

**Great Thinkers
on
Sri Ramakrishna**



SRI RAMAKRISHNA

I

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

ALDOUS HUXLEY

‘The further you go towards the East,’ Sri Ramakrishna was fond of saying, ‘the further you go away from the West.’ This is one of those apparently childish remarks, which we meet with so often among the writings and recorded sayings of religious teachers. But it is an apparent childishness that masks a real profundity. Within this absurd little tautology there lies, in a state of living, seminal latency, a whole metaphysic, a complete programme of action. It is, of course, the same philosophy and the same way of life as were referred to by Jesus in those sayings about the impossibility of serving two masters, and the necessity of seeking first the kingdom of God and waiting for all the rest to be added. Egoism and alter-egoism (or the idolatrous service of individuals, groups, and causes with which we identify ourselves so that their success flatters our own ego) cut us off from the knowledge and experience of reality. ...

Egoism and alter-egoism advise us to remain firmly ensconced in the West, looking after our own human affairs. But if we do this, our affairs will end by going to pot. ... Whereas if we ignore the counsels of egoism and alter-egoism, and resolutely march toward the divine East, we shall create for ourselves the possibility of receiving the grace of enlightenment and, at the same time, we shall find that existence in our physical, Western home is a great deal more satisfactory than it was when we devoted our attention primarily to the improvement of our human lot.¹

AMAURY DE REINCOURT

Can a connection between the scientific and mystical frames of reference be established over and beyond a certain metaphysical parallelism? The answer lies perhaps in the fact that Indian mysticism, at least as far as its leading representatives are concerned, has evolved as much in the past hundred years as the science of physics itself, in a direction that points toward an inevitable convergence of the two. From its modern awakening with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Eastern mysticism has begun to adapt its revelations to the entirely different cultural framework provided by science and technology, without in any way sacrificing what is valid in its traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself. The true departure occurred with the life and writings of Sri Aurobindo who began to wield India's traditional metaphysics to the concept of a modified and purposeful Evolution—quite a departure for the offspring of a culture that had consistently ignored the spiritual significance of time and history.²

AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition... was rooted in India's perennial philosophy. Truth is One; men call it by different names : this was the Vedic view and it was carried on through the Upanishads, the *Gītā*, and the medieval Indian sages to the nineteenth century saint Ramakrishna. Nearly illiterate but supremely knowledgeable, he not only absorbed the great Indian inheritance but accepted the revelations of other religions, mainly Christianity and Islam. ... [He] discarded sectarianism, used imagism in a highly symbolical and personal way, who dramatically moved from dualistic worship to monism and then to a balance of both, and finally and effortlessly

emerged as a world teacher. ... To many of us, more important than any incident is the miracle of Ramakrishna himself, the miracle that he could be what he was and give us—for all time—his life's truth. ...

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement has proved... that the finest social service, concerned action and commitment spring from pure goodness, from the realization of beatitude and the divinity of life. ... It must be recognized that a saintly person while not seeming to do anything utilitarian for society is actually fulfilling the highest social responsibility by igniting a moral conscience. Through precept and example he is changing individuals and therefore society. Every act of truth is also an act of service. Sri Ramakrishna transformed the hearts of men ; he gave them an exalted view of life, the fruits of which can be seen in the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission. ... Thus we trace a continuous history from the Upanishads to Sri Ramakrishna, from Buddha to Gandhi and Tagore. ...³

ARNOLD JOSEPH TOYNBEE

Sri Ramakrishna's message was unique in being expressed in action. The message itself was the perennial message of Hinduism. ... In the Hindu view, each of the higher religions is a true vision and a right way, and all of them alike are indispensable to mankind, because each gives a different glimpse of the same truth, and each leads by a different route to the same goal of human endeavours. Each, therefore, has a special spiritual value of its own which is not to be found in any of the others.

To know this is good, but it is not enough. Religion is not just a matter for study ; it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness. He practised successively almost

every form of Indian religion and philosophy, and he went on to practise Islam and Christianity as well. His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere. His devotion to God in the personal form of the Great Mother did not prevent him from attaining the state of ‘contentless consciousness’—an absolute union with absolute spiritual Reality.

Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which he and his message were needed. This message could hardly have been delivered by anyone who had not been brought up in the Hindu religious tradition. Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal in 1836. He was born into a world that, in his lifetime, was, for the first time, being united on a literally world-wide scale. Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world’s history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only ‘annihilated distance’ ; it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka’s and the Mahatma Gandhi’s principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna’s testimony to the harmony of religions ; here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

In the Atomic Age the whole human race has a utilitarian motive for following this Indian way. No utilitarian motive could be stronger or more respectable in itself. The survival of the human race is at stake. Yet even the strongest and most respectable utilitarian motive is only a secondary reason for taking Ramakrishna's and Gandhi's and Ashoka's teaching to heart and acting on it. The primary reason is that this teaching is right—and is right because it flows from a true vision of spiritual reality.⁴

ASHAPURNA DEVI

My myopic vision cannot fathom the unfathomable Sri Ramakrishna. He seems to me like an ever enigmatic boundless sky.

Sri Ramakrishna is meant for both the learned and unlettered persons. The quintessence of all knowledge is treasured in his gospel which he has catered to all in his own rural language.

The academic body of the whole world has realized that the life of Sri Ramakrishna manifests the essential creeds of all religions.

I see Sri Ramakrishna like an ocean so vast, so profound! I ask and ask, who is He?

SRI AUROBINDO

When scepticism had reached its height, the time had come for spirituality to assert itself and establish the reality of the world as a manifestation of the spirit, the secret of the confusion created by the senses, the magnificent possibilities of man and the ineffable beatitude of God. This is the work whose consummation Sri Ramakrishna came to begin and all the development of the previous two thousand years and more since

Buddha appeared, has been a preparation for the harmonization of spiritual teaching and experience by the *avatāra* of Dakshineshwar.

