



SPECIAL FEATURE

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA AN INDIAN MYSTIC, A REFORMER AND A SAINT

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EARLY LIFE

Sri Ramakrishna was born as Gadadhar on February 18, 1836, to Khudiram Chattopadya and Chandramani Devi. The poor Brahmin family lived in Kamarpukur village in Hoogly District in Bengal Presidency. His family was very pious. After studying in a village school for 12 years, Gadadhar gave it up, as he was not interested in traditional education. He loved to paint and make



"My supreme good fortune is that I am his servant through life after life. A single word of his is to me far weightier than the Vedas and the Vedanta. Oh, I am the servant of the servants of his servants."

Swami Vivekananda

clay models of Hindu Deities. He was attracted to folk and mythological stories which he had heard from his mother. He gradually learnt Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and other holy literature by heart by hearing it from priests and sages. Young Gadadhar loved the nature so much that he used to spend much of his time in orchards and on the river banks. From a very young age, Gadadhar was religiously inclined and he would experience episodes of spiritual ecstasy from everyday incidents. He would go into trance while performing pujas or watching a religious drama. After the death of his father in 1843, the responsibility of the family fell on his elder brother, Ramkumar. Ramkumar left home for Calcutta to earn for the family and Gadadhar back in his village started performing regular worshipping of their family deity, previously handled by his older brother. He was deeply religious and would perform the pujas ardently. Meanwhile, his elder brother had opened a school to teach Sanskrit in Calcutta and also served as a priest at different socio-religious functions.

Gadadhar was married to five-year old Saradmoni Mukhopadhyay from a neighbouring village when he was twenty-three years of age. The couple stayed apart until Saradmoni came of age and she joined her husband at Dakshineswar at the age of eighteen and the marriage was never consummated. Gadadhar proclaimed her as the embodiment of Divine Mother and performed the Shodashi Puja with her in the seat of Goddess Kali. She became an ardent follower of her husband's philosophies and took up the role of mother to his disciples with much ease.

INDUCTION INTO PRIESTHOOD

The Kali temple at Dakshineswar was established by the celebrated philanthropist and Rani Rashmoni, the Queen of Janbazar, Calcutta in 1855. Ramkumar the older brother of Gadadhar was invited by the Queen to take the position of the Head Priest at the temple. Ramkumar obliged and sent for Gadadhar to join him at Dakshineswar to assist him in the daily rituals. He arrived and was entrusted with the duty of decorating the deity. Ramkumar died in 1856, leaving Gadadhar to take over the position of the head priest at the temple. Thus began the long, celebrated journey of priesthood for young Gadadhar. It is said that, after witnessing Gadadhar's pious and certain supernatural incidents, the name *Ramakrishna* was given to him.

FIRST SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Around age six or seven, Ramakrishna experienced his first moment of spiritual trance. One morning, while walking along the narrow ridges of a paddy field, eating some puffed rice from a small basket, he came across the sight of a flock of milky white cranes, flying against the background of heavy rain laden black clouds, which soon covered the entire sky. The ensuing sight was so beautiful that he got absorbed into it and lost all his outer consciousness, before falling down with the rice scattered all over. People nearby who saw this, came to his rescue and carried him home. Ramakrishna grew up practicing Bhakti towards Lord Rama and his duties as a priest at Dakshineswar temple led him to practice worship of Mother Kali. While serving as a temple priest at Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna would encounter various itinerant sadhu's who would visit his place and stay there for a while. Practicing their own modes of worship, several of them initiated Ramakrishna into various schools of Hinduism.

RELIGIOUS JOURNEY

He worshipped God Rama as Hanuman, Rama's most devoted follower and even experienced vision of Sita merging with himself. He learned the nuances of *Tantra Sadhana* or tantric ways from Bhairavi Brahmani, a female sage, during 1861-1863. Under her guidance, Ramakrishna completed all 64 sadhanas of tantras, even the most intricate and demanding of them. He also learnt *Kundalini Yoga* from Bhairavi Brahmani.

