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Sri Ramakrishna - The Greatest of Avataras

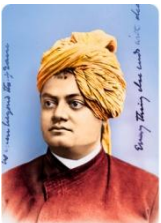
Swami Bhuteshananda

(Translated by Swami Sunirmalananda)



Swami Vivekananda on Sri Ramakrishna

In his countless letters, lectures and valuable writings, Swami Vivekananda has discussed so much of religion, literature, science, art, history, political science, social sciences and so on in such depth that it is impossible for any other literature to compare itself with them. However, surprising as it may appear, how little Swamiji has spoken and written about his own master, Sri Ramakrishna, who was ever awake in his soul, ever in his thoughts, and ever an indispensable part of his life! Regarding Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji told his disciple:



He was the concentrated embodiment of how many previous Avataras! Even spending the whole life in religious austerity, we could not understand it. Therefore one has to speak about him with caution and restraint. As are one's capacities, so he fills one with spiritual ideas. One spray from the full ocean of his spirituality, if realised, will make gods

of men. Such a synthesis of universal ideas you will not find in the history of the world again. Understand from this who was born in the person of Shri Ramakrishna. (1)

In fact, Swamiji would become emotional while speaking about Sri Ramakrishna. It has been seen that the very remembrance of Sri Ramakrishna's name brought tears to his eyes and choked his throat. Swamiji said to his disciple about Ramakrishna, 'Shall you or I ever be able to do all that he has done? None of us has understood him fully. So I do not venture to speak about him anywhere and everywhere. He only knows what he himself really was; his frame was a human one only, but everything else about him was entirely different from others.' (2)

The disciple asked Swamiji if he accepted Sri Ramakrishna as an avatara. Swamiji replied, 'Tell me first - what do you mean by an Avatara?' The disciple said, 'Why, I mean one like Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Shri Gauranga, Buddha, Jesus and others.' To this, Swamiji replied, 'I know Bhagavan Shri Ramakrishna to be even greater than those you have just named. What to speak of believing, which is a petty thing - *I know!*' (3)

Such an attitude of Swamiji towards his Master was born from the depths of his heart. He has expressed his devotion, love and deep faith in Ramakrishna in the famous salutary hymn: 'I salute Ramakrishna, who is the establisher of religion, the embodiment of all religions, and the greatest (varishtha) amongst all those avataras who were born before.' (4)

In order to expound this aphorism-like hymn, we should first discuss the ideal of the avatara, or incarnation. Then we can discuss why Swamiji called Sri Ramakrishna the 'greatest of avataras'.

The Meaning of Avatara

The term avatara is found in the Puranas. There is no specific mention of this word in the shrutis. 'The Lord desired that He would be many, and thus He entered creation.' (5) In all such Vedic passages we get only a hint on the principle of avatara. The interpreters have therefore said that avatara means 'Aprapancat prapance avataranam avatarah.' To become manifest from the divine state beyond maya in the world of maya has been called avatarana, descent from divinity. Whose manifestation is it? Indicating himself, Sri Ramakrishna told Swamiji, 'He who was Rama and Krishna has come down as Ramakrishna now. But this is not in your Vedantic sense.' From the Advaita Vedanta viewpoint, Brahman alone is sat, or real, and the world is unreal. The coming down of the formless, changeless, actionless, attributeless Brahman is not possible. But this world, which is existentially and practically real and has living beings in it, can also have the coming down of the avataras. This avatara or descent is of Brahman Itself, or of the Mahashakti, who is not different from Brahman. Though She is in Brahman Itself, being without attributes and in the state of the supreme Fourth, She assumes forms out of Her creative motive.

'Though [the supreme Prakriti is] formless and attributeless, She is with form. In the state of manifestation, She assumes numerous names and forms. In the attributeless state She is only indicated by Truth, Knowledge and Bliss; but She is not to be known through any other means like direct sense experience.' (6) Though the Lord is involved in maya, He is also the ruler of maya and is called bhagavan. It is He who comes down in every age as the avatara. It is written in the Bhagavata, 'The first manifestation of this supreme Power is as the Purusha, possessing

sixteen kalas.' (7) The sixteen kalas are the eleven senses (mind plus the ten sense organs) and the five gross elements - all born of the five supreme elements. These supreme elements are born of ahankara and that in turn is born of mahat.