The long ages of discipline which India underwent, are now drawing to an end. A great light is dawning on the East, a light whose first heralding glimpses are already seen on the horizon; a new day is about to break, so glorious that even the last of the *avatāras* cannot be sufficient to explain it, although without him it would not have come. The perfect expression of Hindu spirituality was the signal for the resurgence of the East. Mankind has long been experimenting with various kinds of thought, different principles of ethics, strange dreams of a perfection to be gained by material means, impossible millenniums and humanitarian hopes. Nowhere has it succeeded in realizing the ultimate secret of life. Nowhere has society or politics helped it to escape from the necessity of sorrow, poverty, strife, dissatisfaction from which it strives for an outlet; for whoever is trying to find one by material means, must inevitably fail. The East alone has some knowledge of the truth, the East alone can teach the West, the East alone can save mankind. Through all these ages Asia has been seeking for a light within, and whenever she has been blessed with a glimpse of what she seeks, a great religion has been born, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Mohammedanism with all their countless sects. But the grand workshop of spiritual experiment, the laboratory of the soul has been India, where thousands of great spirits have been born in every generation who were content to work quietly in their own souls, perfect their knowledge, hand down the results of their experiments to a few disciples and leave the rest to others to complete. They did not hasten to proselytize, were in no way eager to proclaim themselves, but merely added their quota of experience and

returned to the source from which they had come. The immense reservoir of spiritual energy stored up by the self-repression was the condition of this birth of *avatāras*, of men so full of God that they could not be satisfied with silent bliss, but poured it out on the world, not with the idea of proselytizing but because they wished to communicate their own ecstasy of realization to others who were fit to receive it either by previous *tapasyā* or by the purity of their desires. Of all these souls Sri Ramakrishna was the last and greatest, for while others felt God in a single or limited aspect, he felt Him in His illimitable unity as the sum of an illimitable variety. In him the spiritual experiences of the millions of saints who had gone before were renewed and united. Sri Ramakrishna gave to India the final message of Hinduism to the world. A new era dates from his birth, an era in which the peoples of the earth will be lifted for a while into communion with God and spirituality become the dominant note of spiritual life. What Christianity failed to do, what Mohammedanism strove to accomplish in times as yet unripe, what Buddhism half accomplished for a brief period and among a limited number of men, Hinduism as summed up in the life of Sri Ramakrishna has to attempt for all the world. This is the reason of India's resurgence, this is why God has breathed life into her once more, why great souls are at work to bring about her salvation, why a sudden change is coming over the hearts of her sons. The movement of which the first outbreak was political, will end in a spiritual consummation.⁶

BENOY KUMAR SARKAR

Ramakrishna cannot be identified with the movement for any particular Hindu gods, rituals, religions, scriptures or institutions. Ramakrishna did not promulgate a religion. ... No set of commandments and duties or virtues and vices can be

discovered in Ramakrishna's *Kathāmṛta* ('The Nectar of Words'). It would be difficult also to discover in Ramakrishna's teachings any advocacy or propaganda in regard to caste reforms, race-uplift and other social questions. And as for the questions of constitutional progress, nationality, provincial autonomy, federation, democracy, socialism or the like, Ramakrishna had no message whatsoever.

Where then, lie Ramakrishna's claims to recognition by East and West as a world-teacher or as a re-maker of religion? They are to be found in some very elemental characteristics.

Ramakrishna used to function as guide and friend to all and sundry in regard to the most fundamental questions of daily life. He spoke to individual men and women of flesh and blood and tried to evoke in their personalities just those human qualities which enable persons to flourish in the world. In the East as well as the West, human beings—the richest and the poorest, the expert and the layman, the businessman, the scholar, the lawyer, the peasant and the workingman—all are at times subject to diffidence in the concerns of the day-to-day round of duties. Ramakrishna's teachings enable the meanest of human beings as well as the mightiest to combat diffidence and acquire self-confidence in the pursuit of life. ...

The Gospel of Strength. Ramakrishna has delivered a gospel of strength with which human beings can overpower the thousand and one frailties of worldly existence. That is why Ramakrishna has been accepted as a Teacher by merchants, industrialists, menial servants, government officials, lawyers, medical men, scholars, persons belonging to the most varied professions. Ramakrishna has, therefore, become a prophet for every corner of the globe. ...

...In his sociology or metaphysics of values *jīva* (man) = Śiva (God). The formulation of this equation by Ramakrishna

enables us to establish an identity between service to man and service to or worship of God. We are again and again rendered conscious that he was not constructing a 'kingdom that is not of this world'. This is the most marked characteristic in the sayings of Ramakrishna. He was a positivist, a teacher of worldly duties in the most emphatic sense. On the other hand, Ramakrishna's perpetual emphasis on the spirit and the soul is epoch-making. He has taught mankind that with this instrument men and women can demolish the discouraging conditions of the surrounding world and transform them in the interest of the expansion of life. ... The freedom of personality is a concept by which Ramakrishna has succeeded in electrifying the mentality of the middle classes, the higher classes, and the lower classes of the human society. Anti-defeatism and world-conquest have entered their soul as permanent categories in an unobtrusive manner.⁷

* * *

The diversity of paths in the moral world does not frighten him (Ramakrishna). It is rather the fundamental ground-work in his analysis of human behaviour. As a true servant of man he is profoundly convinced of the dignity of individual manhood and personality.

...Ramakrishna's faith in the dignity of man enables him thus to welcome the exponents of every faith as the builders of and travellers on the most diverse roads to reality, light and immortality. ...

Every *cheminot* or wanderer on all these most heterogeneous roads is to him a colleague and fellow-priest in the temple of man's struggle towards higher and higher flights of freedom. ...

Ramakrishna is a believer in the equality of faiths. ... He has established the democracy of religions. His conceptions of

religious democracy and spiritual equality are organically linked up with his ideals of the fullness of life. ...His mind is bent on recognizing the claims of the not-self, the other I's or we's and on establishing a harmony between the self and the not-self.

His philosophy of life's fullness, based as it is on this sympathy with the urges and requirements of the not-self, the others, the duality or the plurality, is not confined to the reactions and demands of the individual personality alone. ... Ramakrishna would have applied this maxim of dual, multiple or complex personality to each and every group of men as well as to all inter-human forms, inter-group relations, and inter-communal moralities.