PRACTICED ISLAM

In 1866, Govinda Roy, a Hindu man who was previously initiated into Islam and practiced Sufism, initiated Ramakrishna into Islam. Ramakrishna came to know about Govinda through the later regular visits to Dakshineswar. Being much impressed by seeing the faith and love for God in Govinda, Ramakrishna decided to practice Islam, reasoning; This also is a path to realization of God; the sportive mother, the source of infinite Lila, has been blessing many people with the attainment of her lotus feet through this path also. I must see how through it she makes those who take refuge in her, attain their desired end. Ramakrishna engaged himself in the practice of Islam according to its prescribed rules. He devotedly



repeated the name of Allah and said their prayers five times a day and remained in that state of mind for three days, after which he had full realization through their path. During this practice he had a vision of luminous of Mohammad.

PRACTICED CHRISTIANITY

End of 1873, Ramakrishna started the practice of Christianity. Once when the Bible was being read out to him, from the very beginning there were references to the doctrine of Sin. He ideated that more we give up such ideas as *I am sinful, I am weak* the better it will be for all, as we all are children of God, thus not weak and sinful, and considered thinking of oneself as weak and sinful to be the greatest sin. In 1874, Ramakrishna experienced a strange vision, while walking in the Panchavati, he reportedly had a vision of Jesus coming towards him, embracing and merging into his body. In his own room amongst other divine pictures was one of Christ, and he burnt incense before it in the morning and evening. After more than a decade of in various religious paths, each culminating in the realization of God by that path, his personal practices settled, and he is said to have remained in bhavamukha, a level of blissful samadhi. He would meditate in the Panchavati (a wooded and secluded area of the Dakshineswar Temple grounds), go to the Kali temple to offer flowers to the Goddess and wave incense to the assorted deities and religious figures, whose pictures hung in his room.

INITIATION TO SANYAASA

At *Panchavati*, situated to the north of the temple garden, Ramakrishna was initiated into sannyasa by *Tota Puri*. At the dawn of morning in the auspicious moment of Brahmamuhurtha, with the Homa fire lighted, he was guided through the various rites and ceremonies involved in the procedure of becoming a Sannyasi. In accordance with the scriptural injunctions and tradition of successive generations, he offered as an oblation, to be free from the desire of having spouse, children, wealth, admiration from people, beautiful body and so on, and renounced them all. He then also offered his sacred thread and the tuft of hair on his head as part of the oblation

NOTABLE DISCIPLES

Foremost among his innumerable disciples was Swami Vivekananda, who was instrumental in establishing the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna at a global stage. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 to carry out the visions of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and dedicated the establishment in servitude of the society. Other disciples who renounced all ties to family life and participated in the formation of Ramakrishna Math along with Vivekananda were Kaliprasad Chandra (Swami Abhedananda), Sashibhushan Chakravarty (Swami Ramakrishnananda), Rakkhal Chandra Gosh (Swami Brahmananda), Sarat Chandra Chakravarty (Swami Saradananda) among others. All of them were instrumental in propagating the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa not just in India, but throughout the world and carried forward his vision of Seva.

HIS TEACHINGS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY

Sri Ramakrishna was probably the most celebrated mystics of all times. A simple man, some times with childlike enthusiasm, he explained the most complex concepts of spiritual philosophies in most simple parables, stories and anecdotes. His words flowed from a deep sense of belief in the Divinity and his experience of embracing God in a very real form. He directed that the ultimate goal of every living soul is God-realization. Having practiced different facets of Hinduism as well of other religions like Islam and Christianity, he preached that all of these religions were different paths that lead up to a single God. His influence reached all strata of the

SPECIAL FEATURE



society; he did not differentiate between devotees based on caste. He even embraced the skeptics, won them over with his simplistic charm and unselfish love. He was a force of revival to re-energize the decaying Hinduism in the nineteenth century Bengal.

TITLE OF PARAMAHAMSA

Sri Ramakrishna taught the world through his direct spiritual experience that God could be realized through all religions. He had a unique way of teaching profound Vedanta philosophies through simple stories and parables. His teachings are entitled *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Sri Ramakrishna was rewarded the title of *Paramahansa* by one of his Guru from Punjab who was a naked monk, Vedantic guru named Totapuri. In his own life time, Ramakrishna came to be hailed by people of all classes as a spiritual embodiment of God.

DEATH

In 1885 Ramakrishna suffered from throat cancer. In order to consult the best physicians of Calcutta, Ramakrishna was moved to a devotee's house in Shyampukur by his disciples. But with time, his health started deteriorating and he was taken to a larger house at Cossipore. His condition kept worsening and on August 16, 1886, he passed away at the Cossipore Garden house.

