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A SHORT LIFE OF M.,

The Witness of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna





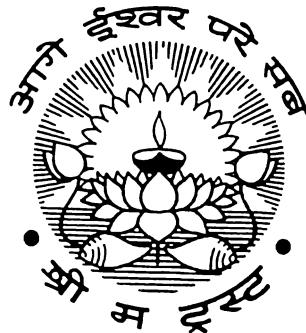
SRI RAMAKRISHNA

A SHORT LIFE OF M.,

The Writer of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

by

Dharm Pal Gupta



SRI RAMAKRISHNA SRI MA PRAKASHAN TRUST

SRI MA TRUST

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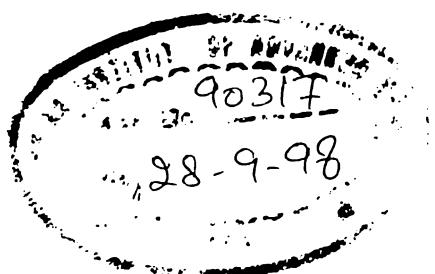
Published by :

Shrimati Ishwar Devi Gupta

President, Sri Ma Trust, Chandigarh

Printed at :

Azad Hind Stores (P) Ltd., 34, Sector 17-E, Chandigarh



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 **Library** IAS, Shimla



Price Rs. 25.00

00090317

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

By the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, we bring out this second edition of *A Short Life of M.*, in the firm faith that we are only an instrument of His will.

The generation that knew Sri M. is gradually passing away. His chief disciple Swami Nityatmananda, who has recorded the talks of his Guru, Sri M., in his monumental work, *SRI MA DARSHAN*, in 16 volumes, left his mortal frame in 1975.

Sri Ma Trust, SRI RAMAKRISHNA SRI MA PRAKASHAN TRUST, therefore, felt that a short life of Sri M. must be brought out without delay.

Shri Dharm Pal Gupta, who has had the privilege of sitting at the feet of Swami Nityatmananda for almost seventeen years was entrusted with this task which Shri Gupta readily accepted. Shri Gupta has already translated five volumes of Sri Ma Darshan — the first volume directly under the guidance of the author, his Gurudeva, and the others in collaboration with his Bengali brother-disciples. He also edited *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial* with Padmashri Shri D.K. Sengupta as the co-editor.

For information on the life of M., Shri Gupta has freely drawn on *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, *Sri Ma Darshan*, *Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Bhakta Malika*, *Ramakrishna and his Disciples*, and some articles which have

appeared from time to time in the *Prabuddha Bharata*, the *Vedanta Kesari*, and *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial*. Due acknowledgements have been made in the body of the text. If, however, there is any omission it is entirely due to our ignorance of the original for which we express our regrets.

We bring out this book with the blessings of sadhus and bhaktas to whom our sashtanga. Our thanks are due to all the writers on Sri M., books and journals from where material has been taken to compile this book. We are also indebted to Professor I.M. Verma, for reading through the MS of the first edition, and to young devotees, Vinay Mehta and Praveen Sapra for their help in preparing the MS of this edition.

Sri M. has shown the path to the bhaktas. He said, "Sri Bhagavan came down in a human body only the other day. So what's there to fear ? Practice the Neo-Vedanta : Establish a relationship of love with Him. When the man of the world in you will fall into the whirlpools of pleasure and pain and will be getting drowned, his divine counterpart, the illumined man will come to his rescue and transform the drowning weakling into a great hero."

We pray that the readers of this book may be blessed by Him with faith, bhakti and love for His lotus-feet.

Sri Ma Trust

Chandigarh

January 1, 1989 — Kalpataru Day

Ishwar Devi Gupta

Publisher

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*RISHI M., meditating (1926) under the Vilva tree,
Spot of Sri Ramakrishna's Tantric Sadhana*

THE EARLY LIFE OF M.

"Aum sthapakaya cha dharmasya, sarvadharma swarupine, avatara varishthaya, Ramakrishnaya te namah!"

1

THE DIVINE PLAN

When spirituality in man gets smothered by his animal instincts, the Great Intelligence incarnates Itself as a human being 'for the protection of the righteous, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of Dharma', said Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

For the execution of His plan, this Divine Being brings with him a band of extraordinary persons who act as instruments in spreading his message. They appear suddenly as a troupe of *Bauls*, wandering minstrels, sing the name of the Lord and disappear into the unknown as suddenly as they came, leaving behind people fascinated and awe-stricken with their uncommon performance. With Jesus Christ came his apostles who spread the New Testament in far off lands and climes. A little more than eighteen hundred years after Christ came to Bharata —this land of spiritual geniuses — Sri Ramakrishna, who was to stem the tide of growing materialism, lead mankind Godwards, and re-establish eternal values. With him he also brought a score of apostles who were to act as his mouthpiece and help his work of the revival of Dharma.

The greatest and the most well-known of Sri Ramakrishna's messengers was Swami Vivekananda who not only spread his Master's message far and wide in foreign lands, but also gave his own countrymen a much-needed jolt to wake them from their slumber, induced by long years of slavery. An equally important personality that Sri Ramakrishna brought with him was Mahendra Nath Gupta, known to the world as M., who was to record and perpetuate the life and message of his Master. Just as the sonorous notes, emanating from the lips of Vivekananda, were to melt the hardened minds of the materialistic world, so the soft and soothing record of the life and word of the Master, made by M., was to be the nectar for the parched lips of humanity in its quest for eternal life.

2

M.'s CHILDHOOD

M. was born on Friday, 14 July 1854, on the Naga Panchami Day, 31 Asadha 1261, Bengali Era. The house he was born in was situated in the Shivanarayan Das Lane of the Shimulya region of Calcutta. This incidentally is the same locality where the great Vivekananda was born.

M.'s father, Madhusudan Gupta, and his mother, Swarnamayee Devi, were both very pious and kind people. It was a middle-class Vaidya-Brahmin couple. Sri Madhusudan Gupta worked in the Calcutta High Court. Of their four sons and four daughters, Mahendra was the third child.

In his early childhood, Mahendra studied in a *pathashala* under a guru, not far from the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj Mandir. As he grew up, his parents shifted to a new

house at 13/2 Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane, which later came to be known as 'Thakur Bari'. It is currently known as the 'Katha-nrita Bhawan'.

At the age of four, Mahendra was taken out to witness the Rath Yatra Festival at Mahesh on the Ganga near Calcutta. The family visited the Kali Temple*, in the village of Dakshineswar, built very recently by Rani Rasamani. This temple, as we shall see later, turned out to be not only a haven of bliss and peace for the sensitive young mind of M., but also the great seminary which was to make of Mahendra a saint and a seer by bringing him into contact with his divine guru, Sri Ramakrishna.

An early incident connected with this temple is worth recording here — it is in M.'s own words. Says he, 'The temple was all white then, new and fresh. While going round the temple, I lost sight of my mother and was crying for her, standing on the platform in the temple. Someone then came out and caressed me and began to call out : "Whose child is this ? Where has his mother gone ?" Later, when Mahendra had met Sri Ramakrishna, he began to wonder whether it was not his guru-to-be, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva himself, who had come to console him so early in his childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna was to ask him later, "Do you remember the dust storm of Ashvin (Oct. 5, 1864) ?" Mahendra replied, "Yes sir, I do. I was then nine or ten years old. I was in a room alone, calling on God."

*The temple of Bhavatarini built by Rani Rasamani at a cost of Rs. 9,00,000 and consecrated on 31 May 1855.

M.'s mother was a lady of uncommon piety. Perhaps M. loved her all the more for it. She had prayed to Siva long before she was blessed with the birth of Mahendra. In the love of his dear mother, Mahendra saw the Mother of the Universe bestowing Her love and protection on him. When she died, Mahendra felt disconsolate and wept bitterly. Then one night he saw her in a dream saying, "I have so long protected you and shall continue to do so but you will not see me." This promise sustained Mahendra throughout his life.

3

BOY MAHENDRA

At the age of thirteen we find Mahendra studying at the Hare School, Calcutta, in what was then Class Three (Class VIII of the present day). It was while studying in this class, in 1867, that Mahendra began keeping a diary—a habit which was to make of him the Vyasa of Sri Ramakrishna in the years to come.

Mahendra was a very religious and reverent boy. His reverence for elders and his religious temperament show themselves in some of the notings of his early diary: 'Today on rising, I greeted my father and mother by lying prostrate on the ground before them'...or 'Today, while on my way to school, I visited, as usual, the temples of Mother Kali (at Thanthania), and Mother Shitala and paid my obeisance to them.' Mahendra also tells us that he wrote his diary regularly everyday, noting down all he did, wherever he went and so on.

Among the great men of Bengal of this period who inspired Mahendra during his early youth may be

mentioned the names of Keshab Chandra Sen, the illustrious leader of the Nava Vidhan Brahmo Samaj, Ishwar-chandra Vidyasagar, the great savant and philanthropist, Michael Madhusudan Datt, the great Christian padre and poet and Surendranath Banerji, the well-known orator and one of the earliest Indians to qualify for the Indian Civil Service from England. Of all these, Keshab Sen was his chief love — him he looked upon as his ideal. He would attend many of Keshab's prayer meetings and listen to him with the attention which is bestowed only to the hero of one's heart.

The religious temperament of the young Mahendra found expression in many pious deeds which he had been doing since his early boyhood. For example, he would invariably bow to the Deity whenever he passed by a temple and sit in front of the image with awe and reverence. Besides, his love of the company of sadhus was extraordinary for a young man of his age. He would run to meet the holy men who came to Calcutta en route to Jagannath for the Car Festival or otherwise. In fact, it was this streak of his character which was to bind him inextricably to the greatest of the sadhus of his age, Sri Ramakrishna Deva. This love for holy men he nurtured throughout his life and it made him one of the chief helpers and friends of his brother-disciples who embraced sannyasa after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna.

4

MAHENDRA AS STUDENT AND SCHOLAR

Mahendra passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University from the Hare School, and secured the second place in the merit list of the year. This was indeed

a great achievement considering that the Calcutta University of his times had its jurisdiction over such far off areas of the Indian Sub-continent as Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Burma, the present Bangla Desh and vast areas of Pakistan. In his F.A. Examination, he came fifth even though he had to miss one of his Mathematics papers. Finally, he graduated from the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1875, standing third in the University. Mr. C.H. Tawney, a well-known professor of English, was really fond of this bright pupil of his and kept corresponding with him even after his retirement in the United Kingdom. Later, this professor wrote a brochure on Sri Ramakrishna and his life.

Mahendra was uncommonly fond of acquiring knowledge, eastern as well as western. He studied modern Indian law as well as the Sanhitas of Manu, Yajnavalkya, Brihaspati and other rishis. While he tried to master western philosophy, literature, history, political economy, he also dived deep in the corresponding Indian disciplines. He knew the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy as well as those of the Jains and the Buddhists. He was well-read in Sanskrit literature and knew by heart *slokas* from Kumar-sambhava, Shakuntalam, Bhaktikavya, Utter Ramacharita and other classics. On the Puranas and the classical grammatical texts in Sanskrit he was considered an authority. He knew by heart descriptions of the ancient forest abodes of the rishis and loved to narrate them. Wasn't this because he had a deep-rooted love of nature and the ideal of absolute renunciation of the monastic life? Mahendranath was also interested in Astronomy and Ayurveda.

Like most top students of the Indian Universities, Mahendranath's desire was to qualify for the Indian Civil Service, the most prestigious government employment of the time. There was only one competitive examination for this service, both for the Indian and the white men, and that was held once a year in England. To get a firsthand knowledge of this service he established contacts with Surendranath Banerji who had just returned from England after qualifying for the I.C.S. We are told that Mahendranath would dream of his ship sailing on the Mediterranean Sea through mist, while he was pacing up and down on the deck of the ship in pyjamas.

5

MAHENDRANATH ENTERS THE HOUSEHOLDER'S LIFE

For various domestic reasons, Mahendranath had to take up a job even before he could complete his studies. Initially he entered the service of a British business house.

And in 1873, while still in college, he married Nikunja Devi, daughter of Thakur Charan Sen and a cousin of Keshab Sen.

Having entered the householder's life, Mahendranath took up education as a profession, that being the most natural for a man of his temperament and calibre. At first he served as the headmaster of the Narnail High School in the Jessor District of the present day Bangla Desh. But soon after, he returned to Calcutta where he worked as the headmaster of three schools. He also served in the City, Ripon and Metropolitan Colleges as a Professor of English, History, Political Economy and Mental and Moral Sciences.

As a teacher, Mahendranath Gupta enjoyed the love and affection of his pupils to an extraordinary degree. His method of teaching was also unique for his times. He would gauge the mental level of his pupils and try slowly and gradually to raise it without any violence or harm to their personalities. An important innovation he introduced in schools much before its general acceptance was the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

Hardly had he spent ten years as an educationist when circumstances so contrived that either he became a saint or a criminal, or committed suicide to rid himself of his mental burdens.

Be it what it may, Mahendranath came face to face with unbearable domestic difficulties, living as he was in a joint family. His mother had died in his early youth, and in Indian joint families, it is only the mother who wields sufficient authority to administer the family in a just manner. The position of Mahendranath—and of his young wife—became so complicated in the family that the sensitive young intellectual began seriously to think of putting an end to his life.

By this time M. had four children—three sons and a daughter. Later, another daughter was born. He lost one of his sons about the year 1884.

6

MAHENDRANATH LEAVES HOME

It was Saturday, 25 February 1882, ten o'clock at night that Mahendranath's mind was made up—he must leave home immediately. A typical Hindu wife, a partner in life

and religion, Nikunja Devi would not let her husband be alone in that dark hour. So she came out secretly into the street to accompany him. They hired a cab and reached Shyam Bazaar where a wheel of the cab broke down. The dejected couple, therefore, had to knock at the door of a friend in the locality for a night's shelter. The friend, however, was not happy at this intrusion at such an unearthly hour. Mahendranath, therefore, left Nikunja Devi there and went out in search of some coach from a nearby stable. It was already midnight. In Baranagore, there lived Ishan Kaviraj, his sister's husband. Mahendranath went and spent the night in his house.

One can easily gauge Mahendra's state of mind. Overwhelmed by despair and exhausted in body, he began to wonder if he should still continue to live in this wicked world.

7

TRYST WITH DESTINY

The next morning, Sunday, 26 February, Mahendranath was wandering from garden to garden in the company of his distant nephew, Siddheswra. They were in Prasanna Banerji's garden, when the latter suggested that he might visit a charming garden on the bank of the Ganga where lived a Paramahansa. Mahendranath readily agreed to the suggestion and soon they were both in a superb rose-garden. Mahendranath, with his extremely sensitive mind and an innate love of nature and sadhus could not but be soothed by the superb beauty and exquisite atmosphere of the place. He would stop at each rose bed in the garden and exclaim, 'wonderful' !

Having entered the garden by the main gate, Mahendranath and Sidhu went directly to Sri Ramakrishna's room. Mahendranath stood speechless, looked around and said to himself, 'Oh, what a beautiful place !'

The proximity of the Paramahansa, no less than the beauty of roses, acted imperceptibly as a balm on his heart, lacerated by the ungrateful wicked world, by what the Paramahansa would call the 'burning fire of the world'. Didn't Jesus say : 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' (St. Matthew II : 28).

Yes, the tryst with destiny had been made. The Divine Hand had already raised itself over the head of the suffering soul to bless it with fearlessness — the bhakta had already reached the threshold of Bhagavan.

Mahendranath and Sidhu stood on Sri Ramakrishna's verandah and looked inside the room. They had their first look of Sri Ramakrishna.* He was seated on a wooden *divan* and was talking of God with a charmingly smiling face. The room was full of people, seated on the floor and listening with rapt attention to every word that fell from the Master's lips. Said Mahendra, "What a fascinating man ! How charming his words are !" A little later, however, he said to himself, "Let me see the place I have come to before I sit down here".

As he came out of the room with Sidhu, the sweet music of *arati*, the evening worship, could be heard — bells, gong, drum, cymbals were ringing. A soft spring breeze was

*Mahendranath was teaching in the Metropolitan Institution established by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, when he first met Sri Ramakrishna.

blowing, carrying the sweet music and fragrance of the flowers all over. The moon had just come out to shed its silvery light on the Ganga, the twelve Siva Temples, the Temples of Radhakant and Mother Bhavatarini, Mahendra Nath visited these temples full of joy. Said Sidhu, "This is Rani Rasamani's Temple. Here the Mother is worshipped daily; many sadhus and beggars are fed...."

MAHENDRA MEETS THE MASTER

1

THE FIRST VISIT

Having visited the temples, Mahendranath and Sidhu walked across the vast brick courtyard and again reached Sri Ramakrishna's room. They found the door shut. Brinda, the maid-servant, however, asked them to enter without ceremony. They entered. Sri Ramakrishna was seated alone on the smaller of the two wooden *divans*. Mahendranath saluted him with folded hands. A mat was already spread on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna asked them to take their seats, and made some kind enquiries. Mahendra answered him but he noticed that in the course of the conversation, Sri Ramakrishna frequently became absent-minded—the state of *bhava* when the mind goes inward on some object of meditation. Is it God-consciousness?—wondered Mahendranath. Later he would see that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into *samadhi*—a state in which one is totally unconscious of his body and the physical world.

After a short conversation with the Master, Mahendra saluted him and took leave to depart. The Master said, "Come again".