Ramakrishna's religion of life does not consider itself to be adequate and complete until it has granted a franchise of self-expression and self-direction to the creative urges, morals and spiritual experiences of the 'other groups'—new races, strange faces, the minds of the great not-self. ... Nobody in the world's culture-history and philosophical annals has been a more pronounced architect of the republic of religions than Ramakrishna.⁸

BRAHMABANDHAB UPADHYAYA

সর্বৈশ্বর্যময় ! নিঃস্ব, রিক্ত ব্রাহ্মণের রূপ ধরিয়া তুমি আসিলেও তোমার চক্ষের ঐ প্রসন্ন দৃষ্টিতে বুঝিতে পারিয়াছি—তুমি কে। তুমি নিরক্ষরতার ছলনা করিলেও অনুভব করিয়াছি, তুমিই সেই বেদগোপ্ত ! নহিলে কাহার বাক্যামৃতে বেদ ও বেদান্তবাণী এমন করিয়া নিঃসারিত হয় ? তুমি চিরশঠ। এবার ছলনা করিলেও তোমার চাতুরী যে ধরিতে পারিয়াছি, দেবতা। তুমি রামকৃষ্ণ—একাধারে তুমিই কি রাম ও কৃষ্ণ নহ ?⁹

(Crowned with all treasures—that is what you are. Although you have appeared in the guise of a penniless, ascetic Brahmin, I have been able to ascertain from the contented and serene look of your eyes the truth of your identity. In spite of your pretention of being an illiterate person, I have realized—you are that

Custodian of the Vedas! Otherwise, in whose nectar-words the message of the Vedas and Vedanta could spring in such a manner ! You are ever playful. You wanted to make fools of us this time also; but we have seen through your game, O Lord, we have recognized you. You are Ramakrishna, indeed! Are you not Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in One ?)

জানো কি, রামকৃষ্ণ কে ? ...পুরাতন যুগের অন্তিমকালে নূতন যুগের প্রারম্ভে স্বয়ং বিষ্ণু আবির্ভূত হন। এই সনাতন সত্যটি শ্রীকৃষ্ণ দ্বাপরের অন্তে কলিযুগের প্রারম্ভে আমাদের শুনাইয়াছিলেন :

পরিত্রাণায় সাধুনাং বিনাশায় চ দুষ্কৃতাম্ ।

ধর্মসংস্থাপনার্থায় সম্ভবামি যুগে যুগে ॥

আজ যিনি রামকৃষ্ণরূপী, তিনিই সেই যুগসম্ভাবনা ! যাহা আমরা আমাদের সাধনা ও শক্তিবলে পারি না, তাহাই তিনি কৃপা করিয়া সিদ্ধ করিতে আসিয়াছিলেন। ... হিন্দু দূর জীবন্ত ও বহু ইতিহাস তাহার শ্রীচরণ হইতে উদ্ভূত হইয়াছে। সেই হিন্দুর আদর্শ, হিন্দুর জ্ঞান ও শিক্ষাকে পুনরায় তিনি জীবনে পরিষ্কৃষ্ট, বেগবন্ত করিতে আসিয়াছিলেন। ...তাই আমেরিকায় তোমার বেদান্তের ধ্বজা উঠিয়াছে। ইংলণ্ডে তোমার শাস্ত্রের মর্যাদা বাড়িয়াছে। তোমার সমাজের ছায়া অনুসরণ করিবার জন্য সেই ফিরিঙ্গি নরনারীগুণ্ডলির কী প্রাণপণ আকিঞ্চন তাহা জানো কি ? কাহার কৃপায় হইয়াছে ? তোমার গোলামখানার বিদ্যায় নহে। ঐ ব্রাহ্মণের কৃপায়!¹⁰

(Do you know who is Ramakrishna? Lord Viṣṇu incarnates Himself as and when an old age ends yielding place to a new one. Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave us this eternal truth towards the close of *Dvāpara-yuga* and the beginning of *Kali-yuga* :

Paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām

Dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge

[For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evildoers, and for the establishment of religion, I am born in every age.] He who is known as Ramakrishna today is the fulfilment of that great promise in this age. In His grace He came to the world to fulfil what we cannot attain through our efforts and [limited] power. ...Hindu culture with its long history owes its origin to His sacred feet. And he [Ramakrishna] came to

manifest in his own life and thus to rejuvenate the ideal, knowledge, and culture of the Hindus... . That explains why the banner of Vedanta has gone up in America. That explains why Hindu scriptures are looked upon with more and more respect in England. Do you know with what earnest craving the white men and women are striving now to toe the line of your society? Do you know whose grace has brought about this? No, it has not come about through your education—an education that goes to turn out mere slaves! [Know it for certain that] behind all this is the grace of that Brahmin.)

BROJENDRA NATH SEAL

He [Sri Ramakrishna] sought to experience each religion in its entirety in *sādhanā* or spiritual discipline. ...Here was an individual soul who would enrich himself all human experience in religious life and history. And precious elements were thus added to his Hindu heritage — the sense of human brotherhood and equality from the Muslim faith, and the need of salvation *from sin* from Christianity. In the same way, Vaiṣṇava *saṅkīrtana* and music were added to his religious exercises. These became elements (*aṅgas*) of his *sādhanā*.

What we want is not merely Universal Religion in its quintessence, as Rammohun sought it in his earlier days — not merely an eclectic religion by compounding the distinctive essences, theoretical as well as practical, of the different religions, as Keshub Chandra sought it, but experience as a whole as it has unfolded itself in the history of man, and this can be realized by us, Ramakrishna taught, by syncretic practice of Religion by being a Hindu with the Hindu, a Moslem with the Moslem, a Christian with the Christian, and a Universalist with the Universalist, and all this as a stepping stone to the Ultimate realization of God-in-Man and Man-in-God.¹¹

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

It is no exaggeration to call Sri Ramakrishna's teachings an Upanishad. A sage like the *ṛṣi*s of old was born in our age. This was Ramakrishna Paramahansa.... Learned men with a command of language can and do write excellent essays and discourses. But this writings lack true life. Sri Ramakrishna was a *mahātmā* 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.... There is a peculiar power in the words of those who lead a godly life. They have a force which the exhortations of merely learned and intellectual men do not have. When a *maharṣi* talks, it is his whole life that speaks through him, not mere intellect.¹²

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

This is the story of a phenomenon.