The second manifestation of the Supreme is when He enters the universe as the indwelling Spirit of the moving and unmoving things. As the first Purusha, He is the Controller of Prakriti and in Him are hidden mahat and others. As the second Purusha He is the Controller of the universe, and the fourteen worlds are hidden in Him. Finally, as the third Purusha He is in the hearts [as God] of all the living beings of the infinite number of worlds. But all these three are his subtle bodies. In the gross physical body, He comes down as the avatara of the age, as the sportive divine incarnation. Avatars like Matsya, Kurma and Varaha, or Sanaka, Sanatana, Sanandana and Sanatkumara, or Nara-Narayana, Kapila and Dattatreya, or Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Chaitanya and Ramakrishna - all of them are 'great waves on the ocean of Power' (shakti-samudra-samuttha-taranggama). So it has been said in the Bhagavata, 'Hari's incarnations, full of pure sattva, are infinite. Just as small rivulets spring forth from a huge source of water that never dries up, so also do all the avatars spring forth from Hari. From Prajapati down to the extremely brilliant sages, the Manus, the gods, and the children of Manu - all are parts of Hari.' (8)

Scriptures on Incarnation

This statement of the Puranas has its echo in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:

Praising Sri Krishna, Arjuna said, 'Thou art Brahman Absolute.' Sri Krishna replied, 'Follow Me, and you will know whether or not I am Brahman Absolute.' So saying, Sri Krishna led Arjuna to a certain place and asked him what he saw there. 'I see a huge tree,' said Arjuna, 'and on it I notice fruits hanging like clusters of black-berries.' Then Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Come near and you will find that these are not clusters of blackberries, but clusters of innumerable Krishnas like Me, hanging from the tree.' (9)

The meaning is this: since time immemorial, innumerable avatars have taken birth, are taking birth and will take birth. In that case, what could be the yardstick to measure them and compare notes? All are embodiments of the Supreme alone. In essence there is no difference at all. But according to the manifestation of their powers, they are called either partial or complete incarnations. That there is a difference in the manifestation of power we see in Sri Ramakrishna's statement itself. The Gita says, 'Whatever is glorious, whatever is excellent, whatever is brilliant, know them all to be a minuscule part of Myself.' (10)

There are some characteristics common to all the incarnations. The Lord incarnates for three important reasons. He Himself has said in the Gita:

'Whenever dharma (of the nature of the four stages of life and meant for the uplift of human beings) declines, and adharma or irreligion spreads, I take birth and become embodied (using My power called maya). In order to protect the good and punish the wicked, and also to establish dharma, I come down as a human being in every age.' (11)

We find a similar verse in the Devi Bhagavata: 'Whenever there is trouble owing to the uprising of the demons, I manifest Myself and destroy them.' (12)

In the Gospel of the Holy Mother, we find Holy Mother saying this: 'Human beings have by nature forgotten God; therefore He Himself comes down whenever necessary, performs sadhana, and shows the way.'

Comparing Avataras

So if we are to make a comparative study of avataras, we should first see how far these three things have been done by them. Second, we should see how many people have been inspired by them towards the divine life. Third, we should see if their influence is limited to any particular place, region or group of people, or if it is universal. Further, how permanent and far-reaching is this influence? Fourth, we should also see the vitality and the universal utility of their message. And, finally, we should see if there is balance between their divine births and purposes, as well as in their human play.

Swami Vivekananda has saluted his master, Sri Ramakrishna with the words 'Sthapakaya ca dharmasya; the establisher of dharma'. This is worth noticing. Ramakrishna was not the originator of any new faith or religion. The religion of the Vedanta, which is eternal and immortal, has been divested of the limitations of time and place and has been placed on the world stage. This religion is not just limited to worship and adoration, sin and virtue, heaven and liberation: it is beyond limits. 'Durgati-prapatat jantu dharanat dharma ucyate; that training which lifts up the living being beyond sorrow and misery is dharma.' The ancient sages did not reject the world as unreal, but they positively accepted it as Brahman. They said, 'Jivo brahmaiva, the living being is Brahman Itself.' (13) Therefore their singular attention was fixed towards making the life of the human being - from birth to death - worthwhile. We are the children of Immortality, amritasya putrah, (14) and shall return to Immortality alone. Our aim of life is to regain our real nature. The teachings of the avataras are meant to take us towards that goal, and to see that we don't fall away from the supreme ideal; this is called dharma, and these teachings are aids to our sadhana.