THE SECOND VISIT

A couple of days later Mahendranath called again. It was 28 February, 8 in the morning. During the conversation the Master talked of one 'Partap's brother'. He had come there to stay. He had no work to do and had left his wife and children with his father-in-law. Said Sri Ramakrishna, "I scolded him — he has no self-respect. Don't you think it is wrong to go about like this when he has so many children to bring up ? He is not even ashamed that somebody else is bearing his burden. I took him to task severely and asked him to look for a job. Then he was willing to leave here." Though it was only later that the Master came to know that Mahendra was married and had children, it seems he had already hinted that it was his duty to provide for his wife and children. Later, in another meeting, he would tell him not to think of committing suicide since he had already found a guru. The Master, thus, built up his disciple slowly and gently, peeping into the innermost recesses of his heart and cleaning all 'dross from the gold' that lay buried within him. He told him in this very second visit, "You see, my boy, you have some good signs. I can see them by looking at a person's eyes and forehead. The eyes of yogis— those who in their previous lives had passed their days in communion with God—have a peculiar look.... In the case of some, it looks as if they have just left their seat after divine contemplation !" The Master then explained who was wise and who was ignorant . Educated as Mahendra was in the Western way of thinking, he thought that his wife was 'ignorant' because she was illiterate. The Master knocked off this

wrong notion of his disciple and told him that it was wrong to think that a person who *read* books was wise and all others were ignorant. Later, he was taught that knowing God alone was the true wisdom and not knowing Him ignorance. Mahendra's intellectual pride received blow after blow as he entered the portals of the divine wisdom.

The next lesson he was imparted by his Divine Teacher was that God could be conceived both with form and without form, and that there was nothing wrong with image worship. One could meditate on any aspect of God one felt drawn to, but *one must not think that his own mode of worship was alone true, and all else was false*. The disciple got another shock when he was told that the image of the deity was also made of the Spirit and that he had no business to preach otherwise. "If there is anything wrong in image worship, does He not know that it's He who is being worshipped ? And will He not be pleased with that worship ? " asked the guru.

This was Mahendra's only argument with the Master, happily his last. Later, he was to tell his listeners any number of times, "Intelligence has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Intellect, feeble organon, limited and conditioned by the senses, cannot solve the problem of the Unlimited. Revelation is necessary to have a knowledge of the Unconditioned Reality." Mahendra was immediately impressed and went on to more positive aspects of the worship of the Divine. It is rightly said that religion begins only when philosophy ends. In other words, in religion one has to take a practical step in fixing the mind on God. Mahendra asked, "How, Sir, may I fix my mind on God ?" The Master replied, "Repeat God's name

and sing His glories, and now and then visit God's devotees and holy men. The mind will not fix on God unless one practises meditation in solitude...But one can meditate on God even while attending to one's duties. The mind, the quiet corner of the house and the forest are the three places for meditation (*mane, bane, cone*). Besides one must discriminate between the Real (God) and the unreal (the phenomenal world). Thus one will be able to shake off one's attachment to sensual pleasures, fame, power and pelf."

Mahendranath, as we have seen, was inclined to worship the formless God in the beginning. The Master encouraged him to carry on in that way. In fact, one day, he took him to a lake, called the Mati Seal Jheel and showed him how the fish moved about, full of joy, on the large sheet of water. This, he told him, was the state of the mind of the aspirant when he contemplated the Infinite Formless.

Gradually, however, the Master taught M. the worship of God with form. M. soon understood that God Himself had become all forms.

The Master also began to train Mahendranath for his work, brought as he was to the world to help him in his *leela*. He told him how one could live in the family and yet be a sannyasi at heart—his ideal of *grihastha-sannyasa*.

Said he, "Attend to all your duties but keep your mind fixed on God. Live with all—wife, children, father and mother and serve them as if they were your own—but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you unless they, too, love the Lord.

"The maid-servant in the house of a rich man attends

to all the household duties, but her thoughts remain fixed on her home in her native village. Besides, she brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She speaks of them as 'my Rama' or 'my Hari', but in her mind she knows that they are not hers at all.

"The tortoise moves about in water, but do you know where its mind is ? There on the bank where its eggs are lying. Do all your work in the world but keep your mind on God. If you enter family life before you have cultivated the love of God, you will get more and more entangled. You will not be able to withstand its dangers, griefs and sorrows. The more you throw yourself in the affairs of the world, the more attached you will be to them.

"You must first rub your hands with oil before you break open the jack-fruit, otherwise its milky juice will stick to your hands. Rub yourself with the oil of God's love and then take upon yourself the duties of the world.

"And to attain the love of God you must go into solitude. The milk has to be curdled undisturbed before one can get butter from it. If it is shaken it won't curdle. Your next step is to churn it, seated in a quiet corner. By this means you will acquire dispassion and devotion. But if you allow the mind to go downwards, it will only think of the world which is another name for 'woman' (lust) and 'gold' (greed).

".... Along with this you must practise discrimination. 'Woman and gold' are unreal, the one reality is God. What does one get with money ? Food, clothes and a place to live in—that's all. Surely you cannot see God with its help. Thus, money cannot be the goal of life. This is the process of discrimination.

"Similarly, consider what is there in a beautiful body. Discriminate and you will see that even the body of the most beautiful woman contains only flesh and blood, bones and fat, urine and excreta, like other animals. Why should you forget God for things of this kind ?"

Mahendra now went on to his last question of the interview :

"Sir, is it possible to see God ?" To this question the Master's answer was a positive 'Yes'. Said he, "There are some means by which one can see God" and he proceeded to give 'his three and half point prescription' : Pray incessantly, cry to the Lord with a longing heart in some solitary corner, keep company of sadhus and serve them and go at times to some solitary place (or the guru's ashrama)." "This", he said, "would come about only if one could discriminate between the Real and the unreal."

3 THE THIRD VISIT

Mahendranath paid his third visit to the Master on the following Sunday, 5 March 1882, between three and four in the evening. He tells us how profoundly he had been touched by his first two visits. It seemed to him as if he had always before his eyes the smiling face of the Master explaining the deep truths of life and of the soul. Never before had he met such a wonderful man.

It was during this visit that Mahendra met Narendra, a young man of nineteen, who, by the grace of the Master, later matured into the great Swami Vivekananda. When Mahendra reached Sri Ramakrishna's room, the latter was

teaching how to deal with the people of the world. Narendra was being told that God resided in all beings—good and bad. The Master was also saying that a man living in the world must make a show of anger to protect himself from bad people. But he must never harm anybody. 'He may hiss but not inject his poison like a snake. The Master's teaching continued till he asked Mahendra if there was any book in English on reasoning. Mahendra said that there was, and it was called 'logic'. The Master wanted to know what it said but before Mahendra had explained, the Master became so absent-minded that he hardly heard his words. Was the Master thus emphasizing the futility of reasoning in arriving at spiritual truths ?

At about five on the evening of the same day, Mahendranath returned to the verandah north of the Master's room. Narendra was singing a hymn : 'O my mind, Meditate on Hari, the spotless Dweller within !' Never had he heard anyone sing so sweetly. But he witnessed something that was even more wonderful than the song—he saw the Master in samadhi. Mahendra had never seen such a sight; he was truly wonder-struck. The Master had completely lost outward consciousness and had fixed his gaze inwardly on the peerless beauty of God.

The sight of the samadhi and the bliss of the Master left an indelible impression on his mind. A host of ideas surged up in him. He returned home deeply moved, bearing within himself the echo of those soul-intoxicating moments.

4

THE FOURTH VISIT

The next day, it was 6 March 1882, about three in the

afternoon. No sooner had Mahendranath entered the Master's room than he heard him laughing and laughing. The Master was saying to the great amusement of all the boys present there, "Why ! look, there he comes again." And then he added, "Once a peacock had been given a pill of opium at four o'clock in the afternoon. Well, punctually at that time he returned the next afternoon for another dose".

The Master was very right—M. had been counting minutes until he could go to the Master again.

The Master was having great fun with the boys—peals of side-splitting laughter were filling the room. M. who had seen the Master only yesterday in such a state of God-intoxication would not believe his eyes—such a God-man and so human !

Seeing Mahendra sitting silently unlike others, the Master quipped : "You see, he is a little older—Mahendra was twenty-seven then—so he is keeping aloof from the merry-making of the youngsters." Then he asked Mahendra to argue with Narendra in English—a language the Master did not know — obviously as his contribution to the general fun. For Mahendra it was impossible to do so in the presence of the Master. Mahendra and Narendra both laughed and then talked to each other, but only in Bengali.

Late in the evening, when the devotees had left except Narendra and Mahendra, the Master spoke to both of them separately. To Mahendra he said, "Do you know how peasants buy their bullocks ? Oh ! they are experts and can easily tell the good ones from the bad, just by touching

the tail. On being touched there, those who are weaklings lie down meekly on the ground. The peasants at once recognize that they have no mettle in them and reject them. They only select those who stand up in a spirited manner as soon as their tails are touched. The former are worth Rs five, the latter Rs seventy-five. Narendra is a bullock worth seventy-five, full of spirits within."

The Master smiled as he said this and continued, "There are some people who have no grit whatsoever—popped rice soaked in milk, soft and mushy they are—no strength within."

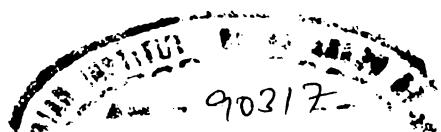
Was the Master teaching Mahendra not to be too soft ? He asked him to go and talk to Narendra again.

THE MASTER AND THE DISCIPLE

Sri Ramakrishna looked an ordinary man, a simple village priest, not even a sadhu. Yet he attracted persons of all ages specially boys, by the charm of his personality. Of course, not all who came to see him were attracted by him. One had to have a pure mind before one could find a place in the Master's heart. We know how M. fell for the Master on his very first visit—a case of love at first sight—something rare in the spiritual world.

The Master's personality had innumerable facets, not the least of which were his human approach and divine love. His divinity glowed through all his actions, some of which were nevertheless childlike.

The Master gave glimpses of his early life to M. which are recorded in the *Kathamrita*. We shall, however, content ourselves with only those which have a bearing on M.'s spiritual development. On 10 June 1883, he said, "During my boyhood the men and women of Kamarpukur were very fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate others well. So, they would enjoy seeing me do so. No one distrusted me. Everybody took me in as one of the family. I was like a happy pigeon—I used to visit only happy families.



"While I was at school, Arithmetic used to throw me into confusion. But I could paint very well and model small images of gods.

"I loved to visit the free eating places meant for holy and poor people. I loved to hear the sacred books such as the Ramayana and the Bhagavata.

"When I was ten or eleven, I experienced my first samadhi, while passing through a field. There are certain signs of God vision : One sees light, one feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest." It was the flight of white cranes against dark clouds in the sky which had touched his divine chords and brought on him the state of samadhi.

Sri Ramakrishna married Sri Sarada Devi 'for the sake of *samskaras*' (sacraments), as he himself explained. However, the couple never lived as husband and wife. The Master instead made his wife the Holy Mother of his hundreds of disciples and devotees. And, he himself worshipped her as the Blissful Mother of the universe.

Here was a unique personality which was averse to learning but could make the greatest intellectuals of his time sit at his feet like school boys; he married but only to make his wife the spiritual guide of thousands after his demise. He did not care to read books but learnt what the Vedas and Vedanta, the Puranas and the Tantras contain, by praying, weeping yearningly, to the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna had a very humble nature. "I am the servant of the servants of the devotees of God", he would say. He never liked to be called a guru; he never tried to

impose his views on his listeners. I eat, drink and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows." He had an absolutely open mind and would offer to verify any of his assertions, if a doubt was cast upon it.

He would have fun with boys and treat them as his most intimate friends. But with all this he would suddenly unite his mind with the Ultimate and begin to swim in the ocean of divinity. And last but not least, his devotional music and dance could melt the hearts of the most confirmed non-believers.

2

If the Master was a 'phenomenon', the disciple was also unique. It is not so common to meet a disciple who has so completely merged his personality into that of his master as M. had done. He was seldom heard giving spiritual instructions to anybody without adding, 'Thakur said so', so saturated was his mind with his Master's teachings. Every word that he heard falling from the Master's lips was a *mantra* for him and he would teach his listeners how to meditate on them.

M. possessed a very humble, self-effacing and shy personality. When he came to know from Sri Ramakrishna that God-realization was only possible when the 'I' in man was completely crushed, he tried to efface himself even more assiduously both as a writer and as a disciple.

It would be very difficult to describe this trait of his character better than by the following incident :

Subodh Chandra Ghosh, later Swami Subodhanada,

like many of Sri Ramakrishna's circle of immediate disciples, was rather outspoken. One day, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to go and talk to Master Mahashay. Subodh replied, "He is a family man. What can I learn about God from him ?"

Sri Ramakrishna, however, insisted saying, "He is not going to talk to you of anything but what he has learnt from *here* (that is, from the Master)."

Subodh went to M. and bluntly related his conversation with the Master. M. replied in the now-famous words which sum up his character and the mission of his life as nothing else does :

"I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean and keep with me a few pitchers of sea-water. When a visitor comes I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words ?"*

So very humble and non-assuming in life, he would nevertheless never compromise with his principles, whatever the outcome. During the illness of Sri Ramakrishna, he was working as the headmaster in a school managed by the great Vidyasagar. The results of the school at the public examination happened to be rather poor. Vidyasagar attributed it to M.'s pre-occupation with the Master and his consequent failure to attend adequately to the school work. M. felt it was an insinuation against his *sadhana*. So he resigned his post without any thought

**The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Advaita Ashrama, 1955 ed., pp. 265-266.*

of the morrow. Within a fortnight, his family was in poverty. M. was one day pacing up and down the verandah of his house, musing how he would feed his children. The next day, a man arrived with a letter addressed to 'Mahendra Babu'. On opening it, M. found that it was a letter from his friend, Sri Surendranath Banerji, asking whether he would like to take up a professorship in the Ripon College. In the same way, three or four times he gave up the job that gave him wherewithal to support the family, either for upholding his principles or for practising spiritual *sadhana* in holy places, without any consideration of the possible consequences. But he was always able to get over these difficulties somehow, and the interests of his family never suffered. Here is a typical instance of the Lord's promise of protection to his real devotees : "I take care of the welfare of the devotee who knows no other refuge than me."*

3

It is not easy for an ordinary man to recognize spirituality in a holy man, how much more difficult it is to recognize it in an *avatara* ! How many people were able to recognize Rama, Krishna or the Christ in their lifetime? Hardly a score. Ramakrishna, in order to gauge the minds of his devotees would sometimes ask them how much he 'weighed'. He put the same question to Mahendra. "What do you think of me ? How many *annas* of it do I have ?" asked he. M. replied, "I can't tell the *annas*. But I can say that never before have I seen such knowledge, faith, love, communion with God, renunciation and catholicity, in any person anywhere."

**Gita*, IX-22.

The Master laughed. Evidently he was pleased with his disciple. Mahendranath took his leave bowing down before the Master and falling at his feet. He had only recently given up greeting the Master by merely folding his hands.

Now it was in 1885 (28 July). M. had been with the Master for about three years. "After seeing all this what is your feeling ?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. M. replied, "I feel Christ, Chaitanyadeva and yourself are one and the same—the same Purusha having become three." The Master was naturally very happy at the spiritual progress his disciple had made. "Yes, yes, one, one indeed ! It's He alone who dwells *here*." And he pointed to his body.

On the same day, the Master was explaining to M. what is an avatara. He said to him, "Imagine an endless field stretching not only up to the horizon but far far beyond it. In that field there is a wall which obstructs your vision. But in that wall there is a hole through which you can see a part of the infinite beyond. Which is that hole, can you tell me ?" "Yes, sir," said M. "You are that hole." Sri Ramakrishna was again very pleased. "I am happy that you have understood it at last," said he. Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God was the last stage of Mahendranath's spiritual *sadhana*. Henceforth he knew nobody else, the Master was his life's breath. He only heard him, spoke only of him. His love, his ideal—it was only Ramakrishna, and yet M. felt till the last that he owed much more than that to his Guru.

4

The faith of the disciple in his master was only matched by the love of the master for his disciple. So we see that

Sri Ramakrishna often interceded with the Mother of the Universe on behalf of Mahendra. Once he prayed : "Don't let him renounce completely, Ma. If he is to live in a family, reveal Thyself to him sometimes. Otherwise what will he live with ? How will he keep up his zest ? But ultimately, Ma, it's Thy will."

Another time he said to Her, "Mother, you have endowed him with a *kala* (1/16th part) of Shakti (Divine Power) O' ! I see this will suffice to carry out Your mission."

To M. Sri Ramakrishna said, "With these very eyes, I saw you among the singers of Sri Chaitanya's *sankirtana*, ...Hearing you read the Chaitanya Bhagavata, I recognized you.... You belong to the Ever-Perfect Class.... You are my own, of the same substance as father and son.... You belong to my inner circle.... You are one of those who trade in the jewellery of the Spirit.... You will have to do a little of Divine Mother's work, you will have to teach the *Bhagavata* to people."

On the 24th of August 1882, the following conversation took place between Sri Ramakrishna and M.

Sri Ramakrishna—"The Yogis' eyes are always fixed on God—always immersed in the atman—with the eyelids half-closed. They can be immediately recognized, like a bird sitting on its eggs, the whole of its mind fixed on them—it looks outward only in name. Well, can you show me such a picture ?

M.— "Yes sir, I shall try if I can get it."