I will begin by calling him simply that, rather than 'holy man', 'mystic', 'saint', or *avatāra* ; all emotive words with mixed associations which may attract some readers, repel others.

A phenomenon is often something extraordinary and mysterious. Ramakrishna was extraordinary and mysterious; most of all to those who were best fitted to understand him. A phenomenon is always a fact, an object of experience. That is how I shall try to approach Ramakrishna.

Modern advertising has inflated our value-judgements until they are nearly worthless. Every product and person is said by its publicist to be the best. I want to avoid the competitive note here so I will say only this : Ramakrishna's life, being comparatively recent history, is well documented. In this respect, it has the advantage over the lives of other, earlier phenomena of a like nature. We do not have to rely, here, on fragmentary or glossed manuscripts, dubious witnesses, pious

legends. What Ramakrishna was or was not the reader must decide for himself ; but at least his decision can be based on words and deeds Ramakrishna indubitably spoke and did. ...

I myself am a devotee of Ramakrishna ; I believe, or am at least strongly inclined to believe, that he was what his disciples declared that he was : an incarnation of God upon earth. Nevertheless, I am not writing this book primarily for confirmed believers or unbelievers. The sort of reader I am writing for is the one who is not afraid to recognize the marvellous, no matter where he finds it ; the sort of reader who is always on the lookout for a phenomenon.

I only ask you approach Ramakrishna with the same open-minded curiosity you might feel about any highly unusual human being : a Julius Caesar, a Catherine of Siena, a Leonardo da Vinci, an Arthur Rimbaud. Dismiss from your mind, as far as you are able, such categories as holy-unholy, sane-insane, wise-foolish, pure-impure, positive-negative, useful-useless. Just say to yourself as you read : this, too, is humanly possible. Then later, if you like, consider the implications of that possibility for the rest of the human species.¹³

CLAUDE ALAN STARK

Sri Ramakrishna's approach to the dilemma of religious plurality has been documented as an exposition of his experiences of God-consciousness in different religious traditions. It is hoped that this exposition, in and of itself, represents a contribution to inter-religious understanding. ...

Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings form...an approach based on the experience of God, which is worthy of closer examination by sincere adherents of all religious traditions. One may conclude, by the details of his life, that this approach is a significant one.

The fact that Sri Ramakrishna experienced God in different religions is a matter of historical record. The fact also that God or ultimate Reality has been realized directly and immediately by many persons of diverse religious backgrounds cannot be ignored. Whole civilizations have been based on the strength of their testimony.

Sri Ramakrishna taught that any person who wishes to verify the authenticity of the experience of God may do so by raising his or her level of consciousness to a higher plane through prayer and spiritual practices. Then he or she can affirm with Sri Ramakrishna, 'I actually *see* God, more clearly than I see you', or declare with Swami Vivekananda, 'I have touched the feet of God.'¹⁴

D. S. SARMA

Of all the religious movements that have sprung up in India in recent times, there is none so faithful to our past and so full of possibilities for the future, so rooted in our national consciousness and yet so universal in its outlook, and therefore none so thoroughly representative of the religious spirit of India, as the movement connected with the name of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciple, Swami Vivekananda. In a way, the true starting point of the present Hindu Renaissance may be said to be Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. For his life represents the entire orbit of Hinduism, and not simply a segment of it. ...In fact, Sri Ramakrishna is a unique figure in the history of Hinduism, because, without much education and scholarship, he traversed the entire region of religious experience by his own *tapas* and confirmed by his own personal testimony the truths of the Hindu scriptures.¹⁵

DALAI LAMA

Sri Ramakrishna was one of the greatest of India's spiritual adepts of recent times, actively embodying India's profound tradition of plurality. By assimilating the *sādhanās*, customs, and practices of different faiths into his own personal practice, he presented a powerful example of respect for other traditions, even while maintaining a deep fidelity to his own. His transparently pure and well-documented life remains a guide and inspiration to millions on their spiritual path.¹⁶

ERNEST CARY BROWN

What a wonderful thing that a divine Incarnation should have attained to the highest realization of God as Divine Mother at a time when women all over the world were struggling for emancipation ! Is it difficult to believe that the incarnation on earth of this great advocate of womanhood should have given their cause a powerful impetus ?¹⁷

FRIEDRICH MAX MÜLLER

Many times the question has been asked of late, what is a *Mahātman*, and what is a *Sannyāsin* ? *Mahātman* is a very common Sanskrit word, and means literally great-souled, high-minded, noble. It is used as a complimentary term, much as we use noble or reverend; but it has been accepted also as technical term, applied to what are called *Sannyāsins* in the ancient language of India. *Sannyāsin* means one who has surrendered and laid down everything—that is, who has abandoned all worldly affections. 'He is to be known as a *Sannyāsin*,' we read in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, v.3, 'who does not hate and does not desire.' As the life of a Brāhmaṇa was, according to the laws of Manu, divided into four periods, or *āśramas*—that of a pupil, of

a householder, of a hermit, and of an independent sage—those who had reached the fourth stage were called *Sannyāsins*, a word difficult to render in English, but perfectly familiar to everybody in India. ... It has been denied that there are any *Sannyāsins* left in India, and in one sense this is true. If the scheme of life traced out by Manu was ever a reality, it has long since ceased to be so. ...[But] we meet at all times, both before and after the Buddhist reform, with men who had shaken off all social fetters; who had retired from their families and from society at large, lived by themselves in forests or in caves, abstained from all enjoyments, restricted their food and drink to the very utmost, and often underwent tortures which makes us creep when we read of them or see them represented in pictures and photographs. Such men were naturally surrounded by a halo of holiness, and they received the little they wanted from those who visited them or who profited by their teachings. Some of these saints—but not many—were scholars, and became teachers of their ancient lore. Some of course, were impostors and hypocrites, and have brought disgrace on the whole profession. But that there were *Sannyāsins*, and that there are even now, who have really shaken off the fetters of passion, who have disciplined their body and subdued their mind to a perfectly marvellous extent, cannot be doubted. ... It is generally supposed that these same persons, these so-called *Sannyāsins*, are also very learned and wise persons. ...[But] in the case of *Sannyāsins* of the present generation we look in vain either for great learning, even learning by heart, or for original thought and profound wisdom. ... There was, for instance, Dayananda Sarasvati, who tried to introduce some reforms among the Brāhmaṇas. He was a scholar in a certain sense. He actually published a commentary in Sanskrit on the Rig-Veda, and was able to speak Sanskrit with great fluency. It is supposed that he

was poisoned because his reforms threatened to become dangerous to the Brāhmaṇas. But in all his writings there is nothing that could be quoted as original beyond his somewhat strange interpretations of words and whole passages of the Veda.