This religion is the religion of love or the all-encompassing religion of humanity. The gist of Indian sadhana can be summed up as this much: The perfection of the living being is in knowledge, and the perfection of knowledge is in love. The elaborate rituals of religion consisting of numerous dos and don'ts, and which in subsequent times became weapons for the priests to earn bread, are not considered the religion of the Upanishads. The religion of India is spirituality, and it is centred in the Self, or Atman. Advaita is its fundamental ideal. But this Advaita is not a vacuum or nihilism. By relinquishing everything unreal with the ideal of 'nedam brahma, this is not Brahman', we should acquire the Supreme through the ideal of 'Sarvam khalvidam brahma; All this is indeed Brahman' (15) and 'Ishavasyam-idam sarvam; All this is pervaded by God.' (16) Mukti is not the last word. To know the fifth purushartha, the ideal of life, as the embodiment of Love, and to 'serve Shiva in the jiva' is the final word.

With the flow of time, when some selfish and worldly-minded people forgot religion and became antagonistic and vengeful towards others, there began the growth of irreligion. There arose various sects whose fundamental qualities were dissension and narrowness. In such situations, the helpless wanderer who has lost his way goes on searching for a pathfinder or a guidepost and praying fervently to the Lord for the descent of divine grace. Then arrives the incarnation of the age.

Speciality of the Ramakrishna Avatara

The Ramakrishna incarnation too happened at such a crucial juncture in world history. Human beings have always had numerous problems. These problems relate to the individual, society, class and country. During the times of Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Chaitanya, the problems were localized. But from the eighteenth century onwards, thanks to science, our earth has become a 'family'. Therefore the problems of today do not pertain to any single nation or faction. Any problem or its solution should be considered from the global context. Compared to the painful situation we are passing through nowadays, that of the past has been termed a 'mud-puddle' by Swami Vivekananda.

From the superficial viewpoint, it would appear that Sri Ramakrishna never touched any universal problem. Let alone the problems of the world, Ramakrishna neither discussed nor tried to solve even the burning problems of India, like social injustice, caste discrimination or the narrowness of different faiths and religious denominations. Like his predecessors, he never openly antagonized any political dynasty or religious reign. He didn't have to leave his Dakshineswar room and go out as a mendicant or a religious preacher. Not only that; even when he was in his room, he never gave lectures. He only practised and casually discussed, in a simple rural language, all that he had attained through spiritual struggle, thereby tremendously influencing the English-bred and qualified Bengali youth who were deeply interested in gaining true knowledge but were dismayed and misguided. Along with this, he reformed and remodelled the minds of the seekers of those days as if their minds were wet clay, thereby bringing light to their hearts and removing the age-old ignorance. All this has no parallel in world history. What could be a greater miracle than this?

The long-forgotten glories of the Eternal Religion became enlivened and rejuvenated in those few young men and others who were influenced by Ramakrishna's life and teachings. They re-established that Eternal Religion not only in India but also in other parts of the world - just within a few years of his passing. Compared to other avatars, this is the speciality and greatness of the Ramakrishna avatara. His life as a spiritual seeker and as a guru, and his Gospel, have effortlessly and quietly revolutionized the whole world. By his own personal example, he brought about a sweet harmony between the different Vedantic tenets like Advaita, Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita, as also between the Shaiva, Sakta, Vaishnava and their numerous sects. On the one hand there was the newborn Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, and on the other were the Sahajiya, Kartabhaja and, worse, Vamacara groups.

Ramakrishna welcomed them all heartily and cordially, and declared with utmost boldness: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' In Swamiji's language, he was ananta-bhavamaya - of infinite moods. Swamiji has also remarked that even brahmajnana can have limits but not Ramakrishna and his infinite moods. That is why Swamijied call him avatara-varishtha, the greatest of the avatars.

