character can be remodeled.

Character-building education might focus on teaching what is right and wrong. But simultaneously, or alternatively, it should teach how to decide what is right and wrong. It has been rightly argued that participation in discussions of morality is more instructive than simply hearing about it. In any case, teachers should be moral exemplars if the classroom and the school are to serve as arenas for the teaching of ethics. The students then have the experience of being part of a group of people who take moral values seriously and, this helps them imbibe moral values spontaneously.

The present education system has over emphasized the cultivation of the intellect at the cost of the general well-being of humanity to check this dangerous trend, Vivekananda strongly recommended all-round progress of human faculties. In one of his lectures he expressed the desire "that all men

were so constituted that in their minds all these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion and of work were equally present in full! That is the ideal – my ideal, of a perfect man.”<sup>29</sup>

And the RKM expected that the education systems would be suitably designed to produce such wholesome human beings. Interestingly, the UNESCO report *learning to be* published in 1972, while defining the goal of education, echoed this same idea. It reads, “The physical, the intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man is a broad definition of the fundamental goal of education.”<sup>30</sup>

#### **4.8 RKM’s Educational Services in Bangladesh**

The RKM’s educational services in Bangladesh, in places like Dhaka, Barishal, Sylhet, Habiganj, etc. deserve a mention here. The struggles of the pioneers at this places are now history, about which the present generation has little knowledge. Fortunately for us, some of the initial struggles in these places have been recorded by Swami Prabhananda, presently the Vice President of the RKM, who is well known for his thoroughly documental studies and research in the Mission’s history.

We came to know that Gauri Ma, a saintly woman–disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, visited Habiganj in 1914 and granted *mantra–diksha* to a few devotees. Inspired

by her, many devotees then started a Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samity at Habijan.<sup>31</sup> Even before the Samity was started, some of the youths of Habiganj village had begun service activities for the illiterate cobbler folk. In this the pioneer was Yogesh Chandra Datta, who later become Swami Ashokananda and headed the Mission's Northern California Centre for a long time. He was then highly regarded for his intellectual and spiritual attainments. This Band of dedicated young men started a literacy campaign in the village with a night school. With the help of a lantern they used to go from house to house in cobbler colony and literally catch hold of the slum children and bring them to school to study.<sup>32</sup> From Habiganj, these young man used to cross the river khoyai to go to Gosainnagar village in the evenings to conduct their coaching classes. When the boat service used to be suspended during the rainy season on account of flood-tides, these young men would swim across the river. In later days, the monks of the RKM used to do the same.

The workers of the seva samity kept the night school going in spite of all odds. After few days, they felt that the helpless, illiterate cobbler-folk need to be helped with food and clothing too along with primary education. Mixing with the intimately and listening to their tales of woe, they first persuaded them to give up their surname of 'Cobbler' and assume, instead, the surname 'Rishi'.<sup>33</sup> This was in tune with Swamiji's idea of giving back the masses their 'lost individuality'. Health and hygiene education and necessary arrangements for

clean living were also initiated. Along with this, they took care to see that professional training in cobbler skills was imparted to them in a scientific manner. And many of these trained cobblers went over to places like Sylhet, Karimganj, Silchar, etc. and earned their living by using their acquired expertise.<sup>34</sup>

Table 1.1: RKM'S Educational Services in Bangladesh

Institutions	No. of Units	No of Students		
		Boys	Girls	Total
<b>Junior High School</b>				
Dhaka	1	150	100	250
Dinajpur	1	97	96	193
<b>Junior Basic/P. School</b>				
Faridpur and Dinajpur	2	80	71	151
<b>Hostels/Students Homes</b>				
Dhaka, Bagerhat, Barishal, Chittagong, Comilla, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Narayangonj and Sylhet	11	584		584
<b>Orphanages</b>				
Cumilla	1	70		70
<b>Chatuspathis</b>				
Faridpur	1	73		73
<b>Vocational Training Centres</b>				

Bagerhat and Narayangonj	2	80		80
<b>Computer Training Centre</b>				
Dhaka Cultural Centres	1			
Dhaka and Dinajpur	2	60	30	90
<b>Public Library and Reading Room</b>				
Dhaka, Bagerhat, Barishal, Baliati, Chittogong, Cumilla, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Habiganj, Mymensingh, Narayangonj and Sylhet	12			

Source: Swami Atmapriyananda, (ed.) *Ramakrishna Mission: A Saga of Service*, 2010, pp. 202-303.

#### **4.9 RKM Sangskriti Bhavan, Dhaka**

On the Cultural side of the RKM'S activities, a pride of place is occupied by the RKM *Sangskriti Bhavan* at Dhaka. The pioneer of this project was Swami Akshwarananda, a monk of originality and vision. From its modest beginning, it has come a long way and has now grown into an important centre for learning and research. It was created to actualize Swamiji's vision of combining the best elements of Eastern and Western cultures by making scholars of both the worlds come together in friendly exchange of views. This centre also seeks to educate the younger generation on the glorious spiritual and cultural heritage of Bengal. Its fully computerized library, having nearly one lakhs of books and more than one-hundred periodicals and Journals, is one of the richest and the modern in

Bangladesh. The Scholars' house accommodates guests and scholars from several countries, who come to Bangladesh to study Bengal culture and spirituality. Seminars, symposia and lectures on various topics relating to culture, history, religion and spirituality form the main fabric of the RKM institute's life.

Table 1.2: List of Educational Institutions of RKM in Bangladesh as in the Year 2009.

Sl. No.	Name of the Institution	Place	Place Name of the Activity	Year of Starting
1	Ramakrishna Math & Mission	Dhaka	School	1899
2	Ramakrishna Mission	Barishal	Students' Home	1904
3	Ramakrishna Mission	Barishal	Students' Home	1911
4	Ramakrishna Mission	Dhaka	Jr. High School, Vocational	1914
5	Ramakrishna Ashrama & Seva Samity	Sylhet	Students' Home	1916
6	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Faridpur	Students' Home	1921
7	Ramakrishna Ashrama & Mission Seva Samity	Habiganj	Students' Home	1921
8	Ramakrishna Ashrama	Mymensingh	Students' Home	1921
9	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Dinajpur	Students' Home	1923
10	Ramakrishna Ashrama	Bagerhat	Students' Home	1926

Source: Swami Atmapriyananda (ed.), *Ramakrishna Mission: A Saga of Service*, 2010, pp. 301-302.

## **RKM, a publisher**

The RKM now rank one of the publishers of books in Bangladesh. Three of its most important publishing centres are: Dhaka RKM, Sylhet RKM, and Chittagong RKM. However, the status of the RKM as a publisher should be judged not merely by the number of volumes or the amount of money realized through the sale of books, but by the intellectual, moral and spiritual quality of the books and the beneficial effect they produce on the minds of people. Through its books the RKM disseminates some of the highest and noblest ideals and ideas of the Modern World. ‘A good book is the precious lifeblood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life’ – this famous statement of Milton is literally true of the books published by the RKM. Since its books are published without any commercial motive, they are priced very low. In recent years’ books have become very expensive, beyond the reach of the common people. By keeping the price of books low, often by subsidizing them, the RKM make quality books available to people all over Bangladesh. A new encouraging trend as regard Ramakrishna – Vivekananda literature has helped immensely in the propagation of RKM’s ideology. A few publishers have started publishing some selected books at highly subsidized rates so that even an ordinary person can afford to buy them. Also, more and more organizations are making gifts of books on RKM’s ideology to their friends. The Dhaka RKM centre has started distributing books free of charge among students and teachers. During the seminar on value-oriented education, the



RKM centre of Dhaka took the initiative in publishing books on Vivekananda and morality. Two books named *Biswavivek Vivekananda* and *Noitiko* (in Bengali) were distributed among the students and teachers when this humble researcher read main article in a seminar held on 2 December 2017 at Dhaka RKM. The programme has received an overwhelming response. Thus a great enthusiasm and awakening was generated in the educational institutions by the distribution of such books. Such attempts, if made on a regular basis, will go a long way in spreading the RKM's ideology and in uplifting humanity as regards the quality of life.

#### Salient Features of the RKM's Books

1. It is non-sectarian, nonpolitical in nature, and negative ideas against any religion or sect or community are not projected in this literature.
2. It has maintained high standards in terms of language as well as literary value. Some of the books are prescribed as textbooks. In a reference book of Dhaka University, *The Philosophers of Bengal*, the author Professor Aminul Islam, former Dean, Faculty of Arts, has introduced a chapter on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.
3. It is equally appealing to the intellectuals as well as the masses.
4. Authenticity is given an important place in the literature. Only authentic material is published in books and journals published by the RKM. Miracle mongering, stories based on hearsay, etc., are avoided.

5. The span of Ramakrishna – Vivekananda literature is very wide. It covers a wide range of subjects including history, philosophy, religion, psychology, self-development, mysticism, etc.
6. Even though it is firmly founded on ancient knowledge and wisdom, it is modernistic in approach.

Table 1.3 : Survey of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Book (RVB)

Summary of RVB published by the major publication centres of RKM as in the year 2015

Sl.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
1.	Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Dhaka, Bangladesh	20	English-16, Bengali-4	First title published: <i>The Philosophy of Vivekananda and Future of man</i> by G. C. Dev in 1963.
2.	Ramakrishna Math, Udbodhan, Calcutta	433	English-14, Bengali-416, Hindi-3,	First title published: <i>Ramakrishna</i> (Bengali) in 1899. Popular Books: 1. <i>Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> (Bengali). 2. <i>C. W. of Sw. Vivekananda</i> (Bengali).
3.	Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta	132	English-98, Bengali-31, Hindi-2, Oriya-1	First title published – <i>Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance</i> in 1940. Popular Books: 1. <i>Cultural Heritage of India</i> (6 Vols). 2. <i>Shatarupe Sarada</i> (Bengali). 3. <i>Chinanayak Vivekananda</i> (Bengali).
4.	Sir Ramakrishna Math, Madras	838	English-292, Tamil-333 Telugu-196, Sanskrit-17	First title published: <i>Inspired Talks</i> in 1908 Popular Books: 1. <i>Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> (Eng). 2. <i>Sri Ramakrishna Upadesh Mozighal</i> (Tamil). 3. <i>C. W. of Sw, Vivekananda</i> (Tamil) 16 Vols. 4. <i>C. W. of Sw, Vivekananda</i> (Telugu) 10 Vols.

5.	Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore	82	English-54, Sanskrit-5, Kannada-23	First title published: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (Kannada) in 1925.  Popular Books: Secret of Concentration (English)
6.	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur (W.B)	82	English-7, Bengali-140	First title published: <i>Ma Sarada Devi</i> (Bengali).
7.	Vedanata Society of New York, USA	45	Englis-45	Early Books: Vedanta Philosophy by Sw. Vivekananda.  The Real and Apparent Man by Sw. Vivekananda and Spiritual Unfoldment by Sw. Vivekananda published in 1901. Baker & Taylor Co. started publishing many books of Sw. Vivekananda before Vedanata Society started doing do.
8.	Vedanata Society of Northern California, USA	17	Englis-17	Early Books: <i>Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> in 1912. Book edited by this centre but published from Advaita Ashrama have not been included, eg. <i>Swami Vivekananda in the West. New Discoveries</i> (6 Vols.) by Marie Louise Burke.
9.	Vedanata Society of St. Louis, USA	13	Englis-13	Books edited by this centre but published from Advaita Ashrama have not been included. Early Books: <i>Ethos and Religion</i> in 1942.
10.	Vedanata Society of Southern California, USA	12	Englis-12	Popular Books: <i>Vedanata-Voice of Freedom</i> by Sw. Chetananda.
11.	Ramakrishna Vedanata Centre, UK.	7	English-7	<i>Women Saints of East &amp; West</i> published in 1955.
12.	Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, Japan	26	Japanese-19	Early Books: <i>Selected Verses of Sw. Vivekananda</i> (Japanese) in 1962.  Popular Books: <i>Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> (Japanese).
13.	Ramakrishna Ashrama, Argenina	26	Spanish-26	Early Books: <i>Conferencias de 1934</i> by Swami Vijayananda in 1935  Popular Books: <i>Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> (Spanish).
14.	Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna, Gretz France.	15	French-15	(no details)

15.	Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta	283	English-182, Hindi-53 Nepal-2, English- Sanskrit-46	Early Books- <i>The Atman</i> in 1905. <i>C. W. of Sw, Vivekananda</i> (Eng) in 1907. 1. <i>Selections from C. W. of Sw Vivekananda</i> (Eng). 2. <i>Sw Vivekananda – His call to the Nation</i> . 3. <i>Mind and its Control</i> . 4. <i>Will Power &amp; Its Development</i> . 5. <i>Thoughts of Power</i> .
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Table 1.4 : Books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published from outside the RKM as in the year 2015

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
1.	Sri Sarada Math Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700076.	33	English-13, Bengali-18 Hindi-2	First title published: <i>Bhagini' Nivedita</i> by Pravrajika Muktiprana. The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita (in 4 Vols) was earlier published from there; now it is published by Advaita Ashrama.
2.	Akhii Bharatiya Vivekananda Yuva Mahanandal, 'Bhuban—Bhavan', P.O.Balaram, Dharma Sopan Khardeh, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal — 743121.	74	English-25, Hindi-11 Bengali-29, Sanskrit-1, Oriya-'4, Telugu-2, Assamese-I, Marathi-1	Popular Books: <i>Janaganer Adhikar</i> (Bengali)
3.	Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust, 3 Singarachari Street, Triplicane, Madras-600005	8	English-6, Tamil-1, Hindi-1	Important Books: <i>Comprehensive Biography of Sw. Vivekananda</i> by Prof. S.N.Dhar (in 2 Vols.)
4.	Sri Ma Trust 579, 18-B Chandigarh-160018	7	English-4, Bengali-1 Hindi-2	Sri Ma Darshan (English) in 16 Vols (8-16 Vols under print); Hindi & Bengali each in 16 Vols.

Table 1.5 : Periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published by the centres of RKM as in the year-2015

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Publication Centre	Remarks
1	Prabuddha Bharata	English	Monthly	1896	Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati	Started by Alasinga Perumal and Dr. Nanjunda Rao under the inspiration of Sw. Vivekananda. The first editor was B. Rajam Iyer. From August 1898 to March 1899 it was published from Almora, and from April 1899 onwards it is regularly being published from Mayavati.
2	Udbodhan	Bengali	Monthly	1899	Ramakrishna Math Udbodhan, Calcutta	Inspired by SW. Vivekananda, Sw Trigunatitananda started this journal.
3	Bulletin of Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture	English	Monthly	1950	Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta	
4	Vedanta	English	Bimonthly	1951	Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, UK,	
5	Global Vedanta	English	Bimonthly	1996	Vedanta Society Seattle, USA	
6	Vedanta	French	Quarterly	1965	Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, France	
7	Fumetsu No kotoba (Universal Gospel)	Japanese	Bimonthly	1961	Nippon Vedanta Kyokai Kanajauva, Japan	Started as a monthly in 1961 by RK Vedanta Society, Tokyo. From 1970 it is being published as a bimonthly.

8	The Vedanta Kesari	English	Monthly	1914	Sri Ramakrishna Math. Madras	
9	Samaj Siksha	Bengali	Monthly	1955	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, (West Bengal)	
10	Ashrama Vani	Tamil	Monthly	1982	Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg) Kila Maidan_ Indore- 452006 (M.P)	
11	Viveka Jyoti	Hindi	Quarterly	1963	Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Asarama Raipur (M.P)	
12	Journal of Educational Research & Extension	English	Quarterly	1963	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore	
13.	Nirvana	English	Quarterly	1994	Ramakrishna Mission Singapore	
14.	Prabodhan	Bengali	Quarterly	2015	Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka	

### **Vivekananda History Fund, Dhaka University**

‘Vivekananda History Fund’ is established in the Department of History, Dhaka University on 8 November 2017. <sup>33</sup> RKM, Dhaka in Association with the Vivekananda Study and Philanthropic Centre, USA donated 10 lac Taka to establish this fund. A seven-member committee works to operate aims and

objectives of this fund. The salient aim of this fund is to provide 'Vivekananda Educational Stipend' to the needy students of the department of History. Besides, this VHF organised 'Vivekananda Memorial Lecture' every year to focus on Swami Vivekananda's secular perspective in understanding the religious, social, cultural and educational issues of South Asian studies with an emphasis on Bangladesh society.

The educational Services rendered by the RKM, is going on and growing steadily in size. There is great public appreciation of the work. There is also tremendous demand for more institutions, more schools, colleges, students' home, hostels and so on. Besides, we must confess that there have been many changes in the field of education since Swami Vivekananda passed away more than one hundred years ago, but not as many changes as in other areas of society. One such noticeable change in education is that it is now engaged in preparing human beings for a new type of society, and it is trying to create a new type of human being for it. Interestingly, Swamiji had envisioned a society with a new type of human being in whom knowledge, action, work, and concentration were harmoniously blended, and he proposed a new type of education for achieving this.

The right to education for everyone, guaranteed by the constitution, was Vivekananda's dream, but it is still a far cry from its goal. His idea of continual

or lifelong education, however, has been adopted in many countries already. Vivekananda's cry for the uplift of the downtrodden masses, particularly of the long-neglected women, has evoked a favorable response from different quarters, but societies tailor education to meet their own needs, thereby often robbing the weak of their freedom to determine their own destiny. Unless radical changes are made in all societies the poor will never be able to raise themselves. This was a major concern of the Swamiji.

There is a remarkable similarity between Vivekananda's thoughts and works a century ago and the present concerns of UNESCO.

- His commitment towards universal values and tolerance, his active identification with humanity as a whole.
- The struggle in favour of the poor and destitute, to reduce poverty and to eliminate discrimination against women – reaching the unreached.
- His vision of education, science and culture as the essential instruments of human development.
- The idea that education should be a lifelong process.
- And the need to move away from rote learning.

A major personality of the RKM, Vivekananda pointed out in his first lecture in Asia, on 15 January 1897, "But education has yet to be in the world, and civilization – civilization has begun nowhere yet."<sup>35</sup> This is true. If we consider civilization to be the manifestation of the divine in human beings, as



Vivekananda conceived it to be, no society has made much progress so far. This is why we find that mildness, gentleness, forbearance, tolerance, sympathy and so forth — the signs of a healthy civilization — have not taken root in any society on an appreciable scale, although we prematurely boast of a global village. The lack of basic necessities among the underprivileged all over the world is no less striking than the lack of morality among the educated privileged ones. To squarely meet this great challenge, Vivekananda prescribed ‘man-making and character-building education.’<sup>36</sup> For this reason, if not for anything else, Vivekananda’s thoughts on education ought to be seriously re-examined today.

#### **4.10 Services in Humanity**

The ideology of the RKM finds expression through their multifarious services. These services cover different areas of human need and social welfare such as health, self-employment, women’s welfare, education, inter-faith understanding, moral life, spiritual guidance, and relief to victims of calamities. All these works are conducted as service, service to God in man.

The monks and *brahmacharins* of the RKM already drew the attention of the Bangladeshi people by their selfless service of the poor, the distressed and those afflicted with famine or flood as representations of God.<sup>37</sup>

Besides, the devotees and the followers of the RKM never forgot the poor and never will. Indeed those who are in the RKM are the people who are most dissatisfied and critical of their record of service for the humanity. They always feel that they have not done enough. They must do much more. This is only indicative of the RKM'S deep commitment to the service to humanity.

According to its General Report for the year 1990-91, the RKM spent in that year Taka. 329.2 million on health and education and Taka. 5.9 million for relief and rehabilitation. It spent similar amounts on its miscellaneous welfare programmes.<sup>38</sup> All its services are directed to the benefit of the disadvantaged. Its services are also open to all, irrespective of race and religion.

The service of the RKM is modest, but significant. It is significant because of the spirit that stimulates it. The spirit is: service is worship. Everything the RKM does is part of its spiritual discipline. It is a form of prayer. The poor, the ignorant, the sick, even the wicked – all are God.

#### **4.11 The Beginning**

The history of the RKM'S services to humanity is as old as that of the RKM itself because its first organized relief service was started by Swami Akhandananda after the Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1897. After his triumphal return from the West,

Swamiji at once sent two monastic workers and Rs. 150/- with the instruction to start work immediately and to take forward the work of Swami Akhandananda. Thus began the first relief service of the RKM on 15 May 1897 with the distribution of rice among 18 famine-stricken families at Mahula in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it was a historic event, for it marked a new phase in the Remakrishna Vivekananda movement.

The distribution of rice was continued for several months, and it covered many families in the neighbouring villages as well. Unfortunately the situation became worse when a severe earthquake rocked Mahula and nearby villages. But finally the service was concluded after a mass feast and distribution of a large number of clothes. It may be mentioned here that many of the beneficiaries of this first relief service were Muslims.<sup>40</sup>

Swami Akhandananda drew inspiration for his humanitarian services primarily from his Master. Sri Ramakrishna used to say. If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?<sup>41</sup> While explaining the essential doctrine of the Vaishnava religion, he said, "... compassion for all beings. ... No, no, it is not compassion to Jivas but service to them as Shiva."<sup>42</sup> It was this ideal that Swami Vivekananda later developed into his philosophy of service.

Sri Ramakrishna himself initiated primary relief operations on at least two occasions, viz. at Deoghar and Kalaighat. The Holy mother Sri Sarada Devi too actively participated in famine relief when she was merely eleven years. In 1864, a terrible famine broke out in Bengal. Her father, though not affluent, opened his granary and started a free kitchen at his home for feeding the starving poor people.

#### **4.12 First Plague Relief**

After the famine relief service in Murshidabad the next most important relief work of the RKM was the relief in the plague affected areas of Calcutta in the year 1898. Hearing the tragic news Swamiji rushed to Calcutta from Darjiling and convened a meeting of monastics at the Math, which was then at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house in Belur. He emphatically said, "Look here, we have assembled here in the name of God. We will have to nurse the plague-patients without caring for our lives. If necessary, we are ready to sell away the new Math premises or give up our lives for nursing and treating the plague-affected."<sup>43</sup>

In order to restore normalcy, Swamiji printed a handbill in Bengali and arranged to distribute it free among the inhabitants of Calcutta. The circular read in part as follows

Don't be afraid. There is no reason to become panicky. ... Don't believe in rumors. The British Government does not give vaccination

forcibly. ...let the rich fly away. We are poor; we realize the pang of the poor. ... If you have none to help you, immediately send word to the servants of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. We will extend our help as much as possible by the grace of the Divine Mother.<sup>44</sup>

However, this disease reappeared in the next year, i. e. in 1899. People started dying in large numbers. Again there was panic. The RKM immediately swung action with plague relief work on Good Friday, the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1899, under Swamiji's instruction. Swamiji himself came to live in a poor house to inspire courage in the people and cheer up the workers. The whole management was placed in the hands of Sister Nivedita as President and Secretary, Swami *Sadananda* as the officer-in-chief.<sup>45</sup>

The monastics and volunteers of the RKM worked day and night for the eradication of the disease. They even cleaned the stinking latrines and drains and sprinkled disinfectants. *The Indian Mirror* wrote on 29 April 1900, “ The Ramakrishna Mission ... plague ... volunteers ... are to be met within Calcutta in the dirtiest streets and filthiest busters (settlements), helping to clear plague – spots, encouraging the people, consoling them in their affection and teaching them to live clean lives. And this is done without the expenditure of much money.”<sup>46</sup>

Though the disease subsided in 1899, the next year in 1900, an even more serious attack of plague ravaged Calcutta.<sup>47</sup> The workers of the RKM continued their services till the disease was eradicated. The dedication and sacrificing spirit of the relief workers served as a source of inspiration for posterity.

#### **4.13 Some Major Relief and Rehabilitation Services in Bangladesh**

##### **a. East Bengal Riot Relief**

Riot in Noakhali and Tippera Districts began on the 10 October 1946. As soon as information reached the RKM workers were dispatched to the affected places for inspection and bringing succor to the distressed people. On 22 October a relief centre was started at Chandpur, from which food grains were supplied daily to some 2,000 people. The RKM also took over the management of two relief centres opened there by the Government, which distributed food to nearly 3,000 people everyday. Steps were taken to minister to their other needs too.<sup>48</sup>

The work of the RKM continued from October 1946 to December 1948 and covered 140 villages. The relief was given under the following headings: a) Gratuitous Relief, b) Educational help, c) Medical help, d) Rehabilitation, e) House construction, f) Test Relief Work, g) Spiritual Succor, h) and Pecuniary help. the total expenditure for the aforesaid work was Taka. 3,25,500.<sup>49</sup>

## **b. East Pakistan Refugee Relief**

In 1947, when refugees from East Pakistan started coming to west Bengal, the RKM started relief service for them on a small scale. Many displaced boys and girls were maintained in different institutions of the RKM. A refugee colony was slowly built up near Agartala. A relief centre was also opened at Assam in December 1949.

At the request of the Government of West Bengal, the RKM took up the work of giving immediate relief to the refugees from East Bengal in the Calcutta industrial area in May 1948. Food stuffs, cash and clothing, supplied by the Government, were distributed from two branch centres of the RKM. This work was continued up to 16 March 1949.

Upon the recurrence of communal troubles the following year, relief centres were opened in April 1950 in various places of Khasi and Jainta Hills, Silchar, Bongaon, Malda, Cooch-Bihar, Murshidabad and Patna districts. About 300 refugees were given food and shelter for a number of days in the RKM centres at Dhaka and Narayanganj. In all the above centres thousands of refugees were received and provided with temporary shelter, food, and clothing.<sup>50</sup>

In June 1950, when a large number of refugees were stranded at the Sealdah Station in Calcutta, the RKM served cooked food to about 12,000 refugees every day for a period of nearly 3 months.

Later on, systematic rehabilitation of the refugees was taken up. Thus by 1950, the RKM had succeeded in rehabilitating about 400 families at Agartala, Simurali and 24 Parganas. by 1953, the number had risen to 1,583,25.<sup>50</sup>

### **c. Bangladesh Evacuees' Relief in 1971**

Seldom has human misery been seen on such a scale as when ten million refugees took shelter in India following the Pakistani military crackdown in what was then East Pakistan in March 1971. As if a human tidal wave was swarming over the borders: wild-eyed men and women fleeing homes of torture, and death, all reduced to skeletons through hunger and exhaustion, and some of them carrying gunshot wounds from which they died. Many died on the way from disease, especially old people and children. The refugees lay down wherever they could find an open space, quietly awaiting what fate might bring them.<sup>51</sup>

Since the situation was too stupendous to be treated by any single Government, many voluntary agencies appeared on the scene with relief materials. The RKM started its first camp on 13 April 1971 through its centre at Katihar in Bihar, to



provide shelters, food, and necessities to the incoming refugees. As the RKM is a non-sectarian and non-political philanthropic organization, its workers had an advantage and naturally the Government officials relied heavily on them.

Soon more camps were organized by the RKM of different points of the border ranging from Tripura, Meghalay, down to West Bengal, the total Population under its care at the peak period being 2,20,000. In all the camps run by the RKM, food, clothing medicine, etc. were provided to all the refugees. As cooked food had the risk of getting contaminated, dry rations (rice, lentils, and vegetables) were distributed once a week, sometimes twice a week. Besides, milk was supplied to children and adults every morning. Besides distributing food materials, the RKM also distributed clothes, blankets, utensils, shoes, soap, mosquito-nets, quilts, text books, stationary, and even sports equipment. By December 1973, 1,466 houses were constructed and 248 tube wells were sunk to supply safe drinking water. For the work in Bangladesh proper, the RKM spent well over Rs. 1 crore in cash and kind. Several schools were also set up to provide education for the refugee children, while arrangements were made for their recreation too.

In the whole the RKM could soon bring normalcy among the dazed refugees, who started returning to their homesteads in response to the call from the newly formed Government of Bangladesh asking the refugees to return home.