Another scene. It was the 14th of July 1885. Sri Ramak-

rishna (to M.)—Perhaps you don't believe in *Salagram*. The 'Englishmen' don't believe in it. What does it matter though, whether you do or do not. The *Salagram* should contain a big circular mark, it has to be *Gomukhy*, (smaller in the front portion, and bigger in the rear) and there have to be other signs. If these signs are there, it (the *Salagram*) is worshipped as God's idol."

M.—"Yes sir, just as there is a fuller manifestation of divinity in the physical signs of some men."

...Sri Ramakrishna was describing God's vision when he went into samadhi. When he came down to the earth, Sri Ramakrishna said, "What do you think I saw ? I saw the whole universe as a *Salagram* and I saw your two eyes in it."

On April 24, 1886, Mahendranath with his wife went to visit Sri Ramakrishna, who was lying critically ill in the Cossipore Garden House. They had lost one of their sons about a year and a half earlier—he was seven years old. The mother was mad with grief. Sri Ramakrishna had therefore asked Mahendranath to bring her to him even though he himself was so ill.

That day the Master allowed Mahendranath's wife to wait on him several times during the day. Her welfare seemed to occupy his mind a great deal. In the evening, she came with the Holy Mother to Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) carrying a lamp. He requested her to come again to the Garden House and spend some time with the Holy Mother, not forgetting to ask her to bring her baby daughter.

At 9 o'clock, that evening, Mahendranath was fanning Sri Ramakrishna who was wearing a garland put around his neck by some devotees. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly took off the garland, murmured some words to himself and put the garland on Mahendra in a most benign mood.

5

Swami Deshikananda narrates that M. took him to the spot of Thakur's Tantric *sadhana* under the Vilva-tree, and said to him, "One day, Thakur sent me under this very Vilva-tree in this dense wood to sit and meditate. Three hours passed but I did not return to his room. Noticing it, Thakur personally came to this spot to look for me. On the platform around the Vilva-tree, I was meditating facing east. Because of the proximity of his physical presence my meditation broke. On opening my eyes, I saw that he on whom I was meditating was standing in front of me. I was overwhelmed by bliss and lay prostrate in dust at his feet."

Swami Deshikananda adds, "Hearing this account, I understood that M. had attained samadhi by meditation on Sri Ramakrishna also."

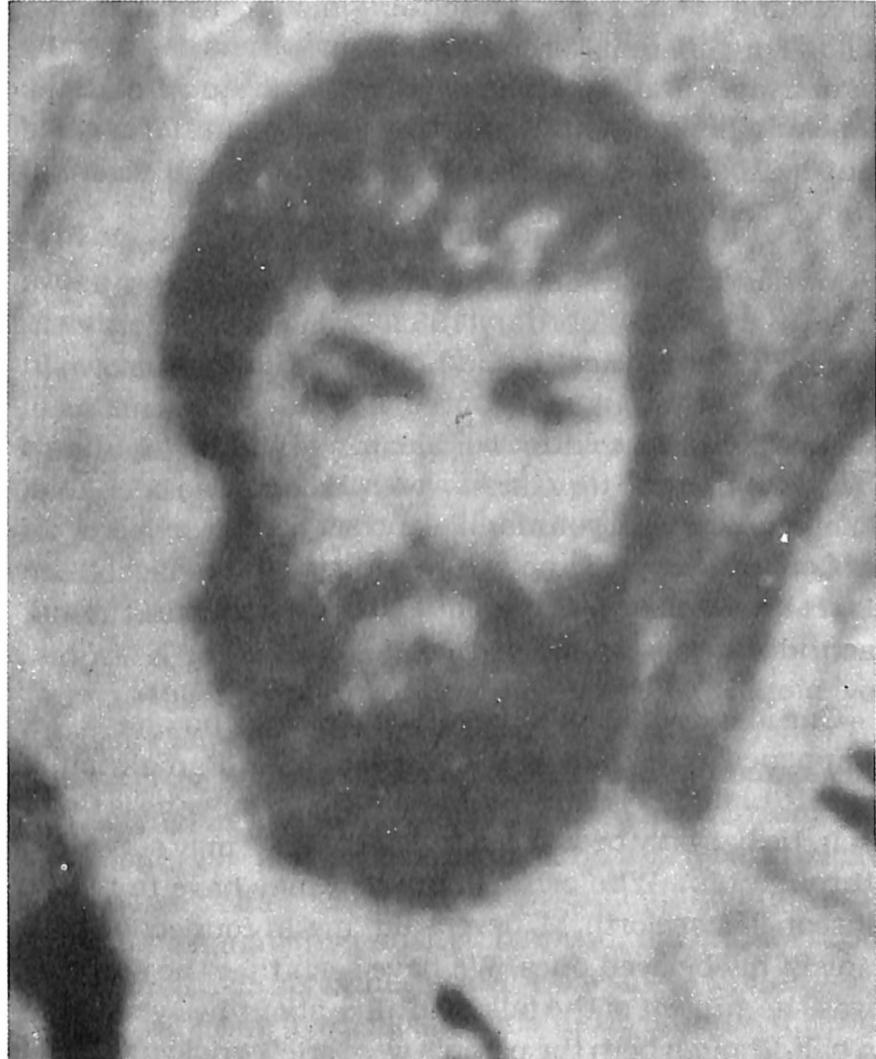
M., THE EMBODIMENT OF SANNYASA IN THE HOUSEHOLD

1

The Mother of the Universe had 'shown' his immediate disciples to Sri Ramakrishna in his different ecstasies even before some of them were born. M. had also been seen by him as one of the Lord Chaitanya's singing party. Twenty-two years after this vision, M. came to Sri Ramakrishna and he was instantly recognized.

The Divine Mother had said to Sri Ramakrishna, "This bhakta will remain in the household. He will read out *the Bhagavata* to humanity scalded by the burning fire of worldliness.

When M' began visiting the Master, he thought that renouncing family life and embracing sannyasa was the only way to peace and happiness. Whenever he got an opportunity, M. would try to draw out Sri Ramakrishna on the subject of sannyasa for himself but the Master would only talk to him of spiritual life in the household. One day, however, M. told Sri Ramakrishna openly of his desire to renounce the world. At this the Master snubbed him saying, "Let nobody think that if he does not do the Mother's work, it would remain undone. The Mother can turn even a straw into a teacher—when something goes



M. at 32 (16 Aug. 1886)

out of order the engineer can always replace it." This silenced M. completely. However, till as late as 5 January 1886, the year of the Master's passing away, M. was dreaming of sannyasa. Describing his recent dream, he said, "I dreamt that Narendra and some others had become sannayasis and were sitting round a fire and perhaps smoking hemp." Sri Ramakrishna was silent for a while but he soon said, "Mental renunciation is the essential thing. That makes one a sannyasi."

M. had met Ramakrishna for the second time, as we have seen, on 28 February 1882. Even on this early visit, the seed of sannyasa-in-the-household had been sown in the life of M. though, of course, he was not conscious of it. He had been told to live like a maid in a rich man's household or the tortoise in water. He had also been told, "You will live with your family and serve them as portions of God. But you will know in your heart that none of them is really yours; only God is your father, mother and friend, as indeed He is of all."

One day, while talking of some family business, M. happened to say, '*My son*', Immediately Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "Pray don't say 'My son'. Remember he is God's son. He has only been given to you that you may serve God through him. Who can tell, but you may have to realize it soon." Henceforth, M. never said, 'my' in connection with any of his beloved ones. We have seen that the son who was the subject of the talk died after about two years and a half. Though both the parents were grief-stricken, M. was able to bear the shock better than his wife who nursed her grief throughout her life and behaved like a mad person for a long time.

And, Sri Ramakrishna led his beloved disciple on the path to God, holding his hand, lest he should take a false step. He was once living with his Master for some time to cut himself away from the allurements of family life. A letter from his Calcutta home arrived for him. No sooner did Thakur see it than he shouted as if at the sight of a cobra, "Throw it away, throw it away." M. did so and learnt what is the real *Sadhu Sang*, company of the holy.

This higher sight with which he was taught to look at his near and dear ones got perfectly developed in M. in due course. A family incident may be narrated here. M.'s second son, a university graduate and a bachelor had been initiated into the religious life by the Holy Mother herself. He, however, allowed himself but an indulgence—he would go to races. Gradually, he was tempted to put stakes on his pet horses. M. tried to dissuade him but the young man did not obey. Then one day he said to him without the least trace of bitterness in his voice, "Look here, you are an educated man and can earn your living. If you find it impossible to conform to the rules of this household, you may live on your own and do what you consider right". The son's pride got wounded and he left. But he took shelter in his rich maternal aunt's house. Here he lived for many years but on the death of the aunt he was asked to leave the house. Life became extremely difficult for the young man—he had neither shelter, nor food, nor clothes. Soon he thought of his father again. He went to the Amherst Street where M. lived, mostly with his bhaktas on the third storey of the Morton School. He saw a close disciple of his father going out on some errand. Charu Babu, for that was the young man's name, called out to him to listen to him. The disciple stopped but could not recognize him at first.

When he did, he wondered what had happened to his master's son. Anyway, he learnt that Charu Babu had no food for the last two days and wanted thirty rupees to be given to him. The disciple had some money kept with him by M. for the service of sadhus and bhaktas and perhaps had his own money too, but he felt he could not part with any of it without M.'s permission. Charu Babu understood his predicament and suggested that he might convey his request to his father. The disciple went back to M. and whispered the matter into his ears. M. took no time to decide and whispered back, "Give it to him." But before the disciple had left the room, M. called him back again and said in a whisper, "Yes, give it to him but only if he can pay it back within thirty-one days." Even the disciple felt confused at the hard-heartedness of the father. "Even a stranger when starving for want of the means of livelihood is given succour unconditionally but here, this saintly man, a direct disciple of the Avatar, is so calculative in the case of his own son. What a conduct!" thought he. The disciple had forgotten that the general good of the family, its orderly living was more important than emotional attachment to one's son. Charu Babu, however, promptly came back on the 31st day and returned the money.

A great man's heart is hard like the thunderbolt when it is a question of principles but soft like rose petals when dealing with an afflicted soul. M. was Sri Ramakrishna's servant. Under his orders he was living in the family like a maid-servant who had no right to give away anything to anybody, even to his own son.

From the very beginning, we have seen that the Great Master wanted M. to teach mankind the duties of the householder not only by precept but by example. While instructing M. on the essential ideals of the household life, he told him that 'woman' and 'gold' were the two great impediments in the way of the householder in quest of the Spirit. They made him deviate from Yoga and dragged him down into utter worldliness. The aspirant must practise spiritual discipline in the beginning and learn to overcome the waves and storms of 'woman' and 'gold'. Then there would be no fear—he would enjoy peace and calm in his life. Answering M.'s questions which came naturally to all aspiring house-holders, the Master said, "Perform your duties in an unselfish spirit, without desiring any results." "But Sir, can one realize God while performing one's duties ?" asked M. To this Sri Ramakrishna said, "All without exception perform work—there is no way of renouncing work altogether. So you have to work. But surrender its results to God." M. then asked whether he would try to earn more money. The Master replied that he could do so to maintain a religious family but the means must be honest, "Money," he said, "is not harmful if it is devoted to the service of God." Next M. wanted to know how far he had duties towards his wife and children. To this the Master replied, "Only so long as they are in want of food and clothing. The daughter is to be given away in marriage to a good person; the son is to be enabled to earn his livelihood. When he is able to support himself he is no longer the responsibility of the father. It is not also the moral responsibility of the father to arrange for the marriage of his sons." M. literally obeyed

his Master in all these respects. The marriage ceremony of one of his daughters ended at 2 a.m. Soon after it, M. went into his room and kept meditating and reading his own diaries, the *Gospel*.

Regarding the householder-sannyasi's duties to his parents, Sri Ramakrishna told him : "A householder will serve his parents throughout his life. But for the mother, he has a still greater responsibility. Even if the mother is unfaithful, her child will serve her." Once when M. asked the Master if he might meditate on the form of his own mother as an exercise in meditation on God-with-form the Master replied, "Yes, yes, the mother should be worshipped. She is indeed the embodiment of Brahman."

Once M. returned late from the Gadadhar Ashrama (in Bhabanipur) to his rooms in the Morton School. Though old, he would not seek the services of his household to give him a late dinner. So he asked a disciple to go to the bazaar and buy Punjabi *chapatis*.

"If your maid were to return home late would you cook for her ? No, either she would buy from the bazaar or go hungry for the night," he explained.

M. lived in his own house like a wayfarer in an inn. To get over the idea of home and family and imbibe the feeling of homelessness, he would get up sometimes, at night, carry his bed to the open verandah of the Senate Hall of the Calcutta University and spend the night in the company of the waifs and the homeless of the city.

M.'s household life could be likened to that of the lion who was to guard a store of meat but was neither to eat, nor even to sniff at it.

3

M. loved to defray the little expenses of the Master while he lived and those of the bhaktas. It is recorded in the *Gospel* that he was sometimes asked by the Master to pay for the carriage hire of Purna and other bhaktas when they came to visit him. Once he was also asked to buy a blanket for a bhakta going on pilgrimage, which he gladly did. It is also recorded that he brought the Master a cup, a *chadar* and a pair of slippers. The following incident of November 1884 would be of interest to the reader.

It was the beginning of winter. M. had bought two *broad-cloth* shirts and a third of some heavy material for the Master as he needed some. Seeing the heavy shirt which M. must have thought would be of greater service to him during winter, Sri Ramakrishna said that he did not want it. "Take that one back," said he, "You may use it yourself. There is nothing wrong in it." And he added, "You see, Dwarka Babu gave me a shawl; the Marwari bhaktas also brought me one but I couldn't accept either." The shirt which was returned is still preserved in the "Thakur Bari" (Kathamrita Bhavan) by M.'s descendants.

In 1887, M. was working in three schools at a time. He would give away the remuneration from one of the schools to the Baranagore monastery; the income from the second he spent in the service of the Holy Mother and the bhaktas; and with the income of the third he met the expenses of his family.

M. spent least on his bodily comforts. Throughout his life, a pair of dhoties, a pair of Bengali shirts and a pair

of varnished black slippers constituted his whole wardrobe.

As during the lifetime of his Master, so after his passing away, M. never changed the pattern of his life. In fact, no temptations of the world ever separated him on the mental plane from his beloved Master.

About the qualities of the householder bhakta, Thakur had said that he was to be humble, unconceited, of placid temperament, rigid where principles were involved, possessed of a high sense of humour and the strength of a lion in activity. And he should serve sadhu-bhaktas "as the servant of their servants." M. came nearest to this description of an ideal householder.

4

The following account of a visit to Master Mahashay at Calcutta, narrated by Swami Satprakashananda (in the *Vedanta Kesari*, April 1975) will be of interest to the reader. It was the end of January 1908 when he had come to Calcutta from Dacca, his home city. On reaching Guru Prasad Chaudhury Lane, close to Amherst Street, he entered M.'s parental house and climbed up the fourth level by the brick-built staircase. He found Master Mahashay seated with a group of devotees, very attentively listening to the reading of the *Gospel* (the *Kathamrita*)—his own writing—like a pupil! After the reading was over and the bhaktas had left, Master Mahashay asked him to go inside the shrine (in the attic) and take out some *prasada* and *charanamrita* in a small metallic plate and glass, for himself. The young visitor—he was a student and

a worker of the Ramakrishna Association (Dacca) and had not yet embraced sannyasa—did as asked and having eaten the *prasada* and taken the *charanamrita* left the plate and the glass outside in the verandah. Master Mahashay soon found it out and said, "No, no, this will not do. You should wash them, dry the glass and the plate and keep both in proper places." And he added, "Thakur was very orderly, neat and clean. He used to put things in such a way that one could find them at night, even in darkness". While talking to the young man he found that the latter was planning to establish 'A Temple of the Harmony of Religions'. This temple would comprise a Hindu temple, a Mohammedan mosque, a Christian church and a Buddhist temple, and others, with an appropriate sign-plate at each place of worship.

When the young man had explained his plan, Master Mahashay said that signboards, advertisements and self-advertisements wouldn't do. That was not Thakur's idea. Instead, one should gather something there within the heart (and he pointed his finger to the heart) before one launched on public work. First of all, one should have devotion to God, otherwise it was all frittering away of energies. And one should pray to God in solitude and secrecy, *nirjane gopane*. These two words he repeated several times and then quoted a passage from the Bible : "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and the Father, which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." (St. Matthew 6:6)

In spite of the rebukes that the young sadhaka received from M. on his first visit he made it a point to see him and

bow to him whenever he went from Dacca to Calcutta. And now he was always received cordially and given 'offered' sweets to eat. At these visits, Master Mahashay, however, talked to him of nothing else but Sri Ramakrishna; at the most he would suggest that he read a few pages from a religious book, like *Yogavasistha Ramayana*, which he happened to be reading.

In 1924, Swami Satprakashananda, on his return from several places of pilgrimage went to see M. at Calcutta. M. enquired about all those holy places but was particularly interested in Naimisaranya, where Suta Goswami had narrated the *Bhagavata* to an audience of sixty thousand, including many saints and sages. He asked him how he went there and added, "Ah, you have seen so many places! Had Thakur seen you, he would have gone into samadhi. But I haven't."

M., THE GREAT BHAKTA OF SADHUS AND THE BELUR MATH

Two essential conditions of the spiritual path are *viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and renunciation. He who has been able to discriminate between *sat* (the Real or the Eternal) and *asat* (the unreal or transitory) has prepared himself for his journey towards God-realization. Renouncing the *asat*, the unreal world, he marches towards God, the Eternal. The difference between the sadhu and the worldly man is that the sadhu is a man of *viveka* and *vairagya*, while the worldly man clings to *asat*, the transitory and the illusory pleasures of the sensory world.