He said:

Many become wholly preoccupied with the outward forms and observances merely and fail to direct their mind to thoughts of the Atman! If you remain day and night within the narrow groove of ordinances and prohibitions, how will there be any expression of

the soul? The more one has advanced in the realization of the Atman, the less is he dependent on the observances of forms. Shankaracharya also has said, 'Nistraigunye pathi vicaratam ko vidhih ko nishedhah; Where is there any ordinance or prohibition for him whose mind is always above the play of the Gunas?' Therefore the essential truth is realization. Know that to be the goal. Each distinct creed is but a way to the Truth. The test of progress is the amount of renunciation that one has attained.(17)

Ramakrishna's Sadhana and Attainments

To know Ishvara or Brahman totally or absolutely is impossible; He is eternally beyond everything, and one can't say about Him 'He is this much alone.' So an aspirant will attain Brahman according to his capacity. Brahman alone is real, and Being, Consciousness and Bliss are Its nature. The goal of human life is to attain Brahman. But the sadhana to attain or It is a long-drawn process, and it has to be done consistently; and the sadhana too differs according to the nature of the seeker. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna did not say that any one path is good or bad. The route and the vehicle a person chooses to reach the goal depend on his natural tendencies. For this reason Sri Ramakrishna did not want us to have a 'bargaining mentality' or disturb anybody's mood or method of approach. There should be no problem with the different approaches, and no hatred amongst different groups, since all are travellers along the spiritual path. If there is deep yearning from within, if there is the combination of the three attractions - of the worldly man for his possessions, of the child for its mother and of a husband for his chaste wife (18) - all paths and all routes can lead us to the same goal. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'I offer Myself to the devotee as he propitiates Me.' (19) Therefore, with sincerity at the back, whatever be path an aspirant takes to, there is no danger for him. 'One who does good never goes to ruin.' (20) If necessary, the Lord Himself will purify the path and give us right understanding. Therefore he says that under Mother Annapurna's care, all can eat sumptuously; some may eat in the morning and some in the evening. This love and faith in all paths is not a mere verbal nicety of Sri Ramakrishna. By the superhuman practice of different paths and different attitudes, he realized this truth. The gist of all scriptures became enlivened through his sadhana. He acquired that wonderful knowledge. Looking at the lives of the avatars we have read until now, we don't see such a stunning variety of spiritual practices in any other incarnation. This is yet another speciality of the Ramakrishna avatara.

The Vedas say, '*Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti*; Truth is one, sages call It differently.' The Vedas are the pinnacles of Advaita. But so long as there is I-ness, duality cannot be negated. Therefore both duality and non-duality have been given importance in the shrutis, considering the differences among aspirants. In Sri Ramakrishna's life too we see that he lived in the realm of Advaita for as long as six months but brought his mind down to do good to the world. He has said that one cannot negate the world - 'the weight will then become less.' 'Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds, and weigh only the flesh [of a bel fruit]?' (21) Seeing that Narendra wanted to spend his life in meditation alone, Ramakrishna had scolded him: 'You are small-minded. There is a state higher than that.'

The sages of India did not seek liberation alone; they wanted to dedicate their lives to *jagathita*, the good of the world. This was the ideal of the eternal Vedic religion. In a spiritual mood, we hear Sri Ramakrishna too saying this: 'Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.' (22) This one idea contained the seed which transformed Narendranath

into Swami Vivekananda. Hence the Order which bears his guru's name has adopted this mantra: 'Who loves all beings without distinction/ He indeed is worshipping best his God.' (23)

The 'machines', that is, the direct disciples, of the 'operator' Sri Ramakrishna, discarded the desire for their own liberation and re-established the traditional and ever-flowing current of ancient India, which is the religion of humanity. No bloodshed, no force, no war, no hatred; only that pure and unsullied life and that eternal gospel consisting of some simple, straight words. These have been inspiring people - even after a century of the Master's passing - to join in heralding universal love and mutual understanding. Is this not the greatest revelation? To conquer the world and transform its heart totally without quarrel and without war - can't this be called a glorious revolution? Shall we not call the harbinger of such a revolution the greatest avatara?