The late *Ramakrishna Paramahansa* was a far more interesting specimen of a *Sannyāsin*. He seems to have been, not only a high-souled man, a real *Mahātman*, but a man of original thought. Indian literature is full of wise saws and sayings, and by merely quoting them a man may easily gain a reputation for profound wisdom. But it was not so with *Ramakrishna*. He seems to have deeply meditated on the world from his solitary retreat. Whether he was a man of extensive reading is difficult to say, but he was certainly thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Vedanta philosophy. His utterances which have been published breathe the spirit of that philosophy; in fact are only intelligible as products of a Vedantic soil. And yet it is very curious to see how European thought, nay a certain European style, quite different from that of native thinkers, has found an entrance into the oracular sayings of this Indian saint. ...

In the extracts from Ramakrishna's teachings, some of which have been published by his pupils in their journal, the *Brahmavādin*, these ancient metaphors have for the first time been blended with European thought; and from all that we learn of his personal influence, this blending had a most powerful effect on the large audiences that came to listen to him. He has left a number of pupils behind who after his recent death are carrying on the work which he began, and who are trying to secure, not only in India, but in Europe also, a sympathetic interest in the ancient philosophy of India, which it deserves as fully as the philosophy of Plato or Kant. ...

It was not easy to obtain any trustworthy information about the circumstances of the *Mahātman*'s life, a life singularly

uneventful in his relations with the outer world, though full of stirring events in the inner world of his mind. ...

Protap Chandra Mozoomdar, the leader of the Brāhmo Samāj, and well known to many people in England, tells me of the extraordinary influence which the *Mahātman* exercised on Keshub Chunder Sen, on himself, and on a large number of highly educated men in Calcutta. A score of young men who were more closely attached to him have become ascetics after his death. They follow his teachings by giving up the enjoyment of wealth and carnal pleasure, living together in a neighbouring *Matha* (College), and retiring at times to holy and solitary places all over India even as far as the Himalayan mountains. Besides these holy men, we are told that a great number of men with their families are ardently devoted to his cause. But what is most interesting is the fact that it was the *Mahātman* who exercised the greatest influence on Keshub Chunder Sen during the last phase of his career. It was a surprise to many of Keshub Chunder's friends and admirers to observe sudden change of the sober reformer into the mystic and ecstatic saint, that took place towards the end of his life. But although this later development of the New Dispensation, and more particularly the doctrine of the motherhood of God, may have alienated many of Keshub Chunder Sen's European friends, it seems to have considerably increased his popularity with Hindu Society. At all events we are now enabled to understand the hidden influences which caused so sudden a change, and produced so marked a deviation in the career of the famous founder of the Brāhmo Samāj, which has sometimes been ascribed to the breakdown of an overexcited brain.

It is different with a man like Ramakrishna. He never moved in the world, or was a man of the world, even in the sense in which Keshub Chunder Sen was. He seems from the very first

to have practised that very severe kind of asceticism (yoga) which is intended to produce trances (*samādhi*) and ecstatic utterances. We cannot quite understand them, but in the case of our *Mahātman* we cannot doubt their reality, and can only stand by and wonder, particularly when so much that seems to us the outcome of a broken frame of body and overwrought state of mind, contains nevertheless so much that is true and wise and beautiful. ...

The state of [his] religious exaltation...has been witnessed again and again by serious observers of exceptional psychic states. It is in its essence some thing like our talking in sleep, only that with a mind saturated with religious thoughts and with the sublimest ideas of goodness and purity the result is what we find in the case of Ramakrishna, no mere senseless hypnotic jabbering, but a spontaneous outburst of profound wisdom clothed in beautiful poetical language. His mind seems like a kaleidoscope of pearls, diamonds, and sapphires shaken together at random but always producing precious thoughts in regular, beautiful outlines. To our ears, no doubt, much of his teaching and preaching sounds strange, but not to Oriental ears, or to ears accustomed to the perfervid poetry of the East. Everything seems to become purified in his mind. Nothing, I believe, is so hideous as the popular worship of Kālī in India. To Ramakrishna all that is repulsive in her character is, as it were, non-existent, and there remains but the motherhood of the goddess. Her adoration with him is a childlike, whole-souled, rapturous self-consecration to the motherhood of God, as represented by the power and influence of woman. Woman in her natural material character had long been renounced by the saint. He had a wife, but never associated with her. 'Woman', He said, 'fascinates and keeps the world from the love of God.' For long years he made the utmost efforts to be delivered from

the influence of woman. His heart-rending supplications and prayers for such deliverance, sometimes uttered aloud in his retreat on the riverside, brought crowds of people, who bitterly cried when he cried, and could not help blessing him and wishing him success with their whole hearts. And he succeeded, so that his mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kālī, made him recognize every woman as her incarnation, and honour each member of the other sex, whether young or old, as his mother. In one of his prayers he exclaims: ‘O Mother Divine, I want no honour from man, I want no pleasure of the flesh; only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluence of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā. Mother, I am without *bhakti* (devotion), without yoga (concentration); I am poor and friendless. I want no one’s praise, only let my mind always dwell in the lotus of Thy feet.’ But what is the most extraordinary of all, his religion was not confined to the worship of Hindu deities and the purification of Hindu customs. For long days he subjected himself to various kinds of discipline to realize—the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the Qur’an. For Christ his reverence was deep and genuine. He bowed his head at the name of Jesus, honoured the doctrine of his sonship, and once or twice attended Christian places of worship. He declared that each form of worship was to him a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion; he showed, in fact, how it was possible to unify all the religions of the world by seeing only what is good in every one of them, and showing sincere reverence to every one who has suffered for the truth, for their faith in God, and for their love of men. He seems to have left nothing in writing, but his sayings live in the memory of his friends. He would not be a master or the founder of a new set. ‘I float a frail half-sunk log of wood through the stream of the

troublesome world. If men come to hold by me to save their lives, the result will be that they will drown me without being able to save themselves. Beware of Gurus!’¹⁸

* * *

I am quite aware that some of his sayings may sound strange to our ears, nay even offensive. Thus the conception of the Deity as the Divine Mother is apt to startle us, but we can understand what Ramakrishna really meant by it, when we read his saying :

‘Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than anyone else.’