#### 4.14 Other Services in Bangladesh

Since the inception of Bangladesh in 1971, primary relief as well as rehabilitation services are being conducted almost every year through the centres of RKM in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the services were continued also: a) construction of houses b) distribution of milk powder and clothing, c) medical assistance, d) library, e) student's home, f) giving of texts books to needy students and payment of their examination fees, etc. These were the modes of service there. The RKM center at Dhaka, Marayanganj, Bagerhat, Barishal, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Sylhet, Habiganj, Mymensingh, and Baliati carried on these works.<sup>52</sup>

Table: 1.6: Primary Relief Service by the RKM in Bangladesh since its inception.

Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief service
1 <sup>st</sup>	1897 - 1907	Bengal (East & West)	Famine, Plague, Earthquake
2 <sup>nd</sup>	1907 – 1917	Bengal (East & West)	Famine, Flood
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1917 – 1927	Bengal (East & West)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical
4 <sup>th</sup>	1927 – 1937	Bengal (East & West)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Medical, Riot
5 <sup>th</sup>	1937 – 1947	Bengal (East & West)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Fire Medical, Refugee
6 <sup>th</sup>	1947 – 1957	Bengal (East & Pakistan)	Flood, Medical, Riot

7 <sup>th</sup>	1957 – 1967	Bangladesh (Dhaka)	Scarcity
8 <sup>th</sup>	1967 – 1987	Bangladesh	Flood, Cyclone
9 <sup>th</sup>	1987 – 1997	Bangladesh	Flood, Cyclone
10 <sup>th</sup>	1997 – 2009	Bangladesh	Cyclone, Flood, Distress, Fire, Winter

Source: *Report of the RKM Relief Works in East Bengal, etc. Howrah: Belur Math, 1964 pp. 1-3, 1968-88, p. 82, 1971-75, p. 10.*

#### **4.15 Medical Service**

The RKM has a glorious record of a century of medical service. Its glory lies in the spirit with which patients are served. Serving one patient with the right attitude, truly considering him a God, is far superior to serving a multitude without it.

Apart from the centers engaged in medical service, various RKM centers started charitable out-patient dispensaries, which, in the course of time, developed into well-equipped dispensaries providing allopathic and/or homeopathic treatment.<sup>53</sup>

The health care centres and dispensaries are situated in cities, towns, and even in little villages of Bangladesh and are meant primarily for the poor. One of the special features of the RKM institutions is their achievement of the best possible results and a high standard of service – both technical and humanitarian with the

least possible expenditure. This is partly due to the honorary services offered by local medical practitioners. The personal care taken by the monks adds to this economy and efficiency. In many health centres, monks act not only as administrators but also as nurses, compounders, dressers, and doctors. And because of the presence of these monks, who consider their duty a service to God, and attend personally to the details and bestow sympathy to all irrespective of the caste, creed, and social status of the patient, the patients feel quite at home in these institutions, a fact which explains their continuous public acceptance.

The RKM's services to humanity, from their very humble beginning in the last century, gradually assumed massive dimensions over the past few decades. It should be borne in mind that service is a component of the RKM,s spiritual disciplines – be it in the field of education, in treating the diseased, in providing help and refuge to those ravaged by natural calamities or sudden devastation, they followed the ideal set before them by Sri Ramakrishna and swami Vivekananda – ‘service of man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God.’ And in this kind of service, Sister Nivedita could see yet another historical significance. She wrote, “For the first time in history of Bengal an order of monks found themselves banded with their faces set primarily toward evolution of new forms of civic duty.”<sup>54</sup> By their multifarious services the RKM preaches the worship of God in the form of suffering beings without any destination

whatsoever. Since the RKM provides a wonderful opportunity to exercise one's power of benevolence over other fellow beings and thus become blessed, more and more people should actively participate in the service activities with a view to transforming this world of ours into a better place.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>2</sup>. *Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, their History, Ideals and Activities*, office of General Secretary (Howrah, West Bengal, India: 2014) pp. 16-17. [Hereafter *Ideals and Activities*].
- <sup>3</sup>. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), Vol. 2, [Hence forth *CWSV*].
- <sup>4</sup>. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) p. 247.
- <sup>5</sup>. Swami Gambhirananda, *The History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) P. 95.
- <sup>6</sup>. Vide the Presidential Address of Swami Shivananda in *The Ramakrishna Math and Mission convention* (Howrah: RKM, 1926), P.34.
- <sup>7</sup>. *Activities of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, office of Secretary (Dhaka: RKM, 2016) p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup>. *CWSV*, Vol. 2, p. 374.
- <sup>9</sup>. For a detailed discussion on all the three attitudes, see Allan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1993).
- <sup>10</sup>. A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), p. 37.
- <sup>11</sup>. This discussion on Inclusivism is based on Alan Race, op. cit., p. 38-69.
- <sup>12</sup>. John Hick, quoted in Grant S. Shockley, 'Religious Pluralism and Religion Education Norma H. Thompson, *Religious Pluralism and Religious Education* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1988) p. 141.

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- <sup>14</sup>. John Hick, *God has Many Names* (London: Paul and Macmillan, 1980) p. 141.
- <sup>15</sup>. *CWSV*, Vol. 2, p. 382.
- <sup>16</sup>. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta, Udbodhan Office, 1994) p. 154-155.
- <sup>17</sup>. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. By Swami Jagadananda (Madras: RKM, 1991) Vol. 2, p. 596.
- <sup>18</sup>. Swami Kirtidananda (ed.), *Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal Throuth the Ages* [Kankhal: RKM (n. d.)] p.20-21.
- <sup>19</sup>. *CWSV*, Vol. 2., p.68.
- <sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4. P.385.
- <sup>21</sup>. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1. P. 28.
- <sup>22</sup>. Swami Atmapriyananda (ed.), *Ramakrishna Mission: A Saga of Service* (Kolkata: Belur Math, 2010) p. 273-274. [Hereafter *RKM; A Saga of Service*]
- <sup>23</sup>. *CWSV*, Vol. 7, p. 147-148.
- <sup>24</sup>. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 302.
- <sup>25</sup>. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, P. 38.
- <sup>26</sup>. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Chennai: RKM) p. 851 [Hereafter *The Gospel*].
- <sup>27</sup>. *CWSV*, Vol. 2, P. 15.
- <sup>28</sup>. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 20.
- <sup>29</sup>. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 388.
- <sup>30</sup>. Edgar Faure, *et. al.*, *Learning to be* (Paris: Unesco, 1972) p. 156.
- <sup>31</sup>. *RKM; A Saga of Service*, p. 287.
- <sup>32</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- <sup>33</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
- <sup>34</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
- <sup>35</sup>. *CWSV*, vol. 3, p.114.

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- <sup>36</sup>. In this connection we can cite the views of some historians. Will and Ariel Durant, in their *The Lessons of History*, said, 'Evolution in men during recorded time has been social rather than biological: it has proceeded not by heritable variations in the species, but mostly by economic, political, intellectual and moral innovation transmitted to individuals and generations by imitation, custom or education' (Will Durant and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968, p. 34).
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- <sup>41</sup>. *The Gospel*, p. 407.
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- <sup>43</sup>. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha (Bengali)* [Calcutta: 1387 BS], Vol. 4, p. 129.
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- <sup>45</sup>. *His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Vol. 3, p. 360.
- <sup>46</sup>. *Indian Mirror* (daily), 29 April 1898.
- <sup>47</sup>. Swami Saradananda, in his letter dated 11 April, 1900, wrote about the state of affairs to Sister Nivedita: 'The Plague, the famine, the cholera, the small pox is doing their harvest.'
- <sup>48</sup>. *Report of the Ramakrishna Mission Relief Works in East Bengal*, etc. (1946-1951), issued by the General Secretary, Belur Math, Howrah, May 1954.
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- <sup>51</sup>. Swami Lokeshwarananda, 'The Ramakrishna Mission's Bangladesh Relief Work', in *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1974, pp. 109-16.
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## Chapter Five

### 5.1 Major Personalities of the RKM in Bangladesh

#### a. Sri Ramakrishna's visit to Bangladesh

Sri Ramakrishna came to Bengal, which is now Bangladesh in 1870.<sup>1</sup> And as a preparation of the arrival of the Master in Bangladesh to enlighten the people of the country, some of his intimate devotees were active in different places of Bangladesh. Among them Durga Charan Nag of Narayangoj, Moulana Girish Chandra Sen of Narshindi, Jogeswari Bhairabi Brahmani of Narail, Dr. Abdul Wajij of Satkhira, Ashwini Kumar Dutta and Braja Mohan Dutta of Barishal, Michael Modhusudhan Dutta and Shishir Kumar Ghosh of Jessore, Krishna Kumar Mitra of Tangail, and Professor of Jagannath college Nittagopal Goswami are prominent.<sup>2</sup> These well-known figures were born in Bangladesh and they created a spiritual ambience in Bangladesh which expedited the arrival of Sri Ramakrishna in Bangladesh.

There were reasons behind the arrival of Mathurbabu, son-in-law of Rani Rashmoni, along with his spiritual guide Sri Ramakrishna in Tala and Shonaberi of Satkhira district. The predecessors of Mathurbabu used to receive *mantra-diksha* from a Brahmin family who were the inhabitants of Tala region. The next runner of this Brahmin family was Bharat Chakraborty who was a man of liberal thinking and became very intimate with the lower-caste Hindus. And



other Brahmins considered Bharat as a threat for them and started to exploit him in many ways.<sup>3</sup> Bharat did not get the support from conservative Hindus; rather he was an outcaste from society. People of Brahmin family had been ostracized from the Brahmin Society. In addition, chaos had occurred regarding the allocation of land. Mathurbabu was invited to come to *Tala-Majhiara* village to sort out this eccentric situation peacefully. Mathurbabu accepted the invitation and was anxious about the way out of this clan-based society in Hindu community. Suddenly, he thought that Sri Ramakrishna could put an end to this crisis because he is spiritually enlightened. Mathurbabu was devoted and close to Sri Ramakrishna. He invited the Master to come to *Tala* and *Shonabere*, and the Master agreed to come there. The visit might have taken place in November or December 1870.

People from all walks rushed to *Tala-Majhiara* village to see him once. Sri Ramakrishna and Mathurbabu was there for a week. A special occasion kicked off centering Sri Ramakrishna. The conservative Brahman society came in touch with the Bharat's family together by the presence of Sri Ramakrishna. Besides, the dispute regarding the allocation of land was also solved. Mathurbabu arranged a repast for Brahman and all other village people by the will of Sri Ramakrishna. All classes of people ate together sitting in a row. Mathurbabu gifted Brahman with many things including excellent an attire. Similarly poor people were also gifted with attire and money.<sup>4</sup> Then, Sri

Ramakrishna introduced his ideology in Bangladesh especially at *Tala-Majhiara* village by Mathurbabu.

### **b. Journey to Shonabere**

Shonabere village belonged *kolaroa* thana under Satkhira district. Ramakrishna and Mathur were followed by a stream of people and many horses, elephants and doollies. They came on the bank of the river *Kaoptakkha* in *Patkelghata* through *Kumira* village. Then, they crossed the river by a ferry, where a large bridge has been built now, and *Patkelghata* market. Villagers welcomed the center of this procession, Ramakrishna by standing in a row and placing deep respect. Ramakrishna and Mathur were in doolie and horse-back respectively. As soon as the doolie of Ramakrishna reached the *Shonabere*, many people welcomed him cordially and politely.<sup>5</sup>

### **c. Return Journey to Dakshineswar**

Mathurbabu decided to go to Dakshineswar by a different route. Sri Ramakrishna left plethora of memory there, and started his journey to Dakshineswar. Then, they reached *Chanduria* which was 9 km away from *Shonabere*. From there they reached *Gobordanga* crossing *Ichamoti* river. Then, they crossed river Jamuna and reached *Tebaberya* (Habra) through *Laxmipur, Bergum, Janakul*. The distance between Laxmipur and Habra is 9 km. They stayed there for a night because of the difficulties of transport and the rest of horses. Habra is attached with Jessore Road. Later on, they reached

Dakshineswar through Jessore Road without any hassle.<sup>6</sup> It is informed that Ramakrishna and Mathur went to Dakshineswar from Chanduria terminal by go-cart.

## **5.2 Swami Vivekananda**

### **a. Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Bangladesh**

Swamiji had a lecture tour in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) in 1901. By March 1901, Swamiji was little free to respond to the pressing invitations that had come from Dacca and elsewhere in East Bengal, which he could not refuse. On the other hand, his widow mother had expressed an earnest desire to visit the holy palaces in East Bengal and Assam. Still there was another reason for this visit was his declined health. He had been suffering from both asthma and diabetes. So, it was an advice by the doctor that it was necessary to change the air for the good of the health. These three were reasons of his tour, for on 26 January he had written to Mrs. Ole Bull, "I am going to take my mother on pilgrimage... this is the one great wish of a Hindu widow. I have brought only misery to my people all my life. I am trying to fulfill this one wish of hers."<sup>7</sup> On 18 March 1901, Swamiji left Calcutta for East Bengal with a team of his sannyasi disciples. Swami Brahmananda, the first president of the Ramakrishna Order wrote in his diary on 18 March, "Swamijee Nityananda and five others started for Dacca this evening."<sup>8</sup> He further wrote, "Rs 30/=, paid to Swamijee as asked by him."<sup>9</sup>

He travelled by train to Goalundo, from where he took a steamer to Narayanganj on the following day. When the steamer reached Narayanganj, he was received by some gentlemen who had come from Dacca as representatives of the reception committee there. When the train reached Dacca in the afternoon of March 19, Babu Ishwarchandra Ghosh, the renowned pleader, and Babu Gaganchandra Ghosh received him in the name of the people of the city. The large crowd at the railway station greeted him with enthusiastic shouts of "Victory to Ramakrishna Deva!" Many students of the various educational institutions of the city were present. The procession went along the main thoroughfares until it reached the mansion of the late Babu Mohinimohan Das, zemindar. This had been appointed for the Swami's use during his sojourn at Dacca. Here scores of people had gathered to have sight of him. At Dacca hundreds of people gathered daily to see the Swami and hear his religious discourses. For three days consecutively regular religious discussions were held in the afternoon. On March 24, his mother, aunt, sister, and party left Calcutta and reached Narayanganj on the 25<sup>th</sup> to join the Swami's party. The Swami passed that night in a houseboat on the Sitalakshya. Next day, taking another boat, the whole party left for Langalbandha, arriving there the following morning. The Sitalakshya leads into the Dhaleshwari, and that leads into the Brahmaputra, Tradition has sanctified Langalbandha on account of its connection with the Puranic legend of Shri Parashurama. The festival of Budhashtami draws a large number of pilgrims to the place. The Swami and his

party went to Langalbandha to bathe into Brahmaputra on that holy occasion. After the ritual bathing they returned to Dacca, having thoroughly enjoyed the pilgrimage.

On his return, his place of stay at Dacca was as before, daily besieged by many visitors. To them he gave instructions at all hours of the day, particularly for two or three hours in the afternoon. He spoke to them on Janna, Bhakti, faith, renunciation, discrimination, non-attachment, Karma-Yoga, and on other subjects. All were charmed by his gracious personality and brilliant mind. They found his discourses full of living faith and devotion, and infused with intense vitality and power.

As for the Swami himself, he was charmed by the beauty of East Bengal. In this regard he wrote to Mrs. Bull on March 20, "At Last I am in Eastern Bengal. This is the first time I am here and never before knew — Bengal was so beautiful. You ought to have seen the rivers here regular rolling oceans of fresh water, and everything go green-continual production. The villages are the cleanest and pretties in all India."<sup>10</sup>

Again on March 29 he wrote to her

My mother, aunt, and cousin came over five days ago to Dacca, as there was great sacred bath in the Brahmaputra river. Whenever a particular conjunction

of planets takes place, which is very rare, a huge concourse of people gather on the river on a particular spot. This year there have been more than a hundred thousand people; for miles the river was covered with boats. The river, though nearly a mile broad at the place, was one mass of mud! But it was enough, so we had our bath and puja (worship), and all that, I am rather enjoying Dacca. I am going to take my mother and the other ladies to Chandranath, a holy place at the easternmost corner of Bengal [Bangladesh].<sup>11</sup>

At the earnest request of the educated community of Dacca, the Swami gave a lecture on March 30, lasting an hour. Some two thousand people assembled at Jagannath College to hear him. His subject was “What Have I Learnt?” Next day he again lectured, this time on the open *maidan* adjoining Pogose School. He spoke for about two hours on “The Religion We Are Born In”. The following is translated from a report in Bengali by a disciple, and it contains the substance of the first lecture:

### **What Have I Learnt?**

First of all, I must express my pleasure at the opportunity afforded me of coming to Eastern Bengal to acquire an intimate knowledge of this part of the country, which I hitherto lacked in spite of my wanderings through many civilized countries of the West, as well as my gratification at the sight of the majestic rivers, wide fertile plains, and picturesque villages in this, my own country of Bengal, which I had not the good fortune of seeing for myself before. I did not know that there was everywhere in my country of Bengal –

on land and water –so much beauty and charm. But this much has been my gain that after seeing the various countries of the worlds I can now more appreciate the beauties of my own land.

In the same way also, in search of religion, I had travelled among various sects – sects which had taken up the ideals of foreign nations as their own, and I had begged at the door of others, not knowing then that in the religion of my country, in our national religion, there was so much beauty and grandeur. It is now many years since I found Hinduism to be the most perfectly satisfying religion in the world. Hence I feel sad at heart when I see existing among my own countrymen, professing a peerless faith, such a widespread indifference to our religion – though I am very well aware of the unfavorable materialistic conditions in which they pass their lives – owing to the diffusion of European modes of thoughts in this, our great motherland.

There are among us at the present day certain reformers who want to reform our religion or rather turn it topsy-turvy with a view to the regeneration of the Hindu nation. There are, no doubt, some thoughtful people among them, but there are also many who follow others blindly and act most foolishly, not knowing what they are about. This class of reformers is very enthusiastic in introducing foreign ideas into our religion. They have taken hold of the world “idolatry” and aver that Hinduism is not true, because it is idolatrous. They never seek to find out what this so – called “idolatry” is, whether it is good or bad; only taking their cue from others, they are bold enough to shout down Hinduism as untrue. There is another class of men among us who is intent

upon giving some slippery scientific explanations for any and every Hindu custom, rite etc., and who are always talking of electricity, magnetism, air vibration, and all that sort of thing. Who knows but they will perhaps someday define God Himself as nothing but a mass of electric vibrations! However, Mother blesses them all! She it is who is having her work done in various ways through multifarious and tendencies.

In contradistinction to these, there is that ancient class who say, “I do not know, I do not care to know or understand all these your hair – splitting ratiocinations; I want God, I want the Atman, I want to go to that Beyond, where there is no universe, where there is no pleasure or pain, where dwells the Bliss Supreme”; who say, “I believe in salvation by bathing in the holy Ganga with faith”, who say, “whomsoever you may worship with singleness of faith and devotion as the one God of the universe, in whatsoever form as Shiva, Rama, Vishnu, etc., you will get Moksha”; to that sturdy ancient class I am proud to belong.

Then there is a sect who advises us to follow God and the world together. They are not sincere; they do not express what they feel in their hearts. What is the teaching of the Great Ones?—“Where there is Rama, there is no Kama; where there is Kama, there Rama is not. Night and day can never exist together.” The voice of the ancient sages proclaims to us. “If you desire to attain God, you will have to renounce Kama – Kanchana (lust and possession). The Samsara is unreal, hollow, void of substance. Unless you give it up, you can never reach God, try however you may. If you cannot do that own that,



you are weak, but by no means lower the Ideal. Do not cover the corrupting corpse with leaves of gold!” So according to them, if you want to gain spirituality, to attain God, the first thing that you have to do is to give up this playing “hide – and – seek with your ideas”, this dishonesty, this “theft within the chamber of thought”.

What have I learnt? What have I learnt from this ancient sect? I have learnt:

[Sanskrit]

“Verily, three there are rare to obtain and come only through the grace of God – human birth, desire to obtain Moksha, and the company of the great – souled ones.” The first thing needed is Manushyatva, human birth, because it only is favorable to the attainment of Mukti. The next is Mumukshutva. Though our means of realisation vary according to the difference in sects and individuals – though different individuals can lay claim to their special rights and means to gain knowledge, which vary according to their different stations in life – yet it can be said in general without fear of contradiction that without this Mumukshutva, realisation of God is impossible. What is Mumukshutva? it is the strong desire for Moksha – earnest yearning to get out of the sphere of pain and pleasure – utter disgust for the world. When that intense burning desire to see God comes, then you should know that you are entitled to the realisation of the Supreme.

Then another thing is necessary, and that is the coming in direct contact with the Mahapurushas, and thus moulding our lives in accordance with those of the great – souled ones who have reached the Goal. Even disgust for the world

and a burning desire for God are not sufficient. Initiation by the Guru is necessary. Why? Because it is the bringing of yourself into connection with that great source of power which has been handed down through generations from one Guru to another, in uninterrupted succession. The devotee must seek and accept the Guru or spiritual preceptor as his counselor, philosopher, friend and guide. In short, the Guru is the sine qua non of progress in the path of spirituality. Whom then shall I accept as my Guru? [Sanskrit]—“He who is versed in the Vedas, without taint, unhurt by desire, he who is the best of the knowers of Brahman.” Shrotriya – he who is not only learned in the Shastras, but who knows their subtle secrets, who has realised their true import in his life. “Reading merely the various scriptures, they have become only parrots, and not Pandits. He indeed has become a Pandit who has gained Prema (Divine Love) by reading even one word of the Shastras.” Mere book – learned Pandits are of no avail. Nowadays, everyone wants to be a Guru; even a poor beggar wants to make a gift of a lakh of rupees! Then the Guru must be without a touch of taint; and he must be Akamahata – unhurt by any desire – he should have no other motive except that of purely doing good to others, he should be an ocean of mercy – without –reason and not impart religious teaching with a view to gaining name or fame, or anything pertaining to selfish interest. And he must be the intense knower of Brahman, that is, one who has realised Brahman even as tangibly as an Amalaka – fruit in the palm of the hand. Such is the Guru, says the Shruti. When spiritual union is established with such a Guru, then comes realisation of God – then god – vision becomes easy of attainment.

After initiation there should be in the aspirant after Truth, Abhyasa or earnest and repeated attempt at practical application of the Truth by prescribed means of constant meditation upon the Chosen Ideal. Even if you have a burning thirst for God, or have gained the Guru, unless you have along with it Abhyasa, unless you practice what you have been taught, you cannot get realisation. When all these are firmly established in you, then you will reach the Goal.

Therefore, I say unto you, as Hindus, as descendants of the glorious Aryans, do not forget the great ideal of our religion, that great ideal of the Hindus, which is, to go beyond this Samsara – not only to renounce the world, but to give up heaven too; ay, not only to give up evil, but to give up good too; and thus to go beyond all, beyond this phenomenal existence, and ultimately realise the Sat – Chit – Ananda Brahman – the Absolute Existence – Knowledge – Bliss, which is Brahman.<sup>12</sup>

### **THE RELIGION WE ARE BORN IN**

At an open – air meeting convened at Dacca, on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1901, the Swamiji spoke in English for two hours on the above subject before a vast audience. The following is a translation of the lecture from a Bengali report of a disciple:

In the remote past, our country made gigantic advances in spiritual ideas. Let us, today, bring before our mind's eye that ancient history. But the one great danger in meditating over long – past greatness is that we cease to exert ourselves for new things, and content ourselves with vegetating upon that by –

gone ancestral glory and priding ourselves upon it. We should guard against that. In ancient times there were, no doubt, many Rishis and Maharshis who came face to face with Truth. But if this recalling of our ancient greatness is to be of real benefit, we too must become Rishis like them. Ay, not only that, but it is my firm conviction that we shall be even greater Rishis than any that our history presents to us. In the past, signal was our attainments – I glory in them, and I feel proud in thinking of them. I am not even in despair at seeing the present degradation, and I am full of hope in picturing to my mind what is to come in the future. Why? Because I know the seed undergoes a complete transformation, ay, the seed as seed is seemingly destroyed before it develops into a tree. In the same way, in the midst of our present degradation lies, only dormant for a time, the potentiality of the future greatness of our religion, ready to spring up again, perhaps more mighty and glorious than ever before.

Now let us consider what are the common grounds of agreement in the religion we are born in. At first sight we undeniably find various differences among our sects. Some are Advaitists, some are Vishishtadvaitists, and others are Dvaitists. Some believe in Incarnations of God, some in image – worship, while others are upholders of the doctrine of the Formless. Then as to customs also, various differences are known to exist. The Jats are not out casted even if they marry among the Mohammedans and Christians. They can enter into any Hindu temple without hindrance. In many villages in the Punjab, one who does not eat swine will hardly be considered a Hindu. In Nepal, a Brahmin can marry in the four Varnas; while in Bengal, a Brahmin cannot marry even among the subdivisions of his own caste. So on and so forth. But in the midst of all these differences we note one point of unity among all Hindus, and it is

this, that no Hindu eats beef. In the same way, there is a great common ground of unity underlying the various forms and sects of our religion.

First, in discussing the scriptures, one fact stands out prominently – that only those religions which had one or many scriptures of their own as their basis advanced by leaps and bounds and survive to the present day notwithstanding all the persecution and repression hurled against them. The Greek religion, with all its beauty, died out in the absence of any scripture to support it; but the religion of the Jews stands undiminished in its power, being based upon the authority of the Old Testament. The same is the case with the Hindu religion, with its scripture, the Vedas, the oldest in the world. The Vedas are divided into the Karma Kanda and the Jnana Kanda. Whether for good or for evil, the Karma Kanda has fallen into disuse in India, though there are some Brahmins in the Deccan who still perform Yajnas now and then with the sacrifice of goats; and also we find here and there, traces of the Vedic Kriya Kanda in the Mantras used in connection with our marriage and Shradha ceremonies, etc. But there is no chance of its being rehabilitated on its original footing.

Kumarila Bhatta once tried to do so, but he was not successful in his attempt.

The Jnana Kanda of the Vedas comprises the Upanishads and is known by the name of Vedanta, the pinnacle of the Shrutis, as it is called. Wherever you find the Acharyas quoting a passage from the Shrutis, it is invariably from the Upanishads. The Vedanta is now the religion of the Hindus. If any sect in India wants to have its ideas established with a firm hold on the people it must base them on the authority of the Vedanta. They all have to do it, whether they are Dvaitists or Advaitists. Even the Vaishnavas have to go to Gopalatapini

Upanishad to prove the truth of their own theories. If a new sect does not find anything in the Shrutis in confirmation of its ideas, it will go even to the length of manufacturing a new Upanishad, and making it pass current as one of the old original productions. There have been many such in the past.

Now as to the Vedas, the Hindus believe that they are not mere books composed by men in some remote age. They hold them to be an accumulated mass of endless divine wisdom, which is sometimes manifested and at other times remains unmanifested. Commentator Sayanacharya says somewhere in his works [Sanskrit]—“Who created the whole universe out of the knowledge of the Vedas”, no one has ever seen the composer of the Vedas, and it is impossible to imagine one. The Rishis were only the discoverers of the Mantras or Eternal Laws; they merely came face to face with the Vedas, the infinite mine of knowledge, which has been there from time without beginning.

Who are these Rishis? Vatsyayana says, “He who has attained through proper means the direct realisation of Dharma, he alone can be a Rishi even if he is a Mlechchha by birth.” Thus it is that in ancient times, Vasishtha, born of an illegitimate union, Vyasa, the son of a fisherwoman, Narada, the son of a maidservant with uncertain parentage, and many others of like nature attained to Rishihood. Truly speaking, it comes to this then, that no distinction should be made with one who has realised the truth. If the persons just named all became Rishis, then, O ye kulin Brahmins of the present day, how much greater Rishis you can become! Strive after that Rishihood, stop not till you

have attained the goal, and the whole world will of itself bow at your feet! Be a Rishi – that is the secret of power.

This Veda is our only authority, and everyone has the right to it.