A Spiritual Aspirant Par Excellence

The speciality of Sri Ramakrishna's life was his attitude of a spiritual aspirant. The avatars or world teachers of the past, the sages and the *maharshis* - have all held on to some particular method or path to attain perfection in their lives. Their followers - disciples and grand-disciples - too have followed these known paths. In this way, so many paths - Christian, Buddhist, Jain and so on - have been created. But Sri Ramakrishna's followers didn't form any sect because their guru was the embodiment of all religions. For him all religions were his own. In Rabindranath Tagore's words, he had made his own the 'diverse streams of sadhana of countless aspirants'. In his twelve-year-long spiritual struggle he did not forgo any path, be it the peaceful attitude (*shanta*), the servant attitude (*dasya*), the friend attitude (*sakhya*), the parental attitude (*vatsalya*) or the beloved attitude (*madhura*). The intensity of devotion and steadiness that he showed while performing the spiritual disciplines of the Shaiva, Shakta or Vaishnava - without caring for the world he showed the same intensity while practising the disciplines of Christianity and Islam. What a superhuman courage - to sit in the Kali Temple and do all this, and in those days! The tantric sadhana at the dead of night with the help of Bhairavi Brahmani, worshipping his own wife as the Mother of the universe and, while doing so, losing external consciousness totally - all these are indicators of his being the greatest of the avatars. Without the least hesitation we could say that such impossible sadhanas had never been done before.

Finally, his Advaita sadhana. The Upanishads say that Brahman alone is real. In order to firmly establish this truth, they have added, 'advayam, not two.' The only goal of life is to attain that Reality. Sri Ramakrishna attained that Truth in nirvikalpa samadhi. Unlike the Vedic sages, he did not become satisfied by merely attaining that Truth; he came down from the other side, as it were. He realized the truth that '*Rupam rupam pratirupo babhuva; Brahman is in all forms,*' (24) '*Sarvani bhutani atmani; All living beings are in the Self,*' and '*Sarva-bhuteshu ca atmanam; (Seeing) one's own Self is in all beings.*' (25) The ideal is that, having transcended these three states, the *ritam*, or Truth, that remains should be known with each and every instance of knowing in one's life (*pratibodha-viditam*). And this stunning personality was able to do that. Therefore we see that this *bhava-roga-vaidya* ('the physician who cures worldliness') was firmly established in the pinnacle of Advaita, was overflowing with unparalleled devotion and standing on the highest peaks of prema (*darshita-prema-vijrim-bhita-ranggam*), and at the same time was an embodiment of action who performed magnificent acts (*karma-kalevaram-adbhuta-ceshtam*) - all this, in a single person.

During his sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna had received the command from his chosen deity, the Divine Mother, three times that he should remain in bhavamukha. The meaning of being in this bhavamukha is twofold. One, to remain in exactly the mid-position between the transcendental and the immanent. That is, to bring down the supreme Power to the world, and to elevate worldly power. Only a supreme doer of good to the world alone can accomplish such a task. The second is wider still. He who is set to become the world teacher should know all minds in order to help them in their spiritual practices. The spiritual practice of an aspirant depends on his past actions that are bearing fruit, his desires, his mental tendencies, the variety of his desires, his choice of the ishta and so on. Each aspirant is of a different nature. A person's innermost feelings can be understood and appreciated only if he becomes one with his soul. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was empowered with such a unique power. He himself has said [regarding a devotee], 'Everything inside him can be seen through his eyes, as one sees the objects in a room through a glass door.' (26)

'An Ocean of Resplendent Moods'