Early in his life, Mahendranath had been attracted by the life of the sadhu. His visits to Sri Ramakrishna soon made him a devotee of the sadhus. In fact, so much was he attracted by this life that, as we have noticed earlier, he implored the Master so often to permit him to embrace sannyasa. But that was not to be—the Mother of the Universe had willed that he must stay in the household and 'teach the Bhagavata' to the worldly.

Be it as it may, in his daily conversations with the bhaktas and those who visited him for light after the

passing away of the Master, his main advice was : Keep the company of sadhus. This was his great prescription for warding off the evil influences of the sensory world. "By religion," he would say, "I mean the keeping of the company of sadhus. You may do a thousand other things, but unless you keep the company of sadhus, nothing is being done." And he added, "If a law-suit has to be filed, one approaches a lawyer. To get rid of a disease, one has to call on a doctor. In the same way, if God is wanted, the company of sadhus must be sought."

And who is a sadhu ? "Not necessarily he who has put on the *gerua* (the ochre cloth)", said he, "but the man whose company inspires you to live a Godly life, makes you feel one with God."

It can be said of Mahendranath that twenty out of his twenty-four hours, he kept the company of sadhus and bhaktas. Even when ill, he would have bhaktas around him and would not allow others to serve him. During his conversations, if anybody broached a worldly matter, he would immediately change the topic to that of sadhus and God.

Though he thought of sadhus as a class to be worthy of our reverence at all times, the company of the sadhus, of Sri Ramakrishna was to him the greatest of good fortunes. "Those who live in the *Math*, how great those sadhus are !" said he. "What a lofty ideal they have ! — Thakur, the avatara is their ideal....These sadhus are so unlike others. They want nothing but God. Name, fame, popular applause, creature comforts—none of these they care for."

While M. lived with his bhaktas at Mihijam,* he would regularly receive account of the Belur Math by letters. He had asked one of his bhaktas, the younger Jiten to go daily from Calcutta to Belur Math after office hours, spend the night there and meditate in the company of sadhus; and he had asked him to send his account daily.

One day, he read the news that the Mahapurusha Maharaj (Swami Shivananda), the President of the Math and the Mission, had bowed one morning to the sadhus in meditation. M. remarked : "It is by living in the Math alone that one can be blessed by such a sight. You may read a thousand books, do whatever you may, you can never see such a thing without going there. What cannot be achieved by a thousand sermons becomes possible by witnessing this single act of the Mahapurusha Maharaj. Why did he, the Abbot Supreme of the Math, bow to the sadhus ? Sadhus in meditation are no ordinary souls. In meditation, the person meditating and the subject of the meditation become one. That's why he bowed.

"A bath in the sacred Ganga, a glimpse of the Holy Dakshineswar and the daily company of the sadhus are a rare privilege....For forming new *sanskaras* nothing else is needed. The *sanskaras* of a thousand years are transformed just by going there....The company of sadhus wards off all sorrows, sets everything right. The wrong watch has to be set right with the help of the right one. Attachment and detachment, joy and sorrow, self-will and God's will, self-effort and Grace, the *yoga* and the *yogin* and so on—

* For a fuller account of M. in Mihijam, please read 'M., the Apostle and the Evangelist' Part I, by Swami Nityatmananda (Sri 'Jagabandhu' of this narrative).

all these problems of the spiritual life get automatically solved there. Who is one's own and who is not, who is a friend and who is a foe ?—these matters are also rightly understood." At another time, M. said, "Those who have not yet ripened to tread the path of religion cannot bear to be with sadhus. On the other hand, those who have the *tapasya* of many births to their credit love to frequent the Math."

2

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna on 16 August 1886, his disciples, most of them boys, had nowhere to go. The Cossipore house was to be vacated. Even the Holy Mother had no home. So it was decided that till some arrangements were made for her stay, she might go on a pilgrimage. This would also help her to bear her grief. The boys returned home, though only temporarily.

Early in September 1886, Sureshnath Mitra, called Surendra by the Master, who had obtained the Cossipore house on lease for the Master, was visited by the latter in a vision and asked to arrange for a place for the boys. So he hurried to Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) offering to pay the rent of a new house if it could be got cheap. Thus came into being the first Math (monastery) at Baranagore near the bank of the Ganga, at about the end of September 1886, though it was only in December that the disciples took up monastic names after performing appropriate ceremonies. M. visited the young monks many times during the early months of 1887, his first visit being on 21 February. He always referred to the young sadhus of the Math by their original names because of a long intimacy with them.

M. befriended the young monks, especially Narendra with whom he was on most intimate terms. Once a householder disciple brushed them aside as a few unripe, inexperienced youths. M. immediately defended them. Another day, while M. was at the Math, the father of one of the boy monks, Shashi, came to the Monastery wanting to take him home. Seeing him, Shashi fled through another door. So M. had to face the irate father.

Shashi's Father—Who is in charge of this place ? Narendra is the cause of all the mischief. The boys had returned home and were already devoting themselves to studies.

M.—There is no master here. They are all equals. What could Narendra have to do with it ? Could he make him renounce home against his will ? We householders, for instance, have not been able to renounce our homes.

A fire of intense renunciation was raging in the hearts of the young monks. One day, Narendra was seated with M. in M.'s study in Calcutta. It was 7 May 1887. They were talking.

Narendra—I don't care for anything....I feel I should get up this very minute and run away....I shall fast to death for God-realization.

M.—That's good. Anything can be done for God.

Narendra—But if I cannot control my hunger ?

M.—Then eat something and begin again after a few minutes.

Narendra—I still have no peace....

Then he asked M. to give him six pice to pay for his carriage hire to Baranagore Math. But soon arrived Satkari in his personal carriage. Narendra could now accompany him. He returned the six pice he had taken from M.

Referring to M. Thakur had said, "The Divine Mother catches the wild animals with the help of the tamed ones." Swami Vivekananda wrote in one of his letters to the Math from America, "When Sri Thakur left his body, everybody gave us up as a few unripe urchins, but M. and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We cannot repay our debt to them."

To M., Baranagore Math appeared to be so holy that he would take water from the cistern there and sprinkle it over his body to purify himself. He himself would come to this Math to spend long days in *sadhan* and *bhajan*. In 1890, he actually lived there for six months at a stretch.

M.'s reverence for the Math and the places associated with the life of Sri Ramakrishna can at least partially be appreciated from the rule he laid down for his devotee friends to follow when visiting these places :

"Before you enter the gate, prostrate yourself at the gate," said he, "and recite mentally the following four *mantras* : (1) I shall not harm the Ashrama by word, deed or thought. (2) I shall not pass in front of the sadhus in meditation, or do anything that might disturb them. (3) I shall not take my fill of the holy alms received by the sadhus. Instead, I shall only beg of them to give me a particle of the holy food and water as *prasada*. And (4)

within the campus of the Math, if rebuked or even beaten up by a sadhu, I shall not protest. I shall accept it with folded hands, also as *prasada*."

M.'s reverence for the Math was only matched by his deep feelings for all those who were related to Thakur even remotely. We have seen how he revered the Holy Mother. His reverence for Lakshmi Didi, a daughter of Thakur's brother, may be seen from the following recorded incident. It was in Puri in 1926. Some of M.'s devotees met Lakshmi Didi there. They came and told him about it. Said he, "Lakshmi Didi, a simple village girl, see, how high she has risen ! She has become a God-realized soul by his grace. See what she says : 'Thakur Ma are Brahman-Shakti.' Blessed is he who has recognized Thakur and Ma. And equally blessed is he who has heard such a person speak."

We have also noticed elsewhere that about this time M. was working in three schools so as to meet a part of the expenses of the Holy Mother, of sadhus, bhaktas and his own family.

It may be noted that M. was very keen that the Math might acquire the Cossipore Bagan, for it was here that the seed of the Monastic Order, which was to sprout into the great Sri Ramakrishna Math later got sown during the last illness of the Master. Vinaya Maharaj, one of M.'s devotees and admirers, who later embraced sannyasa, under the monastic name of Jitatmananda, took up the suggestion and ultimately carried it out.



M. at 50 (1904)

M. IN CALCUTTA

M. was born in Calcutta, as we know, and lived there most of his life. However, he was never in peace with himself, living as he was in a joint family in his parental house, till he met Sri Ramakrishna in 1882. To free himself from the joint family entanglements, he rented houses in different localities of Calcutta, till at last he got a portion of his parental house as his share. He named it "Thakur Bari", the House of the Lord. Herein Sri Ramakrishna was daily worshipped — and continues to be worshipped to this day.

M.'s contact with the Great Master, as we know, had completely transformed his attitudes — the traditional way of life involving never-ending duties towards the members of the joint family and leaving no time for meditation or worship could no longer be tolerated by him. Though we do not have sufficient details of the houses where he lived in rented accommodation, we find him living in a Kambuliatola house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna visited him there, at least once. A few years after the demise of the Master, the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, also visited M. in the same locality — whether it was the same house visited by the Master, one does not know. She visited him again in another house in Colootola in 1895 and stayed therein for about a month as an honoured

guest and spiritual mentor of M. and Srimati Nikunja Devi, M.'s wife.

The Holy Mother installed, in 1887, a 'Mangal Ghata' (Holy Vessel) in the "Thakur Bari", for worship of the Master and meditation. Some mementoes were also placed there, including Thakur's *Punjabi* (Bengali shirt), shawl and slippers.

In 1905, M. bought a school, known as the Morton School, and shifted it to 50, Amherst Street. Later M. renamed it as 'Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Institution.' Henceforth M. lived mostly in the school building itself though he went to the *Thakur Bari* also at times. His devotees and sadhus visited him almost every evening in this school to hear his discourses. To the school boys he was known as the Rector Mahashay, his eldest son Probhash Babu having been given the duties of routine management. M. himself almost retired from the active life of a teacher and devoted his remaining twenty-seven years or so to the preaching of the life and message of his master.

While living in the school building in the staircase room on the 3rd floor, he cooked his own meals and attended to all his personal needs himself. His dress was as simple as his food. It was his conviction that limiting personal wants to the minimum was an important aid to *sadhana*, the life of prayer — for objects of luxury take the mind away from God.

In his room, M. kept a simple bedroll with a striped blanket spread out on the floor near the windows, with an ochre coloured bed-sheet over it. On the walls, there

were pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and gods. One had to take off the shoes before entering this templelike room. In a corner there was a table with some writing material and books. The Rector was generally dressed in a *Kurta* with a folded cloth round his back. He had a broad chest, long hair, ample beard and big peaceful eyes. He wore polished slippers and looked firm but patient.

A former student of his school said that it was in his classes that the students were able to gauge the depth of his love for the motherland. He often repeated the dictum, *nayamatma balahinena labhyah* — there is no salvation for the feeble-hearted.

From 1897, M. had but one thought: the spreading of the message of his master, when he started contributing his memoirs based on his diaries in the various magazines of his time. But of this a little later.

M.'s spiritual sessions used to be held either in the *Thakur Bari* or the Morton School. Says Swami Dharmeshananda, "There was a Tulsi grove, a heavenly retreat on the top of the four-storied building of the Morton School, surrounded by high parapets — the only view open to anyone sitting there was the wide expanse of the blue sky. And in this Tulsi grove were a few creepers. And there sat our ever-affectionate M. in deep meditation of God, day and night, whose talks were a source of never-ending delight. As time went on, the number of devotees increased. The staircase room and terrace of the third floor of Morton School became a veritable *Naimisharanya* of modern times."

Swami Raghavananda gives his impressions of M. in his inimitable style. He had seen him off and on in Calcutta, from 1908 to 1932, the year of M.'s passing away. Describing one of his meetings with him, says he, "....In the sweet and warm months of April and May, sitting under the canopy of heaven on the roof-garden of 50, Amherst Street, surrounded by shrubs and plants, himself sitting in their midst like a rishi of old, the stars and planets in their courses beckoning us to things infinite and sublime, he would speak to us of the mystery of God, His love, and of the yearning that would rise in the human heart to solve the Eternal Riddle as exemplified in the life of his master. The mind melting under the influence of his soft sweet words of light would almost transcend the limits of the finite existence and dare to peep into the infinite. He himself would take in the influence of the setting and say, 'What a blessed privilege it is to sit in such a setting, (as he pointed to the starry heavens) in the company of devotees and discourse on God and his love'!"

Besides Dakshineswar Temple — where M. often meditated, sometimes under the Vilva tree at the spot of Sri Ramakrishna's Tantrik Sadhana — and the Belur Math, M.'s favourite haunt was the Gadadhar Ashram, in Bhabanipur, in Calcutta, where he could meditate unhampered by social service activity and have *sadhu-sanga*, company of prayerful sadhus, into the bargain. M. always gave preference to prayer and meditation as against humanitarian social work.

M., THE TEACHER

1

We have said earlier that M. was one of the most brilliant products of the Calcutta University. He was well-read both in Eastern and Western lore. In fact he taught a number of very different subjects — Literature, Social Science, Philosophy and Religion, both in schools and colleges. But the interest that abided with him till late in life was Astronomy, Sanskrit classics, particularly Kalidasa, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Srimad Bhagavata and the Bible. His interpretations of the Bhagavata, the Gita and the Upanishad were unique — not academic like those of the learned but full of verve and life, and he would frequently refer to Ramakrishna's elucidations of them. About his knowledge of the Bible, a learned ninety-five year-old orthodox Christian padre said to his son that M. knew much more of the Bible than many fathers of the Church. To us, it does not look to be strange, for hadn't M. lived with the Avatar and said, "I feel that Christ, Gauranga and yourself are one and the same." About Astronomy he had said to a devotee, fixing his gaze on the nocturnal skies above : "In Astronomy the savants describe the planets and stars of the firmament. The *yogis* of India have also given ample thought to this subject. The contemplation of the firmament leads one to the glimpse of the immensity of Ishwara....it awakens the feeling of God."

In Sanskrit classics, M. was particularly fond of reciting the scene of Shiva in meditation in the great poem *Kumarsambhava* by Kalidasa and the prayer addressed by the gods to Brahman. The description of the *tapovana* of Kanwa Muni and Maharshi Maricha in *Shakuntalam* was another favourite of his. And he had a great fascination for Vivekananda's "Song of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi."

From the Western lore he would often quote the Bible, Shakespeare, Dante, Emerson and Carlyle, and of the philosophers, Hegel and Schopenhauer.

M. was unique both as a class teacher of schoolboys and college students, as well as the spiritual teacher of the world. In fact, he often combined spirituality with his teaching of worldly knowledge and referred to physical phenomena while imparting spiritual instruction. He would come down to the mental level of his pupils and then would raise their minds by injecting knowledge, as if it were, slowly and gradually with great affection; and he would try to concretize all abstractions as far as possible.

Blessed with prodigious memory and an extraordinary imagination, he would describe a person, a holy place or an incident in such a way that the listeners would see them as if it were before their own eyes. Wonderful also was his insight. Looking at a face or listening to a word or two or seeing an act or hearing a couplet, he would divine the inside of the man, touch its chords and build it up.

"Who is this man ? said I* to myself. "There is not the least trace of egotism in his words. The word 'I' simply does

*Jagabandhu Roy, later Swami Nityatmananda on his first visit to M.

not exist for him. I am young, he is old, yet he is talking as to an equal—no distance whatsoever.....I was won over by him for ever."

2

M. taught his devotees from such mundane matters as cooking and washing utensils to the highest point of all knowledge, that is Brahman-realization. Whatever the subject of his teaching, big or small, he would teach by personal demonstration, use the most commonplace of similes to clear up a great truth and keep a constant watch over his pupils lest they should fall into error. A scene of how he taught his bhaktas to cook has been described thus :

Walking up and down the verandah, M. stops in front of the kitchen. Peeping in he says, "Please keep your mug there on the west side.... Before you take the pulse and rice off the fire, please sprinkle a few drops of water and clean the place a little with your hands. You may then place the cooking pot there. If both of your hands need to be washed you may do like *this*". He demonstrates holding the mug with the side of the thumb....

M. was with a disciple in the garden. "Just see this bee," said he to the young man, "It sits only on flowers. It is a class by itself. Those who have a yearning for God want nothing else. They don't like to taste the juice of sensory enjoyments at all — they only desire honey, God."

At another time, M. was pacing up and down under the Jambu-tree in Mihijam. He saw a dog looking for its food in the kitchen drain. Said he to the bhaktas, "Look ! It is

looking for its food. With him, eating is the only thing —its sole aim in life is to eat. But it is not the same with man." Then he proceeded to proclaim a great truth : "There are three bodies of every human being — not only this one you see, the gross. There are also the subtle and causal bodies. The animal gives food only to the gross body. But man must give food to all the three — this is his duty. The food for the gross body is what we eat : cereals, drinks and so on. The subtle body is to be given intellectual pursuits : science, literature, philosophy, art etc. But for the causal body we need worship and holy reading, *japa* and *dhyana*, discrimination and renunciation, devotion and intense love — all these. All the three bodies have to be given food. It is not enough that we merely feed the gross body."

Another —

Troubled by the flies, M. was resting within a mosquito net when he heard a sound. Peeping out, he saw a goat thrusting its mouth into the pot containing the leftover rice for the dogs, and a crow pecking at its head a number of times. Soon the goat had to leave the pot and the crow ate. Said he, "The meaning is clear. You must not try to take what is not your due. You are a goat, you should graze in the field, go into the open and eat grass. I am a crow, I have a right to this rice, not you."