[Sanskrit]

- Thus says the Shukla Yajur Veda (XXVI.2). Can you show any authority from this Veda of ours that everyone has not the right to it? The Puranas, no doubt, say that a certain caste has the right to such and such a recension of the Vedas, or a certain caste has no right to study them, or that this portion of the Vedas is for the satya Yuga and that portion is for the Kali Yuga. But, mark you, the Veda does not say so; it is only your Puranas that do so. But can the servant dictate to the master? The Smritis, Puranas, Tantras – all these are acceptable only so far as they agree with the Vedas; and wherever they are contradictory, they are to be rejected as unreliable. But nowadays we have put the Puranas on even a higher pedestal than the Vedas! The study of the Vedas has almost disappeared from Bengal. How I wish that day will soon come when in every home the Veda will be worshipped together with Shalagrama, the household Deity, when the young, the old and the women will inaugurate the worship of the Veda!

I have no faith in the theories advanced by Western savants with regard to the Vedas. They are today fixing the antiquity of the Vedas at a certain period, and again tomorrow upsetting it and bringing it one thousand years forward, and so on. However, about the Puranas, I have told you that they are authoritative only in so far as they agree with the Vedas, otherwise not. In the Puranas we find many things which do not agree with the Vedas. As for instance, it is written in the Puranas that someone lived ten thousand years, another twenty

thousand years, but in the Vedas we find: [Sanskrit]—“Man lives indeed a hundred years.” Which are we to accept in this case? Certainly the Vedas. Notwithstanding statements like these, I do not depreciate the Puranas. They contain many beautiful and illuminating teachings and words of wisdom on Yoga, Bhakti, Jnana, and Karma; those, of course, we should accept. Then there are the Tantras. The real meaning of the word Tantra is Shastra, as for example, Kapila Tantra. But the word Tantra is Shastra, as for example, Kapila Tantra. But the word Tantra is generally used in a limited sense. Under the sway of kings who took up Buddhism and preached broadcast the doctrine of Ahimsa, the performances of the Vedic Yaga – yajnas became a thing of the past, and no one could kill any animal in sacrifice for fear of the king. But subsequently amongst the Buddhists themselves – who were converts from Hinduism – the best parts of these Yaga – yajnas were taken up, and practised in secret. From these sprang up the Tantras. Barring some of the abominable things in the Tantras, such as the Vamachara etc., the Tantras are not so bad as people are inclined to think. There are many high and sublime Vedantic thoughts in them. In fact, the Brahmana portions of the Vedas were modified a little and incorporated into the body of the Tantras. All the forms of our worship and the ceremonials of the present day, comprising the Karma Kanda, are observed in accordance with the Tantras.

Now let us discuss the principles of our religion a little. Notwithstanding the differences and controversies existing among our various sects, there are in them, too, several grounds of unity. First, almost all of them admit the existence of three things – three entities – Ishvara, Atman, and the Jagat.



Ishvara is He who is eternally creating, preserving and destroying the whole universe. Excepting the Sankhyas, all the others believe in this. Then the doctrine of the Atman and the reincarnation of the soul; it maintains that innumerable individual souls, having taken body after body again and again, go round in the wheel of birth and death according to their respective Karmas; this is Samsaravada, or as it is commonly called the doctrine rebirth. Then there is the jagat or universe without beginning and without end. Though some hold these three as different phases of one only, and some others as three distinctly different entities, and others again in various others ways, yet they are all unanimous in believing in these three.

Here I should ask you to remember that Hindus, from time immemorial, knew the Atman as separate from Manas, mind. But the Occidentals could never soar beyond the mind. The West knows the universe to be full of happiness, and as such, it is to them a place where they can enjoy the most; but the East is born with the conviction that this Samsara, this ever – changing existence, is full of misery, and as such, it is nothing, nothing but unreal, not worth bartering the soul for its ephemeral joys and possessions. For this very reason, the West is ever especially adroit in organised action, and so also the East is ever bold in search of the mysteries of the internal world.

Let us, however, turn now to one or two other aspects of Hinduism. There is the doctrine of the Incarnations of God. In the Vedas we find mention of Matsya Avatara, the Fish Incarnation only. Whether all believe in this doctrine or not is not the point; the real meaning, however, of this Avataravada is the

worship of Man – to see God in man is the real God – vision. The Hindu does not go through nature to nature’s God – he goes to the God of man through Man.

Then there is image – worship. Except the five Devatas who are to be worshipped in every auspicious Karma as enjoined in our Shastras, all the other Devatas are merely the names of certain states held by them. But again, these five Devatas are nothing but the different names of the one God only. This external worship of images has, however, been described in all our shastras as the lowest of all the low forms of worship. But that does not mean that it is a wrong thing to do. Despite the many iniquities that have found entrance into the practices of image – worship as it is in vogue now, I do not condemn it. Ay, where would I have been if I had not been blessed with the dust of the holy feet of that orthodox, image – worshipping Brahmin!

Those reformers who preach against image – worship, or what they denounce as idolatry – to them I say, “Brothers, if you are fit to worship God – without – form discarding all external help, do so, but why do you condemn others who cannot do the same? A beautiful, large edifice, the glorious relic of a hoary antiquity has, out of neglect or disuse, fallen into a dilapidated condition; accumulations of dirt and dust may be lying everywhere within it, may be, some portions are tumbling down to the ground. What will you do to it? Will you take in hand the necessary cleansing and repairs and thus restore the old, or will you pull the whole edifice down to the ground and seek to build another in its place, after a sordid modern plan whose permanence has yet to

be established? We have to reform it, which truly means to make ready or perfect by necessary cleansing and repairs, not by demolishing the whole thing. There the function of reform ends. When the work of renovating the old is finished, what further necessity does it serve? Do that if you can, if not, hands off!” The band of reformers in our country wants, on the contrary, to build up a separate sect of their own. They have, however, done good work; may the blessings of God be showered on their heads! But why should you, Hindus, want to separate yourselves from the great common fold? Why should you feel ashamed to take the name of Hindu, which is your greatest and most glorious possession? This national ship of ours, ye children of the Immortals, my countrymen, has been playing for ages, carrying civilisation and enriching the whole world with its inestimable treasures. For scores of shining centuries this national ship of ours has been ferrying across the ocean of life, and has taken millions of souls to the other shore, beyond all misery. But today it may have sprung a leak and got damaged, through your own fault or whatever cause it matters not. What would you, who have placed yourselves in it, do now? Would you go about cursing it and quarrelling among yourselves! Would you not all unite together and put your best efforts to stop the holes? Let us all gladly give our hearts’ blood to do this; and if we fail in the attempt, let us all sink and die together, with blessings and not curses on our lips.

And to the Brahmins I say, “Vain is your pride of birth and ancestry. Shake it off. Brahminhood, according to your Shastras, you have no more now, because you have for so long lived under Mlechchha kings. If you at all believe in the words of your own ancestors, then go this very moment and

make expiation by entering into the slow fire kindled by Tusha (husks), like that old Kumarila Bhatta, who with the purpose of ousting the Buddhists first became a disciple of the Buddhists and then defeating them in argument became the cause of death to many, and subsequently entered the Tushanala to expiate his sins. If you are not bold enough to do that, then admit your weakness and stretch forth a helping hand, and open the gates of knowledge to one and all, and give the downtrodden masses once more their just and legitimate rights and privileges.”<sup>13</sup>

Both lectures were received with tremendous applause, and as a result of them hundreds were led to make a diligent study of his message and his plans for the regeneration of Bengal.

There was a touching incident while the Swami was at Dacca. One day a young prostitute bedecked with jewelry came in a phaeton with her mother to see him. Jatinbabu, the host, and the disciples hesitated to admit the visitors at first. However, when the Swami heard that they had come, he at once accorded them an interview. After they had saluted him and sat down, the daughter told the Swami that she was suffering from asthma and begged him for some medicine to cure her. The Swami expressed his sympathy and replied, “See here, mother! I too am suffering from asthma and have not been able to cure myself. I wish I could do something for you.”<sup>14</sup> These words, spoken with childlike simplicity and living kindness, touched the two women as well as the others present.

From Dacca the Swami went on a visit to Deobhog, the home village of Nag Mahashaya. He spoke later about the visit to his disciple, Sharatchandra Chakravarty, as follows

His [Nag Mahashaya's] wife fed me with many delicacies prepared by her own hand. The house is charming, like a peace retreat. There I took a swimming bath in a village pond. After that I had such a sound sleep that I awoke at half past two in the afternoon. Of the few days I had sound sleep in my life, that in Nag Mahashaya's house was one. Rising from sleep I had a plentiful repast. Nag Mahashaya's wife presented me a cloth which I tied round my head as a turban and started for Dacca. I found that the photograph of Nag Mahashaya was being worshipped there. The place where his remains lie interred ought to be well kept. Even now it is not as it should be. East Bengal will do well to study and appreciate that great soul, who has sanctified the whole province by his birth, and by living that wonderful life there.<sup>15</sup>

On April 4 the Swami wrote letters to Sister Nivedita, Christine Greenstidel, and Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt, who was then living in England after his retirement from the India Civil Service, and who had praised Sister Nivedita's work there. To Nivedita he wrote

A letter came just now from Mr. R. Dutt, praising you and your work in England very much and asking me to wish you to stop longer in England ... Of course, you stay as long as you think you are working well. Yum [Miss Macleod] had some talk about you with Mother [the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi], and she desired you to come over- of course, it was only her love and

anxiety to see you ... I am now at last in Dacca, and had some lectures here. I depart for Chandranath tomorrow, near Chittagong the farthest eastern extremity of Bengal [Bangladesh]. My mother, aunt, cousin, another cousin's widow, and nine boys are with me. They all send you love.<sup>16</sup>

To Christine Greenstidel he wrote: "Margot [Nivedita] is doing splendid work in England with Mrs. Bull's backing. Things are going on nicely. I am sleeping better, and the general health is not bad."<sup>17</sup> And to Mr. R. C. Dutt the Swami wrote

I am so glad to learn, from a person of your authority, of the good work Sister Nivedita is doing in England. I join in earnest prayer with the hopes you entertain of her future services to India by her pen ... I am under a deep debt of gratitude to you, Sir, for your befriending my child, and hope you will never cease to advise her as to the length of her stay in England and the line of work she ought to undertake.<sup>18</sup>

On April 5 the Swami and his party left Dacca for the shrine of Chandranath, about twenty-five miles north of the port of Chittagong. Afterwards they went to the famous shrine of the Divine Mother at Kamakhya, close to Gauhati in Assam. On the way they stayed for some days at Goalpara. At Gauhati he delivered three lectures. Unfortunately they were not recorded or reported; but those who heard them said, "They were brilliant. The Swami was full of fire and

his language was so beautiful and direct. Never before had we had such an exposition of our religion.”<sup>19</sup>

Both at Dacca and at Kamakhya, the Swami’s health went from bad to worse. The Swami’s health was failing rapidly. Besides the diabetes from which he had been suffering, he had at Dacca another very severe attack of asthma. During it the Swami said half-dreamily, as if to himself, “What does it matter! I have given them enough for fifteen hundred years!”<sup>20</sup>

The Swami, with Swami Sadananda, his own mother, sister, and aunt, and Ramadada’s wife, reached Calcutta from Shillong on May 12. The next day he wrote to Christine Greenstidel, “I arrived in the Math yesterday. This morning came your short note... I paid a long visit of two months to Assam and the different parts of East Bengal. For combined mountain and water scenery this part of the country is unrivalled...”<sup>21</sup>

This tour in East Bengal and Assam was the Swami’s last public tour. After it, he was worse in health. The Monks urged him to have complete rest. They begged him to give up all thought of public work until he was well. So the Swami, to please his brother-disciples and his own disciples, gave up his plans and lived at the monastery for seven months in comparative retirement. Those about him did all they could to restore him to health, to obtain for him the best

medical treatment, and to diverts his mind to lighter subjects. But they found this last difficult, for his mind spontaneously merged in the deepest concentration. Casual teaching he was always engaged in, even during this period. He also kept himself in touch with the general progress of his work, in America, England, or India itself, his ideas were gaining ground. Often he sang and taught his disciples to sing; or he engaged in conversation, serious and not so serious. But when it became serious, his brother-disciples would try to divert his mind to lighter matters. Finally, the great soul of “Swami Vivekananda had left its bodily frame on 4 July 1902.<sup>22</sup> He was fully conscious and active till the last day.

### **5.3 Swami Akswarananda**

Another major personality of the RKM in Bangladesh is Swami Akswarananda who was the first President of the RKM in Bangladesh. He was born in November 1930 in the Satkhira District of Bangladesh.<sup>23</sup> His pre-monastic name was Kalipada. The spiritual pursuits of Kalipada got a great impetus when he was studying at Anandaram Joypuria College, Kolkata.

Kalipada took *mantra-diksha* from Swami Birajananda in 1946 who later became the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order. And, it was the year 1950 when he left home and joined the RKM.<sup>24</sup> While pursuing his spiritual life, already as a member of the RKM, Kalipada was busy taking care of the



Students' Home under the guidance Swami Lokeswradananda in the Home's external activities.

The service activities of Swami Akswarananda created a glorious chapter in the history of the RKM. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, he first rendered his service to the distressed people of East Pakistan who took shelter at different camps in India.<sup>25</sup> And, after the emergence of Bangladesh he started his work for the cause of humanity as the chief of the RKM in Dhaka. His service activities in Dhaka got both national and international attention. Presidents, Prime Ministers and Senior Government Officials of Bangladesh were regular visitors to the Ashrama. Details of his relief service during the several floods of Bangladesh were published in international editions of some journals.<sup>26</sup> A large number of disciples were initiated by him from all corners of Bangladesh.

Swami Akswarananda was renowned in literary and cultural circles as the best exponent of Swamiji's thoughts and ideals. His speeches have played a major role in spreading RKM's ideology in Bangladesh.

He worked very hard on RKM's academic development and on the negotiations with the Government so that the funding and other requirements would be met. His lectures on religious discourses used to touch everyone very deeply and

dearly and he himself contributed valuable Articles to the Newspaper. Moreover some of his Articles published in Scholarly Journals from home and abroad.

Swami Akswarananda was a great Karma-yogi and did not stop initiating disciples and travelling even during the last days of his life. The Dhaka RKM temple that has been constructed under his supervision demonstrates architectural novelty.<sup>27</sup>

We lost Swami Akswaranda on 18 April 2011 in Dhaka. He breathed his last having lived an extremely busy life at the service of humankind. This generous and very loving personality is no more with his physical body but in spirit he will always be with us.

## **5.4 Monastic Disciples of Ramakrishna who visited Bangladesh**

### **a. Swami Brahmananda**

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) met Sri Ramakrishna in the middle of 1881 and lived with him almost constantly until the Master's passing away. The Master had a vision about him prior to their first meeting, and as soon as he saw Brahmananda, recognized him as his spiritual son. The swami later became the first president of the Ramakrishna order.<sup>28</sup> Swami Brahmananda first came in

Bangladesh in 1916 and visited some places like Mymensingh, Gazipur, Dhaka, Narayangonj and Bogra.<sup>29</sup>

#### **b. Swami Premananda**

Swami Premananda (1861-1918) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1882 and became his monastic disciple, living with the Master and serving him. His sister was married to Balaram Basu, a great householder disciple of the Master. The Master regarded Swami Premananda as one belonging to the class of *Ishwarakotis* (great souls) and said that he was pure to his very marrow. In later days the Swami was one of the trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission and was the manager of the Ramakrishna Monastery at Belur.<sup>30</sup> Swami Premananda first came in Bangladesh in 1908 and last in 1917. He visited places like Barisal, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Narayangonj, Netrokona, Tangail and Pabna.<sup>31</sup>

#### **c. Swami Shivananda**

Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) first met Sri Ramakrishna in 1880 in Calcutta. His father was a legal adviser to Rani Rasmoni and had met the Master at Dakshineswar a number of times in the late 1850s. Swami Shivananda lived with and served the Master and later practiced hard austerities in various holy places of Bengal. The purity of his life earned him his popular name, *Mahapurusha* (great soul), given to him by Swami Vivekananda. After the

death of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Shivananda became the second president of the Ramakrishna order.<sup>32</sup> Swami Shivananda came in Bangladesh in 1922 and visited the places Dhaka, Narayangonj and Mymensingh.<sup>33</sup>

#### **d. Swami Saradananda**

Swami Saradananda (1865-1927) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1883 and became an ardent disciple of the Master. his premonastic name was Sharat Chandra Chakrobarty. After the Master's passing away he travelled all over Bengal as an itinerant monk, and he then went to England and America in 1896 at Swami Vivekananda's request to preach the message of Vedanta there.<sup>34</sup> In 1898 Swami Saradananda was recalled to India by Swamiji to become the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. He held that office until his death in 1927. He is the author of *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, the authoritative biography of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Saradananda visited Bangladesh in 1899 and travelled places like Dhaka and Barisal.<sup>35</sup>

#### **e. Swami Abhedananda**

Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1884. His premonastic name was Kali Prasad Chandra. He was very devoted to the Master and served as one of his attendants during his last illness. After the Master's passing away he became an itinerant monk. In 1896 Swami Vivekananda asked him to carry on the Vedanta work in England and America, which he did for the

next twenty-five years. He returned to Bengal in 1921 and soon afterwards founded the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math to propagate the message of Vedanta in Calcutta. He was a great scholar and wrote many books.<sup>36</sup> Swami Abhedananda visited Bangladesh for two times in 1922 and 1926. He visited places like Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chittagong and Kushtia.<sup>37</sup>

#### **f. Swami Turiyananda**

Swami Turiyananda (1863-1922) was born in Calcutta, and his premonastic name was Harinath Chattopadhyay. From his boyhood he led an austere life. He met Sri Ramakrishna in his early teens and was regarded by the master as the embodiment of renunciation as taught in the Gita. In 1887 he joined the Ramakrishna monastery. He went to America in 1899 to preach Vedanta and established the *Shanti Ashrama* in Northern California. In 1902 he returned to India and led a contemplative life. His life was an inspiration to all who came in contact with him. Swami Turiyananda came in Dhaka, Narayangonj and Sylhet.<sup>38</sup>

#### **g. Swami Trigunatitananda**

Swami Trigunatitananda (1865-1915) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1884 through M., the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. He served the Master at Cossipore and took his final vows at Baranagore monastery. He was the first editor of *Udobodhan* magazine, which was started by Swami Vivekananda. In

1902 he became the head of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco, and through his efforts the first Hindu temple in the West was built in 1906. Swami Trigunatitananda Paid a visit to Dinajpur, Bangladesh on 1907.<sup>39</sup>

#### **h. Swami Akhandananda**

Swami Akhandananda (1864-1937) was born in Calcutta, and his premonastic name was Gangadhar Ghatak. When he met Sri Ramakrishna he was a young boy. The Master praised his ascetic habits and attributed to the spiritual disciplines performed in his past life. Swami Akhandananda travelled with Swami Vivekananda to many places. He later became the third president of the Ramakrishna order. From the year 1890 to 1924, he came in Bangladesh two times and visited Dinajpur, Rajshahi.<sup>40</sup>

#### **i. Swami Subodhananda**

Swami Subodhananda was born in 1867 at Calcutta. His premonastic name was Subodh Chandra Ghosh. From the year 1890 to 1926, Swami Subodhananda came in Bangladesh for five times. The Swami, visited places like Barisal, Dhaka, Tangail, Baliati (Manikganj), Narayangonj, Chandpur (Comilla).<sup>41</sup>

#### **j. Swami Vijnanananda**

Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938) met Sri Ramakrishna when he was a boy and later was initiated by the Master. His premonastic name was Hari Prasanna

Chattapadhyay. After graduating from College, he became a District Engineer for the Government, but in 1896 he resigned from his job to join the Ramakrishna monastery at Alambazar. He was a Sanskrit scholar, and translated Devi Bhagavatam and Valmiki Ramayan into English. He was the fourth president of the Ramakrishna Order. He came in Bangladesh in 1935 and visited Dinajpur, Dhaka and Barisal.<sup>42</sup>

## **5.5 Some Noteworthy Admirers of Ramakrishna in Bangladesh and Their Reminiscences**

### **a. Girish Chandra Sen.**

Girish Chandra Sen (1835-1910), a devoted follower of Keshab Chandra Sen, was a well-known writer and an esteemed editor of Brahma journals. He knew six languages- Bengali, Sanskrit, English, Persi, Arabic and Urdu- and translated the Holy Al-Quaran into Bengali. Because of his knowledge of and writings on Islam he was known as “Maulavi” in the New Dispensation Church. He collected 184 sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and published them in 1878 under the title *Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamser Ukti*. It is need to mention that he was an inhabitant of Panchdona village under Narsinghdi District in Bangladesh.<sup>43</sup>

Girish Chandra Sen stated

Our respected Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was born in 1836 at Kamarpukur, Hooghly, and passed away in 1886 from throat cancer at Cossipore. From his Childhood he was spiritually inclined. Whenever he met any mendicants, he would associate with them; and like them, he would wear a loin cloth, even if it meant tearing up his own cloth. He had very little school education, but he knew many stories from the Puranas, which he had heard from scholars. He had a tremendous memory and was very intelligent. Whatever he heard once, he remembered.

His elder brother [Ramkumar] was a great scholar who taught in Calcutta, and Sri Ramakrishna went there and lived with him for some time. Later, Sri Ramakrishna moved with him to Dakshineswar, where the brother officiated as a priest at the dedication ceremony of Rani Rasmani's Kali temple. Sri Ramakrishna was then eighteen years old. Mathur, Rasmani's son-in-law, was impressed with Sri-Ramakrishna's spiritual nature and engaged him as a priest of the Kali temple.

Sri Ramakrishna began his spiritual journey in the Panchavati grove of Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganga. For eight years he practiced severe austerities, such as fasting, staying awake at night, and meditation, and as a result his body became like a skeleton. He did not follow the prescribed disciplines of the yoga scriptures. Being led by intense longing for God-realization, he adopted various methods for controlling passion and increasing renunciation. He also practiced various sadhanas for purification of the mind



and for God-vision. Seeing the sitting sun, he would cry, “Mother another day is gone and still I have not seen you!” Once somebody asked him, “What is the way to realize God?” “Yearning,” he replied. “But without the grace of God, yearning does not come. I was once carried away by the tempest of longing.”

Even at the beginning of his spiritual quest he knew that lust and gold are the two great obstacles to God-realization, so he underwent hard austerities and conquered them. He used to bow down to women, seeing the Divine Mother in them. When he married, his wife was seven [actually, five] years old, and he never had any physical relationship with her. She later lived with him, but he remained a self-controlled yogi. Once during his sadhana Sri Ramakrishna threw money into the Ganga, saying, “Money is clay and clay is money.” Later, his hand would become numb if he even touched money inadvertently. He never thought about his daily needs nor did he save anything for the future. He had a dispassionate attitude towards the world and had little faith in worldly-minded people. He cared neither for the wealthy nor the learned. At times he told them unpleasant truths, which made them upset.

While talking about God or singing the Lord’s Sri Ramakrishna would go into ecstasy. Sometimes he would laugh and sometimes he would cry. Sometimes he would behave like a drunkard and sometimes like a child. Again, sometimes he would be in deep samadhi, motionless like a statue. Truly, just by seeing his divine ecstasy, one could be spiritually benefitted. Truly, just by seeing his divine ecstasy, one could be spiritually benefitted. The skepticism

of the sceptics and the sin of the sinners would be wiped away. Coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, many drunkards and debauchees were transformed. He was an unlettered man, yet many highly educated people were influenced by his pure life and became his disciples. He expressed profound spiritual truths in simple village language with common day-to-day examples. His conversations were so sweet and captivating that even a grief-stricken person would forget his grief and pain within a few moments. People became enchanted, seeing his smiling face, his childlike simplicity, his exuberant devotion for the Divine Mother, and his absorption in samadhi.

When he went into samadhi his eyes would be fixed without blinking, tears of ecstasy would flow down his cheeks, and a sweet smile would spread over his face. He then had no outer consciousness, and his body would be stiff and motionless like a statue. He would return to his normal plane of consciousness only after someone had chanted “Om” repeatedly near his ears.

He was above all social customs and manners. He always talked about God and spiritual life, and never indulged in worldly talk. He had a tremendous sense of humor and remarkable presence of mind. His Chosen Deity was both with form and without form. While talking about Kali the Mother, he would cry and become ecstatic. Someone once asked him about Kali and he replied: “I do not worship Kali made of clay and straw. My Mother is the conscious principle. My Mother is pure Satchidananda — Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. That which is in finite and deep is always dark-coloured. The

extensive sky is dark-coloured and so is the deep sea. My Kali is infinite, all-pervading, and consciousness itself.”

Sri Ramakrishna was not an idol-worshipper. One day he was passing through a street and saw a man cutting a tree with an axe. Immediately he burst into tears, saying, “My Mother is present in this tree, and the axe is striking her.” He was as much a Shakta as he was a Vaishnava and a Vedantin. Yoga and bhakti were wonderfully harmonized in him. While chanting God’s name he would become intoxicated and dance like Chaitanya used to do. At that time, in an ecstatic state, the cloth would fall from his body and he would pass into samadhi. Childlike simplicity, devotion, and knowledge were all seen in him. Even at the beginning of his spiritual journey Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of the harmony of religions, and he foreshadowed the New Dispensation. If he had not been endowed with catholic views, he could not have repeated the name of Allah and eaten Muslim food. A picture of Jesus hung on the wall in his room along with pictures of Chaitanya, Nityananda, and other. In March 1875 Sri Ramakrishna arrived with his nephew Hriday at the Belgharia garden house of Jay Gopal Sen. At that time Keshab Chandra Sen was conducting a retreat there with his ministers. He was practising self-control, renunciation, and other austerities as cooking and eating food under a tree. When Sri Ramakrishna arrived Keshab and his followers [including this writer] were seated on the ghat of the pond, preparing themselves for bathing. Hriday got down from the carriage, went to Keshab, and said to him: “My uncle loves to hear about God, and sometimes out of exuberant devotion he passes into samadhi. He has come to hear you talk about God.”

Keshab consented to the visit, and Hriday helped Sri Ramakrishna get down from the carriage and brought him to us. Sri Ramakrishna was wearing a red-bordered cloth, without a shirt or chadar. One end of his lower cloth was thrown over his shoulder. His body was lean and weak. Seeing this, the ministers took him to be an ordinary person. Sri Ramakrishna approached us and said, "I hear that you have had visions of God, so I have come to hear about it." Thus the religious conversation began. Afterwards Sri Ramakrishna sang a song by Ramaprasad, and while singing he went into samadhi. No one considered this samadhi to be a high state of spiritual consciousness; rather they thought he was feigning. Immediately Hriday began to chant "Om loudly and requested others to do the same, which they did. After a while Sri Ramakrishna came back to the normal plane and smiled. Then he began to talk about profound spiritual truths, and the ministers were amazed. They now realized that Sri Ramakrishna was a divine being and not an ordinary person. All were deeply moved by his company, and they forgot about their usual routine. It was late that day when they finished their bath and prayers.

On this occasion Sri Ramakrishna said: "If any other kind of animal comes to herd of cattle, they turn on it and gore it with their horns. But if a cow joins the herd, they lick its body and welcome it as one of themselves... That's what has happened to us here today." Then, addressing Keshab, he added, "Your tail has dropped off." He went on to explain: "As long as the tadpole has its tail it can only live in the water, but water, but when the tail drops off, it can live on land as well as in the water. As long as a man wears the tail of ignorance he can only live in the world, but when the tail drops off he can live either in the

knowledge of God or in the world, whichever he places. Your mind, Keshab, has reached that state now. You can live in the world and still be aware of God.” A holy man can recognize another holy man. After this visit Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab became close to each other.