How deep Ramakrishna has seen into the mysteries of knowledge and love of God, we see from the next saying :

‘Knowledge and love of God are ultimately one and the same. There is no difference between pure knowledge and pure love.’

The following utterances also show the exalted nature of his faith:

‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, that he who yearns for God, finds Him.’

‘He who has faith has all, and he who wants faith wants all.’

‘So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get Divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that thou hast acquired and become as ignorant about it as a child, and then thou wilt get the knowledge of the True.’

‘Where does the strength of an aspirant lie? It is in his tears. As a mother gives her consent to fulfil the desire of her importunately weeping child, so God vouchsafes to His weeping son whatever he is crying for.’

‘As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God.’

‘God is in all men, but all men are not in God : that is the reason why they suffer.’

From such sayings we learn that though the real presence of the Divine in nature and in the human soul was nowhere felt so strongly and so universally as in India, and though the fervent love of God, nay the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Ramakrishna, yet he perfectly knew the barriers that separate divine and human nature.

If we remember that these utterances of Ramakrishna reveal to us not only his own thoughts, but the faith and hope of millions of human beings, we may indeed feel hopeful about the future of that country. The consciousness of the Divine in man is there, and is shared by all, even by those who seem to worship idols. This constant sense of the presence of God is indeed the common ground on which we may hope that in time not too distant the great temple of the future will be erected, in which Hindus and non-Hindus may join hands and hearts in worshipping the same Supreme Spirit—who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.¹⁹

FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

Not content with receiving devotees, Ramakrishna would also go forth to find other seekers after God and ascertain how far they had progressed towards their goal. Usually devotees are satisfied if they have experienced God in one aspect. Ramakrishna yearned to know Him in every aspect. Nothing

fully satisfied him. His whole life was spent in seeking God and experiencing Him in different aspects.

[Ramakrishna] had no urge ... to go all over India preaching—or even to go as far as Calcutta only four miles off. But there did arise in his mind a tremendous longing to pass on his experiences to a few devotees. ‘There is no limit to the yearning I had then’, he afterwards said. ‘I looked forward wistfully to the day when my beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace by conversing with them and telling them of my experiences. A mother has never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, not a lover for his sweetheart, as I did for them.’²⁰

GEORGE C. WILLIAMS

On the philosophical level,...in Ramakrishna [we find] a formula for adapting the philosophy of India, Vedanta, for expansion beyond the borders of India, and for serious scrutiny in the centres of philosophy and psychology around the world. Without the impulse of Ramakrishna, the great treasures of the Indian philosophical speculation might not have become so available, in the present flexible and constructive form, to the Western world.²¹

GOVIND BALLABH PANT

Sri Ramakrishna was born about 120 years ago when our country was entangled in the whirlpool of cultural chaos. The English culture was taking its root in India and the people were forgetting the values of India’s ancient tradition and culture. . . . Sri Ramakrishna’s life was simple and . . . full of practical religion with tremendous spiritual force which influenced the life of those who were being led astray by Western materialism and were losing confidence in India’s spiritual tradition and ancient culture.²²

HARLOW SHAPLEY

The mind and heart of Sri Ramakrishna encompasses all who work and think on the problems of man's place in the scheme of things.²³

HENRY R. ZIMMER

To speak of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching with regard to our present world-situation means, as the wicked jester-king in *Hamlet* puts it, 'in equal scale weighing delight and dole'. It means putting the question, what can the spiritual forces of the enlightened and perfect, of the teacher who embodies the Divine, effect in the world-wide struggle and suffering caused by the demoniac forces of man's nature ; or, in Hindu terms, what can pure *Sattva* achieve against *Rajas*, reckless lust for power, aggressive selfishness, triumphant tyranny, and against *Tamas*, beastiality and sloth of man's animal nature ?...

The actual task of the individual of to-day, in so far as he can perceive this problem at all, could be, to become, in the Hindu style, a permanent inmate of both spheres, of this phenomenal world and the supra-phenomenal reality, and 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's'. ...These two realities bar each other,—the phenomenal tangible, and the supra-phenomenal intangible ; they are as if two sides of the same and only coin. They preclude each other logically, but they are meant to be reconciled through life by each of us. That is Sri Ramakrishna's message on the lines of India's perennial wisdom.²⁴

HIREN MUKHERJEE

It was Ramakrishna's unalloyed, if also apparently unsophisticated, love for all beings overflowing so beautifully that its nectarine quality never fades, his humility, that he wore

like a natural garment, humility, however, which had not a tincture of passive piety but gleamed with sheer certitude over his own intimate realization, and the simple sublimity of his equation of *jīva* with Śiva (that is to say, of every sentient being with the godhead) — all this and so much more beyond the purview of this talk that places the Paramahansa on a peerless pedestal where vying with West or East becomes irrelevant and petty.

If there has been anybody in modern times who symbolized, without the least trace of solemnity and scholasticism, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*'s definition of religion as 'the honeyed essence of all creation' (*sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ madhu*), it was Ramakrishna, in his quintessence 'the beauty of holiness'. ...It was Ramakrishna, unconcerned about contentions over superiority between East and West and vice versa, from whom, essentially, Vivekananda had learnt, rather imbibed, as one does one's mother's milk, that 'not princes or prelates and periwigged charioteers' but the common, earthly people, suppressed cruelly for ages but never entirely vanquished, are the salt of our earth.²⁵

HUMAYUN KABIR

In remembering the services and the examples of Sri Ramakrishna, we ...have before us the example of a personality who tried to live and explain the different aspects of human functions, of which we have very few equals in our country's history.