M. would not feel satisfied merely by imparting instruction. He would look after his disciples and their welfare at all times. A brahmachari had gone out under the *aswattha tree* in Mihijam to meditate at the dead of night. M.'s watchful eyes did not fail to notice it. He took a lantern and went to the spot. Having lowered the wick he placed the light quietly behind the tree and returned. The Brahma-

machari, when he finished his meditation in the early hours of the morning, was surprised to see the lantern. M. said to him later in the day : "You see, wild bears roam about at night. They can only be kept away by a light."

"M. carried with him such a deep impression of the time he had been privileged to spend with Sri Ramakrishna that it had become a part of his being. The distance of time and place simply did not exist for him. Whatever he saw around him, he would be inspired to think of his master and his words. Whether it was a grove, a wood or a village, his mind saturated by Thakur's teaching would immediately connect it with some saying of the Master and then he would impart it to his disciples and devotees. He was truly his master's voice.

Ask him any question read out any scripture, sing a song to him, he would begin to talk of the Master and narrate some incident of his life, repeat the words he had heard from the beloved lips — he called them all *mantras* —and he would teach his listeners how to meditate on those *mantras* and scenes. And he would hold out to all the promise that the Master made to his intimate disciples —"Verily, verily I say to you that if you think on me, you will inherit my wealth just as a son inherits the wealth of his father. And my wealth is knowledge and devotion, discrimination and dispassion, peace and happiness, intense love and realization of God."

He would remind all the aspirants the Master's other promise : "Think on me. You will have to do nothing else."

As a religious teacher, he was full of bliss, vigour and robust optimism which never failed to infect his listeners.

He was an 'officer' destined to preach his Master's word and was holding the *chapras* (authority), as if it were, from the Mother of the Universe to teach the 'Bhagavata' to mankind.

Mahendra by nature possessed a very humble, self-effacing and shy personality, as we have seen. When he came to know from Sri Ramakrishna that God-realization was only possible when the 'I' in man was completely crushed, he tried to efface himself even more assiduously both as a writer and a disciple. For example, he wrote the *Kathamrita* (and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) under the pen-name of 'M.' This resulted in his admirers and bhaktas calling him Sri 'M.' (Shri Ma in Hindi and Bengali) or as Sri Ma.

During the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna, M. was teaching in various schools and colleges. Some of his students who felt attracted by the life of the spirit were brought by him to the Master's feet. Most of them became Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and some of them even his apostles, the pillars of his Order. Puranchandra, Tejendra, Binod, Bankim, Paltoo, Kshirod and Narayana may be counted among the former and Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda), Babu Ram (Swami Premananda) and Subodh (Swami Subodhananda) among the latter.

Being his students, they all called M. as 'Master Mahashay'. This appellation also became popular with his friends and contemporaries. Sri Ramakrishna also called him, 'Master'.

To hide himself, M. refers to himself in the text of the

Kathamrita sometimes as Mani, sometimes as Mohini Mohan and at other times merely as a bhakta.

When the young men from his school and colleges came to him for religious guidance after the passing away of the Master, he would make them sit on a mat before him and say, "Look here, Thakur had completely renoun. ed 'woman' and 'gold'. To understand him fully you have to go to those who have themselves renounced the world completely. Family men, whoever they may be, cannot fully describe the mental state of Thakur." And then he would send them to the Math, with the result that those who had an inner urge to renounce would embrace sannyasa in due course.

Though M. taught and spoke for more than 40 years about God-realization, yet he never took up the role of the guru nor would he initiate anybody. He would never use compulsion or rebuke his young listeners. He would simply talk of Thakur to them or of the life of renunciation. It is another matter if his divinely inspired words would so much impress his visitors that they would willy-nilly follow the path shown by him. Kali Krishna (Swami Virajananda) was one of those students of the Ripon College who went to the Math at M.'s suggestion in 1890. It is no exaggeration to say that most of the young men who entered the monastic life at the Math had been initiated initially by the glowing terms in which M. had talked to them of sannyasa.

3

M. wrote the immortal *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Kathamrita* in Bengali, which is the source book of all the

knowledge that any spiritual aspirant may ever need. It stands in the same rank with such scriptures as the *Gita*, the *Bible*, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and the *Quran*.

M. had started teaching "the Bhagavata" during the lifetime of the Master. Swami Vivekananda paid him the highest compliments as early as 1889. They—Vivekananda, M. and some other disciples—were staying in the village of Antpore, at the house of Swami Premananda. Swami Vivekananda was observing a vow of silence but so over-whelmed he was by Master Mahashay's talk and conduct that he wrote out a note and handed it out to him. It said : "Thanks ! 1,00,000 Master ! You have hit *Ramkristo* in the right point. Few alas, few understand him !!

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

4

We may reproduce here some of the important teachings of M. which, of course, are only the echo of his Master's words :

*God resides in everything as its warp and woof—all is He. He pervades all.

*Our first and foremost duty is to realize Him.

**Prakriti*'s role is to bind man to the world. It manifests itself in man's lust, anger, greed, grief and suffering. Even an avatara is not free from it completely.

*To successfully overcome the strong current of your nature, take refuge in Him, keep the company of sadhus, live in solitude, pray to Him for His grace.

*Whether cooking or eating, always remember His name.

*Everything is alike in animal and man except that the latter has divine potentiality—the potentiality to realize the Self, God.

*The animal man lives to eat, sleep, procreate and fear. The spiritual man tries to subjugate the animal in him, in other words, his *prakriti*, and to realize Him.

*‘Brahman is the Truth, the world is false’ — this pertains to the last stage, it is the last word. Till that stage is reached — that is, till you have realized God — you should learn to live with the pairs of opposites and try to imbibe the better of the two.

*Basic duties must not be given up saying, ‘Brahman is the Truth, the world is false.’ This is not to say that all social duties are necessary. Your foremost duty is to call on God.

*To the worldly people Thakur said : “Do this as well as that — both *yoga* and *bhoga* — now. In future, it will be what it may—maybe you renounce (*bhoga*) of your own accord.”

*For those who have married, he (Sri Ramakrishna) was most worried. He would say : ‘You are yourself sinking and you have the load of so many round your neck. Those who have got stuck up in the world are cared for more by Him.’

*When struck by sorrows and troubles, awakening will come and you will begin to call on Him.... Man was made to call on Him.

*If one calls on Him with a sincere heart, He reduces one's *karmas*.... He can do everything.

*Before the appearance of the avatara, people feel contented with rituals — so much of japa, such and such worship, so many days of fasting.... The root of dharma, yearning, the sincere desire to realize Him, is completely lost. The avatara comes. He reduces the external activity and gives a fillip to the inner activity — the longing for God. He comes to show the shortest cut—he simplifies everything.

*Selfless work is not to be counted as *karma*. It purifies the mind.

*The ideal would be not to marry. But if you must, have one or two children and then live like brother and sister.

*There is no panacea for the worldly ills except the company of sadhus.

*Only a part of your income should be spent on yourself and your family. The rest should go to :

- (a) the service of God (*devasthana*),
- (b) the service of sadhus and bhaktas,
- (c) the service of God-in-the-poor (*dridra-narayana*) and
- (d) the service of the sick (*rogi-narayana*).

*He (Sri Ramakrishna) came only the other day. No fear. Establish an imaginary relationship with Him and live in

the world—any relationship of love, that of father, mother, friend or Lord. Later, this relationship will become a reality and take possession of your mind and heart. The devotee has two personalities—the worldly and the divine. When his worldly personality is overwhelmed by the whirlpools of worldly pleasures and pains, his divine counterpart comes to his rescue and transforms the weakling into a hero.

*The *dhyana* system of Sri Ramakrishna is the easiest, simplest and most profitable. During the *dhyana* the Ista, the Chosen Deity, should be meditated upon in the eye of the mind as a living being.... Whenever Thakur meditated on the Divine Mother, She appeared at once before him and he talked to Her like a child to his Mother. So many times had I the great fortune of seeing this living *dhyana* of Thakur and him conversing with the Divine Mother. We must establish a living mental and emotional relationship with our Ideal—it will not do to meditate on a lifeless image.

*Shakespeare — such a great poet and dramatist but nowhere did he say a word on the Gospel of (divine) Love.

AT MIHIJAM

Mihijam is a tiny village, 144 miles from Calcutta, in the Santhal Pargana. It is a health resort. M. spent nine months there.

It was in 1922; M. was about seventy. Most of the luminaries of the spiritual firmament of Sri Ramakrishna had passed away including the Holy Mother. With her passing away, M. felt as if he had been orphaned. Besides, he had not been keeping too well at Calcutta for some time. So it was to rest his broken body and mind, and to plunge into the contemplation of the Divine that M. decided to go to Mihijam. Sri Ramakrishna had taught his disciples occasionally to go and live in a solitary place and to concentrate their energies in divine pursuit, away from the din and noise of their usual surroundings. In going to Mihijam, M. was obeying yet another command of the Master. Another reason for M. to go to Mihijam was this : it was just then that a few sadhus and brahmacharis of scanty means had established there a Vidyapeeth (seminary). Brahmachari Vidya Chaitanya, later known as Swami Sadbhavananda, was the head of this institution. He had sent out affectionately an invitation to M. to spend some time in the Vidyapeeth and give him the benefit of his advice, a

veteran educationist as he was. This Vidyapeeth which was started with just two or three boys, of course with M. as one of its advisers, grew in time to be the famous Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapeeth of Deoghar.

In Mihijam,* M. lived in a thatched cottage in a lonely spot in a vast open field though he had a brick house at his disposal. To the south of the cottage stretched beds of roses and other flowers and an orchard of mangoes and other fruits. In front of the cottage stood a jambu-tree with a circular brick platform round its trunk. M. would generally sit there and hold discussion with the bhaktas on the *Bhagawata*. To the north in the field, there was an aswattha-tree. Under this tree M. would sit to meditate. The brahmacharis lived in the brick-built house close to M.'s cottage. M.'s ashrama in Mihijam reminded one of the ancient rishis, living in *tapovanas*, forests in the Vedic age. There was no servant in the ashrama — the devotees and the brahmacharis themselves attended to all the household work. For cooking, they used earthen pots, for plates green *sal* leaves of the forest and for bed just an ordinary blanket spread out on the floor. For consulting time, no watch was kept. The up and down trains served the purpose of the watch.

With other necessities of life having been reduced to the minimum, the food that was eaten there was also equally simple. *Moongdal* and boiled rice with a pinch of salt and a piece of smashed turmeric and a spoonful of cow's ghee

*For a fuller account of M. in Mihijam, please read 'M., the Apostle and the Evangelist' Part 1, by Swami Nityatmananda (Sri 'Jagabandhu' of this narrative).

— this was all that the brahmacharis took, while M., considering his age, took milk and rice in the morning and milk and bread (*chapati*) at night. Parcels of food received from Calcutta were given away to the neighbours and the poor Santhal children.

For worship, a part of M.'s living-room was partitioned off by a screen to form a worship room. A packing box was covered with a piece of cloth and placed within, with the idol of Baby Krishna and a photograph of Ramakrishna over it facing south. The devotees sat on the floor on a blanket, facing the photograph and the idol. The space between the pulpit and the bhaktas was about six feet. In the middle of this space sat the *pujari* on his *asana*. On both sides of his seat there were two more *asanas* for meditation—the left one for M. M. read out from the *Upanishads* daily in the morning and the *Kathamrita* in the evening. He also read the *Bhagavata* in the afternoon and the *Gita* at midday.

Whenever M. recited and explained the Upanishadic texts—and this he did so frequently—not only was his chanting perfectly Vedic but his explanations were also so sweet and touching as only he who had himself experienced the joys of the ancient rishis could give. On some days, one of the brahmacharis would read and M. explain the texts.

M. had laid down the routine of life at the ashrama for the brahmacharis and the bhaktas as below :

To rise from the bed in the *Brahma-muhurata* (between 3 and 4 a.m.) and meditate till sunrise.

To finish the morning bath and the meals without waste of time and to gather round 9 o'clock to hear a talk on God.

By about 11 o'clock a class on the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, the *Chandi*, the *Bhagavata* or the *Kathamrita* would be held by M. himself. Frequently, M. would send brahma-charis to distant solitary spots to meditate alone every morning and afternoon. The dinner at night was to be over by 9.

Thakur had said : "My ideal is to live in a cottage, eat rice with leafy vegetables and repeat His name day and night." Wasn't M. following literally the teaching of the Great Master and also teaching his young disciples both by precept and example ? By bringing his disciples to this spot M. gave them an idea of what was known as *aranya* in *Vedic* times. The *aranya* was nothing but a solitary spot in a forest where they meditated on God and discussed Him. M. himself said of Mihijam : "This is a *tapovana*. It is in places like these that rishis and munis of yore used to live *Tapasya* in the forest, well, it's here. This too is a forest. Lord Buddha carried out *tapasya* under the aswattha-tree in this very region."

M.'s visit to Mihijam directly helped to establish the religious life of the young persons who were with him. Not only did he demonstrate how to lead a simple and higher life but he also helped them to obtain glimpses of the rare experiences of spiritual life.

We may quote verbatim what one of the inmates of the ashrama at Mihijam (Sri Jagabandhu, later Swami Nityatmananda) says about a morning at Mihijam in 'M., the Apostle and the Evangelist,' Part 1.

"It is very early in the morning. The bhaktas are seated under the aswattha-tree for meditation. M. has joined them. It is *Brahma-muhurta*. The east is gradually announcing the approach of the dawn. The eastern sky is slightly illumined. A rosy hue has enveloped the sky. The birds have not yet risen. They have not yet started singing the praises of the Lord. The soft cool breeze of the spring is blowing. The bhaktas are seated, lost in meditation, in the company of the rishi, the master of the three ages. What a sacred feeling ! What a sacred time ! What a sanctified place ! Isn't it a rare sight on the path of the Spirit ? The darkness of the night is fading away and the new-born hue of the dawn is spreading all over. Are the bhaktas wondering whether, by the Grace of Sri Thakur, their darkness of ignorance would also be dispelled in the same way and the light of *jnana* shine forth ?"

We also owe the following description of M. to Swami Nityatmananda :

"M. had an impressive, stately personality. He was tall with a strongly built body, broad chest, fair complexion, a long silvery beard flowing down his chest. He had long arms touching almost his knees; his face was bright, forehead broad and eyes tinged with divine love. He was a picture of humility, serenity, intellect and divinity."

Sri Ramakrishna also gave M. his estimate of his (M.'s) personality. Said he, "I can see from the signs of your eyes, brow and face that you are a *yogi*—a *yogi* who has just left his seat of meditation."

The following narration from '*M., the Apostle and the Evangelist*,' Part 1, is also reproduced to give the reader an idea of the state of mind of M. while living at Mihijam.

“... He is almost running. He goes up and returns; again he goes completely lost, overwhelmed by a divine frenzy. Eyes brimming with tears, looking heavenwards; his mind is fixed to a far distant world of bliss, his inner soul dancing in sheer joy. Because of the intensity of emotion, he repeats the same one word a number of times Walking briskly in deep emotion, he says, ‘Thakur said : In the depth of the night the *anahat* sound is heard.’”

A letter received at Mihijam from a devotee to another reads as below :—

“Sri Sri M.’s company will completely crush all vanity and pride—all egotism will vanish. This is wonderful indeed. I do not know if this thing can be found anywhere else in the world. At least I have never seen anywhere in my life such a completely egoless state—in spite of his learning, knowledge, devotion, discrimination and dispassion, so completely egoless; not a particle of praise can enter him. Such a personality is unique indeed.

“The teachings of Sri Sri M. that you reproduced in your previous letter are a mine of precious gems. Those who are living in his presence and are hearing and drinking together from the *Kathamrita* belong indeed to a very high class.

“Please convey my prayer at the holy feet of Sri Sri M. that he may reduce my worldly involvements and make me live in solitude in the company of sadhus....”

M.'s life in Mihijam was truly a picture of a rishi of yore living in a forest hermitage.

2

M., THE LOVER OF NATURE

Since his childhood, the beauty of nature had a strange fascination for M. But since he generally lived in the heart of the crowded city of Calcutta, what he would do, as he tells us, was to sit down on the roof of his house and let the rain drench him. Why he did so he didn't know, but he enjoyed it very much. Later, he was to tell us that 'Clouds are nothing but He, the rain also He.'

"By going to a solitary place," said he, "One develops a sense of infinity. There nature educates the mind... one is inspired... the deep truths of existence begin to reveal themselves."

Seeing the clouds in the sky, he was reminded of the ancient rishis. They had visions of God in the beauty of the six seasons. This found expression in the Vedic hymns.

"Behold, what a beauty the rising clouds have lent to the sky ! And there you see the rainbow. How beautiful ! How very beautiful !", he would exclaim and add, "The rishis of yore delighted in this store-house of beauty and felt the presence of God in every thing.... The sun, the moon, the fire—the energy of all these is nothing but He."

Seeing the fire of the burning coal, he once said, "This is an other form of Brahman. Some people do not feel any wonder. This is because they see it daily. The sun is also a manifestation of Brahman. What a wonderful sight !"

M. was one day roaming with his bhaktas in the early morning in Mihijam. They were approaching a cluster of trees. Suddenly M. exclaimed, "Behold, behold, what a wonder!" The sun was rising behind the cluster. M. added in ecstatic joy, "It was in the sun that the rishis conceived the *Gayatri*. With these words, they described the *Brahman-Jyoti*, the Eternal Light. The sun is the image of God."

Sri Ramakrishna describes the state of the still mind in perfect meditation by three images : When the sky is overcast and it is close, or when the water in a big lake has no ripples, or when the flame is still and unflickering in the breezeless night.