From time to time Keshab would visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with his followers, and Sri Ramakrishna also would come to Keshab’s house at Calcutta with Hriday. On such occasions Keshab’s neighbours and relations would assemble at his house to meet and listen to Sri Ramakrishna. These spiritual discourses continued for five to seven hours at a time. What a joyful and festive occasion it always was! Every year after the annual festival of the New Dispensation, Keshab would visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, travelling by steamer or boat with his Brahma followers. Sometimes he would go to his Belgharia retreat and send a carriage to take Sri Ramakrishna there. To have Sri Ramakrishna’s holy company was a part of the festival. Keshab’s life was very much influenced by Sri Ramakrishna, and Sri Ramakrishna’s by Keshab. It was due to the influence of Sri Ramakrishna that the concept of the Motherhood of God was enkindled to a great extent in the Brahma Samaj. Keshab learned from Sri Ramakrishna how to call on God as Mother and how to pray to and make demands on her. For, in spite of the devotional aspect in it, the Brahma religion was more a religion of faith and rationalism. However, Sri Ramakrishna’s influence added more sweetness and fervour to it. With Keshab’s help Sri Ramakrishna also advanced more towards the formless God, acquired a catholic religious attitude, and learned to some extent the etiquette of social life.

After Keshab began writing articles for the *Indian Mirror and Dharmatattwa* about Sri Ramakrishna's pure life and lofty teachings, people came to know about him. A small pamphlet, *Paramahamser Ukti* (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna), was also published and distributed. Besides the Brahmos, men and women of other classes now began going to Sri Ramakrishna for spiritual guidance. It was not the aim of Sri Ramakrishna to start a new religion, to preach, or to form sect. If anybody asked for advice, he would say: "Go to Keshab. He is meant for that." Later, Sri Ramakrishna gave spiritual instructions to many people, and many educated young men became his devoted disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna had wonderful insight by which he could recognize the inner nature of a person seeing someone's face or hearing a few words from him, he could at once know what kind of person he was Sri Ramakrishna once said: "Many years ago I went one Wednesday to the Brahma Samaj at Jorasanko. Saw at that time young Keshab meditating at the pulpit and other worshippers seated on both sides of him. I studied Keshab intently and observed that his mind was absorbed in Brahman, that his float had sunk. From that time my mind was drawn to him. The rest of the congregation, I noticed, were seated with weapons, as if ready to fight. Observing their faces I realized that their minds were full of passion, ego, greed, and attachment to sense objects." Ever since then Sri Ramakrishna was fond of Keshab, but the latter did not know anything about it. Many years later they met at Belgharia. It was necessary for

the Brahmos at that time to have contact with Sri Ramakrishna. We have to accept it as Divine Providence.

We do not accept all the religious views of Sri Ramakrishna, and some of them are not approved of by the Brahma religion, but we have no doubt that his exalted life, endowed with yoga and devotion, was utilized by Providence for the betterment of the New Dispensation. Keshab –the great religious leader and world famous scholar –would sit next to the unlettered Sri Ramakrishna like a disciple or younger brother. He listened to Sri Ramakrishna with love and respect, and he never argued with him. Keshab absorbed the spiritual treasures of Sri Ramakrishna in his own life. He demonstrated how to respect a holy person and how to imbibe holiness.

Whenever we visited Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna always served some refreshments. And when he went to Keshab's house he was also served with luchs and vegetable curries. He was very fond of ice cream. Keshab would always try to get some ice cream for him, and sometimes he would send it to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was also fond of jilipis [a sweet]. Once after dinner someone asked him to eat some more. He said, "My stomach is full, but if you give me a jilipi I shall eat it." Then he explained: "During the fair the roads are jammed and overcrowded. At that time it is difficult for a man to pass through the street. But if the Viceroy carriage comes along, all other carriages make room for his to pass. Similarly, the stomach makes room for jilipis."

One day Sri Ramakrishna went to a Brahmo temple with a Brahmo minister. When he heard that three hundred people were worshipping there and chanting God's name, he went into ecstasy. He never attended the service in the temple, for how could he do so? Even before the service had begun he was in ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna went to see Keshab during his last illness, and they talked about profound spiritual topics. When Sri Ramakrishna later received word of Keshab's death, he was overwhelmed with grief. He said: "Keshab's death has taken half my life away. He was like a great banyan tree, giving comfort and shelter to thousands of people. Where will you get another such tree? We are like betel-nut and palm trees, incapable of sheltering a single soul."

Sri Ramkrishna's humility was marvellous. As soon as he met a person he would salute him before the other could do so. He never cared for his teachings to be published, or that publicity be given about him in the papers, or that his photograph be taken. It was impossible to take his photograph except when he was in samadhi and had lost all outer consciousness. During samadhi he neither fell on the ground unconscious nor stepped on anybody around him. At that time he would either sit or stand motionless. Such a great soul is a living example of divine grace. His life is a beacon light of hope to people whose lifeboats are almost sinking in the ocean of relative existence, covered with dark ignorance.

We read about Chaitanya and other great souls of the world, but we were blessed to have seen the divine life of Sri Ramakrishna with our own eyes. He



never cared for the present-day civilization, he never attended any meetings or gave any lectures, nor did he read books or newspapers. He demonstrated to the world how one can attain a high spiritual state through divine grace and one's earnestness alone, without help from anyone. As a swan takes only the milk and rejects the water, so Sri Ramakrishna took only the essence of Hinduism and rejected the nonessentials.

He was like a simple child. The examples he used in his teachings he wanted to see with his own eyes. For that reason he expressed a desire to ride a steamer. Once Keshab picked Sri Ramakrishna up from Dakshineswar in a steamer. Some Brahma followers were with them. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased to hear the *jhak-jhak* sound of the steamer. One of our friends requested him to look through the telescope of the steamer, but he replied: "My mind is now attached to God. How can I withdraw it from him and put it on this telescope?"

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on August 16, 1886. His body was placed on a cot and decorated with flowers, garlands, and ochre cloths. The disciples and friend of Sri Ramakrishna took the dust of his feet and then carried the cot to the Cossipore cremation ground. Nearly one hundred and fifty people followed the procession, and a group of Vaishnavites led it, singing kirtan with drums and cymbals. Some Brahma devotees and four ministers from the New Dispensation — Amritalal Basu, Trailokya Nath Sanyal, Prankrishna Datta, and I joined Sri Ramakrishna's funeral service. Banners imprinted with the symbols of different religions — the Trident and Om of Hinduism, the Spud

of Buddhism, the Crescent of Islam, and the Cross of Christianity — were carried at the head of the procession.

After reaching the cremation ground, the devotees sang kirtan, encircling Sri Ramakrishna's body. Then at the devotees' request Trailokya Nath Sanyal sang three or four songs befitting the occasion. Sri Rama Krishna had been very fond of his melodious singing. Finally Sri Ramakrishna's body was placed on the funeral pyre, and the devotees again bowed down to him. His eyes were slightly open, and his face had a sweet smile. He had left his body in samadhi. I heard that before he entered into mahasamadhi the previous night, he had uttered thrice, "Kali." By evening Sri Ramakrishna's pure body was consumed by fire.<sup>44</sup>

### **b. Dr Abdul Wajij**

Dr Abdul Wajij was a Muslim devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Originally from East Bengal (now Bangladesh), he studied medicine in Calcutta and later worked at Noakhali Municipality as a doctor. He met the Master in 1885 through Ram Chandra Datta. On Sunday, August 7, 1898, Dr. Wajij came to see Ram Chandra Datta at the Kankurgachi Yogodyana. Ram was delighted to see his old friend after such a long time. The devotees received him cordially. Before going to the shrine, the Muslim doctor removed his shoes and socks, and then he bowed down three times to Sri Ramakrishna. The memory of the Master brought tears to his eyes, which he wiped with a handkerchief. He was a

vegetarian and had a calm, sweet nature. At the devotees' request Dr. Wajij told his reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna.

I was born at Satkhira in the Khulna district of East Bengal. After finishing school I studied homeopathy under Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar and worked as a physician in his charitable dispensary. There I heard about Sri Ramakrishna, the great saint of Dakshineswar, who accepted all religions to be true, and I learned that Ram Babu was his main disciple.

I had believed all along that the truth exists in all religions and that it was important to read all the scriptures of the world. Though I am a Muslim and Islam is my religion, I have no animosity towards people of other faiths. I wanted to visit Sri Ramakrishna, but I decided to make an appointment with Ram Babu first and go with him.

I was then living in Beliaghata (in the eastern part of Calcutta). Just at that time I got dysentery and was unable to go to work for four or five days. I decided that as soon as I felt better I would meet Ram Babu and go to Dakshineswar.

I usually slept late in the morning, but one day I got up very early and heard the whistle of a nearby jute mill. It was 4:30 in the morning and there was a light rain. As it was a Sunday, I decided that I would go to Dakshineswar that day with Ram Babu. My stomach was also better. My friend Abbas Ali (who

is now the deputy magistrate at Pheni Bazar in Shyllet) came with me, and after a long search we located Ram Babu's house. As soon as we informed Ram Babu of our intention, he expressed his happiness and we left for Dakshineswar.

When we arrived, Sri Ramakrishna was not in his room. He had gone to the pine grove to answer the call of nature. We waited for him at the Panchvati. When Sri Ramakrishna came there Ram Babu bowed down to him. We decided not to bow down to anyone other than Allah. We were, however, willing to pay proper respect to him. But as soon as he came near he bowed down to us. We were puzzled and were compelled to bow down to him.

Sri Ramakrishna then took us to his room and spread a carpet for us to sit on. He sat on another carpet and began talking to us. While sitting there I started thinking: "We heard that he is a holy man. Then why has he kept us a distance? Has he given us a separate carpet because We are Muslims and he Hindu Brahmin?" This doubt did not last long, however. While talking about God, Sri Ramakrishna became so intoxicated that he gradually came closer and closer until at last he was sitting on our carpet. This holy man's loving behavior gave us immense joy.

While coming to Dakshineswar, I had thought of three questions to ask him. But I was amazed to find that there was no need of asking him those questions. He answered all three of them in a convincing manner during his conversation. One of the questions was: "Is it possible to practise yoga while living as a

householder?” In the course of conversation he said: “If one enters the family life after practising spiritual disciplines, there is less chance for one to fall from the spiritual path. But it is extremely difficult to make spiritual progress while entangled in family life. If you live in a room full of soot, your body will be a little soiled, however clever you may be. Similarly, if you practise spiritual disciplines while living a householder life, a little attachment will remain somewhere.”

We had heard from Ram Babu earlier that Sri Ramakrishna had pain in his throat, so we did not want to disturb him with too many questions. But he talked of his own accord in such an ecstatic mood that it removed all doubts from our minds and filled our hearts with joy. When Sri Ramakrishna had finished speaking, Ram Babu introduced me to him as a doctor. Sri Ramakrishna looked at me and said: “Very well. Why don’t you cure me of the pain in my throat?” I replied: “Sir, if you give me the power I can try. Otherwise I would not be capable of curing the disease of someone like you.”

Sri Ramakrishna fed us some sweets. As we said good-bye, he told me, “Come here three more times.” But we could not make any more trips to Dakshineswar to see him. We were afraid that if we had too much inclination towards spiritual life we would have to renounce the world.

Our holy Quran mentions some signs of prophet. We noticed those signs in Sri Ramakrishna. After seeing and listening to him we believed that he was a

prophet. I still had some attachment to lust and gold, so I did not dare visit him again at Dakshineswar.

I did meet Sri Ramakrishna once more however –this time at Ram Babu’s house. Amrita, Doctor Sarkar’s son, accompanied me there. When we arrived we saw Sri Ramakrishna dancing and singing Kirtan with a group of people. As he danced, he went into samadhi. I had never before seen such a thing. I asked Amrita what was going on, and he explained about samadhi.

When the kirtan was over we bowed down to Sri Ramakrishna. He smiled at us and inquired about our welfare. Then he asked me: “Why didn’t you visit me again? Try to come now and then.” Spiritual talk went on for awhile, and there was also more devotional singing. After that we enjoyed a nice feast at Ram Babu’s house and then went home. I never met Sri Ramakrishna again, as I had to move to different cities to earn money.<sup>45</sup>

### **c. Ashwini Kumar Datta**

Ashwini kumar Datta (1856-1923) was known as a great educationist, patriot, and lover of God. Through the Brajamohan Institute, which was founded and conducted by him, he inspired and trained many young students. He also led boycott movements and wrote several books on love of God, including *Bhaktiyoga*, which is still widely read today.

It was probably during the autumn holidays of 1881 that I met Sri Ramakrishna the first time. I arrived at Dakshineswar in a country boat and,

going up the steps of the landing-ghat, asked someone where the Paramahansa was.

“There is the Paramahansa,” was the reply. A man was pointed out on the north verandah, which faces the garden. He was sitting reclining against a bolster. He wore a black-bordered cloth. At the sight of the bolster and the black-bordered cloth I said to myself, “What kind of paramahansa is this?”

Going nearer, I found him half leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. Then I thought: “Evidently he is not used to pillows as gentlemen are. So perhaps he is the Paramahansa.” At his right, very near the pillow, sat a gentleman whose name, I came to know, was Rajendra Lal Mitra, later an Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. A little farther off sat some others.

After a few moments the Master said to Rajendra Babu, “See whether Keshab is coming.” Evidently Keshab Sen was expected that day.

Someone walked away a few steps and, coming back, said, “No, he isn’t.”

After a brief interval, hearing a sound outside, he said, “please look once more.”

Again someone went out and came back with the same reply.

Then Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, quoting a popular saying “The leaves rustle outside, and Radha says, ‘Oh, here comes my Sweet-heart!’” Continuing, he said” “You see Keshab always tantalizes me like this. It is his way.”

At dusk Keshab came with his party. Keshab bowed low before the Master, Touching the ground with his forehead. The Master returned his salutation in the same manner.

Shortly afterwards Sri Ramakrishna said, in a state of partial consciousness: “Look! He has brought the whole Calcutta crowd. I am supposed to deliver a lecture. I won’t do anything of the sort. Do it yourself if you like. Lecturing is none of my business.”

Still in the ecstatic mood, he said with a divine smile: “I shall eat, drink, and be merry. I shall play and sleep. But I can’t give lectures.”

As Keshab Babu watched him, he became overpowered with divine emotion. Every now and then he said, “Ah me!”

I too watched the Master and said to myself, “Can this be pretense?” I had never seen anything like it before.

Coming back from samadhi, the Master said to Keshab: “Keshab, once I went to your temple. In the course of your preaching I heard you say, ‘We shall dive into the river of devotion and go straight to the Ocean of Satchidananda.’ At



once I looked up [at the gallery where Keshab's wife and the other ladies were sitting] and thought, 'Then what will become of these ladies?' You see, Keshab, you are householders. How can you reach the ocean of satchidananda all at once? You are like a mongoose with a brick tied to its tail. When something frightens it, it runs up the wall and sits in a niche. But how can it stay there any length of time? The brick pulls it down and it falls to the floor with a thud. You may practise a little meditation, but the weight of wife and children will pull you down. You may dive into the river of devotion, but you must come up again. You will alternately dive and come up. How can you dive and disappear once for all?"

Keshab babu said: "Can't a householder ever succeed? What about Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore?"

Twice or thrice the Master repeated softly, "Devendra Nath Tagore –Devendra –Devendra" and bowed to him several times.

Then he said: "Let me tell you a story. A man used to celebrate the Durga Puja at his house with great pomp. Goats were sacrificed from sunrise to sunset. But after a few years the sacrifice was not so imposing. Then someone said to him, 'How is it, sir, that the sacrifice at your place has become such a tame affair?' 'Don't you see?' he said. 'My teeth are gone now.' Devendra is now devoted to meditation and contemplation. It is only natural that he should be, at his advanced age. But no doubt he is a great man.

“You see, as long as a man is under maya’s spell, he is like a green coconut. When you scoop out the soft kernel from a green coconut, you cannot help scraping a little of the shell at the same time. But in the case of a ripe and dry coconut, the shell and kernel are separated from each other. When you shake the fruit you can feel the kernel rattling inside. The man who is freed from maya is like a ripe and dry coconut. He feels the soul to be separated from the body. They are no longer connected with each other.

“It is the ‘I’ that creates all trouble. Won’t this wretched ego ever leave a person? You see a peepal tree growing from the rubbish of a tumbledown house. You cut it down today, but tomorrow you find a new sprout shooting up. It is the same with the ego. You may wash seven times a cup that onions have been kept in, but the wretched smell never leaves it.”

In the course of the conversation he said to Keshab: “Well, Keshab, I understand that your calcutta babus say that God does not exist. Is that true? A Calcutta babu wants to climb the stairs. He takes one step, but before taking the next he cries out: ‘Oh, my side! My side!’ and drops down unconscious. His relatives raise a hue and cry and send for a doctor, but before the doctor arrives the man is very likely dead. And people of such stamina say, ‘There is no God’,”

After an hour or so the kirtan began. What I saw then I shall never forget either in this life or in the lives to come. Everybody danced, Keshab included. The Master was in the centre. All danced around him in a circle. During the

dancing Sri Ramakrishna suddenly stood motionless, transfixed in samadhi. A long time passed this way. After hearing his words and seeing all this, I said to myself, “Yes, a paramahansa indeed!”

Another day, probably in 1883, I visited the Master with a few young men from Srerampore. Looking at them, he asked, “Why have they come here?”

Myself: “To see you.”

Master: “What’s there to see in me? Why don’t they look at the buildings and temples?”

Myself: “Sir, they haven’t come to see those things. They have come to see you.”

Master: “Ah! Then they must be flints. There is fire in them. You may keep a flint under water a thousand years, but the moment you strike it, sparks come out. They must be of that type. But it will be useless to try to strike fire out of me!”

At this last remark we all laughed. I do not recall now what other things he said to us that day. But it seems to me he told us about the renunciation of “woman and gold” and the impossibility of getting rid of the ego.

I visited him another day. When I bowed down to him and took a seat, he said, “Can you bring me some of that stuff –a little sour, a little sweet – that begins to fizz when you push down the cork?”

Myself: “Lemonade?”

Master: “Why don’t you bring a bottle for me?”

I think I brought him a bottle. So far as I remember, I was alone with him that day. I asked him a few questions.

Myself: “Do you observe caste?”

Master: “How can I say yes? I ate curry at Keshab Sen’s house. Let me tell you what once happened to me. A man with a long beard brought some ice here, but I didn’t feel like eating it. A little later someone brought me a piece of ice from the same man, and I ate it with great relish. You see, caste restrictions fall away of themselves. As coconut and palm trees grow up, the braches drop off of themselves. Caste conventions drop off like that. But don’t tear them off as those fools do [meaning the Brahmos].”

Myself: “What do you think of Keshab Babu?”

Master: “Oh, he is a saintly man.”

Myself: “And Trailokya Babu?”

Master: “A fine man. He sings very well.”

Myself: “Shivanath Babu?”

Master: “... A very good man. But he argues.”

Myself: “What is the difference between a Hindu and a Brahmo?”

Master: “There is not much difference. In the serenade we have here, one flutist plays a single note right along, while another plays various melodies. The Brahmos play one note, as it were; they hold to the formless aspect of God. But the Hindus bring out different melodies; that is to say, they enjoy God in his various aspects.

“The formless Deity and God with form may be likened to water and ice. The water freezes into ice. The ice melts into water through the heat of jnana [knowledge]. Water takes the form of ice through the cooling influence of bhakti [devotion].

“The Reality is one. People give it various names Take the case of a lake with four landing-ghats on its four banks. People who draw water at one ghat call it ‘jal,’ and those who draw it at the second ghat call it ‘pani.’ At the third ghat they call it ‘water,’ and at fourth, ‘aqua.’ But it is one and the same thing: water.”

I told the Master that I had met Achalananda Tirthavadhuta of Barisal.

Master: “Isn’t that Ramkumar of Kotrang?”

Myself: “Yes, Sir.”

Master: “How did you like him?”

Myself: “Very much.”

Master: “Well, Whom do you like better –him or me?”

Myself: “Oh, can there be any comparison between you two? He is a scholar, an erudite person; but are you one?”

Sri Ramakrishna was a little puzzled at my reply and became silent.

A Moment later I said: “He may be a scholar, but you are full of fun! There is great fun in your company.”

At this the Master laughed and said: “Well said! Right you are!”

He asked me, “Have you seen my Panchavati?”

Myself: “Yes, sir.”

He told me a little of what he had practised there –his various religious austerities. He also told me about Nangta [Tota Puri].

Then I asked him, “how can I realize God?”

Master: “ You see, he is constantly attracting us, as a magnet attracts iron. But the iron cannot come to the magnet it is covered with dirt. When the dirt is washed away, the iron is instantly drawn to the magnet. Weep for God and the tears will wash away the dirt from your mind.”

As I was writing down his words, he remarked: “Look here. Only repeating the word *siddhi* will not produce intoxication. You must actually get some hemp, rub it in water, and then drink the solution...”

Later he said: “Since you are going to lead a householder’s life, create a roseate intoxication in your mind with the thought of God. You will be doing your duties, but let that pleasant intoxication remain with you. You cannot of course, like Shukadeva, be so inebriated with the thought of God that you will lie naked and unconscious. As long as you have to live in the world, give God

the power of attorney. Make over all your responsibilities to him. Let him do as he likes. Live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She bathes her master's children, washes them, feeds them, and takes affectionate care of them in many ways, as if they were her own children, but in her heart she knows very well that they do not belong to her. No sooner is she dismissed than all is over. She has no more relationship with the children.

“Before breaking open the jackfruit you should rub your hands with oil in order to protect them from the sticky juice. Likewise, protect yourself with the oil of devotion. Then the world will not cling to you and you will not be affected by it.”

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

He said to me, “Fan me a little.”

I began to fan him and he was silent.

After a while he said: “Oh, it's so hot! Why don't you dip the fan in water?”

“Ah!” I said, “You have your fancies, too!”

The Master smiled and drawled out, “And –why –not?”

“Very well!” I said, “Have your full measure of them.”

I cannot express in words how immensely I enjoyed his company that day.

The last time I visited him I had with me the headmaster of our school, who had just then graduated. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he asked me:

“Where did you pick him up? He's a fine fellow!”

Then he continued: “You are a lawyer. You are very clever. Can you give me a little of your cleverness? The other day your father came here and stayed three days.”

Myself: “How did you find him?”

Master: “A nice man. But now and then he talks nonsense.”

Myself: “Please help him get over it when you see him next.”

At this Sri Ramakrishna smiled a little.

Myself: “Please give us a few instructions.”

Master: “Do you know Hriday?”

Myself: “Your nephew? I know him only by name.”

Master: “Hriday used to say to me: ‘Uncle, please don’t give out your stock to instructions all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?’ I would reply: ‘You fool, what’s that to you? These are my words and if I like I shall repeat them a hundred thousand times. You keep quiet!’”

Myself (smiling): “Exactly so!”

A little later he sat up on the bed. He repeated “Om” several times and began to sing a song whose first line is: “Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God’s Beauty.”

Hardly had he sung one or two lines when he himself dived deep and was lost in samadhi.



When the samadhi was over, he began to pace the room and with both hands pulled up the cloth he was wearing till it reached his waist. One end of it was trailing on the floor and the other was hanging loose.

Nudging my companion, I whispered, "See how nicely he wears his cloth!"

A moment later he threw away cloth, with the words: "Ugh! What a nuisance! Off with it!"

He began to pace up and down the room naked. From the northern end of the room he brought an umbrella and a stick, and asked us, "Are these yours?"

Scarcely had I replied no when he said: "I knew it. I can judge a man by his stick and umbrella. They must belong to that man who was here some time ago and swallowed a lot of my words without understanding them."

A few minutes later he sat down, still naked, on the northern end of his cot, facing the west, and asked me, "Well, do you consider me ungentlemanly?"

Myself: "Of course not. You are a perfect gentleman. But why do you ask me that?"

Master: "You see, Shivanath and others don't think I am a gentleman.

When they come I have to wrap a cloth or something around me. Do you know Girish Ghosh?"

Myself: "Which Girish Ghosh? The one who is in the theatre?"

Master: "Yes."

Myself: "I have never seen him. But I know him by reputation."

Master: "A good man."

Myself: "They say he drinks."

Master: "Let him! Let him! How long will he continue that? Do you know Narendra?"

Myself: "No, sir."

Master: "I wish very much that you could meet him. He has passed the B.A. examination and is unmarried."

Myself: "Very well, sir. I shall meet him."

Master: "Today there will be a kirtan at Ram Datta's house. You may meet him there. Please go there this evening."

Myself: "All right."

Master: "Yes, do. Don't forget."

Myself: "It is your command. Shall I not obey it? Surely I will go."

He showed us the pictures in his room and asked me whether a picture of Buddha could be had.

Myself: "Very likely."

Master: "please get one for me."

Myself: "Very well. I'll bring one when I come again."

But alas, I never returned to Dakshineswar.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house and met Narendra. In one of the rooms the Master sat reclining against a pillow. Narendra sat at his right, and I in front.

He asked Narendra to talk with me. But Narendra said: "I have a bad headache today. I don't feel like talking."

I replied, "Then let us put it off until another day."

And that came to pass in May or June of 1897, at Almora. The will of the Master had to be fulfilled, and it was fulfilled after twelve years. Ah, how happily I spent those few days with Swami Vivekananda at Almora! Sometimes at his house, sometimes at mine, and one day on the top of a hill with nobody accompanying us. I never met him after that. It was as if to fulfill the Master's wish that we saw each other at almora.

I saw the Master not more than four or five times, but in that short time we became so intimate that I felt as if we had been classmates. How much liberty I took while speaking with him! But no sooner had I left his presence than it flashed on me: "Goodness gracious! Think where I have been!" What I saw and received in those few days has sweetened my whole life. That Elysian smile of his, laden with nectar, I have locked up in the secret closet of my memory. That is the unending treasure of a hapless person like myself. A thrill of joy passes through my heart when I think how a grain of the bliss shed from that laughter has been sweetening the lives of millions, even in distant America.<sup>46</sup>

## **5.6 Sri Ramakrishna himself on some major personalities of Bangladesh.**

### **a. Micheal Madhusudan Datta**

Micheal Madhusudan Datta (1824-1871) was a famous christian Bengali poet and legal practitioner. About him Sri Ramakrishna told

Micheal visited The temple garden when Narayan Shastri was living with me. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, brought him here. The owners of the temple garden were about to get into a lawsuit with the English proprietors of the neighbouring powder magazine; they wanted Michael's advice. I met him in the big room next to the manager's office. Narayan Shastri was with me. I asked Narayan to talk to him. Michael couldn't talk very well in Sanskrit. He made mistakes. Then they talked in the popular dialect. Narayan Shastri asked him his reason for giving up the Hindu religion. Pointing to his stomach, Michael said, 'It was for this. 'Narayan said, 'What shall I say to a man who gives up his religion for his belly's sake?' Thereupon Michael asked me to say something. I said: 'I don't know why, but I don't feel like saying anything. Someone seems to be pressing to be pressing my tongue.'<sup>47</sup>

### **b. Nag Mahashay (Durga Charan Nag)**

Nag Mahashay (Durga Charan Nag) was born on 21 August 1846 at Deobhog, a small village in the part of East Bengal that is now Bangladesh. His father's name was Din-dayal Nag and mother was Tripurasundari Devi. Nag Mahashay was a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was noted for his great

truthfulness even from his childhood. With growing age Nag Mahashay developed a great thirst for knowledge.<sup>48</sup>

His religious view was that everything depends on the grace of God. But man has to pray. If anyone prays earnestly, and if he has no earthly desire, God's grace is sure to come. The physical existence of this saintly life ended in December, 1899. But the name of Nag Mahashay is more than a memory. It is force –It is a source of inspiration. To Nag Mahashay Sri Ramakrishna told: “Live in the world like a mudfish. The fish lives in the mud but its skin is always bright and shiny. Similarly, remain at home unattached and the stain of worldliness will not touch your mind. Come again. A relationship grows through frequent visits.”<sup>49</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna further told

What harm is there in remaining as a householder? Only keep the mind fixed upon God. The householder's life is like fighting from within a fortress. Remain in the world like the ancient king Janaka, unattached. Your life will be an example of how a householder lives. You should stay at home, and the real holy people will come to you of their own accord.<sup>50</sup>

### **c. Devendra Nath Majumdar**

Devendra Nath Majumdar was born in the village of Jagannthpur in the Jessore District of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) on 7 January 1844. His father,

Prasanna Nath Majumdar, died two month before devendra was born, but his mother lived a long life. An uncle was his guardian.<sup>51</sup> From boyhood Devendra was truthful. He had a good touch with Sri Ramakrishna. Near the end of his life Devendra composed a beautiful hymn of eight stanzas to Sri Ramakrishna as the Master. The first stanza runs:

*Bhava-Sagara tarana karana he*

*Ravi nandana bandhana khandana he;*

*Saranagata kinkara bhita mane*

*Gurudeva daya-kara dina jane.*

O Thou the means to cross the ocean of worldliness!