...In his own life he tried to realize truth in its different manifestations, to recognize the value of the contribution of different types of human endeavour to the achievement of salvation. ...The aspect which has impressed me, is his emphasis on toleration, on service. ...His emphasis on toleration is only a

development of the aspect of service to humanity. ...Once he told Swami Vivekananda, ‘...So long as you Serve people, there is no question of your trying to show mercy, there is no question of showing compassion as is ordinarily understood. What is wanted is compassion in the true and literal sense of the word, compassion by which you identify yourself with others.’ ... His emphasis on toleration rests on this emphasis upon compassion in the sense of identifying oneself with humanity, identifying oneself with the individual of whatever colour, whatever creed, whatever religion, whatever race, of whatever nationality. And in his life he exemplified this sense of identification with all human beings. ...To my mind that is also the greatest teachings of true democracy and Sri Ramakrishna in his own way emphasized the dignity of the individual.

...The greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, the beauty of Sri Ramakrishna, thus lies in this sense of identification with human beings, the recognition of the value of the individual.²⁶

HUSTON SMITH

In my study of the world’s religions I have been fortunate in coming upon inspiring firsthand accounts of the world’s great spiritual geniuses, including Sri Ramakrishna, India’s greatest nineteenth century saint.

During the summer in the 1950s while I was writing the chapter on Hinduism in what was to become my book, *The World’s Religions*, I read and meditated on ten pages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* each day, and I credit those meditations for the acclaim that has greeted that chapter.²⁷

On the heels of [the] dispute over whether we are all saved, there is another. At the end of our journey do we merge with the godhead or enjoy the beatific vision of God forever? Monotheists champion the latter, mystics the former.

Ramakrishna, who had a genius for embracing both horns of a dilemma, identifying with both sides, exclaimed in one of his monotheistic mood, 'I want to taste sugar; I don't want to be sugar.' The standard metaphor for the mystics' alternative is : the dewdrop slips into the shining sea.²⁸

As pain's intensity is partly due to the fear that accompanies it, the conquest of fear can reduce pain concomitantly. Pain can also be accepted when it has a purpose, as a patient welcomes the return of life and feeling, even painful feeling, to a frozen arm. Again, pain can be overridden by an urgent purpose, as in a football game. In extreme cases of useless pain, it may be possible to anesthetize it through drugs or control of the senses. Ramakrishna, the greatest Hindu saint of the nineteenth century, died of cancer of the throat. A doctor who was examining him in the last stages of the disease probed his degenerating tissue and Ramakrishna flinched in pain. 'Wait a minute', he said; then 'Go ahead', after which the doctor could probe without resistance. The patient had focused his attention to the point where nerve impulses could barely gain access. One way or another it seems possible to rise to a point where physical pain ceases to be a major problem.²⁹

[God conceived as with-attributes is called *Saguna* Brahman], as distinct from the philosophers' more abstract *Nirguna* Brahman, or God-without-attributes. *Nirguna* Brahman is the ocean without a ripple; *Saguna* Brahman the same ocean alive with swells and waves. In the language of theology, the distinction is between personal and transpersonal conceptions of God. Hinduism has included superb champions of each view, notably Śaṅkara for the transpersonal and Rāmānuja for the personal; but the conclusion that does most justice to Hinduism as a whole and has its own explicit

champions like Sri Ramakrishna is that both are equally correct. At first blush this may look like a glaring violation of the law of the excluded middle. God may be either personal or not, we are likely to insist, but not both. But is this so? What the disjunction forgets, India argues, is the distance our rational minds are from God in the first place. Intrinsically, God may not be capable of being two contradictory things—we say *may not* because logic itself may melt in the full blaze of the divine incandescence. But concepts of God contain so much alloy to begin with that two contradictory ones may be true, each from a different angle, as both wave and particles may be equally accurate heuristic devices for describing the nature of light. On the whole, India has been content to encourage the devotee to conceive of Brahman as either personal or transpersonal, depending on which carries the most exalted meaning for the mind in question.³⁰

JADUNATH SARKAR

During his [Ramakrishna's] lifetime he had shown the way to Freedom to thousands of devotees. Everyone had recognized in him one who had really seen God. Amongst those who had seen him and recognized the manifestation of the Great Power in him are to be found not only Hindus but also Brāhmos like Keshub Chandra Sen, and rationalists like Dr Mahendralal Sarkar. Whether we believe in an *avatāra* or not, all of us recognize that light can be transmitted through the help of sparks of fire. It is many years since the earthly life of Paramahansa Deva came to an end. But the light that he brought to this world is still burning. Even today millions of people, men and women, rich and poor, scholars and the illiterate, the happy and the miserable, the high caste and the low, reading his life and hearing his teachings, have

been able to tune their life to a higher key. His life has brought solace to many a heart afflicted with sorrow and has shown that the Kingdom of Heaven can be brought to this earth.³¹

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. He appears to be in the tradition of the great *ṛṣis* of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit. ...

One of the effects of Sri Ramakrishna's life was the peculiar way in which he influenced other people who came in contact with him. Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet when they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God and ceased to scoff and 'remained to pray'.³²

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

The Europeans who protested against the empire of mediocrity, themselves failed to attain to the springs of power. So their world of ideas went down before the steamroller. But in Dakshineswar, only a few miles outside the Victorian metropolis of Calcutta, practising his *sādhanā* not according to enlightened, modern methods, but after the most ancient, most superstitious, most idolatrous traditions of timeless India : now hanging to a tree, like a monkey ; now posturing and dressing as a girl ; now weeping before an image : now sitting, night and day, like a stump ; six years unable to close his eyes, himself terrified at what was happening to him, swooning in the ocean of the Mother's love ; stunned by the experience of Brahman—Sri Ramakrishna cut the hinges of the heavens and released the fountains of divine bliss.³³

K. M. MUNSHI

The ageless vitality of Aryan culture expressed itself in no nobler form than in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In this materialistic age, he demonstrated the validity of the experiences which the *Gītā* had taught. He was almost illiterate, but his training was all drawn from this gospel. Every word and act of his expressed the teachings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in a living manner. By devotion, knowledge, and yoga he surrendered himself to God. He saw God as reality. It was, as for all mystics, the only religion. He realized Him in all His aspects.