Remaining in bhavamukha, Ramakrishna could understand the natural spiritual tendencies of each one of his admirers and, having understood them, interact with them in accordance with those very tendencies, thereby establishing an eternal bond of love. He would also accelerate their movement towards God by resorting to their particular moods. Since he had traversed all the paths of the spiritual world, he was fully aware of their pros and cons. He had done sadhana with utmost dedication. He would become very involved in each one of the particular moods he practised. While performing the sadhana of Ramachandra, for instance, he not only became mentally one with Hanuman but his body too underwent changes. While he was engaged in the sadhana of the attitude of the female companion of the Divine Mother, that is, the maidservant attitude, his physical nature had become so feminine that even Mathuranath, who was his constant companion, couldn't recognize him. On seeing Gopaler Ma, in ecstasy he became Gopala himself. But none of these is either pretension or drama. Something possible only for him, these were extraordinary states of mind, of his identity with the Ideal. It was owing to such an identity that everyone saw his chosen deity in him and became contented thereby. Again, many yogis and jnanis have realized him in their hearts as the supreme Brahman or Purushottama, who is beyond the pale of the three qualities (gunas). Indeed, this avatara of infinite moods has gone beyond whatever is written in the Vedas and the Vedanta. In one single personality, he was 'the ocean of love, the Infinite of the Vedas, as also all the gods like Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma.' He was the embodiment of all the yogas - jnana, bhakti, karma and raja. In and through him are to be found solutions for everybody's problems. In none of the past great ones have we seen such countless spiritual moods, vastness and broadness. He was the very personification of all the moods and attitudes; he was '*bhasvara bhava-sagara*; the ocean of resplendent moods' and thus did he become the greatest of the avataras.

Sri Ramakrishna's twelve-year-long hard spiritual practices, repeated samadhis, his harmonization of all the diverse faiths, his ethereal personality which was the personified form of love - all these apart, there is something significant in what Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi says. And this is the distinctive factor of this avatara. Holy Mother says, 'I tell you, my son, it never occurred to me that he practised all the religions with the express motive of preaching the idea of spiritual harmony. He was always in his mood of divine ecstasy. ... But what you should note, my dear, is that renunciation is his special message in this age.' (27)

The greatest curse of the present times is worldliness. Selfishness, my-ness, egotism and so on have bound us down to abysmal depths. As I have already said, Ramakrishna did not deliver lectures. Whatever he had to say he has shown through his life. He has given a practical demonstration. In the field of renunciation too he was the ideal. In Swami Vivekananda's words, he was the emperor of renouncers. There was no question at all of his 'enjoying' the world, because he never touched things he didn't need. In his life was manifest the ideal of '*vancana kama-kancana ati nindita indriyag*; you are the re-nouncer of all enticements of the despicable sense attractions.' But at no moment of his life - from beginning to end - do we see egotism touching him; he never allowed I-ness to raise its head. Relinquishment of the ego by a person for all time is something new to history. He would swear and say that he didn't have even a trace of egotism - words that came from the lips of the Truthful One. Such was his total dedication of body, mind and soul at the Divine Mother that he couldn't pray to Her for his own health.

He was a great revolutionary too. In his early life he had disregarded brahminical orthodoxy and accepted alms from a low-caste woman. He had subsequently eaten the leftovers of a lowborn. And towards the end of his life he said that the mind that he had given away totally to God could never be brought back to seek the removal of disease from his body.

Ramakrishna's Attitude to Life

Since the body-idea had completely left him, Sri Ramakrishna could stand apart and look upon himself as a witness. Thus the sore in the throat had been kept aside. The kick of the priest Haldar did not affect his mind; Hriday's rude behaviour didn't bring adverse reaction in the mind, nor did he hesitate in the least to stamp with his feet the costly shawl that Mathuranath gave him. Not a single instance was seen in his life, either during his sadhana or after his enlightenment, when even the slightest trace of desire arose in his mind. The little trace of ego that the Divine Mother had left in him was either the 'I of the devotee' or the 'I of the servant'. That too was for the experience of the sport of the Divine Mother, and for the good of the world. Here is a beautiful scene showing his ego-lessness: when great pundits like Padmalochan praised him, he sat without concern in a corner and smiled like a child. Except for truth he had surrendered everything to the Divine Mother. Truth is another name of love or bliss, and this filled the heart of this supernatural being.