O destroyer of the bondage of death!

O Guru Divine, please show compassion to thy lowly servant,

O Who has come to thee for refuge with a mind stricken with fear.<sup>52</sup>

The great soul, Devendra Nath passed away on 14 October 1911. Now a day, everyone recalls that he is an extraordinary life of simplicity, renunciation, purity and service.

To Devendra Nath Majumdar, Sri Ramakrishna told

My relationship with you is different. Look, you will not have to practise austerities. It will be enough if, in the morning and evening, you chant the name of Hari while clapping your hands. Chaitanya taught this path, and one

can attain perfection by chanting Hari's name. Visit this place whenever possible. Your life will be fulfilled in this way.<sup>53</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna further told, "Ram has declared me to be an avatar. Can all of you verify Ram's statement? Nowadays I always feel that I am merging into the infinite Brahman."<sup>54</sup>

#### **d. Bhiravi Brahmani**

In 1861, Sri Ramakrishna accepted Bhairavi Brahmani, an orange-robed, middle-aged female ascetic, as a teacher. She was an inhabitant of Jessore, a Part of East Bengal (now Bangladesh).<sup>55</sup> Brahmani was thoroughly conversant with the texts of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and practised Tantra. The Brahmani initiated Ramakrishna into Tantra. Tantrism focuses on the worship of *Shakti* and the object of tantric training is to transcend the barriers between the holy and unholy as a means of achieving liberation and to see all aspects of the natural world as manifestation of the divine shakti. Under her guidance, Ramakrishna went through sixty-four major tantric disciplines which completed in 1863 with all success.<sup>56</sup> The Bhairavi with the yogic techniques and the tantra played an important part in the initial spiritual development of Sri Ramakrishna.

On Bairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna told,

(Pointing to Bhairavi Brahmani) Mother, what are these things (burning sensation, sleeplessness, and other physical symptoms) that keep happening to me? Am I mad, really? Have I truly developed this disease by whole heartedly calling on the Divine Mother? (on eating the food offered by Brahmani to be chosen Deity Raghuvir) who knows, Mother, why I lose control over myself and do such things.<sup>57</sup>

She (referring to Brahmani) says that all the signs of the avatars are in this body (pointing to himself).

Sri Ramakrishna further told

One night the Brahmani brought a beautiful young woman from somewhere and arranged the worship. She put the woman on the Devi's seat, then instructed me, 'My child, worship her as the goddess.' I was seized with fear, wept piteously, and said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, why do you give this command to one who has taken refuge in You? Does Your weak child have the power to withstand such a severe trial?' As soon as I said that, my heart was filled with divine strength. Like a hypnotized person, not knowing what I was doing, I repeated the mantra, sat on the woman's lap, and immediately went into samadhi. When I regained outer consciousness, the Brahmani said: 'You have completed the rite, my child. Under such circumstances, others restrain themselves with great difficulty and finish by repeating the mantra for a very short time. But you entered samadhi, losing body consciousness



completely!’ When I heard this I was reassured. With a grateful heart I bowed down to the Divine Mother again and again for enabling me to withstand the ordeal. ...Having thus initiated me into Purnabhisheka (full initiation into Tantric rites), the Brahmani made me perform innumerable rites. I don’t recall all the details now. But I do remember the day I witnessed the union of a man and a woman: I perceived only the divine sport of Shiva and Shakti, and went into samadhi, When I regained outer consciousness, the Brahmani told me: ‘My child, you have attained perfection in an extremely difficult esoteric sadhana and are established in the divine mode.

Thus, I completed the sadhana of the heroic mode. Throughout the long period of the Tantric sadhana, I always maintained my attitude towards all women as mother, and I also could not touch even a drop of karana (meaning *wine*, but also *cause*). Whenever I heard the word karana or smelled wine, I would realize the Cause of the universe, God, and lose outer consciousness. I would likewise go into samadhi as soon as I heard the word yoni, (meaning female organ, but also source), thinking of the Source of the world, God.<sup>58</sup>

## **5.7 Monastic disciples of Vivekananda who visited Banagladesh**

### **a. Swami Virajananda**

Swami Virajananda (1873-1951) was a direct disciple of Swami Vivekananda. His pre-monastic name Kalikrishna Basu.<sup>59</sup> In Bangladesh, Ramakrishna Mission figures well from the year 1899 when two monk disciples deputed by their Master Swami Vivekananda visited Dhaka of East Bengal, now

Bangladesh. Swami Virajananda was one of these two monks.<sup>60</sup> In 1944, He came again Bangladesh and visited Sylhet.<sup>61</sup>

### **b. Swami Prakashananda**

Swami Prakashananda (1874-1972) was a monastic disciple of Swami Vivekananda. His premonastic name was Sushil Chandra Chakraborty<sup>62</sup> Deputed by the Master Swami Vivekananda, Swami Prakashananda came first in Bangladesh in 1899 with Swami Virajananda.<sup>63</sup> He worked hard to preach universal humanism, the core message of Ramakrishna - Vivekananda, in Bangladesh and USA.<sup>64</sup>

## **5.8 Disciples who visited Bangladesh with Swami Vivekananda**

On March 18, 1901, in the company of a large party of his sannyasin disciples, the Swami Vivekananda left for Dhaka, the chief city of east Bengal, from Belur Math and arrived the next day.<sup>65</sup> He was accompanied by Swami Shuddhananda (1872-1938), Swami Sadananda (1865-1911), Swami Nirvayananda (?-1934) Swami Nityananda (? -1913).<sup>66</sup> In Dhaka, Swamiji delivered two public lectures and also visited the house of Nag Mahashay in Narayangonj.<sup>67</sup> Next he proceeded to Chandranath, a holy place near Chittagong, and to sacred Kamakhya in Assam. After Swamiji's visit, several personalities paid their visit to East Bengal and they are Swami Atmananda, Swami Abhayananda, and Sister Nivedita.<sup>68</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna is now being regarded as the prophet of the modern age by an increasingly large number of people in the East and in the West. One unique feature of this prophet is that our knowledge of his life is based not on dubious witness or pious legends but on “words and deeds, Ramakrishna indubitable spoke and did”, as Christopher Isherwood, his famous western biographer, has put it.

It is noteworthy mentioning that the devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, however, would like to know more about the daily life of their Master. They would like to know how they were seen by their own close disciples and friends, by people of other faiths, by the pioneers of the contemporary society, and by the common people of their time. So, here we get an impressive collection of accounts and reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda by their disciples and acquaintances. The Master and the Swamiji expressed many things before their intimate devotees about their external as well as internal state. The quantitative and qualitative values of these states are of paramount significance to many of this earth.

The RKM has certainly become more effulgent due to the luster spread by the lives of Master's and Swamiji's disciples. Their lives exemplified matchless devotion to their guru, and were also perfect expressions of Swamiji's twin ideals of renunciation and service. The life and service of each one of disciple

personified, as it were, a facet of the ideal their Master stood for, and can be said to be a living commentary on Ramakrishna's and Swamiji's teachings. A study of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's life and personality will thus be incomplete without looking into the lives of these noble personalities. The life and service of these noble souls presents the story of their self-sacrifice for the ever-expanding Ramakrishna Movement.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>6</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 7.
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- <sup>13</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 454.
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## **Chapter Six**

### **6.1 Impact of RKM on Bangladeshi Educators and World Thinkers**

The RKM represents one single truth and that is – men and women can develop till they feel they are all with God. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, between themselves, they have done much to regenerate Bengal. They are not just religious and social leaders; they have given back to Bengal her lost identity by rousing her national pride. Bengal Renaissance can truly be said to have begun with them. Great thinkers, historians, educationists, students and all section of the world are influenced by the magical ideology of the RKM and electrifying message of Swami Vivekananda. If today the impact of the RKM and its major personalities are spreading, it is because they address themselves to entire humanity. No wonder they enjoy universal love and respect, a fact to which the following statements bear ample testimony.

### **6.2 Syed Anwar Husain**

Syed Anwar Husain, a leading historian and thinker, held the chair of the History Department at Dhaka University in Bangladesh. He believed that true philosophy is comparative philosophy. He delivered a paper at the seminar on *Sri Ramakrishna's Ideas and Our Times* organised by Ramakrishna Mission



Vidyamandir at Belur Math, India on January 2012. There he provided a remarkable interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's ideas and essentials of Islam.

The essence of Sri Ramakrishna's belief and preaching was similar to that of Islam. Such a similarity was not providential or circumstantial; rather a product of Sri Ramakrishna's humane, egalitarian and inclusive perception of religions. These are also the qualities of the core Islam. Essentially, all religions, revealed or otherwise, carry a common message. Sri Ramakrishna's perception of Islam as well as other religions had origins in how he delved deep into the cores of all these religions and imbibed the underlying spirit of the same. Thus his religious philosophy was anchored in a deductive, not inductive context. Perhaps unlike any other religious personality throughout history he was the one to practice himself some religions, at least for some time, before emerging with perceptions or convictions *vis-a-vis* these religions. This way of comprehending religions other than his own was for him without any alternative as he was not literate enough to go for a fastidious reading of religious texts. He had, however, the right and endowed mind to understand the core message of every faith, and, in which capacity he was found to have excelled them any one else. Such an exercise left him with the conviction in the essential commonality of messages of all religions; and also the core of his preaching *Jato mat, tato path*. To him religions are different paths to reach a common destination. This was thus Sri Ramakrishna's recipe for religious pluralism; again, something not divergent from the spirit of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017 Professor S. A. Husain delivered an extempore address at the RKM centre in Dhaka, stating in part:

... It is true that of late there have been murmurings and musings on interfaith harmony. But as it becomes obvious that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and preachings of Swami Vivekananda had ample indications for now to achieve interfaith harmony in the present world.<sup>2</sup>

### **6.3 Gour Gopal Saha**

Mr. Gour Gopal Saha, a prominent justice of Bangladesh Supreme Court, wrote an excellent article titled *Swami Vivekananda - Monk with A Difference*. He brought out this point:

Clad in saffron attire from head to feet, representing a typical Hindu Sannyasi renouncing worldly order. Swami Vivekananda appears before us as a mixture of opposites – a seeker of spiritual sublimity and a lustrous worldly man solely dedicated to the cause of universal love, fraternity, transcending geo-physical boundaries. As the most beloved disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who is widely regarded as a *Jugavatar*, Swamiji took upon himself the onerous task of propagating the teachings and philosophy of his preceptor to the farthest corner of the globe within a short span of his life. The establishment of Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belur, which serves as the spiritual headquarters of all activities of the Mission the world over, is a permanent

monument of his undaunted spirit and unending zeal for service to the mankind.<sup>3</sup>

He further wrote

To Swamiji, food for soul is the divine love and fellow-feeling, which science cannot provide. Disharmony is eating into the vitals of our mundane existence. Man is now faced with a cultural crisis which may precipitate an outburst of open hostilities and conflagrations endangering the very existence of the human species on earth, if the perilous rot is not checked positively and decisively without any further loss of time. The universality and magnanimity of the teachings of Swamiji's loving heart are capable of bringing about an out-pouring of bliss in the world in which man can breathe freely in an atmosphere of divine calm and compassion.<sup>4</sup>

## **6.4 Father Tapan De Rozario**

In a 2015 article on “A Glimpse of Swami Vivekananda on Christ, Christianity and Harmony”, Professor Father Tapan De Rozario, a faculty member of the Department of World Religions and Culture at the University of Dhaka, expressed these insights

Swami Vivekananda was an admirer of Jesus Christ but a brave critic of Christianity and its missionary activities especially in India. His education in a

college run by the Christian missionaries provoked him to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though he questioned the historicity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth but did not negate him. He interpreted some of his teachings in the perspective of the religious traditions found in India, richness of their theology, integrity of their morality. His various sayings on Jesus Christ bring some salient points which are very much in accord with Christian faith and believe. His writings and lectures presented in home and abroad give a clear picture of his convictions and criticisms on Christ and Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

## **6.5 Niru Kumar Chakma**

Professor Niru Kumar Chakma, a philosopher and a former member of National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh,<sup>6</sup> wrote an article (in 1985) on “Teachings of Ramakrishna in the Light of Buddhist Morality”. He expressed Sri Ramakrishna’s teaching thusly

The positive aspects of Buddhist morality, the virtue of metta (to love all and have malice towards none) in particular, have been reflected in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa of the ‘supremely holy’ as he was, was no mere mystic turning his backs on man and nature. He was the living synthesis between god and man, between impersonal Brahma and personal man, between supernaturalism and naturalism, between idealism and materialism, between monism and dualism, between Hinduism and other Faiths. Essentially a Pantheist, he saw and experienced God in everything. As he said, *Jiva is Siva* (all life is God). He believed that everything is nothing but

a manifestation of God. So he regarded his wife and for that matter all women as an embodiment of Goddess Kali.<sup>7</sup>

Professor N. K. Chakma further expressed

Modern man has now reached the highest peak of civilization and technological development. But there is very dark-side to his existence. In recent decades violence, terror, conflict, hatred, colonization, exploitation etc, have mounted up and are causing suffering to a large section of world population. In this crisis - ridden world of ours today let Ramakrishna's philosophy of life vis-a-vis the moral teachings of the Buddha be our guide not simply as a mark of respect for them, but to make our life worth living.<sup>8</sup>

## **6.6 Kazi Nurul Islam**

Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, Professor, Department of World Religions and Culture and Director, Centre for Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Dialogue, Dhaka University, expressed his admiration for RKM's spiritual discourses and dialogues in the following words

The need for unity in the family of mankind is being brought home with an increased sense of urgency. And indeed, religion in the truest sense of the term can provide the motive power to create a peaceful world, not through *war-armaments*, but through *word-armaments*, i.e., through discourses and

dialogues. For the resolution of disputes and maintenance of peace among sections of people irrespective of caste and creed we should agree to use *word-~~armaments~~* or dialogues in assuaging all doubts and even agreeing to disagree on some points. The crying need of the hour is to give a clarion call to all to lay utmost importance on the moral development and hearty religious thinking as dialogues to establish peace in the world.<sup>9</sup>

## 6.7 Nikhil Bhattacharjee

Professor Nikhil Bhattacharjee, an Ex-principal (Rtd), Sreemangal Govt College, wrote an article in 2012 titled “Sri Ramakrishna — A Messenger of Peace”. He records

Sri Ramakrishna being born of a poor Brahmin family of a remote village of West Bengal, having no so called education of formal school and colleges, had the zeal of an outstanding scholar of a modern university. His devotion and his many-fold ways of finding out God brought him on a platform from where he saw a unique uniformity – a unity of faiths. His unity of faiths was not a metaphor, it was proved as truth. A truth like the truth in the discovery of a scientist or like the truth in the invention from a laboratory of a modern university. Dakhineswar temple being the venue of his work may well be termed as a research centre. Sri Ramakrishna a research scholar, the very research led him to make a prophecy for the mankind. The prophecy was – so many ways are as many paths of reaching the same goal.<sup>10</sup>

Professor N. Bhattacharjee further records

The Truth discovered by Ramakrishna is unique before the mankind. In making this discovery Ramakrishna as a prophet is not opposed to all other great prophets of the world. No prophet professed hatred of faith. Sri Ramakrishna's discovery is a formula to establish unity of faiths which may lead to a permanent world peace.<sup>11</sup>

### **6.8 M. Shamsheer Ali**

Dr. M. Shamsheer Ali, a prominent scientist and educator in Bangladesh, taught for two years at the Advanced school of physics of the University of Trieste and had been lecturing on several advanced courses at the Atomic Energy Centre,<sup>12</sup> Dhaka, paid his respect for RKM by writing a very good article titled "On the Synthesis of Science and Religion". There Dr. M. S. Ali affirms

In our efforts to integrate science and religion, we might come across enquiring students who might like to confront all scientific knowledge with the findings of the Holy Books. This, in fact, would not be the right spirit. It should be remembered that the Holy Book is the genesis of information and not a book of information as such. It lays down broad guidelines and indications for our moral, religious and material life as well as for understanding the mysteries of God's creation. If any of the scientific findings of the present day seems to be in apparent conflict with the Divine Revelations, one need not draw hasty conclusions. A lot of such instances are

found in the suras of the Holy Quran and the scriptures of different Faiths As the human Knowledge increases gradually the meaning of verses appears to be more clear and significant.<sup>13</sup>

With this observations, M. S. Ali expressed this note of optimism that if those who understand religion best and those who understand science best get together and have fruitful interactions with each other, then the synthesis of science and religion will indeed become a pleasant task. When that happens, this planet of ours would be inhabited by more and more knowledge but God-fearing men who would be able to hold out before our future progenies and noble vision of a beautiful city of man.

## **6.9 Jarlath D'souza**

Brother Jarlath D'souza, Director of Bangladesh Inter-Religious Council for Peace and Justice. About the RKM, he made the following observation in 2015

Swami Vivekananda opened the windows, so to say, for western thinkers and scholars to be able to peep into the cultural and religious background of the Indian sub-continent. Wearing such a mantle, Swami Vivekananda may even be titled – the pioneer of inter faith dialogue for modern times! ... The Ramakrishna Mission is another reminder, albeit a living reminder of what Swami Vivekananda stood for. As it exists today, the Ramakrishna Mission is



a vibrant tribute to the foresight and positivist vision of Swami Vivekananda. Here was religion in practice, quite some years before even Mother Teresa (1910-1997). The Ramakrishna Mission was set up by Swami Vivekananda to put into practice the norms of human charity towards the poor and the unwanted in society.<sup>14</sup>

## **6.10 Shamim Sikder**

Shamim Sikder, a renowned sculptor in Bangladesh and a former teaching faculty at the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University, recorded in her memories

Whenever I think of humanism, Swami Vivekananda appears before me as a vivid symbol of humanism. I had been curious about this man since my early life. Afterwards having read a lot about him, I came to learn what immense power which he spread all over the world in the light of humanism. How great the power is! Standing in America, he made people understand that all men are brothers and they can cross the barriers of nation, caste or creed. It is he who established first the concept that we were all world citizens if we could cross the boundaries of countries and time. Vivekananda strove till his death to put a stop to sorrows and poverty and cruelties inflicted upon men by men. Swami Vivekananda always thought the power of youths to be great all his life and believed that if there were one hundred young men, strong, determined, wise and truthful, the pace of the whole world could be changed.<sup>15</sup>

## 6.11 Reaz Ahmed

Reaz Ahmed, an executive editor of United News of Bangladesh (UNB) wrote an article in 2018 by title “Love ‘all beings’ in Vivekananda’s way”. There he mentioned

The main risk of fragmentation, segregation and balkanization is creation of a mindset that allows one to ‘love’ some and ‘hate’ others. Such selective behavior goes counter to Vivekananda’s teaching – as the Ramakrishna disciple had always advocated for loving all creators. Indeed, it was Vivekananda who had uttered the power and passion of “loving all beings” in simplest of couplets in his poem –*To a Friend*.

Here goes the verse-

These are his manifold forms before thee, Rejecting them, where seekest thou  
for God?

Who loves all beings without distinction;

He indeed is worshipping best his God.

Here Vivekananda proclaims, he who loves all beings is, indeed, serves the creator the best. And his mentor Ramakrishna had famously said – Many good sayings are to be found in holy books, but merely reading them will not make one religious. It’s their teaching that the creator has to be searched within, in God’s creations, in all its blessings.<sup>16</sup>

## The “Love ‘all beings’ in Vivekananda’s way” article added

Vivekananda was a master of giving examples to show how ‘all beings’ – doesn’t matter how big or tiny one is – are all parts of the whole scheme of the things that we call God’s universe. In his book – *Jukti O Dharma* – Vivekananda stated how a tiny insect was crawling dangerously on a rail track when an approaching train was moving fast on the track. But eventually that insect managed to crawl down from the track and escaped death. A huge locomotive couldn’t grind a tiny insect. Vivekananda declares that the tiny insect is also a minuscule of the God.<sup>17</sup>

### **6.12 Muhammad Sahidullah**

Another luminary who gracefully straddled the cultural domain of Bengal is Dr. Muhammad Sahidullah.<sup>18</sup> He distinguished himself as a great authority on linguistics and used to teach at the University of Dhaka. Sahidullah placed his regards to Ramakrishna and writes:

Religion creates dissension between people. Truth is one. Man interprets it in different ways. Real uniqueness lies in discovering unity in diversity Sri Ramakrishna alone on earth practiced all religions on himself. Then he arrived at a conclusion that all religions have a fundamental unified truth. It was Sri Ramakrishna pronounced a death knell for all divisions in religion. Ramakrishna is indeed our savior. ... He ushered in a new epoch for the whole humanity.<sup>19</sup>

## 6.13 Jagadish Chandra Bose

A Great Bengali physicist and science fiction writer Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose<sup>20</sup> is considered as the father of radio science. He writes on Vivekananda,

What a void this makes! What great things were accomplished in these few years! How one man could have done it all. And how is stilled now. ... When one is tired it is best that he should sleep, but his deeds and teachings will walk the earth and waken and strengthen.<sup>21</sup>

## 6.14 Prafulla Chandra Ray

Sir Prafulla Chandra Ray,<sup>22</sup> a prominent social leader and reformer of East Bengal, now Bangladesh. He writes

It was Swamiji's great principle that the service of *Daridra Narayana* should be the real service of humanity. ... Swami Vivekananda's great message was that all the low caste people should be taken as our brethren. Not only the right hand of fellowship should be extended to them, but they should be embraced as a brother embraces his fellow-brother. ...Many things come out of Swami Vivekananda's life. He said that the temples should be thrown open to all the Hindus irrespective of caste distinction. That is a very simple thing. In the eye of God there is no distinction between one man and another ...The aim of Swami Vivekananda was not only to obliterate all distinctions of caste, but also to uplift the *Daridra Narayana*. ...Another thing he has done is propounding the principles of Vedanta in foreign countries. We are all the

worshippers of the material world. We forget that there is anything good in our own teachings and literature. This is due to our illusion and ignorance. He expounded the principles of Vedanta and created not only a profound impression in the New World, but there were also many converts to it in America. Many of them came out to India, and devoted their time, energy and money to the cause of India. That was not a small service that he rendered.<sup>23</sup>

### **6.15 Sayed Mujtaba Ali**

The next is Sayed Mujtaba Ali,<sup>24</sup> an eminent literateur and distinguished linguist. He writes,

Like him [Ramakrishna] none had ever spoke in such a such a simple language. ... He was determined to attach greatest value to folk, religion, customs, rituals and language and, hence, had continually used peoples, language and the mode of talking with heart's content. ... We frequently see that he was not satisfied with the company of his Hindu disciples and followers alone, and has earnestly kept on asking – 'Where is Srinath (Sivanath Sashtri), Abdul (Dr. Abdul Aziz) has assured me that he would come.' ... It is my firm belief that for obviating the conflict, Sri Ramakrishna deserves the unique glory.<sup>25</sup>

## 6.16 Govinda Chandra Dev

Professor Dr. Govinda Chandra Dev,<sup>26</sup> popularly known as Dr. G. C. Dev was a faculty in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Dhaka. He was a bachelor in life. On the dreadful night of 25 March 1971, he was brutally bayoneted by the Pakistan occupation army and was also hit by their bullets inside his residence in the campus leading him to succumb to death. He was awarded the Ekushey Padak (1986) (Posthumous) and *Swadhinata Padak* (2008) (Posthumous) by the Government of Bangladesh.

This great philosopher writes in his famous Article “The Philosophy of Vivekananda and the Future of Man,”

I am enamored of the philosophy of Vivekananda because I believe that a great philosophy almost invariably works behind a great mind. But there is perhaps a weightier reason that goads me to my present task. Vivekananda seems to me to be an inveterate champion of the ‘perennial philosophy,’ that underlines all religions, and is the much – needed meeting ground of men of religion on the one hand and the modern humanists of different varieties on the other, a philosophy in whose practical application lies I believe the future of man at this crisis of history. ... If I were to sum up in one word all that is best in human endeavor since the dawn of history for a better world and a better existence, I could possibly do no better than to stumble on the magic word ‘Synthesis.’ Vivekananda’s greatness lies in the fact that he has given us

a synthetic philosophy which is no less suited to our skeptical doubts and vacillations than to our humanist aspirations and yearnings.<sup>27</sup>

### **6.17 Kazi Nazrul Islam**

Kazi Nazrul Islam,<sup>28</sup> national and rebel poet and a renowned litterateur of Bangladesh. He placed his deep respect to Sri Ramakrishna by writing a poem titled *Jugavatar Sri Ramakrishna*. This poem makes the peace message of Ramakrishna more poignant as it says

O Spiritual teacher, mother - lover

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Please take my respect,

You have worshipped living being,

In Temples, Mosques and Churches, without making any discrimination.

And the planet earth has filled with your message of love for all.<sup>29</sup>

### **6.18 Ramesh Chandra Majumdar**

Professor Ramesh Chandra Majumdar,<sup>30</sup> a noted historian and academic was first Professor and Chairman in the department of History at Dhaka University. About Ramakrishna, he stated, “He [Ramakrishna] held that not only all the different forms of Hindu religion, including the Puranic and Tantric, but all

religions, such as Islam and Christianity, are true in their essence and may lead to salvation, if properly perused.”<sup>31</sup>

Besides, on Vivekananda, R. C. Majumdar writes

He [Vivekananda] was a product of the nineteenth century Renaissance in Bengal, in its initial stage, but it was his genius and personality that molded it into the shape it finally assumed. ... It would appear that Swami Vivekananda has laid before us the final phase of the Renaissance Movement that is still leading us forward, and India will derive the fullest benefit from it if she follows the path laid by him.<sup>32</sup>

## **6.19 Rabindranath Thakur**

We all know that Bengal produced a very great literature and educationist who has drawn people into the orbit of the RKM. He is none other than Rabindranath Thakur,<sup>33</sup> a most celebrated poet of modern Bengal. In 1936 Thakur wrote the following poem for publication in the *Prabuddha Bharata*

To the Paramhansa Ramakrishna Deva

Diverse courses of worship from various springs of fulfillment have mingled  
in your meditation.