SELECTED WORDS OF WISDOM OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA



My Master's message to mankind is: "Be spiritual and realise truth for Yourself."

Swami Vivekananda

I have practiced all religions, Hinduism, Islam Christianity; and I have also followed the paths of different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name of religion: Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Siva and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus and Allah as well; the same Rama with a thousand names. A lake has several Ghats. At one, the Hindu takes water in pitchers and calls it "Jal"; at another the Musalmans take water in leather

bags and call it "pani". At the third the Christians call it "water". Can we imagine that it is not Jal, but only Pani or Water? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him.

To work without attachment is to work without the expectation of reward or fear of any punishment in this world or the next. Work so done is a means to the end, and God is the end.

That knowledge which purifies the mind and heart alone is true knowledge, all else is only a negation of knowledge. You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you, therefore, say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God. As a lamp, does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God. The Man who works for others, without any selfish motive, really does good to himself. Women and gold keep men immersed in worldliness. The woman is disarmed when you view her as the manifestation of the Divine Mother. All religions are true and God can be reached by different religions. Many rivers flow in many ways, but they fall into the sea. They all are one. Never get into your head that your faith

"Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the latest Avatara and the most perfect, the concentrated embodiment of Knowledge, Love, and renunciation, catholicity and the desire to serve mankind."

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA



alone is true and every other is false. Know for certain that God without form is real and that God with form is also real. Then hold fast to whichever faith appeals to you. To explain God merely after reading the scriptures is explaining to a person the city of Banaras after seeing it only on a map. Sugar and sand may be mixed together, but the ant rejects the sand and goes off with the sugar grain; so, the pious men lift the good from the bad. When a certain quantity of milk is mixed with double the quantity of water, it requires a good deal of time and labour to condense it. The mind of a worldly man is diluted with the filthy water of impure thoughts, and he has to work long and hard to purify it.

QUOTES OF WELL-KNOWN PEOPLE ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA Swami Vivekananda

All the time I am, all that the world itself will some-day be, is owing to my Master, Sri Ramakrishna, who incarnated and experienced and taught this wonderful unity which underlies everything, having discovered it alike in Hinduism, in Islam and in Christianity. He was contented simply to live that great life and to leave it to others to find the explanation.

In the Ramakrishna Incarnation, there is knowledge, devotion, infinite love, infinite work and infinite compassion for all beings. Sri Ramakrishna came for the good of the world. Call him a man or God or even an Incarnation, just as you

please. Accept him each in your light. He who will bow before him will be converted into purest gold that very moment. Such a unique personality, such a synthesis of the utmost of Jnana, Yoga, Bhakti and Karma has never before appeared among mankind.

The one (Sri Adi Sankara) had a great head, the other a large heart (Sri Ramanuja), and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both this head and heart.

Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhiji said in a tribute to this great soul: The story of Sri Ramakrishna's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. Sri Ramakrishna was a living image of Godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the book of life. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man, but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. In this age of skepticism,

Ramakrishna presents an example of bright and living faith, which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in Ahimsa. His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all.

C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji)

It is no exaggeration to call Sri Ramakrishna's teachings an Upanishad. Sri Ramakrishna was a mahatma who saw God in his heart and in all things in the world outside. He saw Him in all things with the same certainty and strength of feeling with which we see each other. When a Maharishi talks, it is his whole life that speaks through him, not mere intellect. He saw Him in all things with the same certainty and strength of feeling with which we see each other.

Francis X Cooney, S. J.

Sri Ramakrishna's example has taught me a great deal about how a believer can go about appreciating the religious experiences of other people.

Romain Rolland

Sri Ramakrishna, is the younger brother of our Christ. Hossainur Rahman said; Sri Ramakrishna's involvement in man was unique. I place Rammohan, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Rabindranath and Gandhi in one single category. Of course, they had their own individualities, their own perspectives, their own limitations. Yet, in essentials, they were a single family. They were the sponsors and leaders of modern Indian Renaissance.

Historian Arnold Toynbee

Toynbee began his career as a critic of Indian culture, later on wrote: "Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and place at which he and his message were needed."

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