A divine temperament is natural to all incarnations. When the supreme Lord comes down with the aid of His divine maya, He accepts many qualities of the human form. Though His birth and actions are divine, it is difficult for either the person of knowledge or the devotee to recognize Him as God without a shadow of doubt. This is true of everyone from Sri Rama to Sri Chaitanya. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'Though I am eternal, pure, all-knowing, beyond bondages, and the inner Ruler of all beings, ignorant mortals disregard Me, considering Me to be a human being because I behave like them.' (28)

'Brahman weeps entangled in the snare of the five elements.' (29) Where even the gods are in doubt and difficulty, what to speak of the human being of limited intellect? Sri Ramakrishna was no exception, as he too was misunderstood. However, we see the manifestation of divinity in him since the very beginning of his life. What Sri Ramakrishna says about Sri Chaitanya - that he lived in three states, the external, semi-external and internal - was true of himself too. Since his childhood the manifestation of divinity was as clear as daylight in Ramakrishna. His losing consciousness while going to the Vishalakshi Temple at Anur and regaining consciousness when

Mother's names were sung; his becoming deeply indrawn during the enactment of the role of Shiva; his becoming ecstatic seeing cranes flying against the backdrop of dark clouds - all these are instances of his manifestation of divinity.

From the records available about his sadhana years and the last few years of his life, we see how most of the time he was immersed in God or was in a semi-conscious state. His body was for all intents and purposes that of a human being, but it had become a divine body. His mind and soul too were always in God. But the most surprising thing is, when he was in the ordinary state or the conscious state, no one could realize that this person was the one who was in the blissful spiritual universe just a few moments ago.

His human sport too was beautiful in every way, and he has defeated us in this aspect too. In his interactions with friends in childhood, in his play, in his relations with the elders in age, in his curiosity natural for a child - in everything he endeared himself to everyone. To bring joy to every heart through fun and wit was a natural tendency in him since his childhood. Girish Chandra Ghosh said, 'Even in naughty pranks I couldn't beat you.' In any matter, his senses would be wide awake and it was this speciality that helped him in later life to see other people as if looking into a glass case. Since he had a keen eye on the minute details of household life, he could give everyday instances and examples to illustrate his abstruse and philosophical teachings.

'The Wish-fulfilling Tree'

He taught Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi how to deal with people, how to prepare the betel roll, how to prepare the wick for the lamp. And the truth had appeared to his seer's eyes that Holy Mother was to be the Mother of the monastic order that he would establish. Hence he quietly trained her in that aspect too, without any public notice. Thus he was the ideal husband, though without the least trace of any worldly desire; and to Chandramani Devi, he was the ideal son. By being like a teacher, father and friend to his disciples, he showed them the highest Truth and at the same time kept a keen watch over their physical, emotional and moral development. At times, he would create a wave of bliss through his mimicry, wit and so on. The bliss he had enjoyed in the spiritual plane was showered by him all his life in the physical plane also. 'O Mother! Don't make me a dry monk. Keep me full of bliss' - that was his constant prayer to the Divine Mother. By granting this prayer, the Divine Mother brought about a wonderful harmony of the Divine and the human in him, which is seen to some extent in the lives of Sri Krishna and Sri Chaitanya. The fullest manifestation of his divine nature was seen on the 'Kalpataru Day'. The picture we get of his self-revelation and the bestowing of the boon of fearlessness on that particular day has no parallel in world history. Seeing the vishvarupa form of Sri Krishna, Arjuna had become afraid and scared, and had prayed to the Lord to reassume His usual form. Moreover, the grace of Christ, Buddha or Chaitanya was obtained by only a few fortunate souls. But to shower grace on so many disciples at one time and to bring about a tremendous transformation in their spiritual lives by a mere touch, is un-heard of in the world.

What is to be observed here is, it is not that he brought about a complete transformation in some lives on that Kalpataru Day, or on the Kali Puja night at Shyampukur, or at Dakshineswar; even after a hundred years of his advent it is evident how his power is working in all spheres of the world, transforming numerous lives. So far as the earlier avatars are concerned, countless peoples of different countries have been inspired by them, true. But the expansiveness and

breadth of this avatara is something new. It is true that in the spread of this message the services of Swami Vivekananda and other direct disciples of Ramakrishna, as also of the author of the *Gospel*, Mahendra Nath Gupta, are to be reverentially remembered. But weren't they instruments in the hands of their Master? It was the all-encompassing humanism and the soul-song of the Sanatana Dharma of India that they have carried throughout the two hemispheres of the globe. We have not heard of any other religion spreading so fast in such a short time.