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

Where from far and near arrive salutations to which I join my own.<sup>34</sup>

About Vivekananda, R. Thakur writes

Some time ago Vivekananda said that there was the power of Brahman in every person that Narayana [i.e. God] wanted to have our service through the poor. This is what I call real gospel. ... This naturally contained in it protest against untouchability – not because that would make for political freedom, but because that would do away with the humiliation of man – a curse which in fact puts to shame the self of us all.<sup>35</sup>

## **6.20 Satyendra Nath Bose**

Satyendra Nath Bose,<sup>36</sup> a scientist and teacher of international fame, was a faculty member in the Department of Physics at the University of Dhaka. He writes

The immeasurable force having its source within him [Vivekananda], had ceaselessly strived to have emanation. Throughout his life this irrepressible force had moved him around the world. And wherever he went, people who had his contact could experience this life - force and were, consequently, rejuvenated. There hardly was anyone more capable than him to arouse the people of our country from their deep illusory slumber. ... It was our

misfortune that like the great Vedantist Shankaracharya, he had an early demise. But as the Shankaracharya in his short life had moved around India for umpteen times and tried to inject a new life force among the Indians, So also was the Swami during the nineteenth century stormed around India and the Western countries and preached Sri Ramakrishna's message of inter-religious harmony.<sup>37</sup>

## **6.21 Arnold Joseph Toynbee**

The celebrated English thinker and eminent historian at London University, Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975),<sup>38</sup> was very much agitated seeing the horrors of the World War, and he became dejected until he came in contact with the books of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He then became hopeful about the bright future of mankind and wrote in the foreword to the book Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message

Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which he and his message were needed. This message could hardly have been delivered by anyone who had not been brought up in the Hindu religious tradition. Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal in 1836. He was born into a world that, in his lifetime, was for the first time, being united on a literally worldwide scale. Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not

end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by western technology. But this Western skill has not only “annihilated distance”; it has armed the people of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. Sri Ramakrishna’s testimony to the harmony of religion, here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family – and in the atomic age this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.<sup>39</sup>

## **6.22 A. L. Basham**

Professor A. L. Basham (1914-1986) held the chair of the history of South Asia at London University. In 1958 he delivered an extempore address at the Ramakrishna –Vivekananda Anniversary meeting in London, stating in part

With the growing evidence of the practical blessings of science, telegraph, railway, trains, and so on, more and more educated Hindus began to feel that their culture was not up to scratch, and that the best thing for Indians was to accept the West, lock stock and barrel, and to make themselves as good imitations of Englishmen as possible. I believe that it was this very simple and humble man, Ramakrishna, who was more responsible than any other for altering this attitude. Probably he was one of the most saintly personalities to have lived on this planet for the last two centuries. To humble the last vestige

of pride in his high-caste birth he would perform the dirty and despised tasks of the sweeper in the temple. To understand fully the religious attitude of men of other faiths he would take to living the life of Christian, Muslim and Jain in turn, repeating their prayers, studying their scriptures and sacred writings, thinking their thoughts... The slogan “All religions are true”, must be interpreted in another sense. The great mystic, in his “experiment with truth” (to take a Gandhian phrase out of its context), found that experience of truly religious souls, whatever their sectarian background, was fundamentally the same, and that all religions ultimately led to the same goal, however much they lingered on the way – the freeing of the human spirit from the fetters of selfhood, the transcendence of fear in communion with that which is ultimate, and brotherly love. In this sense I have no doubt of the righteousness of Ramakrishna’s message.<sup>40</sup>

This famous historian A. L. Basham, gave a prominent place to Vivekananda in the history of the world. According to him,

Even now, a hundred years after the birth of Narendranath Datta, who later became Swami Vivekananda, it is very difficult to evaluate his importance in the scale of world history. It is certainly far greater than any Western historian or most Indian historians world have suggested at the time of his death. The passing of the years and the many stupendous and unexpected events which have occurred since then suggests that in centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main molders of the modern world, especially as far as Asia is concerned, and as one of the most significant figures in the whole

history of Indian religion, comparable in importance to such great teachers as Sankara and Ramanuja, and definitely more important than the saints of local or regional significance such as Kabir and Chaitanya. ... I believe also that Vivekananda will always be remembered in the world's history because he virtually initiated what the late Dr. C. E. M Joad once called 'the counter - attack from the East'. Since the days of the Indian missionaries who travelled in South-East Asia and China preaching Buddhism and Hinduism more than a thousand years earlier, he was the first Indian religious teacher to make an impression outside India.<sup>41</sup>

## 6.23 Will Durant

The great historian Will Durant<sup>42</sup> writes in his famous book *The Story of Civilization*,

[Ramakrishna] taught his followers [that] each [religion] is a way to God or a stage on the way adapted to the mind and heart of the seeker. To be converted from one religion to another is foolishness; one need only continue on his own way, and reach to the essence of his own faith. [He said,] 'All rivers flow to the ocean. Flow, and let others flow, too'. He tolerated sympathetically the pall polytheism of the people, and accepted humbly the monism of the philosophers, but in his own living faith God was a spirit incarnated in all men, and the only true worship of God was the loving service of mankind. ... Many fine souls, rich and poor, Brahman and pariah, chose him as guru, and formed an order and Mission in his name.<sup>43</sup>

This remarkable historian writes on Vivekananda in the same book

He [Vivekananda] preached to his countrymen a more virile creed than any Hindu had offered them since Vedic days: It is a man-making religion that we want. ... Give up these weakening mysticisms, and be strong. ... For the next fifty years ... let all other, vain gods disappear from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears; He covers everything. .... The first of all worship is the worship of those all around us. ... These are all our gods – men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our own countrymen. It was but a step from this to Gandhi.<sup>44</sup>

Will Durant further writes

The most vivid of [the followers of Ramakrishna] was a proud young Kshatriya, Narendranath Datta, who full of Spencer and Darwin, first presented himself to Ramakrishna as an atheist, unhappy in his atheism, but scornful of the myths and superstitions with which he identified religion. Conquered by Ramakrishna's patient kindness, Naren became the young master's most ardent disciple; he redefined God as 'the totality of all souls' and called upon his fellow men to practice religion not through vain asceticism and meditation, but through absolute devotion to [mankind].<sup>45</sup>

## **6.24 Friedrich Max Muller**

Friedrich Max Muller,<sup>46</sup> the venerable dean of European Orientalists and one of Germany's most acclaimed poets and scholars. It is Muller, who first declared

Vedanta to be the ‘acme’ of human thought.<sup>47</sup> It was also no wonder that when Muller became captivated with Ramakrishna, the rest of the world took notice. His interest first piqued by Professor Tawney, a Librarian of India House in London, first wrote an article titled ‘A Modern Hindu Saint’ and published in January of 1896 by *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*. Professor Tawney referred to Ramakrishna as a saint, a sage and a true mystic. Muller followed up this initial exposure by reaching Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings which were published in the *Brahmavadin* and also meeting Pratap Chandra Majumdar, the eloquent minister of the Brahma Samaj who had knew the Ramakrishna. In February and March 1898, Lewis Janes (1844-1901) [q.v.] submitted two letters to the *Outlook*, a Christian periodical, as a response to its statements about Swami Vivekananda’s lack of success in America and England. In the first letter Janes mentioned the influence among western people of Mazumdar’s and Muller’s articles on Ramakrishna

If, in his [Vivekananda’s] statement about the master, Sri Ramakrishna, the word “reverenced” were substituted for “worshipped”, the fact world hardly be greatly exaggerated. There are doubtless hundreds, if not thousands, in Europe and America who have been deeply touched by the accounts of that remarkable man which have been written by Professor Max Muller (“A Real Mahatman”, *Nineteenth Century*, August 1896), and by Majumdar, in a pamphlet [about Ramakrishna] which has been circulated in the United States. His influence over the remarkable coterie of educated young men who, as his disciples, are now spreading the doctrines of the Vedanta in India, Europe, and

America, and of whom the Swamis Vivekananda, Saradananda, and Abhedananda have been teachers in this country, has eventually been notable and worth tracing to its causes.<sup>48</sup>

Muller wrote a book named *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, published two years before his death. One quotation from Muller's biography on Ramakrishna reads as follows

He was a wonderful mixture of God and man. In his ordinary state he would talk to himself as servant of all men and women. He looked upon them all as God. He himself would never be addressed as Guru, or teacher. Never would he claim for himself any high position. He would touch the ground reverently where his disciples had trodden. But every now and then strange fits of God-consciousness came upon him. He then became changed into a different being altogether. He then spoke of himself as being able to do and know everything. He spoke as if he had the power of giving anything to anybody. He would speak of himself as the same soul that had been born before as Rama, as Krishna, as Jesus, or as Buddha, born again as Ramakrishna. He told Mathurnatha, long before anybody knew him, that he had many disciples who would come to him shortly, and he knew all of them. He said that he was free from all eternity and the practices and struggles after religion which he went through were only meant to show the people the way to salvation. He had done all for them alone. He would say he was a Nitya-mukta, or eternally free, and an incarnation of God himself.<sup>49</sup>



## 6.25 Alexander Schifmen

Alexander Schifmen, Adviser to the Tolstoy state Museum, in his book *Tolstoy and India* writes, “During the last decade of Tolstoy’s life Ramakrishna Paramhansa and his pupil Swami Vivekananda occupied his [Tolstoy’s] thoughts.”<sup>50</sup> He further writes, later on in February 1906, Tolstoy received from his friend and biographer, P. A. Sergernko, the book *Ramakrishna Paramhansa’s Sayings* in English published in 1905 in Madras and read it with interest. Wonderful saying! Ramakrishna died 50 [20?] years ago. A remarkable sage, said Tolstoy to a circle of his intimates and read aloud to them some of those sayings by the Indian philosopher.”<sup>51</sup>

Tolstoy continued to study and to benefit from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda until his death in 1910. Discussing the Russian Philosophical tract known as the *Vekhi*, Tolstoy wrote in 1909, “It is not worth reading, the *Vekhi*. ... when one has such [things] for reading such as Ramakrishna, the Buddha, Vivekananda, the Gospel.”<sup>52</sup> In the same year Tolstoy spoke to his publishing house, wanting to create a theology of Swamiji’s sayings. The most eminent of modern Indian thinkers is Vivekananda, he asserted, and he should be published.”<sup>53</sup> Tolstoy’s desire and contribution to the RKM did not end with his death. After Tolstoy’s death, Ivan F. Nazhivin (1874-1940), a follower of Tolstoy, translated and published Max Muller’s *Ramakrishna His Life and Teachings (Sri Ramakrishna*

*Paramagamza, 1913*) into Russian. In doing so, he purposely deleted some of Ramakrishna's sayings. Nazhivin had formerly translated some of Vivekananda's writings. The following year *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* (Provozviestie Ramakrishna) translated by Swami Abhedananda with a Foreword and Introduction was rendered into Russian in St. Petersburg, and reprinted in 1931 in Riga, the capital of Latvia. These volumes are now preserved at Stamford University as part of the Konstantinoff and John Gladchenko Collections.<sup>54</sup> So, it is clear that Tolstoy's interest in and appreciation for Vivekananda and Ramakrishna greatly helped to spread the ideology of the RKM. And thus the RKM in Russia is now breathing a new life into the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere there.

## **6.26 Christopher Isherwood**

Christopher Isherwood was a renowned Anglo-American novelist and productive writer and playwright. His novels display a remarkable breadth of style and vision. In his 1965 biographical *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, he reached the conclusion that

Ramakrishna's life, being comparatively recent history, is well documented. In his respect, it has the advantage over the lives of other, earlier phenomena of a like nature. We do not have to rely, here, on fragmentary or glossed manuscripts, dubious witnesses, pious legends. What Ramakrishna was or was

not the reader must decide for himself; but at least his decision can be based on words and deeds Ramakrishna indubitably spoke and did. ... I myself a devotee of Ramakrishna; I believe, or am at least strongly inclined to believe, that he was what his disciples declared that he was: and incarnation of God upon earth.<sup>55</sup>

Christopher Isherwood further discerned

I only ask you approach Ramakrishna with the same open-minded curiosity you might feel about any highly unusual human being: a Julius Ceaser, a Catherine of Siena, a Leonardo da Vinci, as Arthur Rimbaud. Dismiss from your mind, as far as you are able, such categories as holy - unholy, sane-insane, wise – foolish, pure-impure, positive-negative, useful-useless. Just say to yourself as you read: this, too, is humbly possible. Then later, if you like, consider the implications of that possibility for the rest of the human species.<sup>56</sup>

It is noteworthy mentioning that *The New York Herald Tribune* rated the book as one of the five most outstanding “Philosophy and Religion” volumes of the year. *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* have been translated into French, Italian, Russian and other languages. In the Foreword for Swami Gambhirananda’s *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, Isherwood discerned

The RKM is unique because its founder was unique. ... And who, in the world’s recent history, can stand beside Ramakrishna’s disciples, Vivekananda

and Brahmananda? Spiritual truth is eternal, but it has to be restated and redemonstrated in a human life in order that it may solve the varying problems of each succeeding epoch. Ramakrishna's teaching is our modern gospel. He lived and taught for us, not for the men of two thousand years ago; and the RKM is responsible for the spreading of his gospel among us, here and now. For this reason alone, the Movement must be regarded as the most important of all existing religious movements.<sup>57</sup>

## **6.27 Humayun Kabir**

Professor Humayun Kabir<sup>58</sup> was a faculty member in the department of philosophy at the University of Andhra. Later he became the Chairman of University Grants commission. He writes

In remembering the services and the examples of Sri Ramakrishna, we have before us the example of a personality who tried to live and explain the different aspects of human functions, of which we have very few equals in our country's history. ... In his life he tried to realize truth in its different manifestations, to recognize the value of the contribution of different types of human endeavor to the achievement of salvation. ... The aspect which has impressed me, is his emphasis on toleration, on service. His emphasis on toleration is a development of the aspect of service to humanity. Once he told swami Vivekananda, 'So long as you serve people, there is no question of your trying to show mercy, there is no question of showing compassion as in ordinarily understood. What is wanted is compassion in the true and literal

sense of the word, compassion by which you identify yourself with others.’ His emphasis on toleration rests on this emphasis upon compassion in the sense of identifying oneself with humanity, identifying oneself with the individual of whatever colour, whatever creed, whatever religion, whatever race, of whatever nationality. And in his life he exemplified this sense of identification with all human beings. To my mind that is also the greatest teachings of true democracy and Sri Ramakrishna in his own way emphasized the dignity of the individual. ... The greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, the beauty of Sri Ramakrishna, thus lies in this sense of identification with human beings, the recognition of the value of the individual.<sup>59</sup>

## **6.28 Jadunath Sarker**

There is another great mind that placed his respect for Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Jadunath Sarker, a famous historian of late Mughal India. He writes

It is many years since the earthy life of Paramhansa Deva came to an end. But the light that he brought to this world is still burning. Even today millions of people, men and women, rich and poor, scholars and the illiterate, the happy and the miserable, the high caste and the low, leading his life and hearing his teachings, have been able to tune their life to a higher key. His life has brought solace to many a heart afflicted with sorrow and has shown that kingdom of Heaven can be brought to this earth.<sup>60</sup>

Professor Sarkar further writes

Ninety-one years ago a boy was born who has turned the lives of millions of us in India into a new channel, and thousands in the west to find their own souls amidst the doubts and distractions of this mechanical civilization. When we calmly reflect on our social scene, we feel bound to admit that the moral resolution not merely preached but actually accomplished by his life and example, is the dominating force of Hindu Society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup>

## **6.29 Romain Rolland**

Another name Romain Rolland,<sup>62</sup> figures mightily in the spread of the RKM memes. Saddened by the horrifying effects of the First World War, Rolland, sought the truth that world bring peace and harmony to the modern world. In his day Rolland was considered the greatest living French writer. Having won Noble Prize for Literature in 1915, some of his works translated into thirty-five languages. Rolland discovered Ramakrishna when he read Mukherji's *The Face of Silence*, after which he sent Dhan Gopal Mukherji an invitation to visit his home in Switzerland. The two met on 4 October, 1926, and at that time Rolland's interest in Ramakrishna and Vivekananda increased significantly. Rolland's description of both Ramakrishna and Swamiji are some of the loveliest written not only the prose elegant, but author's obvious love for his

subjects conveys more than a mere intellectual appreciation. Take, for instance, his description of Ramakrishna's personality lies here

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the soul, the symphony of Bengal, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. ...the man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced whole multiplicity of men and Gods. It is my desire to bring the sound of the beating of the artery to the ears of fever-stricken Europe, which has murdered sleep. I wish to wet its lips with the blood of immortality.<sup>63</sup>

Besides, about Vivekananda's words, Rolland writes

His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel Choruses. I cannot touch these saying of his, scattered as they are through the pages of book at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports must have been produced when in burning worlds they issued from the lips of the hero.<sup>64</sup>

### **6.30 U. Thant**

The next man is U. Thant, who was born in Burma (Now Myanmar). He was former Secretary General in the UNO. He writes

Swami Vivekananda was the greatest spiritual ambassador of Bengal, if I may say so, in the history of Bengal. And for that matter the history of Asia. The main purpose of his historic visit to USA was to find a synthesis, if I can interpret and assess his activities in this country. He was very keen to bring about this synthesis between Bengal and the United States, between Asia and the West. ... Vivekananda had very significant and very pertinent message for these tense times. He said: 'In this country I do not come to convert you to a new belief. I want to make the Methodist a better Methodist, the Unitarian a better Unitarian. So let us dedicate ourselves anew to this pledge: to make Christians better Christians, Hindus better Hindus, Muslims better Muslims, Buddhists better Buddhists, and Jews better Jews.'<sup>65</sup>

### **6.31 William Digby**

William Digby,<sup>66</sup> an accomplished author of several political science texts, made a very significant remark in his book *Prosperous India* of 1901. The statement is as follows

During the last century the finest fruit of British intellectual eminence was, probably, to be found in Robert Browning and John Ruskin. Yet they are mere groupers in the dark compared with the uncultured and illiterate Ramakrishna,



of Bengal, who, knowing naught of what we term “learning”, speak as no other man of his age spoke, and revealed God to weary mortals.<sup>67</sup>

## **6.32 Aldous Huxley**

Aldous Huxley,<sup>68</sup> a renowned British-American Author. He was a famous writer of both fiction and nonfiction articles, essays, short stories, plays, poetry and films. His novels display a remarkable breadth of style and vision. On Sri Ramakrishna Huxley writes

The further you go towards the East’, Sri Ramakrishna was fond of saying ‘the further you go away from the west’. This is one of those apparently childish remarks, which we meet with so often among the writings and recorded sayings of religious teachers. But it is an apparent childishness that masks a real profundity. Within this absurd little tautology there lies, in a state of living, seminal latency, a whole metaphysic, a complete programme of action. It is, of course, the same philosophy and the same way of life as were referred to by Jesus in those sayings about the impossibility of serving two masters, and the necessity of seeking first the kingdom of god and waiting for all the rest to be added. Egoism and alter-egoism (or the idolatrous service of individuals, groups, and causes with which we identify ourselves so that their success flatters our own ego) cut us off from knowledge and experience of reality. ... Egoism and alter-egoism advise us to remain firmly ensconced in the west, looking after our own human affairs. But if we do this, our affairs will end by going to pot. ... Whereas if we ignore the counsels of egoism and

alter-egoism, and resolutely march toward the divine East, we shall create for ourselves the possibility of receiving the grace of enlightenment and, at the same time, we shall find that existence in our physical, Western home is a great deal more satisfactory than it was when we devoted our attention primarily to the improvement of our human lot.<sup>69</sup>

### **6.33 M. K. Gandhi**

M. K. Gandhi,<sup>70</sup> the Father of the Nation of India, paid his deep respect to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. He stated

The story of Ramakrishna Paramhansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of skepticism Ramakrishna presents as example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in *ahimsa*. His love knew no limits geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all.<sup>71</sup>

## About Vivekananda, M. K. Gandhi mentioned

I have come here [Belur Math] to pay my homage and respect to the revered memory of Swami Vivekananda, whose birthday is being celebrated today [6 February, 1923]. I have gone through his works very thoroughly, and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became a thousand fold. I ask you, young men, not to go away empty-handed without imbibing something of the spirit of the place where Swami Vivekananda lived and died.<sup>72</sup>

### 6.34 Muhammad Daud Rahbar

The Islamic scholar Muhammad Daud Rahbar,<sup>73</sup> a Professor of World Religions at Boston University, perceived Ramakrishna this way:

Like a magnet, Sri Ramakrishna attracted ardent disciples. More than thirty of them maintained intimate association with him. Hundreds of them derived solace and blessing by beholding him and talking to him. ... I have read some of the delightful portions of the one thousand - page *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This marvelous volume has extraordinary revelations. Immediately one recognizes a cherishable friend in Sri Ramakrishna. His open, passionate, and transparent devotion humbles and chastens us. He is no common mortal. He is a man of phenomenal gifts. His presence is a heaven. His conversations, recorded abundantly in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by his disciple M., are charming, inspired. Their literary merit is due to the

inspired goodness of Sri Ramakrishna. ... The list of his virtues is magnificent: wisdom: (as distinct from journalistic encyclopaedism), inspired intellect, devotion, renunciation, concerned detachment, sublimation, genuine gregariousness, brilliant conversationalist, friendliness, gracious wit, variety and vastness of life experience.<sup>74</sup>

### **6.35 Jawaharlal Nehru**

Jawaharlal Nehru,<sup>75</sup> the first Prime Minister of Independent India, placed his homage to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. ... one of the effects of Sri Ramakrishna's life was the peculiar way in which he influenced other people who came in contact with him. Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet whom they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God and ceased to scoff and 'remained to pray'.<sup>76</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru further writes

I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and the writings of Swami Vivekananda. But I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him and I think that it would do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through

swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches, and they would learn much from them. That would, perhaps, as some of us did, enable us to catch a glimpse of that fire that raged in Swami Vivekananda's mind and heart and which ultimately consumed him at an early age. Because there was fire in his heart - the fire of a great personality coming out in eloquent and ennobling language - it was no empty talk that he was indulging in. He was putting his heart and soul into the words he uttered. ... He gave us something which brings us, if I may use the word, a certain pride in our inheritance. He did not spare us. He talked of our weaknesses and our failings too. He did not wish to hide anything. Indeed he should not. Because we have to correct those failings, he deals with those failings also. Sometimes he strikes hard at us, but sometimes points out the great things for which this region stood and which even in the days of this region's downfall made her, in some measure, continue to be great.<sup>77</sup>

### **6.36 Frederico Mayor**

Frederico Mayor,<sup>78</sup> a Spanish scholar and politician, served as the Director General of UNESCO from 1987-99. He writes

His (Swami Vivekananda) commitment towards universalism and tolerance, his active identification with humanity as a whole. He said from the tribune of the Parliament of Religions, and I quote: I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen. 'I am sure all of

us would strongly identify with this aspiration, since the struggle against exclusiveness is one that must be perpetually renewed. ... The Mission he established, and which has now spread all over the world, is working to reduce poverty and eliminate discrimination among the different segments of society. I am indeed struck by the similarity of the constitution of the Ramakrishna Mission which Vivekananda established as early as 1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1945. Both Place the human being at the centre of their efforts aimed at development. Both place tolerance at the top of the agenda for building peace and democracy. Both recognize the variety of human cultures and societies as an essential aspect of the common heritage.<sup>79</sup>

### **6.37 Zakir Hussain**

Dr. Zakir Hussain,<sup>80</sup> the Third President of India, paid his deep respect to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda for their contributions to make this world more peaceful. He narrated

God-intoxicated Saint, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, was one of the very great ones in that great army of the spirit, marching down the corridors of time under the Indian sky. ... Sri Ramakrishna used to say do not speak of love for your brother. Realize it. Do not argue about doctrine or religion. There is only one. All rivers flow to the Ocean. Flow and let others flow too. The great stream carves for itself according to the slope of its journey according to race, time and temperament, its own bed. But it is all the same water. Go, flow on towards the ocean.<sup>81</sup>

Dr. Zakir Hussain further narrated

I saw in him a religious man who did not make a narrow specialty of religion who did not exploit it to divide humanity into hostile groups each claiming the monopoly of truth and just passing it by. I felt attracted to his austerity, his religious experience, his enormous energy that experience generates represented the engine which was placed on the rails of work for the people, by the magic spell of Sri Ramakrishna's personality who secretly as it were, passed on to the young disciple the keys of heaven with which could be opened also the doors of the treasures of the world. The service of mankind became the young disciple's burning passion and he could in a moment of ecstasy say, may I be born again and suffer a thousand miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls, and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races and species. May these be the special objects of my worship. ... We have to learn from Swami Vivekananda the courage to put the engine of moral conviction on the rails of social service. We have to hammer ourselves into fit instruments for meeting the challenge by enabling our fellow citizens to meet them. Work, work, work, silent and sincere dedicated work, solid and steady reconstruction on the whole material and cultural life of our people.<sup>82</sup>

Another great gift that the RKM brought to the west was its emphasis on meditation. One was who valued this emphasis – perhaps not surprisingly – was Albert Einstein. Einstein had read a book titled *The Eternal Companion: The life and Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* and was deeply impressed. Upon

Finishing the Book, Einstein remarked, “Maharaj [Sw. Brahmananda] was right. Meditation is important. We know what goes on in the external world but we don’t know what goes on here (pointing to his heart).”<sup>83</sup>

More than a hundred years have passed since RKM was incepted. It is but natural that on this holy occasion many people will give focus to RKM by studying and analyzing its services from various angles in various languages. And, no doubt, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement has been the most marvelous contribution of creative Bangladesh to world civilization. If Sri Ramakrishna is regarded as the ‘Prophet’ of the new movement, Swami Vivekananda is certainly its greatest ‘Preacher’ of protagonist. Bangladesh is born anew through the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement to work out the salvation not only in Bangladesh but of the world at large.

## Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup>. Syed Anwar Husain, Sri Ramakrishna’s Ideas and Islam Today (Paper delivered at the seminar organized by the RKM Vidyamandir, Belur Math, India, January 2012), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>. Syed Anwar Husain, (Address delivered at the Value-oriented education seminar organized by the RKM centre, Dhaka, Bangladesh, December, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>. *Uddipan*, Sri Ramakrishna Temple Consecration Ceremony Commemorative Volume (Dhaka: RKM, 2007) p. 212.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup>. *Uddipan*, Swami Vivekananda’s 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary Commemorative Volume (Dhaka: RKM, 2015) pp. 123-124.



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6. Personal File of Dr. Niru Kumar Chakma, Dhaka University Record Room.
7. *Uddipan*, Sri Ramakrishna's 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary Commemorative Volume (Dhaka: RKM, 1985) pp. 212-213.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
9. *Uddipan*, Commemorative Volume of 175<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna (Dhaka: RKM, 2012) p. 224.
10. *Ibid.*, 2012, p. 298.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
12. Personal File of Dr. Shamsheer Ali, Dhaka University Record Room.
13. *Uddipan*, 1985, pp. 258-259.
14. *Uddipan*, 2015, p. 170.
15. *Gandip*, a yearly publication of Vivekananda Shiksha O Sangskriti Parishad, Bangladesh (Dhaka: VSSP, 2018) p.56.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
18. Muhammad Sahidullah was an illustrious figure in the cultural domain of Bengal. He did his PhD in Linguistics from Paris University. Professor Sahidullah knew several languages and had a boundless love for his own mother language Bengali. He distinguished himself as a great authority on linguistics. He taught at the University of Dacca.
19. Sankari P. Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsa* (Calcutta: Mandol Book House), Vol. 7, pp. 292-293.
20. Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937) was a Bangladeshi Physicist and Science fiction writer, who pioneered the investigation of radio and microwave optics, made extremely significant contributions to plant science, and laid the foundations of experimental science in the Indian subcontinent. he is considered the father of radio science.
21. *Prabuddha Bharata*, November, 1941, p. 498.
22. Prafulla Chandra Roy (1861-1944), a distinguished Chemist and educationist, was the founder of the 'Bengal Chemical & Pharmaceutical Works Ltd'. He was awarded the DSC degree from the University of Edinburgh for his outstanding research in Chemistry. He was an outstanding teacher and his love for the students and devotion to his research, have been proverbial. He believed in 'Plain living and high thinking' and was involved in many

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benevolent services for the welfare of his country. Prafulla C. Roy was adorned with several honors which were bestowed upon him by several Institutions and Organizations at home and abroad. Among his important publications which of course are many, we need to mention his autobiography, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* and *History of Hindu Chemistry* (two volumes).

<sup>23</sup>. *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1931, pp. 243-44.

<sup>24</sup>. Sayed Mujtba Ali (1904-1974) was an eminent litterateur and a distinguished linguist. Between 1928 and 30, he studied at the University of Berlin and Bonn and obtained his PhD degree. He headed the Dept. of Islamic Studies at Santiniketon for a few years. Among his notable publications mention may be made of *Dese Bideshe*, *Pancatantra*, *Cacakahini* etc.

<sup>25</sup>. Swami Purnatmananda, (ed.), *Udbodhan Centenary Collection* (Kolkata: Udbodhan office, 1999), pp. 857-861.