The sky, the fields, the cottage, the trees, the forest—everything was drowned in joy in the sea of the cool beams of the moon. M. was standing in the flower garden to the east of the cottage courtyard in Mihijam. He was gazing at the full moon. A long time passed in this way but there was no movement—M. stood there like a statue.

What was he seeing ? Or was it the indwelling everconscious Purusha in him drinking to his fill in this store of natural beauty ?

"Among the luminous bodies, I am the moon," says the Lord. Was it by seeing Him that M. had lost all outer consciousness ?*

We owe the following description of M.'s state of mind at the time of contemplation to a devoted brahmachari who kept him company at Mihijam for some time.

* *M., the Apostle & the Evangelist, Part 1 (1st ed. P. 259).*

"M. was seated with his eyes half-closed. His body was still, his limbs did not move at all. Tears of divine joy flowed from his eyes. His venerable face, covered with his long white beard was aglow with a divine light. He was like a man overwhelmed by sleep who is not able to keep his mind on the external world;" and the brahmachari adds, "Without seeing the display of supernatural powers, the mind does not believe. So doubting is the mind!"

Much earlier, Thakur had asked M., "I say, were you inspired by the feeling of God on seeing the Himalayas ?" He had been moved to tears at the sight of the Kanchen-junga (the highest peak in the country and the third highest in the world) from Darjeeling, though he did not remember the Lord's word in the Gita : 'Among the immovables, I am the Himalaya.' The same was M.'s state of mind on seeing the sea at Puri.

M. himself says, "This universe, the treasure-house of all beauty, what a great poet he must be who created all this ! The rishis called him the First Poet. What we call beautiful, He is beyond it; what we call a poet, He is not like that. He is the very power behind all poetic art and beauty....

"He who is a poet looks for beauty and the philosopher for truth. The goal of both is the same. He who is Truth is also Beauty and he who is Beauty is also Truth. A true poet and a true philosopher are one.... Except for God, there is nothing eternally beautiful or ever-new."

Feeling the presence of God in all beautiful (and not so beautiful) phenomena of nature was the experience of all

Indian rishis, nay of most of the Eastern and Western saints and seers. When they looked within they found Him seated in their hearts and when they opened themselves to nature outside they still 'saw the meadow, grove and stream and every earthly common sight apparelled in celestial light.'

Whether in the presence of nature or recalling the moments spent in his master's presence or meditating on the words heard from his beloved lips or listening to devotional music, M. would experience the *unmana samadhi*—he would be completely overwhelmed, his mind withdrawing itself completely from objects and thoughts and fixing itself one-pointedly on his Ideal. Then for a time, there would be no awareness of the body or any external object and the mind would dive deep into the ocean of joy.

Here was a rishi of yore come to life in our times !

M.'S VISITS TO HOLY PLACES

1

Though initially M. was a believer in God-without-form, his association with the great Master soon transformed his intellectual convictions into deep devotion to deities in temples. For Dakshineswar he had the greatest reverence. He described it as 'the greatest place of pilgrimage', for hadn't his Master, 'God Himself in human form' lived there for thirty long years ? The Deity, Mother Bhavat- arini, in the Dakshineswar Temple, was also not less divine for him. He would prostrate himself not only at the spots hallowed by Sri Ramakrishna's touch but worship the Mother with great fervour.

Sri Ramakrishna had said that all religions were so many paths leading to the realization of one and the same God. M., therefore, while sticking devotedly to his own mode of worship gave full reverence to all others. Besides temples, he would visit mosques, churches, gurudwaras, and the Buddha Vihara. And a true man of religion as he was, he was welcome to all places of worship.

M. also visited the traditional centres of pilgrimage. In 1886, after the Master had passed away, he went on pilgrimage to Varanasi, Vrindaban and Ayodhya. In 1912-13, he went again with the Holy Mother's party to

Varanasi, then to Hardwar, Kankhal, Rishikesh and Swarga-ashrama on the other bank of Ganga. In 1925-26, he stayed in Jagannath Puri and Bhubaneswar for a pretty long time.

2

JAGANNATH PURI

Swami Deshikananda gives us glimpses of M. when he was at Puri for four months, living the life of a recluse there. He had met M. by a mere chance towards the end of 1925. Says the Swami, "This gentleman was not tall.... he had a long nose, long arms, and the portion of his body above the waist appeared taller than the lower portion. He had a long-flowing silvery beard and was dressed in the Bengali style. He appeared to me the very picture of serenity and peaceful nature.... He spoke almost continually of Sri Ramakrishna, of his life and leela....As he spoke, I noticed a strange phenomenon—his hair over his body was standing on end and tears were flowing down profusely from his eyes.

"He sang in his melodious voice the songs of Ramaprasad, and, as on the previous day, I once again observed tears flowing down and hair standing on end."

"Is music something trivial ?" Thakur used to say, "By weeping and singing with an intense yearning in a secluded place one sees God."

M. himself used to say, "He (the Master) preferred to sing and hear songs of joy....Sorrow and pain are diseases of the worldly existence. To get rid of them one should sing His name and praise : one should sing happy songs—songs

of joy unmixed with pain. Then alone one can rid oneself of one's disease of existence—the fire of the three *fevers* (physical, mental and spiritual) then cools down. Thakur would always sing songs of joy, for example, 'Don't deprive me of joy, You who are the Embodiment of joy Yourself!' "

M. was fond of singing, particularly the songs of Ramaprasad, like his Master. M. had previously visited Puri in 1886, during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna. M. has himself narrated how he embraced the idol of the Lord Jagannath during that visit. He had been asked to visit Puri by the Master himself and was told to embrace the idol before returning. It was not the time when the devotees were allowed to do so but since he must obey his Master, he boldly climbed the sanctum sanctorum and quickly embraced the idol.

Some priests noticed him. M. who had his pocket full of coins, took a handful and threw them around, the priests got busy picking up the coins. M. had thus the time to escape. When he returned to the Master, the latter held him in a tight embrace for quite some time and said, "This is my embrace of Lord Jagannath too".

M. would always encourage his bhaktas to visit places and celebrations which would inspire them to tread the path of God. When it was not possible for him to go to any such place himself, he would send some reliable devotee there and ask him to describe his visit in all details. He believed that listening to such descriptions also helped one on the spiritual path.

Sometimes, he would himself go to the Howrah Railway Station to meet the pilgrims returning from Puri. He would

feel overjoyed on seeing them and beg of them a little of *mahaprasada* of the Lord. He felt that next to visiting the Lord in Puri the best was to meet the pilgrims, who had been there, and partake of Lord's *prasada*.

The following was M.'s routine in Puri—he was then seventy-one. He would usually get up very early in the morning and meditate till a little before 7 a.m. Sometimes he would go to the beach to offer pranams to the rising sun and would visit the temple at about 7 a.m. On return, he would meditate. At 11 a.m. he would take his meals and talk to the bhaktas and the visitors, and then rest. At 2.30 p.m. he would go to the beach for two hours.

M. would talk of nothing else but Sri Ramakrishna and as he moved about in the house, he would sing the songs of Ramaprasad. At 5.30 he would go to the Temple again and return at 6.30....From 6.30 to 8, he would meditate again. At 8 p.m., he would take his dinner and go to bed at about 10 p.m.

3

KAMARPUKUR, KASHI AND VRINDABAN

M. visited Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna nine or ten times. His first visit to this holy place was in 1886, before the Master passed into Mahasamadhi. Though he had a bullock-cart with him, he preferred to walk most of the distance from Burdwan on foot. Whomsoever he met on the way, he greeted him reverently, full of emotion. Seeing Kamarpukur from a distance he fell prostrate on the ground and saluted it. He himself related how everything seemed to him glowing with divine glory.

The road, the temples, the way-side villages, the peasants, even the road-side dust had special sanctity in his eyes. He visited all the spots associated with the Master's boyhood, touched them lovingly and bowed to them. Sri Ramakrishna, on hearing of his pilgrimage, asked him how on earth he could go to such out-of-the-way places, infested by robbers; and was almost moved to tears at his disciple's extraordinary devotion.

After the passing away of the Master, when M. went on a pilgrimage to Kashi, Vrindaban, Prayag, Ayodhya and Hardwar, he met the great Trailang Swami and Swami Bhaskarananda at Kashi, and Raghunath Das Baba at Ayodhya. M.'s story of *sadhana* during all these years is indeed wonderful. He lived the life of a complete recluse, devoting all his time and energy in spiritual pursuits.

During his pilgrimage to Kashi in 1912, he stayed there for some time, and then spent about a year visiting other holy places. He spent a month at the Sevashrama, Kankhal (near Hardwar) in a hut where he would form the *brahmachakra* alongwith his brother-disciples, Swami Turiyananda, Swami Shivananda and others. He lived for more than six months in a *kutir*, at Swargashrama, Rishikesh. This *kutir* was in a dilapidated condition on the Swargashrama estate, near Lachhman Jhula till recently. Now only a small plinth marks its situation. In front of it one can see Pauri Garhwal Hills and on the back, beyond the Ganga Tehri Garhwal. Before his stay in this *kutir* he had carried out *tapasya* in Mayakund, Rishikesh, in one of the rooms of the Ramayat Sadhus' Ann-Kshetra.

After Rishikesh, he went to Vrindaban to witness the Jhula Festival.

During the last few years of his life, M. did not move out of Calcutta because of age.

**'SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAM-
RITA', & THE 'GOSPEL OF
SRI RAMAKRISHNA**

1

SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA

Mahendranath's immortal work is his record in Bengali of his meetings with Sri Ramakrishna from 1882 to 1886, the year of the passing away of the Master. After each visit, he immediately took notes of everything which was said and done in his presence by Sri Ramakrishna and those who were with him. These notes mostly consisted of short phrases, even single words, which were meant as aids to memory of Mahendranath himself—it was well-nigh impossible for others to reconstruct the narrative from them. From these notes, however, M. produced the *Gospel* having laboured on them for the last thirty-five years of his life—he was often busy for three days writing down the conversations and events of a single visit. When he sat down to reconstruct the scenes and the conversations he had seen or heard so long ago, his face, we are told, would beam with an extraordinary light—he was not merely recalling the events of the past but was actually reliving those wonderful moments he had been privileged to live with his beloved Master.

In reply to a direct question by Swami Deshikananda in Puri how he made notes of the *Kathamrita*, M. replied, "I would carry the nectar-like words of Thakur in my memory and would record them briefly in the dairy on returning home. The book written out from these notes appeared much later. On every scene I had meditated a thousand times. Therefore, I could recreate, relive those moments, by Thakur's grace. When I did not feel satisfied with my descriptions, I would plunge myself into meditation on Thakur. Then the correct image would rise before my mind's eye in a bright, real living form."

Swami Deshikananda further records that Sri Ramakrishna would not let other bhaktas keep notes of his words. "There is already a man for it," he would say. "At the time of his conversation with the bhaktas, if M. was not there, he would even call him to his side sometimes...."

In the beginning, when Mahendranath took down his notes, it was not with the idea of publishing them—they were meant only for his own study and meditation when he was away from the Master, so that the impressions made on his mind 'might not be overlaid by the press of worldly work and preoccupation'. Later, his brother-disciples, who had turned monks and devotee editors of some journals in Calcutta, kept on urging M. to publish his records. There was another important factor that made it imperative on him to publish this work. In 1889, he made himself responsible for defraying a part of the expenses for supporting the Holy Mother as we have noticed earlier. One day, he read out some of his notes to her. Later, she wrote to him from Jayarambati that she felt that they were

the very words of her divine consort. She also asked him to get them published soon. For Mahendranath, it was a divine command.

At first M. took a small portion of his material, worked on it and published it in the *Brahmavadin*, in its four issues, beginning with 15 October 1897, under the title, 'Leaves from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. The first two contributions were also printed in the form of pamphlets for distribution. M. sent his pamphlets to Swami Vivekananda, Sh. Ram Chandra Dutta and Sh. Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, editor of the *Dawn* and the *Light of the East*, for review.* Swami Vivekananda was all praise for this work and wrote enthusiastically to him in one of his letters dated October, 1897 : "C'est bon mon ami—now you are doing just the thing....That is the way. Many many thanks for your publication....let it see the blaze of daylight. You will have many blessings on you and many more curses—(but that is always the way of the world, sir). This is the time."

In another letter, dated 24 November 1897, he said, "Many many many many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I can not express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it ? Our teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have, to be original

*This information has been culled from the 'Life of M. and Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita', pub. in 1988.

or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted His life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.... Socratic dialogues are Plato all over—you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it—here or in the West."

Sh. Ram Chandra Dutta and Sh. Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya highly praised the contributions, the former suggesting that M. might expand his notes in Bengali. M. had also felt that the Master must be heard to speak in his own language, so he began to write in Bengali and publish in serial form in some Bengali magazines. Later in 1902, everything already printed was collected by Swami Trigunatitananda and published in one volume under the title, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*—the Nectar of the Word of Shri Ramakrishna, from the Udbodhan Office. This volume was followed by four more at different intervals, the last of which appeared posthumously in 1932, the year of M.'s passing away.

The *Kathamrita* covers the period of Sri Ramakrishna's life from the day M. met the Master for the first time, to 23 April 1886, a few months before his passing away. M. could not bear to recall the tragic days of his Master's last illness. The last chapter of the book deals with M.'s visits to the newly started monastery at Baranagore and an appendix with an earlier meeting of the Master with Keshab Chandra Sen at Dakshineswar.

* * *

"The *Kathamrita* is a classic of a totally accurate reporting, like the one no hero has ever had. Nothing is

ommitted therein, nothing is altered to make a point—neither the humiliation nor the praise that M. received from the Master was edited, nor his unstudied utterances in the uncouth rustic idiom of his village made to look 'civilized', with a view to suit the tastes of the likely readers. The *Kathamrita* begins with 'an artless abruptness and incoherence' which emphasize the immediate impression of authenticity.... Repetitions in the narrative give it continuity and its sense of life actually lived from day to day."*

The descriptions in the *Kathamrita* are, however, graphic and testify to the skill of the writer in recreating a scene of natural beauty and the atmosphere of the place.

'The record is complete with characters, place, time, day of the week, date and even *nakshatra*. They lift the narrative from the domain of academic discussion to the higher realms of drama in life.'

The Upanishad is nothing but divine talk which leads to God-realization and destroys worldliness. The *Gita*, the *Srimad Bhagavata* are all Upanishads in this sense. So is the *Kathamrita*—all that Sri Ramakrishna said is Veda, Upanishad. The *Kathamrita* has proved to be veritable nectar for the spiritually thirsty of our age.

2

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF 'SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA'

We have already said that as early as 1897, M. published in the form of two pamphlets in English, his first two contributions made to the *Brahmavadin*. It seems that M. did not find time to translate his entire Bengali work into

**Ramakrishna and His Disciples* by Christopher Isherwood.

English busy as he was till the last day of life in completing the Bengali *Kathamrita*. He corrected the press proofs of Vol. V of the *Kathamrita* only the night before his death.

However, the first volume of the *Kathamrita* in English by Mahendranath, modestly styling himself as 'M.', a son of the Lord and disciple", under the title of *Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna* was brought out by the Brahnavadin office, Madras, in 1907. Later in 1913, a second edition, "Completely revised by the author" was brought out by the Ramakrishna Mission of Madras.

This volume of the *Gospel* and the *Kathamrita*, it may be mentioned here, are two independent works. Though they have some matter in common, they are not identical.

Volume II of the *Gospel* was published in 1922 but it had to be withdrawn since this *translation* did not meet with the approval of M.

The translation of the entire *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* was ultimately done by Swami Nikhilananda and published by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York, in 1942. This edition claims to be a 'literal, regular and complete' translation of the original, in Bengali. In this translation, however, the material of the five volumes of the *Kathamrita* has been rearranged in a chronological order and edited at several places 'omitting only a few pages of no particular interest to English-speaking readers'.

The latest *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was brought out in its first Indian reprint by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras in 1944.

The *Kathamrita* has been translated in Sanskrit and in many Indian languages, also in some foreign languages.

Says Swami Nityatmananda in his Biographical Sketch of Acharya M., (in 'M.' the Apostle and the Evangelist, Part 1) :

"M. had started distributing the nectar of Kathamrita during the life time of Thakur. Its end will only come in eternity. Today, the whole of the world is drenched with showers of the Kathamrita. Even now, M., in his spiritual body, is raining the Nectar of the Words of Sri Ramakrishna."

M. AND SWAMI NITYATMANANDA

Swami Nityatmananda, the chief disciple of M., has done more than anybody else in making his "shiksha guru" known to the world through his great work, *Sri Ma Darshan*. *The world knew about 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' (in English) and *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (in Bengali original) and its earlier translation into Hindi under the title, *Sri Ramakrishna Vachnamrita* and its recent complete translation also entitled *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, but little about its author who not only gave the world this immortal classic but also lived his life according to the tenets of his Master as recorded by him. It would, therefore, be meet that we give a short account of Swami Nityatmananda and his work as a chapter to this Short Life of M.