Swamiji said:

The present-day civilization of the West is multiplying day by day only the wants and distresses of men. On the other hand, the ancient Indian civilization, by showing people the way to spiritual advancement, doubtless succeeded, if not in removing once for all, at least in lessening, in a great measure, the material needs of men. In the present age, it is to bring into coalition both these civilizations that Bhagavan Shri Ramakrishna was born. (30)

The innate truths in Sri Ramakrishna's words are eternal. They have brought forth a brilliant light of hope to all places, to all times and, specially, to the modern times - an age deep in darkness, engrossed in worldly enjoyments, strained due to divisions, and totally insecure and dissatisfied.

Ramakrishna is the greatest refuge for all - man and woman, the educated and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, the householder and the monastic, the fallen and the well-established in society. Through his followers, a silent revolution has begun not only at the individual level but also at the social, national and, to put it succinctly, global levels. By establishing the truths of Advaita and the true meaning of religion, he has struck a lethal blow at the very roots of the suffering of the world, caused by strife, hatred born of religious differences, and so on.

The effect of the glorious attainments of Sri Ramakrishna, which were achieved sitting in that small room on the banks of the River Ganga, has just begun to show itself and will go on working for a long, long time. Through the combined efforts of thousands of dedicated souls there will definitely be a tremendous revolution, and this world will become a heaven. Once more will Satya Yuga come back to earth. Kazi Nazrul Islam has said, 'O Sage! You have brought the sweet memories of Satya Yuga in this Kali age.' Swamiji saw with his divine eyes the possibilities of the Ramakrishna incarnation and declared, 'From the date that the Ramakrishna Incarnation was born, has sprung the Satya Yuga (Golden Age).' (31) To the blessed feet of the great creator of the Satya Yuga, therefore, was dedicated this remarkable mantra, which sprung from the very depths of the heart of Vivekananda:

Sthapakaya ca dharmasya sarva-dharma svarupine;
Avatara-varishthaya ramakrishnaya te namah.

References

1. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 7.262.
2. CW, 5.389.
3. Ibid.

4. Om sthapakaya ca dharmasya sarva-dharma svarupine; Avatara-varishthaya ramakrishnaya te namah.
5. So'kamayata, bahu syam prajayeyeti ... tat srishtva tadevanupravishat.' - Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.6.1.
6. Nirakara ca sakara saiva nanabhidhanabhrit; Namantarair-nirupyaisha namna nanyena kenacit.
- Durga Saptashati, 'Pradhanika Rahasya', 29.
7. Jagrihe paurusham rupam bhagavan mahadadibhih; Sambhutam shodashakalam -adau loka-sisrikshaya.
- Bhagavata, 1.3.1.
8. Avatara hyasanghyeya hareh sattva-nidher-dvijah; Yatha-vidasinah kulyah sarasah syuh sahasrashah.
Rishayo manavo deva manuputra mahaujasah; Kalah sarve harereva saprajapatayastatha. - Bhagavata, 1.3.26-7.
9. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 128.
10. Bhagavadgita, 10.41.
11. Gita, 4, 7-8.
12. Ittham yada yada badha danavottha bhavishyati; Tada tadavatiryaham karishyamyari-sangksayam.
- Devi Bhagavata, 11.54-5.
13. *Brahmajnanavalimala*, 29.
14. Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 2.5.
15. Chandogya Upanishad, 3.14.1.
16. Ishavasya Upanishad, 1.
17. *CW*, 7.211.
18. *Gospel*, 83.
19. *Gita*, 4.11.
20. *Ibid.*, 6.40.
21. *Gospel*, 328.
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23. *CW*, 4.496.
24. Katha Upanishad, 2.2.9.
25. Ishavasya, 6.
26. *Gospel*, 160.
27. Swami Gambhirananda, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991), 463.
28. *Gita*, 9.11.
29. *Gospel*, 777.
30. *CW*, 6.462-3.
31. *Ibid.*, 6.327-8.