<sup>26</sup>. Dr. Govinda Chandra Dev, popularly known as Dr. G. C. Dev, was a profound scholar with a wide range of learning and scholarship. The essence of his philosophy was to establish love, unity, harmony and peace in societies, in nations and in the world at large. His philosophy of universal love and brotherhood converted him into an uncompromising humanist. He had no specific bias for any specific religion and he used to say that he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, his religion was to serve the humanity. On the dreadful night of 25 March 1971, Dr. Dev along with many other patriots was brutally killed by the Pakistani army.

<sup>27</sup>. Hasan Azizul Huq, (ed.), *Works of Govinda Chandra Dev*, Vol. 2. (University of Dhaka: Dev Centre for Philosophical Studies, Department of Philosophy, 1980), p. 145.

<sup>28</sup>. Kazi Nazrul Islam was a Bengali poet, writer, musician. He is the national poet of Bangladesh. He produced a large body of poetry and music with themes that included spiritual devotion and rebellion against oppression.

<sup>29</sup>. *Uddipan.*, 2012, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup>. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (1888-1980), was a noted historian and academic. He served as a Vice-Chancellor at the University of Dhaka from the year 1937 to 1942. His publications include 11 vols. *History and Culture of the Indian People*; *History of Freedom Movement in India* (3 vols.); *Ancient Indian Colonies in far-East*; *Swami Vivekananda*; *History of India* (4 vols.) etc.

<sup>31</sup>. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement In India* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1971), vol. 1, p. 267.

<sup>32</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 316-321.

<sup>33</sup>. Rabindranath Thakur (1861-1941) was a renowned literature, philosopher and educationist. He was the first Asian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature (1913). He resigned the 'Knighthood' title in protest against military atrocities and tragedy at Jalianwallabagh (1919).

<sup>34</sup>. *Prabuddha Bharata*, February, 1936, p. 53.

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<sup>35</sup>. This brief writing of Rabindranath Thakur first appeared in *Udbodhan* in its Ashwin, 1348 issue. The title was 'Vivekananda'. At the footnote it is mentioned: 'At the request of Swami Ashokananda, formerly editor of the *Prabudhha Bharata* and the minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Sanfrancisco, Rabindranath gave this short writing to him in the month of Phalgun, 1335. The facsimile of Rabindranath's original writing was available to the Ramakrishna order by the courtesy of Viswa-Bharati long after its publication in *Udbodhan*.

<sup>36</sup>. Satyendra Nath Bose (1894-1974) was a Scientist and teacher of international fame. Bose's *Planck's law and the Hypothesis of Light Quanta* (1924) led Albert Einstein to seek him out for collaboration. This physicist is specially noted for his collaboration with Einstein in developing a theory regarding the gas-like qualities of electromagnetic radiation.

<sup>37</sup>. *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsa*, vol. 7, pp. 379-380.

<sup>38</sup>. A J Toynbee was a British historian whose twelve-volume *A Study of History* is most remarkable. He worked for the political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office during World War 1 and served as a delegate to the Parish Peace Conference in 1919.

<sup>39</sup>. Gopal Stavic, *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2010) p. 101.

<sup>40</sup>. A. L. Basham, *Swami Vivekananda in East and West* (London: Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre) p. 210.

<sup>41</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>42</sup>. Durant, William James, Known as Will, American historian and philosopher, taught at Habor Temple School. New York City (1914-1927). After success of his *Story of Philosophy* (1926), he and his wife Ariel Durant, Collaborated on 11-Volume *Story of Civilization* series, comprising, *Our Oriental Heritage* (1935), etc.,

<sup>43</sup>. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), Vol.1, p. 617.

<sup>44</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 618.

<sup>45</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 617.

<sup>46</sup>. Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900) was a German by birth. He became the greatest of the European Indologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Max Muller was one of the first to evaluate properly the greatness of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and give wide publicity of his warm admiration for Ramakrishna in the West.

<sup>47</sup>. Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, New York: Sunny Press, 1988) p. 133.

<sup>48</sup>. Lewis Janes, "American Vedantism", *Outlook* (February, 19, 1898), p. 466.

<sup>49</sup>. F. Max. Muller, *Ramakrishna His Life and Sayings* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2001),

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p. 58.

<sup>50</sup>. Alexander Shifman, *Tolstoy and India* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1969), pp. 28-31.

<sup>51</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup>. Quoted from Dilip Kumar Roy, *Tirthankar* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1982), p. 21.

<sup>53</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>54</sup>. Sergei Serebriany, "Leo Tolstoy and Sri Ramakrishna", *BRMIC* (1987), pp. 164-167.

<sup>55</sup>. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), pp. 1-2.

<sup>56</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup>. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957). P. 94.

<sup>58</sup>. Professor Humayun Kabir (1898-1969) had an illustrious academic career. After his return from Oxford, with an outstanding result, he joined the University of Andhra as a faculty member in the department of Philosophy. Later he joined politics and became a central minister of the Indian Republic. Professor Kabir was the Editor of the reputed literary journal *Caturanga*. His poetical and critical works include *Swapnasadh*, *Sathi* and *Banglar Kavya*.

<sup>59</sup>. Translated from *Udbodhan Centenary Collection* (Satabdi Jayanti Nirbachita Sankalan) ed., by Swami Purnatmananda, (Kolkata: Udbodhan Karyalaya, 1999), p. 870.

<sup>60</sup>. *Prabiddha Bharata*, November, 1941, p. 499.

<sup>61</sup>. *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatavarsa*, vol. 7, p. 268.

<sup>62</sup>. Romain Rolland (1866-1944), a French man, received 1915 Nobel Prize for literature. His works included several prominent biographies *Beethoven* (1903), *Michel-Angelo* (1905), *Tolstoy* (1911), and *Mahatma Gandhi* (1924), *The Life of Ramakrishna*, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*.

<sup>63</sup>. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), pp. 11-14.

<sup>64</sup>. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. E. F. Malcolm Smith (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), p. 146.

<sup>65</sup>. *Vedanta and the West*, (Hollywood: RKM, 1958), pp. 13-17.

<sup>66</sup>. William Digby was the Editor in the *Madras Times*, an Anglo-Indian newspaper. In 1901 he wrote the book *Prosperous India*, which became a legend in the days of Indian Freedom Struggle. It was due to Digby that Swami Vivekananda got an astonishing coverage in the *Madras Times*. Sympathetic to the Indian cause, William Digby of England was a severe critic of British colonialism and bleeding exploitation of Indian resources. His monumental

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and seminal work *Prosperous British India* was a pioneer work on Indian's economic history under British rule.

<sup>67</sup>. William Digby, *Prosperous India* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1969), P. 99.

<sup>68</sup>. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was an English writer. He spent the latter part of his life in United States, living in Los Angeles from 1937 until his death in 1963. He was the author of *The Perennial Philosophy*.

<sup>69</sup>. *Huxley and God, Essays* (San Francisco: Harper 1992), pp. 90-91.

<sup>70</sup>. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was an Indian nationalist, popularly known as 'Bapu' - the Father of the Nation. Studied Law in London (1888—91), practiced in India (1893). Championed the cause of the blacks in South Africa (1893). Presided over the Indian National Congress (1925-26). Author of *Hind Swaraj* (1909), *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, etc.

<sup>71</sup>. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977), Foreword, xi.

<sup>72</sup>. *Tolstoy and India* (New Delhi: Shitya Akademi, 1978), pp. 23-29.

<sup>73</sup>. The Islamic scholar Muhammad Daud Rahbar, a Professor of World Religions at Boston University.

<sup>74</sup>. Gopal Stavic, *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2010), p. 197.

<sup>75</sup>. The first Prime Minister of Independent India. An Ardent follower of Gandhiji and a prolific writer. *Discovery of India*, *Glimpses of world History*, *Letters from a Father to a Daughter* etc. are his famous publications.

<sup>76</sup>. Swami Suparnananda, *Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* (Kolkata: RMIC, 1983), p. 75.

<sup>77</sup>. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (London: Meridian Books Limited, 1960), P.338

<sup>78</sup>. Federico Mayor Zaragoza (1934- ) is a Spanish scholar. He served as the Director General of UNESCO from 1987-99. Mayor obtained a doctorate in Pharmacy from the Complutense of Madrid in 1958.

<sup>79</sup>. *Prabuddha Bharata*, November, 1922.

<sup>80</sup>. Dr. Zakir Hussain (1897-1969) was the 3<sup>rd</sup> President of India, from 1967 to 1969. An educationist and intellectual, Hussain was the country's first Muslim president. He was also co-founder of Jamia Milia Islamia, serving as its Vice-Chancellor from 1928.

<sup>81</sup>. *Vedanta Kesari*, September, 1963. p. 338.

<sup>82</sup>. *Idid.*, p. 339.

<sup>83</sup>. Unpublished reminiscences of Swami Prabhananda, now Vice President of RKM, (Courtesy of Pravajikas Varadaprona, Prabhaprana, Anandaprana and Bhaktiprana).

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

Earlier it is mentioned that the RKM form the core of a worldwide spiritual movement (Known as *Ramakrishna Movement* or *Vedanta Movement*), which aims at the harmony of religions, harmony of the East and the West, harmony of the ancient and the modern, spiritual fulfillment, all-round development of human faculties, social equality, and peace for all humanity, without any distinctions of creed, caste, race or nationality.<sup>1</sup> The RKM, being a Spiritual Sangha and service center aiming at the 'total uplift of humanity', has proved itself during the last 119 years by its noteworthy contributions to humanity at all levels. Now the RKM has stepped into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a providing future. In Bangladesh the RKM runs school and other educational institutions, maintains dispensaries and hospitals, conducts relief operations and follows them up with rehabilitations projects, undertakes schemes for integrated rural development, and works among the tribal people without disturbing their native faith, culture, and traditions. And the RKM services are impressive but not quite pervasive. Most of its services are so silent and free from controversies that it does not attract the media's attention. There is no conscious attempt made to appear in the public eye.

It is noteworthy to mention that the RKM never takes a stand for or against the social issue of the day. It is easy to take sides in any conflict, it is difficult to remain neutral and try to understand the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of each side’s viewpoint. The RKM has chosen the difficult way, because it is the only way to become an instrument of reconciliation, restoring peace, harmony and understanding. So, on one side, the RKM looks like a social service center, and on other side, paradoxically, it looks cut off from society. Neither of these views is right. The RKM is entirely a spiritual institution, but its spirituality is not divorced from the reality of daily life.

Since the RKM studiously kept itself away from politics — and most social issues today get politicized sooner or later — the general impression that the RKM is becoming socially irrelevant. Although request for more schools and relief services are routinely received by the RKM in Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> It must be clear at this point that Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the RKM, had little faith in politics an instrument for human welfare. After making a keen study of history he stated, “... the political systems that we are struggling for in India have been in Europe for ages, have been tried for centuries, and have been found wanting.”<sup>3</sup> And again, “One after another the institutions, systems, and everything connected with political government have been condemned as useless; and Europe is restless, does not know where to turn.”<sup>4</sup> Among Western thinkers, Bertrand Russel, Arnold Toynbee, Emerson and Romain Rolland have

expressed dissatisfaction with politics.<sup>5</sup> Today, In Bangladesh, the concept of the welfare state has come to stay. No longer can governments restrict themselves to the maintenance of law and order. They have to look after the supply of food, water, shelter, medical aid, education, irrigation facilities, and a host of other needs of the people. Governments make budgetary provisions for all these, but the benefits do not actually percolate the masses. *En route* the cream gets siphoned off at various levels. Result, the rich get richer and the poorer. It is in this context that spiritual center, service center and Non-governmental voluntary institutions can play a great role. Indeed, in Bangladesh at present we have a plethora of these voluntary institutions concerning themselves with the amelioration of the condition of their fellowmen in diverse departments of life. Some of them have been rendering signal service in the field of their choice and have won accolades, nationally and internationally. But there is no firm ideology for motivating the social activist along principled channels, and so, in actual practice, tangles develop in the working of most voluntary institutions. Apart from the miasma of corruption and fraud, politics also often creeps in.

It is against this backdrop that we study the evolution of the RKM which comes as a whiff of fresh air. Even those who have not taken much interest in the ideals of the RKM need to take note of one lesson that its work holds for all. Today historians, social-scientists and philosophers admit that by founding the



RKM Swami Vivekananda not only extended the limits of monasticism and religion, but also opened up in them a new dimension. He gave a new consciousness to monasticism and religion - infused new life into both, as it were. He established monasticism on its true ideal and added to it a new dimension, new significance, new import, new expansion, new depth, and new mobility. Ascetic monasticism turned poetic and humane.

Throughout its long tradition, Hindu monasticism had proved itself to be utterly callous to society and to the people at large. The tradition of Hindu monasticism never admitted any commitment either to society or to the people. God-realization or self-liberation was its only ideal and God was the center of its spiritual endeavors and aspirations. The monk used to shut himself up in a secluded cave of a mountain or a cottage in a forest and spend his days and nights in the contemplation of God or the self. Society and people provided him with food, clothing, and sustenance. But he never cared to feel any concern for them; rather he remained content with his majestic aloofness from society and people. Swami Vivekananda said

For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many is the Sannyasin born. His life is all vain, indeed, who embracing Sannyasa, forgets this ideal. The Sannyasin, verily, is born into this world to lay down his life for others, to stop the bitter cries of men, to wipe the tears of the widow, to bring peace to the soul of the bereaved mother, to equip the ignorant masses for the struggle

for existence, to accomplish the secular and spiritual well-being of all through the diffusion of spiritual teachings and to arouse the sleeping lion of Brahman in all by throwing in the light of knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vivekananda placed before the monks of the RKM a twofold motto: *atmano mokartham jagat hitya ca* –for one’s own salvation and for the good of the world. This motto, a novel motto indeed, became the war-song of all services rendered by the RKM. And thus RKM stands as a unique institution in the history of monasticism. Vivekananda kept intact the age-old ideal of monasticism, viz. the ideal of self-liberation, but it to at the same time the ideal of humanism, the ideal of doing public good. He never shifted the position of God from the center of the monk’s spiritual endeavors and aspirations. He only gave a new name for him - ‘Man’. RKM and its founder equated Man with God and thus God exchanged his position with Man as the object of worship. The ‘mission’ of the RKM as set by Vivekananda was - evolving a God out of the material man. The ‘mission’ was nothing but the ‘mission’ of Vedanta. Hence Swamiji termed his new mission ‘Practical Vedanta’. The RKM focuses on the philosophy of service, the another aspect of practical Vedanta, which advocates the equation of service with worship.

The main tenets of Practical Vedanta are as bellows,

1. Each soul is potentially Divine. (What this means is men’s real nature is neither the body nor the mind but the Atman, and this Atman is inseparable

from the Paramatman, also known as Brahman. But, owing to beginning less ignorance, people are not aware of this fact.)

2. The ultimate goal of life is to manifest this inherent Divinity. (It means to realize one's true nature as Atman-Brahman, by the removal of ignorance. This is also known as God realization. It is the goal of life.)

3. The manifestation of Divinity, or God realization, can be attained by following any one of the four yogas. *Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Raja-Yoga* and *Karma-Yoga*. A synthesis of all the four yogas is however, the best method.

4. Every religion is a pathway to the ultimate Reality, which is known by different names in different religious traditions. Religions of the world are therefore not contradictory to one another but complementary.

5. God is present in all beings as the supreme self; hence service to man is to be regarded as service to God, and all work is to be treated as worship.

6. Spiritual life must have a foundation in morality. True morality is the assertion of the inherent purity and strength of the Atman.<sup>7</sup>

The Ideology mentioned above finds expression in all services of the RKM. Sri Ramakrishna practiced various religions. Following this ideal, the monks of the RKM are taught to look upon all religions as true. Not only that, the RKM preaches that to follow a single path, to attain a single goal, is being narrow. Thus, in RKM centers, all festivals are given equal importance. It may be

Nabiday, it may be some other ceremony, but each is celebrated with equal devotion.<sup>8</sup> Such a broad outlook is quite novel.

It is noteworthy to mention that aspirants of all religions are allowed to join the RKM.<sup>9</sup> There is also no distinction of caste in the institution. The only conditions are: the educated, cultured, devout young who aspire to become monks should be unmarried and within a specified age-limit. The first thing a new entrant notices is love. The transition from home to monastery is very smooth for any new entrant. He perhaps feels that he receives more love than his parents showered on him. This is very important in view of the fact that lack of love is a serious problem of the present-day Bangladesh and other parts of the world.

The second thing that a new entrant experiences in the RKM is that he is as free as a bird. Growth is something from 'inside-out'; it is never from outside-in'. Freedom is the basic condition of growth, said Swamiji, and that is put into practice very well in the RKM. There is no regimentation here: you are free to pray as you wish, work as you wish, take up whatever specialization you wish, utilize your time in whichever fruitful way you wish. This however, does not mean that the institution does not have rules. Swamiji himself has framed rules, though reluctantly, saying that the ideal is to go beyond rules. The administration of the RKM is perfectly democratic. The entire monastic fold

comes under a few monks, trustees of the Math and members of the governing Body of the Mission, who control all the services of the Sangha. It is from among these trustees that the President and Vice-presidents, General Secretary and Assistant Secretaries are chosen, and they in turn appoint heads of branch centers.<sup>10</sup> The members of the Governing body are the policy makers.

The authority of the RKM focuses on modern learning system. In Keeping up with the times, it is imperative that the monks have computer education, knowledge of science and so on, and great care is taken to provide that to them. But the monks are never allowed to lose themselves in Harappan civilization, or in Bill Gate's civilization. To strike a smooth balance between the two is so difficult, but it is done so well in the RKM. Learning, selfless service, etc. do not prelude austerities. *Tapasya* is greatly encourage in the RKM, and every monk spends some time each year in solitude in intense spiritual *sadhana*. It has been tried and found that staying away for long times will not help. So the austerity of selfless service is encouraged. Each monk is given ample opportunity to develop and cultivate himself.

Apart from traditional learning, one is astounded at the national sentiments the Bangladeshis imbibe through their education in the RKM schools. In these schools, the entire student community repeats during their assembly the following 'National Integration Oath' of five sentences.

- I will work for the cause of the humanity.
- I will obey the rules and regulations of schools.
- I will follow the pathway of my own religion and will place respect for other faiths.
- I will respect the elder persons.
- I will be a good person.<sup>11</sup>

Besides, some very important aspect of the educational policy of the RKM are emerged. And these are:

- ⇒ In all the educational centers of the RKM, besides the general students, some tribal and distressed students are given facilities to have education up to the high level, entirely free of charge.
- ⇒ Though there has been on fact finding study, from general observation it is noticed that the students passing out from RKM-run schools normally do not join the army of educated unemployed youth as is happening in most of the areas. It is not even happening in the case of those families where children are the first generation learners. This is mainly because the children's general education is integrated with vocational education and they develop positive and constructive views of life and society. This enables them to play on effective role in their communities in the course of time.

As stated earlier, the chief aim of the RKM is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna had, for the good of humanity, taught and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental, and spiritual advancement. One of the well-known aspects of the above aim of the RKM is to prepare the ground for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms of one Eternal Religion. Its methods of service are:

- ⇒ To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;
- ⇒ To promote and encourage arts and industries;
- ⇒ And to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the field of literature and journalism also the RKM has some distinct contributions. In propagating the message of a great soul and a great institution, literature is one of the best media. The term 'literature' conveys a vast meaning as it includes books, journals, pamphlets, etc. on and by the spiritual luminaries. Starting from Bengali, the mother tongue of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and in

English in which the message of universal humanism was preached throughout the world, almost all the principal languages of the world have been benefited by the publications of RKM in various languages on the cultural heritage of Bengal in the light of the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.<sup>12</sup>

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is in urgent need of a literature which is capable of instilling higher values of life, from the poorest to the richest, without being dogmatic and sectarian in nature, and which will be capable of giving wisdom, strength, and peace of mind to all. We have already entered the new millennium. People of this century are looking for global values, a global religion, and a global civilization, Sri Ramakrishna's message of the harmony of religions, Swami Vivekananda's electrifying message of hope and strength, and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's message of universal love have the potential to usher us into a new civilization in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. And here lies the justification for looking forward to the opening of a glorious chapter for the RKM literature in the near future.

Earlier it is mentioned that the RKM is serving for about 119 years for the cause of humanity. Relief rehabilitation service have all along formed a major plank of the social service works of the RKM. Such works are undertaken every year on different scales in some or the other parts of the Bangladesh and the almost regular recurrence of both natural and man-made calamities. In recent times,



huge sums of money have been spent to assist Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar who took shelter at Chittagong and Cox'sbazar area.<sup>13</sup> Besides a handsome amount of money also have been spent on building communal stricken houses in Brhmanbaria and Rangpur.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, it would fill volumes if we were to record the pioneering work done by the RKM for the uplift of Bangladeshi masses, which include its services in the areas of spiritual and cultural development, rural welfare, tribal welfare, educational services, medical services, women's uplift, and relief and rehabilitation work done during disasters caused by famine, flood, plague, fire, earthquake and landslide, cyclone, drought, and cholera, etc. In addition to the relief work within Bangladesh, sometimes the RKM undertakes such services also in the neighboring countries like Nepal. It may be referred to the earthquake relief in Nepal in 2015. Arrangements were instantly made to dispatch milk powder, baby food, sugar, etc. to Nepal for immediate distribution among the distressed. Here, it should be remembered that the RKM's work constitutes a part of the spiritual practice performed with a spirit of dedication and service. As Swamiji said, "It is the giver who is blessed, not the receiver."<sup>15</sup> It is need to mention that the large-hearted public and also benevolent institutions at home and abroad form the major sources of finance for the RKM's relief activities. Besides, the RKM maintains a Provident Relief Fund at the Headquarters which provides necessary assistance. In case of major calamities of large proportion,

appeals are circulated over the media and the relief is conducted out of the earmarked contributions. In some cases, the Government too extends assistance in cash or kind.

It may be noted that RKM has proved its worth in the history of world for its characteristics which it developed in the early years of its existence. Its door is open to all irrespective of caste, creed, learning, or social standing. Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the RKM, observed in 1899 that

the Mission is distinct from all other religious missions of the past and the present as it only has discovered the harmony, the common basis, and necessity of all the various religions, whereas each of the religious missions of the world asserts its own infallibility, perfection, and supremacy over all the rest.<sup>16</sup>

Well known for its catholicity and universal outlook, the RKM has been looked upon as the voice of true Hinduism as also of the religious spirit of Bengal. The RKM is heading Ramakrishna Movement or Vedanta Movement all over the world. This Movement is secular in the sense that while it denounces the concept of secularism as a philosophy of non-religion or anti-religion, it encourages everybody to practice his or her own religion and also tolerate and appreciate - the merits of every other religion. Even as - it preserves a dual character — contemplative Math and socially-active Mission — the Movement

looks upon religion as essentially a science of being and becoming. The above mentioned services rendered by the RKM, from its very humble beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gradually assumed massive dimensions over the past few decades. It should be borne in mind that these services are not merely acts of charity but a specific method of spiritual practice as initiated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Regarding services, the RKM had always stood by the suffering whenever the situation demanded it with its limited resources, it did its utmost to mitigate the sufferings of people. And this it did, looking upon the distressed as the living God.

The purpose of a perfect institution, it is said, is to enable a common man to set uncommon action, Salutation to Swamiji, who by establishing the RKM, has enabled innumerable ordinary men and women to produce extraordinary results. It was Swamiji's believe that Bengal would create a new social order and a new civilization by combining her best spiritual customs with the latest advancements in science and technology. She would be rich both materially and spiritually. He knew affluence was not enough, man had to be human, too. He wanted Bengal to set and instance on this. Swamiji founded RKM's services have definitely created a better society and a better Bangladesh. Because, the RKM's appeal to the followers of all religions to discard their exclusive claims and to recognize the value of other religions is worthy of our attention. Its call

to different religions to cooperate in building a better civilization is gaining ground day by day.

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- <sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 159.
- <sup>5</sup>. Swami Lokeshwarananda, et. al. *The story of Ramakrishna Mission: Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Fulfillment* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006) pp. 1036-1037. [Hence forth the Story of RKM]
- <sup>6</sup>. Swami Prabhananda, *The Eternal Companion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971) p. 158.
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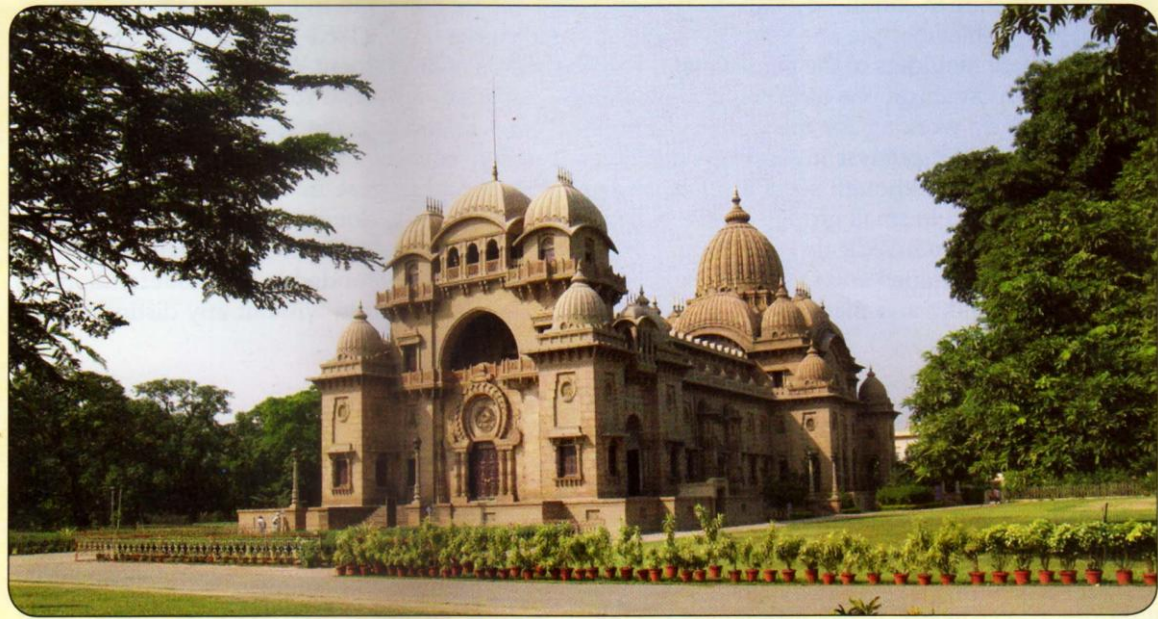
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## APPENDIX

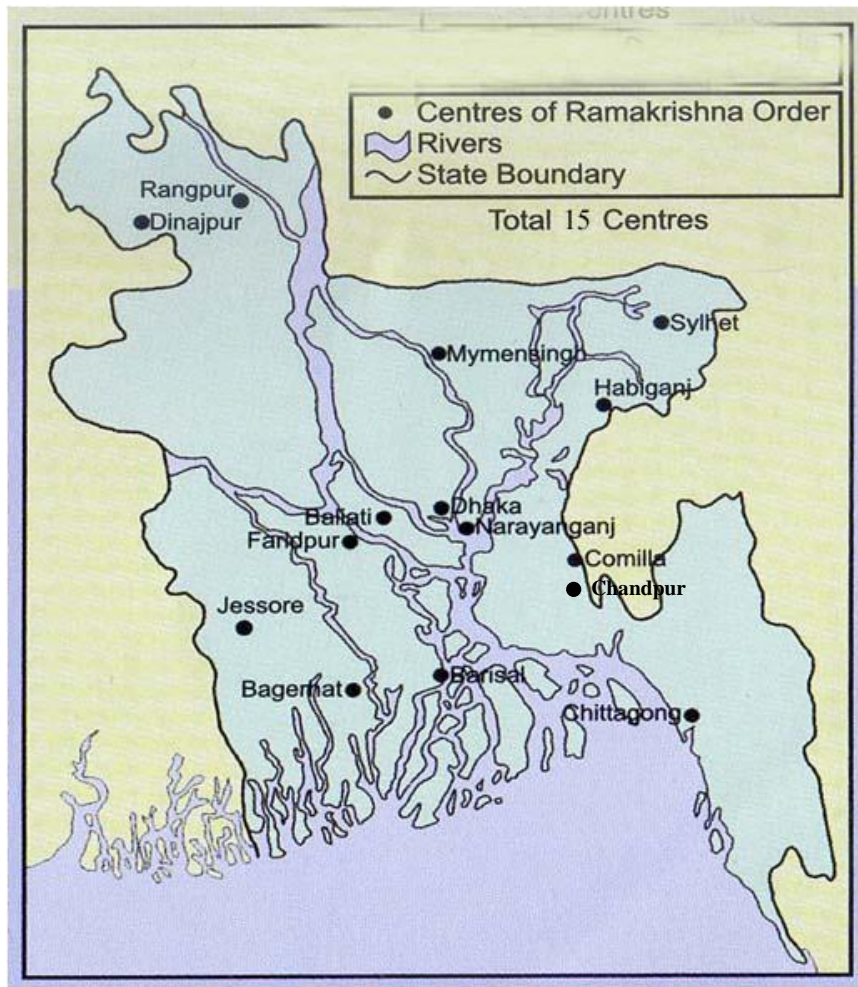


The Universal Temple of Ramakrishna at Belur Math (Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, this incorporates the architectural features of a Hindu Temple, Islamic Mosque, Buddhist Chaitya Hall and Christian Church.)