How Swamiji (then Jagabandhu Roy) met M. is narrated below in his own words :

'My meeting with my future guru was a divine dispensation. When very young, I came across the first part of the *Kathamrita*, but could not understand much of it. At that time, I had no attraction for M. All I knew that he was

* *Sri Ma Darshan*, originally written in Bengali in 16 volumes, is now being translated into Hindi & English. Till 1988, 5 first volumes have already been published, in English, under the title, 'M. the Apostle & the Evangelist', and in Hindi as 'Sri Ma Darshan'.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH LAW & GIA M



SWAMI NITYATMANANDA

the author of the *Kathamrita*. My attraction was for the great prophet and world teacher Swami Vivekananda. In the beginning of the Swadeshi Movement, I had heard his name and seen his portrait in the Chicago pose of lecturing. It was this lion of a hero, Vivekananda, who was my idol. Along with the young men of my age, I used to think that Swamiji was born to free India. Making him as our ideal hero, we tried to lead a pure life and render service to our fellowmen in the spirit of worship, as far as possible. We read the *Gita*, the *Chandi* and the like, though we did not quite understand them. An unsophisticated and simple life became our ideal. But the message that the highest ideal of human life is to realize God had not yet entered our heart.

'While studying at college, one day, I had a discussion about the intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna with a friend. This friend was a devotee of Belur Math and was initiated by the Holy Mother. He said, "M. speaks of nothing else but the words of Thakur." For the sake of discussion, I said, "Why does he not talk of Swamiji ? It is he who has saved Bharata; it is he who has brought it on the path of freedom. It is because of his coming that our battle for freedom has taken this turn It is by his inspiration that we are trying to lead a pure life." The discussion became rather heated. To end it, the devotee friend at last said, "Why don't you go one day and tell him so, if this is your conviction ?" And this is what we decided upon.

I, who had gone to preach to M., was myself caught in the net of his teaching for ever. It was an afternoon in the month of Shravana; it had just stopped raining. I was seated with M. on the terrace of the third floor of the

Morton School. After a few initial words, he fixed those divinely penetrating pair of eyes of his on my face for a minute and then began talking of Swamiji. It was a strange affair. He spoke for three hours at a stretch, but only of the greatness of Swamiji. I felt that peace was raining in my mind. My doubts and restlessness disappeared. I had never experienced such a sweet shower of joy in my heart before. And my tendency to criticize, that too seemed to be melting away. "Who is this man?" I wondered, "There is not the least trace of egotism in his words. The word, *I*, does not exist for him, I am young and he is old, yet his attitude towards me is as between equals—no distance whatsoever. And what a sweetness!"

'Without inducting in the least his own self in the talk, M. went on talking of Swamiji. Said he, "If the youth of India but follow Swamiji, it will not only benefit them but also the country and the people. It is Shukadeva himself who has reappeared as Narendranath in a new body. He has no personal needs. He is already a *nityasiddha*, ever perfect, Godlike, one of the *Sapta-rishis*. His advent is for the good of Bharata and the world. He descended, as it were, from the fourth floor to the ground to teach service of God in man—Narendra, this *Mathar Mani*, the crest-jewel of Ramakrishna. His conquest is greater than that of Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon"

'I had for some time been nursing a deep desire and praying for it day and night: "O God, may Thou grant me association with a man of steady and unwavering intellect, so that by taking shelter under him, the ups and downs of my life may end." I did not ask for anybody's help to realize God. I was merely keen to be able to walk correctly

on the path of life. While in college, an incident made me conscious of the inadequacy of my own intellect. No longer, I thought, could I fully depend on myself. The day I met M., I knew that God had heard my prayers and granted me M. to be the helmsman of the boat of my life.'

Since childhood, Jagabandhu had been reading about Aruni and Upamanyu. So, another desire had seized his mind—that of living in a hermitage with a rishi as his guru. This desire was also to be fulfilled soon.

Since the day of his meeting M., (probably in his early twenties) Jagabandhu began to visit him daily. He would listen to his words with full concentration of mind. The joy those conversations brought him inspired him to record them in the form of a diary, just as M. had done in the case of his master, Sri Ramakrishna.

This pure-hearted young man took M. as his guru and was allowed to stay with him in the school building. He served his guru day after day with an unusual fidelity and seemed to be his constant shadow. It was from this venerable sage that he heard for the first time that Satchidananda, the Absolute Reality, had incarnated itself in the body of Sri Ramakrishna. It did not take him long to realize that Sri Ramakrishna was the *avatara* of the age, the Holy Mother His Shakti, Swami Vivekananda and M., the companions of His lila and Belur Math, the centre to proclaim Sri Ramakrishna's glory. Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that all religions are but various paths to reach the Ultimate Reality had so much percolated into Jagabandhu Babu's heart that while teaching in M.'s school he would say, "Boys, we are all Rama-Christians."

meaning thereby that all religions are alike.

M. began to send Jagabandhu to the Belur Math regularly. Not much later, on 28 May 1926, Jagabandhu was initiated into the holy mantra at Bhubaneswar by Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Order. On 25 March 1927, Jagabandhu joined the Math as a brahmachari, and, on 21 January 1930, initiated into sannyasa—it was the birthday of Swami Vivekananda.

Initially Jagabandhu Roy was very keen to stay with M. and serve him all his life but that was not to be. Under M.'s inspiration and insistence, Jagabandhu had to fulfil his destiny and spend the rest of his life with Sri Ramakrishna alone as his refuge. He was a regular member of the Math for about 12 years (1926-38). However, Destiny had created Jagabandhu Roy to record the inspiring life and sayings of M. in the same way as M. had done in the case of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Nityatmananda began to live in Rishikesh in 1938. There he found the joy and peace on the bank of the Ganga he had always longed for. There too he opened the diary notes of the conversations of M. he had been carrying with him like a treasure trove.

Having worked hard on his basic material for years, Swami Nityatmananda made press copies of as many as 15 volumes of his work, entitled *Sri Ma Darshan*, in Bengali. His unusual capacity in recording the day to day conversations of his master and then developing his notes into narratives are truly amazing. One cannot fail to discover the special training he received from M. himself

while he was serving as a teacher in the Morton School and living with him. The day he sent the MS of his 15th volume to the press, he began to feel that it was the end of his active physical life. Within a couple of days he had an attack of paralysis from which he never recovered. The Swami left this transitory world on 12 July 1975.

SRI MA TRUST AND SRI MA DARSHAN

Before departing, Swamiji, however, made adequate arrangements that his lifework should not be lost to the posterity. He founded a charitable trust, under the name of *Sri Ramakrishna Sri Ma Prakashan Trust, Sri Ma Trust* for short, in 1967, and made Smt. Ishwar Devi Gupta as its life secretary. This lady, not only nursed Swamiji both in health and illness but undertook the onerous job of getting his work published with the help of her family and friends. She also brought out Volume XVI of *Sri Ma Darshan* after the passing away of Swamiji. This volume contains the matter that the late Swamiji wanted to incorporate in the later editions of his 15-volume work. It also contains a short account of Swamiji's life.

Five volumes of *Sri Ma Darshan* have been published so far (1988), in English, under the title, '*M., the Apostle and the Evangelist*', and six in Hindi translation, by Sri Ma Trust of Chandigarh. This great work has been a notable addition to Ramakrishna literature and welcomed by thousands of his devotees.

Sri Ma Trust has constructed a small building in Chandigarh, called *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Peeth*, comprising a meditation room, a small library of religious

books with a couple of ancillary rooms. Here Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped daily, and devotee citizens find a peaceful joyous corner in the otherwise busy but beautiful city of Chandigarh.

THE LAST JOURNEY

1

BEFORE HIS FINAL HOUR

Three months before his final hour, M. returned to his humbler rooms in the *Thakur Bari*, in Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane. Thakur was being worshipped there for the last forty years or so. Now he began personally conducting the worship, sometimes in the company of *sadhus* and *bhaktas* and continued working on the fifth volume of the *Kathamrita*. M. had been suffering from painful nerve-spasms for quite some time. Though they were more frequent now, they were not so acute. His face also was brighter. He would sometimes get up at the dead of night and ask any *bhakta* he found there to wake to the *anahat shabda* — 'the words of the Master in the depth of night as he explains the truth of the *Pranava*.' The writing of the book would continue for an hour or longer. In the morning, he would sit in the shrine in deep meditation, his face beaming with a heavenly light. Then he would sing hymns in a haunting voice. Every evening, he would occupy his usual seat on the roof, listen to the hymns sung after the *arati* and sometimes talk to the *bhaktas* assembled there.

Some time before his passing away, he heard a song sung by a *bhakta* which described the wailings of the devotees of Nadia at the departure of Sri Chaitanya before

his *sannyasa*. Hearing it, M. fell into deep meditation and was so overwhelmed that he had to ask the singer to retire.

Swami Raghavananda also tells us that during those days while one of the bhaktas was meditating in front of the shrine he saw a vision. In this vision he saw M. leisurely climbing up and up and then from a very elevated position jumping into the Infinite Vastness.

*Life went on till the night of June 3, 1932. On that day, M. was exceptionally bright and active. He returned from his family house in the morning, prepared his meals as usual and having eaten retired for a while. In the afternoon, he was seen sweeping a room in the basement. Then he sat down and said, "I have a little spasm now." The devotee thought that it would pass off and to change the topic said, "It is a wonder how rats go into filth, rather unusual!" M.'s reply was : "No, they are showing us that it's Brahman everywhere."

In the evening, M. visited his family residence a second time. Returning at the time of the *arati*, he bowed before the shrine and retired. It was the night of the Phalaharani Kali Puja which was being performed at Dakshineswar and the Gadadhar Ashrama. The *bhaktas* asked his permission to attend the *pujas* which he readily gave. Having visited the shrine a second time, he sat looking over the proofs of the *Kathamrita*, Part V, for an hour when he had a violent attack of nerve-spasm. He asked his *bhaktas* to make his bed on the floor. There he lay down. A doctor was called in. He found the pulse good but the attack did not pass off

*We owe this description of June 3, also to Sw. Raghavananda, (Prabuddha Bharata, October 1932; pp.497-501).

THE LAST JOURNEY

It was for the publication and propagation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the Nectar of the Word of Sri Ramakrishna, that M. came down to the earth in a human body. The writing of the Fifth Part—the last one—of this great scripture was finished as we have seen at nine at night on Friday, 3 June 1932. Immediately after this, M. began feeling unbearable neuralgic pains. He suffered for almost the whole night but the end came peacefully at about 6 a.m.* in the *Thakur Bari*, Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane. A few moments earlier, M. said that his time had come and he began chanting : 'Gurudeva Ma, Kole toole nao'—O Gurudeva Mother, take me up in your arms.

For the last twenty-one days, M. knew his end was approaching. He sat waiting for it serenely chanting the name of Durga and singing : 'I have surrendered my soul at the feet of the Fearless One. Why should I fear the God of Death ?'

The news of M.'s death spread gloom all over. Swami Shivananda, the President of the Belur Math, and other sadhus came to know of it at about 6.30 a.m. Immediately

*All the Biographical Sketches of M. give the date of the passing away of M. as the 4th of June, 1932. The 'Bhakta Malik'a adds 'The day next to the Phalaharani Kali Puja' to this date. 'Sri Ma Darshan' Part XV also gives the date as the 4th of June, 1932, Saturday, the 21st of Jaishtha 1339 Bengali Year. However, the same book (S.M.D. XV) also notes (P. 437 onwards) that the news of his death was conveyed to the Belur Math by phone on the 5th of June at about 6.30 a.m. when sadhus were sent by Mahapurusha Maharaj to the Thakur Bari to take part in the funeral rites. Obviously, this date should also have been the 4th of June, 1932.

some sadhus reached the *Thakur Bari*. M.'s relatives were overwhelmed with grief—everybody wailed that M. who had loved him or her most had departed.

M. was as serene in death as in life. It looked as though he had gone to sleep in his beloved Ma's lap and would soon get up. Swami Pranavananda wiped his face with a new towel soaked in Ganga water and then dressed the body in a raw silk *dhoti* and *chadar* sent by Swami Shivananda. The body was then decorated with sandal-wood paste and wreaths of flowers placed on the body and heaped at the feet. Incense was burnt and Swami Raghavananda waved the holy lights (arati) in front. A German devotee, Miss Fepar (?) and the lady teachers and students of the Nivedita School were also there. All the sadhus, householders and others made offerings of flowers. Then the sadhus carried the body out of the house on a carpet. There on a new bedstead with a canopy which had been made ready for the purpose the body was placed and the last journey of the saint started. With the chanting of 'Jai Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Deva ki jai,' sadhu pall-bearers carried the body on their shoulders barefoot. It was already past midday—the sun was shining bright overhead. At the request of Probhash Babu, the eldest son, the body was taken to the Morton School where M.'s dear ones paid their last tributes to the great departed. The funeral procession then wended its way through the streets of Calcutta to the Cossipore Burning Ghat where the body of the Great Master had previously been consigned to the flames. Thousands of persons joined the procession; at places there was a traffic jam and the trams stopped. The bier was followed by a hymn-singing party;

behind them walked sadhus and bhaktas. At the Burning Ghat, the face was again uncovered. It was still the same, even twelve hours after death, the same child-like face covered with divine glory, happy and joyful.

Some of M.'s ashes were immersed in the Ganga; the rest were filled in two urns and brought to the Belur Math. Mahapurusha Maharaj asked them to be placed in Thakur Temple. The next day they were worshipped along with the worship of Thakur and carried on the heads of Swami Nityatmananda and Swami Jitatmananda to Swami Vivekananda's Temple to be worshipped daily. Later, they were deposited on the first floor of the New Temple at the Belur Math.

* * *

A star had risen. For fifty years, it shed light on the path of travellers trudging their weary way of life. And when it set it left behind a trail of glory—the words and life of Sri Ramakrishna entombed in his immortal Kathamrita—to lead the parched humanity to the Eternal Source of Peace and Joy. Mahapurusha Maharaj (Swami Shivananda) had called him the Narada and the Veda Vyasa of the Divine Lila (Play) of Sri Ramakrishna. This was not merely a poetic expression coming out of the lips of a friend and a fellow-traveller but a truth, for had not M. gone about singing the glories of the Lord like Narada and had he not recorded for posterity the divine words that flowed from the lips of the Lord as was done by his immortal predecessor Veda Vyasa ? The Lord himself had destined this great life to be lived in the way it did—for His work, for His ideas and for His ideals : Ramakrishna ! RamaKrishna ! Ramakrishna !

We who now read him and his life are indeed blessed for we have been granted the opportunity of following in his foot-steps, to wade through the pain and frustrations of life with fortitude and joy, in the firm faith that the Lord will take us up also in His arms when our time comes as He did to M. Let us not forget Sri Ramakrishna's promise to the Holy Mother that His close devotees will go to Him, even though it may be at the time of death.

* * *

3

TRIBUTES AND OFFERINGS

The great man who in life sought to hide his identity by every means available to him, who so completely merged his personality into that of his Master, who in order to get the taste of circumstances other than his own, actually slept on the foot-paths of Calcutta in the company of waifs, did not, however, pass away unhonoured and unsung.

A committee comprising the leading public figures of Calcutta, including Swami Shivananda, President of Ramakrishna Mission and Math, Belur, was formed under the name 'Mahendranath Gupta Memorial Committee'. It held its meeting on Monday, the 25th July, 1932 in the Albert Hall, Calcutta under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manmohanath Mukherjee. In this meeting the committee, besides passing a resolution of condolence by the 'citizens of Calcutta', resolved to take steps to perpetuate the memory of 'the illustrious departed and popularize his work and mission.' A petition was filed with the Calcutta Corporation for grant of space at the Cossipore Burning Ghat where M.'s body had been

cremated. The petition, *inter alia*, said, "Recognising the obligation of every citizen of Calcutta to honour the memory of a great fellow citizen we ask you ... to accord sanction to erection of a permanent memorial structure on the site where the body of ... 'M'. was cremated." The petition eulogized the personality and work of M. in glowing terms "...the silent work of carrying the gospel from village to village and hamlet to hamlet was left for Mahendra Nath Gupta... a half century's service of selfless love and labour that is an abiding inspiration to the Hindus of Bengal. The weary and heavy laden find in Mahendra Nath Gupta's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* the spiritual uplift that carries them above the selfishness and sordidness of a lustridden world (He was) an Evangelist who pierced the mystery of life by rending the veil of Death." The Committee felt that a permanent public memorial (on the spot where the body was cremated, by the side of the existing memorial of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev—the devoted Mahendra Nath Gupta lying at the feet of his Master monumentally placed before the eyes of man), would be a place of pilgrimage to generations unborn. The petition was signed, among others by Swami Shivananda, Sir P.C. Ray, Sir Nilratan Sirkar, the Advocate General Sir N.N. Sircar, Justice Manmohan Nath Mukherji, Raja Janki Nath Roy, the Ex-Sheriff of Calcutta Prafulla Nath Tagore, the late Mayor of Calcutta B.K. Basu, the Deputy Executive Officer of the Corporation of Calcutta Haji Abdul Rashid, Ex-Deputy Mayor H.S. Suhrawardy, Deputy Administrator General, Bengal, O.R. Surita, Dr S.N. Das Gupta, Principal Sanskrit College and Mrinal Kanti Basu of the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*."

M. had loved his fellow-men so deeply in his lifetime. It would have been unthinkable had it gone unrecognized at his death.

OFFERINGS

*By Swami Nityatamananda (Jagabandhu Roy)**

1. Om ! Of mind serene, sans pride, lion in activity, prince among the witty, Ramakrishna's beloved devotee, the devotee of sadhus, the servant of their servants, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

2. Om ! Who chanted the glory of Ramakrishna day and night like Narada, the best of Ramakrishna's beloved devotees, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

Who took the vow of service to Ramakrishna's name, the supreme beloved bhakta of Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

*Swami Nityatmananda, the author of Sri Ma Darshan (M., the Apostle and the Evangelist) had the privilege of sitting at the feet of M. (Sri Ma) for several years. This hymn came out of Swamiji's lips extempore as he sat with a disciple on the bank of the Ganga, at Rishikesh after both had recited their usual arati to Sri Ramakrishna and the hymn to the Ganga. The disciple recorded it as it was being sung and showed it to Swamiji later. He approved of it, making corrections where the disciple had missed the words. The above is a free rendering of this Sanskritized Bengali hymn into English.

3. Om ! Who like Veda Vyasa ever distributed the remedy for worldly ills, the Nectar of the Gospel, the essence of all the holy texts; who was troubled when trouble he found in others, the servant-disciple of Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

4. Om ! Who held within the ultimate knowledge, and outwardly did devotion show; who ever sat at Ramakrishna's feet like Hanuman with Rama, the intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

5. Om ! Who blessed with a *kala* of divine energy by the Mother of the Universe, and grieving at the griefs of the human race, made use of it to shower day and night the nectar of the Gospel on the weary world, the dear disciple of Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

6. Om ! Though a perfected one, he who remained in the *grihastha* at the behest of the Master, for teaching mankind and for the alleviation of pain of all and sundry, who made the Lila of Sri Ramakrishna manifest, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

7. Om ! Living in the household as a maid-servant, he who brought *jnana* and *bhakti* to thousands, he who inspired so many to embrace *sannyasa*, he who was the beloved devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

8. Om ! He who was the perfect teacher of jnana and bhakti like Prahlada, yet served humanity as its servant, that beloved devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

9. Om ! He, though a lion, guarded the store of flesh, living in the household, he who was bedecked with all virtues, had attained all knowledge, the beloved devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him *my* salutations !

10. Om ! He who was the embodiment of jnana and bhakti, a bright university scholar who served like a maid the Nectar of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna to sadhus and bhaktas, the beloved devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma,

To him my salutations !

2. *By Swami Chandikananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Belur—*

Serene, beautiful, O the supreme yogi !
 You of the hue of water-laden cloud,
 You who take the stranded soul across by giving it,
 the Nectar of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,

You who merged in Ramakrishna ever sing of his glory,
 You who living in family yet propagated the ideal of
 sannyasa throughout your life,

You whose 'Nectar' has driven hundreds mad in the love
 of Ramakrishna,

Pray place a drop on my parched soul and bless me in
 life,

3. *By Swami Deshikhananda—*
Salutations to you, Thou Holy M. !
Beloved of Bhagavan and His Chosen Vehicle,
To have carried His love and His message to every nook
and corner,
Through thy Immortal work the 'Kathamrita'
Rightly art thou hailed, Noble One !
As another Vyasa to have given this Ramakrishna Gita.
To thee I offer my salutations again and again.

4. *Sung at the meeting of Mahendra Nath Memorial Committee Calcutta—*

O the best of men, Ramakrishna's Bhakta Supreme,
Mahendra !
With your two attractive eyes, brimming with tears, ever
drowned in love,
With the image of Ramakrishna imprinted on your
mind's screen,
And the light of Ramakrishna's love filling your eyes
With the lustre of his love all over your body, made
beautiful.
A sea of virtue, a mine of divine parts !
Enjoying the divine sport, the secret treasure, no ego
yet so great,
The home of compassion, Siva in every breath,
Your chosen Deity within the heart, His name on the lips
ever,
You came down to the earth with the avatara !

5. Sung at the meeting of Mahendra Nath Memorial Committee, Calcutta—

O the perfected lover,
 You who have pierced the thick veil of time,
 Drowning yourself in the love of your beloved,
 You who have turned the tide of time in bliss,
 Lying deep within the ages,
 You who came down to the earth with the avatara !
 You the ideal householder,
 The light of the householder's life.
 Seen so many times,
 Now as the poet of poets, Balmiki,
 In the shades of the *tapovana*,
 Living full of joy,
 Singing the story of Rama,
 Now reading the Gita to your countrymen,
 The words of Krishna, as another Veda Vyasa,
 Contemplating, O poet of poets !
 The narrative of Chaitanya's life,
 In this our age, alas ! so materialistic.
 O Mahendranath ! You came down to earth
 To practise going Godwards with a resolute mind,
 Having hid your real Self so cleverly
 Your divine Self in worldly apparel,
 Laughing the laugh of love
 Giving away your accumulated jewellery of the spirit with
 such humility.
 You laboured
 To gift away
 Divinity to man
 The Nectar of Ramakrishna's Word
 That which bestows

Peace and solace
To the kindered, the thirsty and the fallen.

6. By Srimati Kabita Adhikari, Lucknow—

Salutations to you ! O the Great Life, Salutations !
The Storehouse of the Gospel of Ramakrishna,
salutations unto You.
Hiding your self, O Maharshi !
You repeated Ramakrishna's name night and day,
Spent your whole life spreading His Name
'Live sannyasa in household', you taught;
'God first, the world next', this great truth you proclaimed,
Who but you could have taught thus Ramakrishna's Name ?
So you gave a new form to the vast sea of the Kathamrita.

7. By Sri Jitendrakumar Rai, Lucknow—

O the great servant of Ramakrishna ! We bring our salutations to you.
You who are known as Sri Ma;
Though a householder, you had renounced your all;
Though in bonds, you were a free soul.
Your ideal : The burning lamp of Bhagavan's Name;
You were great in knowledge, always the seeker after the Truth;
You brought to life, gave a shape to the Divine Form.
You received your 'commission' to teach humanity at Dakshineswar;
You recorded the word of Thakur, having known its meaning,
To raise the human soul, to make it drink the Nectar;
Your labour was limitless, a vast ardent ocean;

With faith in your work, you spread the Gospel.
By drinking from your 'Nectar' the ignorant was saved.
You took the path, you saw, you wrote, created,
You wiped the deep darkness within us all.
Your calm humble self appeared as a *jnani*
The Great Avatar of the Age had rained grace on you !

*Om Satya Brahman Sri Ramakrishna
Kathamrita Nischaya !!*

Chronology of the important events of M.'s Life.

1854 : Birth in Calcutta in Shivanarayan Das (14 July) Lane.

1858 : Visits the Kali temple at Dakshineswar; His parents shift to 13/2 Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane.

1867 : Student of Class VIII, in the Hare School, Calcutta; Begins keeping diary.

1873 : Marries Nikunja Dev; Serves in a British Business House.

1874 : Graduates from the Presidency College, Calcutta; Serves as Head Master of Narnail School, Jessore, City, Aryan, Model Schools, Calcutta and Ripon Collegiate School.

1881 : Hears of Sri Ramakrishna from Nagen-dranath Gupta.

1882 to 1886 : Serves in the Metropolitan Shyam Bazar School, Oriental Seminary and Professor in the City, Ripon and Metropolitan Colleges.

1882 : Leaves home at 10 p.m.
(February)

1882 : Sees Sri Ramakrishna for the first (26 February) time. Teaching at the Metropolitan Institution.

1882 : Second visit to Sri Ramakrishna.

(28 February)

1882 : Third visit to Sri Ramakrishna; Meets (5 March) Narendra (Swami Vivekananda).

1882 : Fourth visit to Sri Ramakrishna. (6 March)

1883 : Sri Ramakrishna prays for M. to get (July) him divine 'Commission', (command).

1885 : Loses a 7 or 8-year old son.

1886 : Visits Kamarpukur for the first time; Visits Puri, Sri Ramakrishna puts a garland round his neck; Sri Ramakrishna passes away; M. visits Banaras, Vrindaban, Ayodhya, meets Trailang Swami, Sw. Vishuddhananda & Swami Bhaskarananda in Varanasi and Baba Raghunath Das in Ayodhya.

1887 : Visits Baranagore Monastery, on the (21 February) Shivaratri Day.

1887 : Narendra meets M. at his Calcutta (7 May) residence.

1890 : M. lives at Baranagore for six months at a stretch.

1897 : A portion of the 'Gospel' appears in the form of two pamphlets.

1902 : *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Part I appears in Bengali.

1904 : Second part of the *Kathamrita* is published.

1905 : Leaves his job as guardian tutor and purchases Morton School in Jhamapukur Lane. Later, the Morton School is shifted to 50, Amherst Street.

1907 : *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Part I, is published by Brahmavadin Office, Madras.

1908 : *Kathamrita*, Part III, is published.

1910 : *Kathamrita*, Part IV, appears.

1911 : Revised Edition of the Gospel Part I by R.K. Mission, Madras appears.

1912-1913 : Pilgrimage with the Holy Mother to Varanasi, then goes to Hardwar, Kankhal, Rishikesh (Mayakund and Swarga ashrama) Vrindaban—spends 11 months in the company of sadhus.

1922 : The Gospel, Part II, published but later withdrawn.

1923 : Visits Mihijam; stays there for about 9 months.

1925-26 : At Puri and Bhuvaneswar.

1932 : Breathes his last.

(4 June)

1932 : *Kathamrita*, Part V, appears posthumously.

SOME LETTERS OF M.

As we have seen, M. went to Mihijam, late in 1922, and stayed there for about a month and a half. From there he wrote letters to some sadhus, as also to others, including 'Su Baba' (Shri Shukalal) who, in spite of his never-ending worldly occupations, still managed to keep in touch with M. and the sadhus of the Belur Math. These letters, mostly translated from Bengali, give us a good peep into M.'s transformed attitude towards God in the image.

1

The Lotus-Feet of Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !

Sri Ramakrishna Vidyapeeth

Mihijam, EIR

(Post mark dated 20 Nov, 1922)

Dear Jagabandhu Babaji, *

Many thanks for your sacred and interesting letter.

Sea-bath, meditation on the sandy beach, and in the Temple, touching the 'Ratnavedi', the Jewel Throne, and puja, taking the holy *maha-prasada* thrice (daily) — all these are matters of great good fortune. Sri Thakur, in Sri Chaitanya Deva incarnation, lived there (in Puri) for 24 years. And, there he (Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) used daily to have the *darshana* of Sri Jagannath. That is why Sri Thakur used to exhort his intimate devotees to visit the holy Puri. It is very good that you are reading Sri Thakur's account there. It would be nice if you read *Sri*

* Later, Swami Nityatmananda, then staying at Jagannath Puri (Orissa)

Chaitanya Charitamrita (The Last Lila, or Sri Puri Lila). Please have *darshanas* of Sri Radhakant's Math, Sri Narendra's Sarover, all the spots (associated with) Sri Chaitanya, also the Sarbhom house, the Kshetrvasi Math and Shashi Niketan—they were visited several times by the Holy Mother and devotees.

With love and namaskar

M.

2

The Lotus-Feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !

Sri Ramakrishna Vidyapeeth, Mihijam.

23rd Nov., 1922

Shri Subodh Maharaj *,

I was very happy to learn that you are well. I have been here for a month or so—in between I went to live at the Jamtara Ashrama for five days. As it is not yet so cold here, I am not feeling strong enough. I am c/o Sjt. Hemendra. It is a nice solitary spot—fit for yogis. There is a talk of removing the Vidyapeeth to Baidyanath—by the end of (the month of) Magh.

Please accept namaskar and loving regards. How is the accomodn (accommodation) in Bhubaneswar ?

Ever affectionately,
Sri Ma (M.)

* *Swami Subodhananda*

The Lotus-Feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !
 Mihijam, New year's day, 1923

Sri J - Babaji,

I was very happy to receive your letter containing the beautiful description of the Math. By reading the whole description we are also in the company of sadhus—there is no doubt about it. Please ask Sjt. Ramesh why he didn't give a graphic description of the Christmas—in the manner of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*....

Affectionately, M.

Sri Sri Durga Sarnam !

Vijaya, Calcutta, 29.10.29

Sri Sri Raghabeshwarananda** and all other devotees of the ashrama,

May you all accept my namaskar and loving embrace on Vijaya !

Here too Sri Durga Puja; Maha-yajna of the great Vijaya celebrations has ended in the Belur Math. I also had the good fortune of attending it on the Saptami Day.

During these several days, the *pujas* in every home, and celebrations in every house, bazaar and such other places had turned Calcutta into a city of gods.

Sri Sri Thakur is spreading the Gospel there through you all—its chief message being that God-realization is the end of life and selfless work is the means.

** Sw. Raghabeshwarananda of Sri Ramakrishna Math, P.O. Wari, Dacca

It will benefit all—not by lectures alone but principally by the mode of your life, by His grace—of this there is no doubt whatever.

Praying always for the Lord's blessings on you all.

Ever yours
Sri Ma (M.)

5

The Lotus-Feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !

Mihijam Vidyapeeth, 5th Nov. 1922
Sunday, Sri Rasa-yatra

Shri Su. Baba*.

Duly received your loving letter and the basket.

We take our meals here in the Vidyapeeth (and) sleep at the residence. This residential house comprises two rooms—one (of them) we use as Thakur's Shrine. It has an open field all around. It is a beautiful spot for (living in) the inspiration of God. During midday and at night, it is complete solitude, as if it is pouring peace. 'Heavenly peace in the rays' — the moon of the Rasa-purnima (day) gives one the illusion of Sri Vrindaban all around.

I am very happy to know that you went for the darshanas of Sri Dakshineswar and also had darshanas of the Math on Sri Jagadhatri's puja day. Both of them are great places of pilgrimage. Sri Sri Thakur always exhorted us to keep company of sadhus and live in solitude in divine mood.

* A rich businessman of Calcutta

So many devotees visit the Math almost daily—this is a matter of great joy.

I am happy to learn that your family, friends and devotees are all well.

With love and namaskar
Sri Ma (M.)

I would like to visit your Shimultala ashrama. It is not yet very cold here.

6

The Lotus-Feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !

Mihijam, 23rd Nov. 1922

Shri Su...Babaji.

... it is by His special grace that you are always meditating on Thakur even amidst so much of work. The soldiers from Dum dum used to come to see Thakur during their three hours of recess. He (Thakur) used to intercede, weeping, on their behalf : 'Mother, you will have to grant Your Grace to them—they come so earnestly amidst so much of work.'

The brahmacharis of this place read the Srimad Bhagavata and other scriptures in the late evening. One day, Sri Bhagavan was narrating the importance of the company of sadhus to Uddhava. Please go through its 11th Skandha. Thakur also says : 'The company of sadhus, only the company of sadhus'...

Please tell Manoranjana Babu that I was very happy to read the description of Sri Math in his letter. Only sadhus are the best men in the world—they are great souls (Mahatama)—Thakur used to say so very often.

With love and namaskar,
Sri M.

7

The Lotus-Feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !

Mihijam, 29th Nov. 1922

Dear Su. baba ji,

... The birth anniversary of the Holy Mother is to be celebrated at the Belur Math on the 25th Agarhayan. I have no doubt that you are surely going to attend it alongwith your friends...

Affectionately, M.

8

Sriyukta M. Babu,

Did you go to the Math last Monday on the birth anniversary of Sri Sri Babu Ram Maharaj (Swami Premananda) ? Please tell Sjt. Jagabandhu that we were all very happy to have the Sri Mahaprasada of Sri Puridham sent by him and today also we were very happy to hear the description of the Math in his letters...

Affectionately, Sri M.

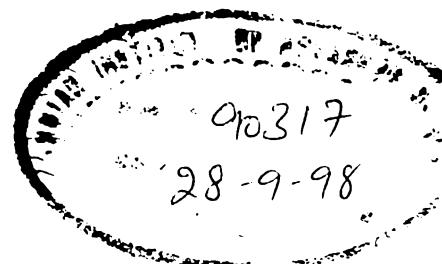
The Lotus-Feet of Sri Sri Gurudeva, the only refuge !

Mihijam, 11th Jan. 23

Sri Su.. Babaji,

I am very very happy to receive your letter. Having visited Sri Dakshineswar, the confluence of all the places of pilgrimage, you saw the great celebrations of (the festival of) Swamiji with sadhus, bhaktas and the God-in-poor. I hope you will also attend the great celebrations of the birth of Sri Sri Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) ; and go to Sri Dakshineswar by steamer at 6 on Posh Sankranti (the first day of the month of Posh) and after a quick bath, having returned to the Math by 9 o'clock hear the Sankirtana etc. (community singing of hymns) in the company of sadhus. The morning of Sankranti is full of joy at the Math; on the way, on both the banks of Ganga, rows of devotees like ants, bathe and worship, reviving the Sanatana Hindu Dharma of yore. Thereafter Saraswati is worshipped to the joy of all in the Math and in all streets and corners of Calcutta. Sri Ram says to the devotees (in the Adhyatma Ramayana), "Do attend the celebrations in My connection—you will then receive divine inspiration." Sri Jagabandhu and Sri Manoranjan.... helped the sadhus in the celebration last evening — blessed they are.

Affectionately, Sri M.



ABOUT THE BOOK —

The author has freely drawn on the *Kathamrita* (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna), *Sri Ma Darshan*, (M., the Apostle and the Evangelist), *Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Ramakrishna & his Disciples* and on some articles which have appeared from time to time in the *Prabuddha Bharata* and the *Vedanta Kesari* in compiling this short life.

The generation that knew M. is gradually passing away. Sri Ma Trust — SRI RAMAKRISHNA SRI MA PRAKASHAN TRUST — therefore, brought out *A Short Life of M.*, in 1977. The present edition is a somewhat enlarged and corrected version of the same. Recently the Trust has also brought out a bigger book on M. and the *Kathamrita* under the title, 'Life of M. and Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita'.



BOOKS ON M. by Swami Nityatmananda

M., the Apostle & the Evangelist
Parts I to VI

Sri Ma Darshan (Hindi)
Parts I to VI

Sri Ma Darshan (Bengali)
Parts I to XVI



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