The Holy Trio - Source & Inspiration of RKM.





Affiliated Centres of RKM in Bangladesh



RKM, Dhaka.



The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma; and lotus of Bhakti; and the rising-sun of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and the awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for the Paramatman (supreme self). Therefore, the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained.

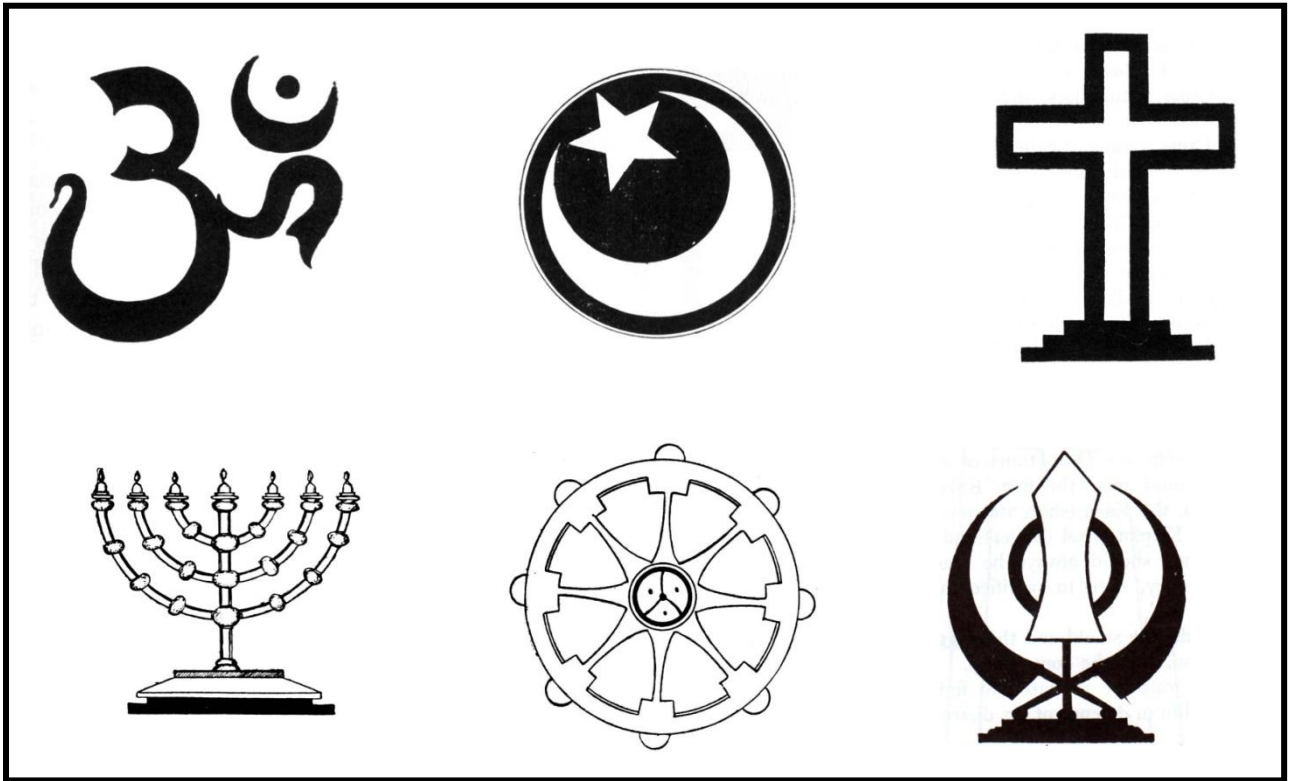
— SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The RKM emblem designed by Swami Viekananda





Emblem of some major religion on the top of RKM centre, Dhaka



Emblem of Six Major Religion at RKM, Dhaka.



RKM, Bagerhat



RKM, Habigonj



RKM, Barishal





RKM, Baliati



RKM, Chandpur



RKM, Jessore





RKM, Mymensingh



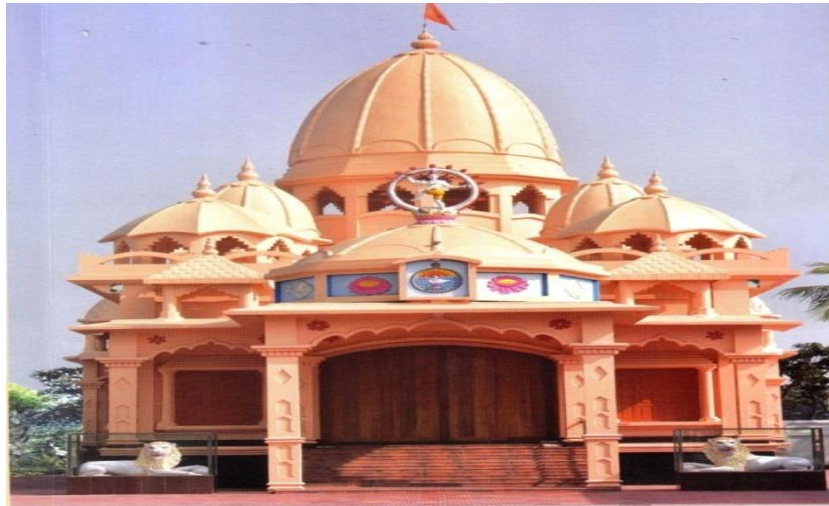
RKM, Dinajpur



RKM, Comilla



RKM, Sylhet



RKM, Jessore



RKM, Faridpur





Sri Sri Durga Puja at RKM



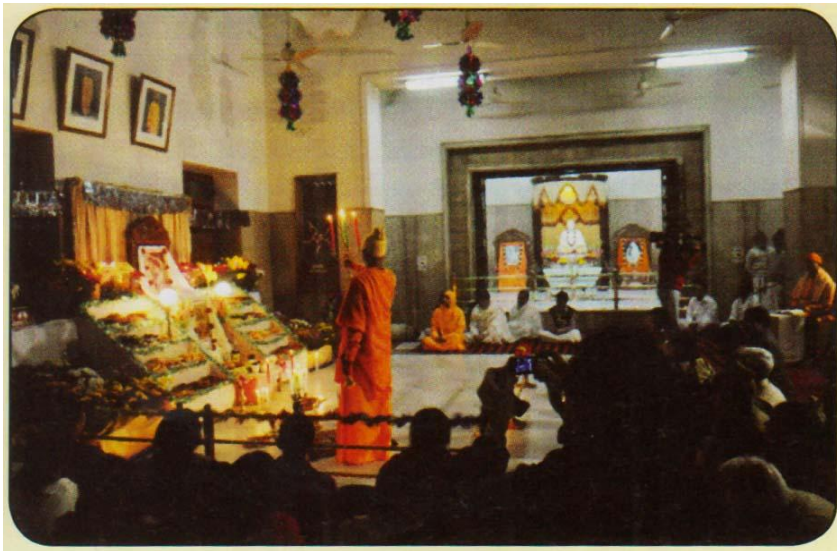
Nabi-Day Celebration At RKM



Nabiday Celebration at RKM



Buddha's Birthday celebration at RKM



Christmas Celebration at RKM



Thakur's Special Puja





A Discourse at RKM



Dignitaries in Discourse



A RKM High School





A RKM Primary School



Students Taking Tiffin at RKM



Ma Sarada Shishu Shiksha Prakalpa





Yoga Session



Computer Training Class



Tailoring Classes for Girls At RKM



Training in Making incense sticks at RKM



Youth Convention at RKM



Value- Oriented Education Seminar at RKM

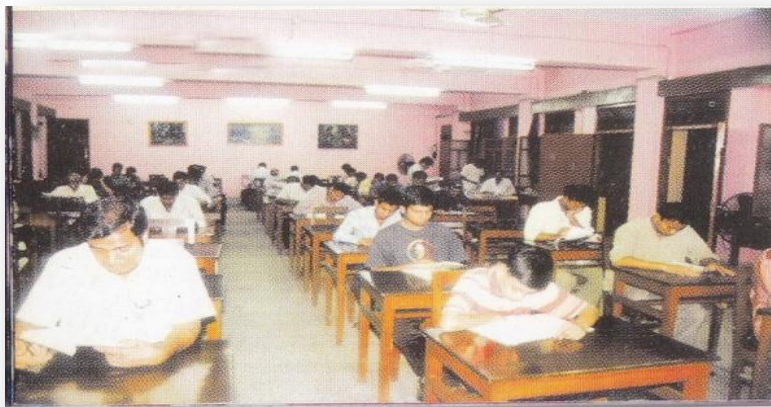




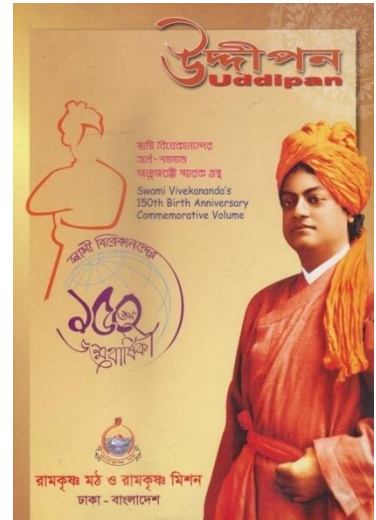
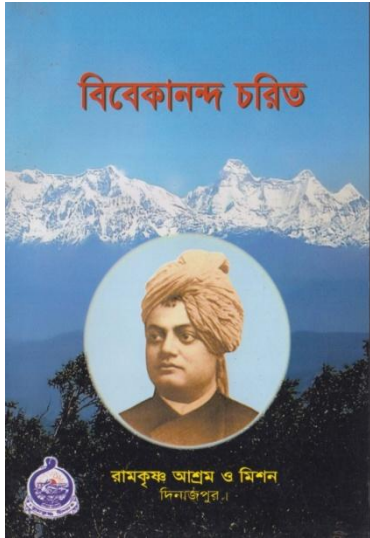
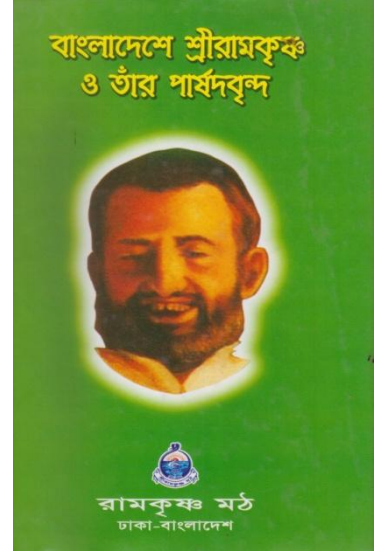
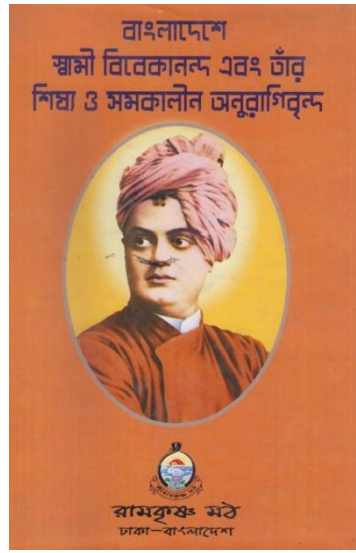
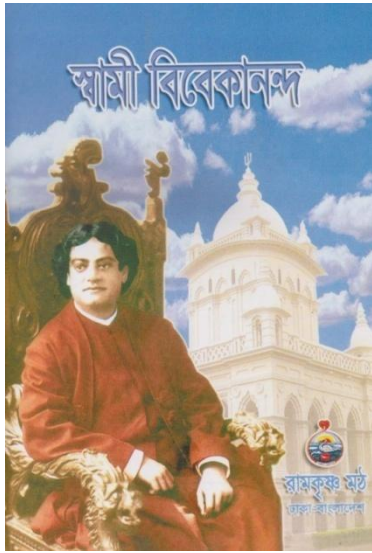
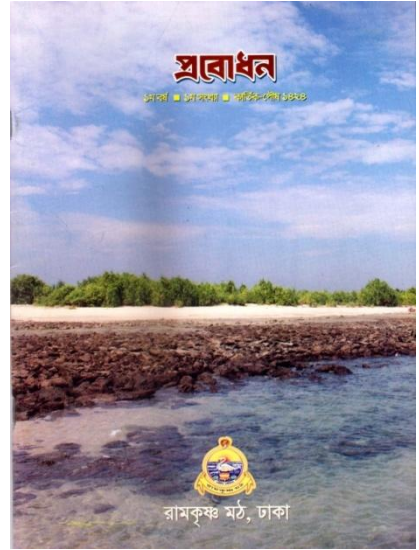
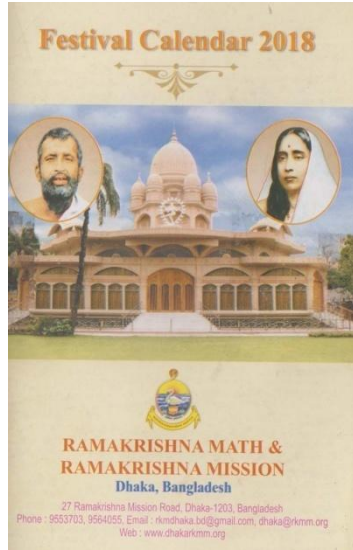
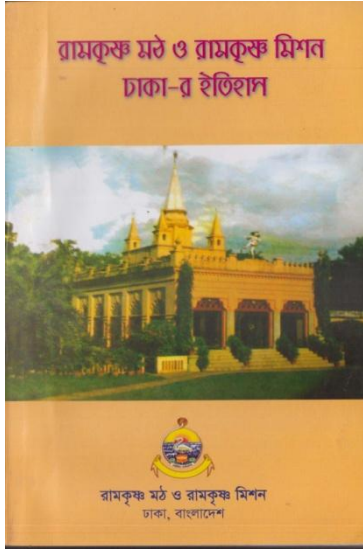
Statue of Swami Vivekananda in Dhaka University



Vivekananda Stipend Distribution at Harijan Palli

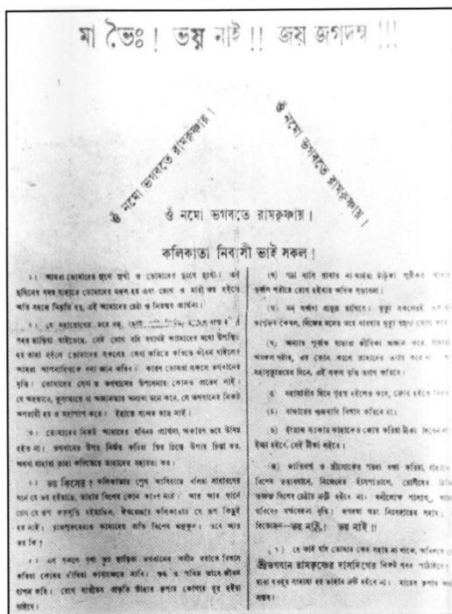


Reading Room

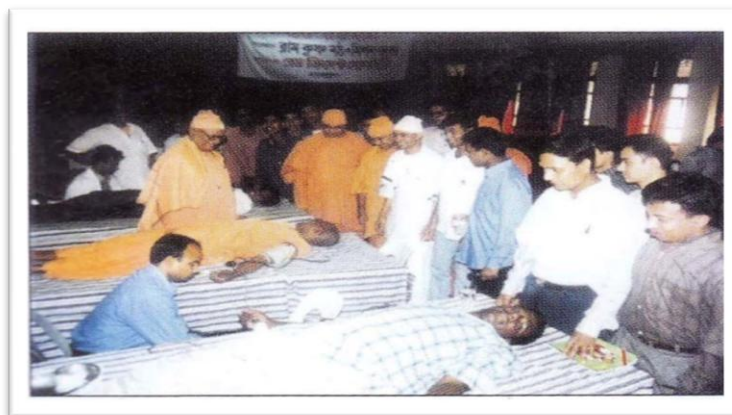


Books, Jourals, Periodicals, Leaflets of RKM in Bangladesh





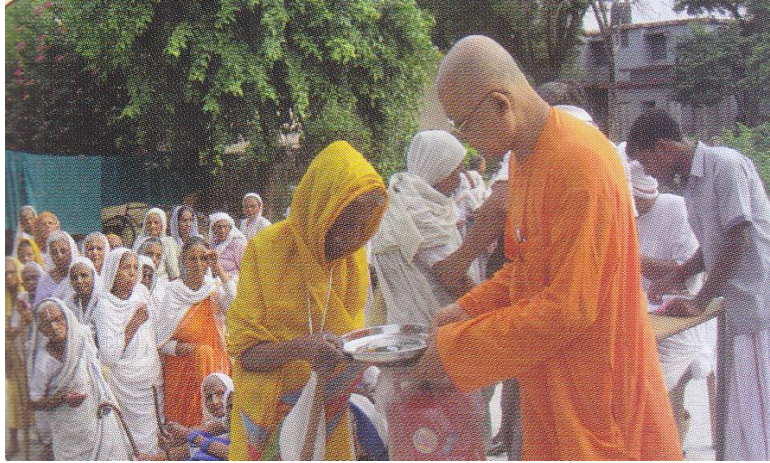
First Leaflet of RKM on Plague



Blood Donation Camp



General Treatment at RKM



Old Being Given Daily Necessities



Flood relief

Distribution of Flood Relief



Aila Cyclone Relief





Construction of Houses During Natural Calamities



Sarada Shishu Niketon



Distribution of Tricycles to disabled People





**Swami Virajananda**



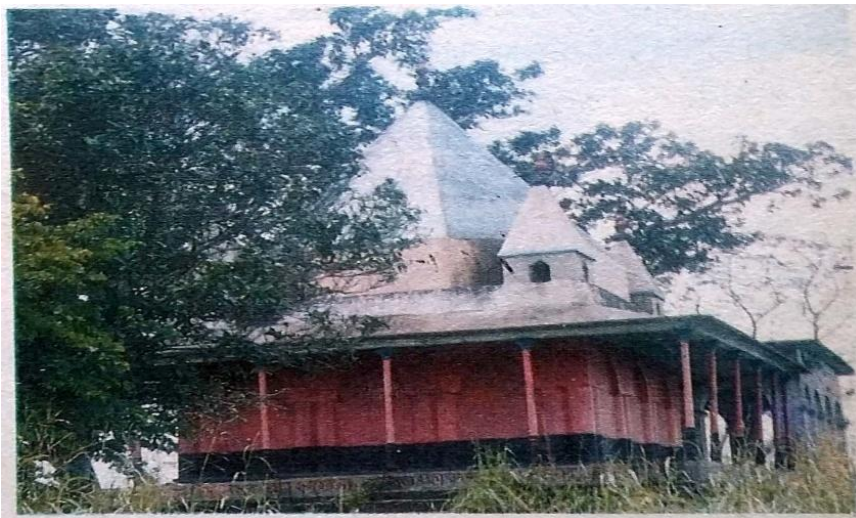
**Swami Prakashamanda**



Zamindar Mohinimohon's Residence at old Dhaka,  
Swamiji stayed here in 1901

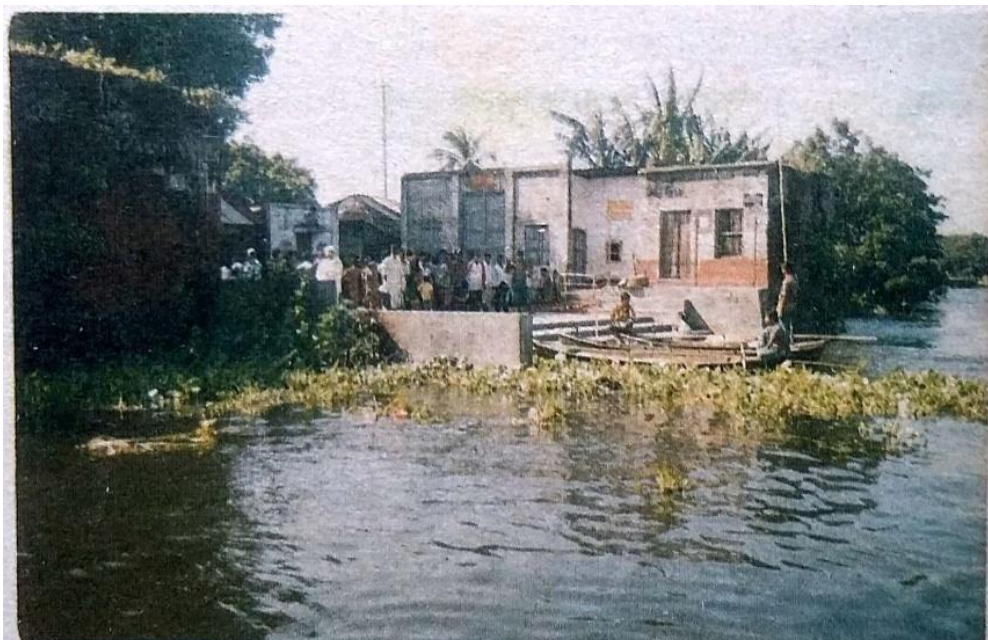


Foundation day picture of RKM, Dhaka



Chandranath Temple, Chittagong, Swamiji visited this place

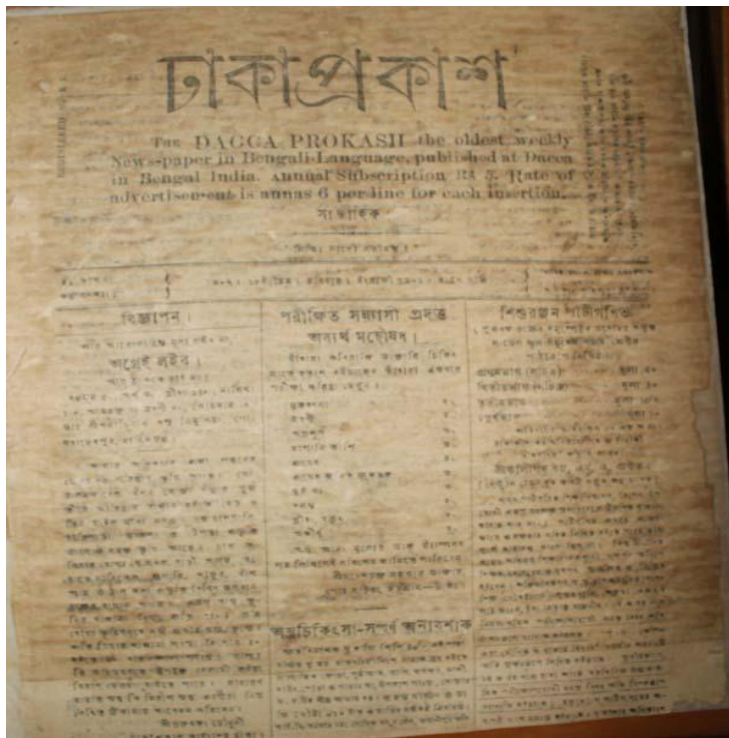




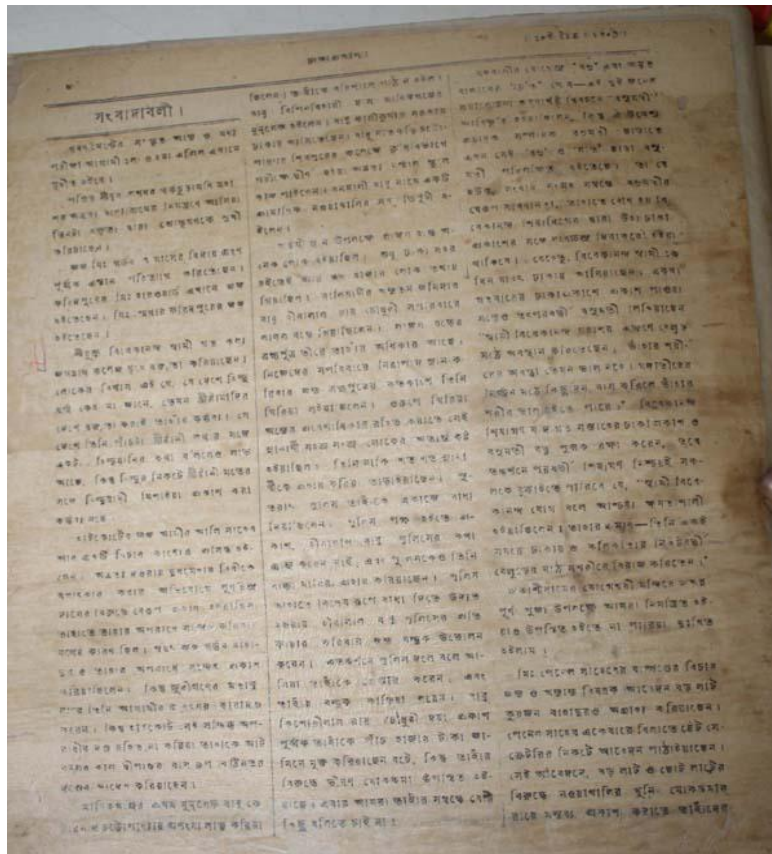
Rajghat of Langolbond, Swamji bathed here during his visit to East-Bengal

31 Days	MARCH 1901	173 77 3rd Month
18 MONDAY [77-288]		
<p>Swamiji, Srihananda &amp; five others worked for Dacca this evening.</p> <p>Paid to Swamiji as asked by him. Rs 30/-</p>		

Swami Brahmananda's Personal Diary



Swami Vivekananda's visit to East Bengal cited in the page of *Dacca Prokash*, March 1901



Report on Swamiji's Lecture at Dacca, *Dacca Prokash*, April 1901

Original MS  
Submitted to  
S. K. Mitra  
18.1.34

Preliminary meeting

Saturday - 1st May 1897

In pursuance to a call from Sri Vivekananda a meeting of the Griha disciples and followers of Sri Ramakrishna was held on the evening of the 1st May 1897 at the premises of the late Ramakrishna Mission, Base no 57 Ramkranta Basu Street, Calcutta. Several Sanyasis of the Math Hazrat Math favoured the meeting with their presence. In view of the increasing interest and expansion of the movement to diffuse Paramahansa Swami's ideas and principles, it was thought desirable to form an organization to carry on the work methodically. A local centre in Calcutta was thought to be essential, where all could meet for

**Proceedings of the first meeting of the  
Ramakrishna Mission Association (1st May, 1897)**





Bangladesh Prime Minister, **Sheikh Hasina** at RKM



Indian Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** at RKM