...His approach to the caste system was the true approach of the *Gītā*. The only way to destroy social distinctions is the rise to perfection by individual efforts. ...Sri Ramakrishna gave experimental vitality to the *Gītā*. The floodgates of a new inspiration were opened.³⁴

LEO TOLSTOY

Alexander Shifman, Adviser to the Tolstoy State Museum, in his book *Tolstoy and India* writes : ‘During the last decade of Tolstoy’s life Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his pupil Swami Vivekananda occupied his [Tolstoy’s] thoughts. ...

‘On 13 February 1903, Tolstoy read the journal *Theosophischer Wegweiser* sent to him from Germany and in his copy underlined a number of Ramakrishna’s aphorisms. “There is much in common with my conception”—he noted in his diary.’³⁵

‘Later on, in February 1906, Tolstoy received from his friend and biographer, P.A. Sergeenko, the book *Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s Sayings* in English published in 1905 in Madras and read it with interest. “Wonderful sayings! Ramakrishna died 50 [20 ?] years ago. A remarkable sage,” said Tolstoy to a circle of his intimates and read aloud to them some of those sayings by the Indian philosopher.’³⁶

‘From the literature about Ramakrishna, Tolstoy selected nearly a hundred sayings and parables which he intended to publish in Russia. However, this publication did not materialise and the writer after carefully working over them included some in his collections of ancient wisdom over which he was working at that time.’³⁷

LEROY S. ROUNER

Sri Ramakrishna, a nineteenth-century Indian saint and mystic, experienced God directly and immediately in the context of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. ...

Sri Ramakrishna was the supreme example of a religious phenomenologist, and phenomenology is the methodology of love. It is the practical application of the New Testament injunction to lose one’s life, for the sake of the neighbour and in Christ’s name, if one would truly find it. This means that neither the attack of religious imperialism, nor the defense of religious exclusivism can be a valid Christian attitude toward inter-religious relationships. The method of love in relation to the neighbour who is a religious stranger is to lay aside one’s own perspective, even one’s own convictions and beliefs, and to take on the life and world and beliefs of the neighbour stranger. In this context, it is possible to discover the continually unfolding truth to which Christ promised the Holy Spirit would lead us. And only in this context it is possible to know the full meaning of the age-old Christian affirmation that God has not left himself without witnesses in any age or human community. ...

[In] Sri Ramakrishna’s story... [our] fellow Christians may find the authentic Spirit of the one true God at work in their inner dialogue with this Hindu neighbour/stranger. In the midst of this meeting and knowing, that Spirit may lead us into some as yet undiscovered new truth. ...³⁸

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in *ahimsā*. His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all. ...³⁹

MAHENDRANATH SIRCAR

One of the most potent forces in the present-day cultural and spiritual life in India is Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Ramakrishna was the *silent man of God*. ...His character can be summed up in one word, God-centric. ...Ramakrishna was a super-mystic. Hence his message and teachings have a unique importance; for they proceed direct from the divine impress upon his being. Intellectual fineness cannot always reach this level; unless the psychic being is transparent, the spiritual aspect of our being cannot be penetrated and its secrets revealed. ...Without a catholic, free and elastic mind, there is every chance of committing mistakes in our attempt to explain and interpret him. ...His being was veritable spiritual laboratory in which he had experiments with every kind of spiritual experience. ...He was born at a time when the Hindu religion was attacked by advanced and liberal thought, and it was no small task for

Ramakrishna unconsciously to revive people's faith in the ancient religion. ...

...Ramakrishna by his intense spirituality which he had attained by the time honoured disciplines and methods, showed the dynamism, power and potentiality of the orthodox faith. He had the spiritual genius to establish that Hinduism was not idolatry, that there was a fine scientific discipline in the orthodox cult to evoke spiritual powers and extensive visions.⁴⁰

MOHITLAL MAJUMDAR

Whether we believe in the Divine incarnation or not, a man of Sri Ramakrishna's stature could be found in the microscopic numbers. In thousands years, a man like Sri Ramakrishna is born in the world.

To reach Him one needs to free oneself from all dogmas, superstitions and sectarian attitudes. And to meet Him would be a realization that this man unlike others has a distinct identity of His own. He is the embodiment of perennial truths and a supreme power.

Now the whole civilization is in utter distress and faces crisis in all spheres. An incarnation is inevitable to tide over such situations. Sri Ramakrishna played that role for the humanity.⁴¹

MUHAMMAD DAUD RAHBAR

Jesus is remembered as the Son of Man. In the recorded history of religion, Sri Ramakrishna shines as a devotee of the Divine Mother. He should, therefore, be remembered as the Son of Woman.

Four miles north of Calcutta, in the Garden of Temples at Dakshineswar, he began his devotions to Mother Kālī and went into rapture when yet only a child. His life from then on is an open book filled with a moving story of worship and

adoration. His revelation of the benign Mother of the Universe is a consummation of the spiritual aspirations of matriarchal India.

Like a magnet, Sri Ramakrishna attracted ardent disciples. More than thirty of them maintained intimate association with him. Hundreds of them derived solace and blessing by beholding him and talking to him.

I have read some delightful portions of the one-thousand-page *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This marvellous volume has extraordinary revelations. Immediately one recognizes a cherishable friend in Sri Ramakrishna. His open, passionate, and transparent devotion humbles and chastens us. He is no common mortal. He is a man of phenomenal gifts. His presence is a haven. His conversations, recorded abundantly in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by his disciple M., are charming, inspiring. Their literary merit is due to the inspired goodness of Sri Ramakrishna. ...

We turn now to another genuine quality of Sri Ramakrishna : renunciation. It is perhaps the virtue most vigorously rejected by the politicized civilization of the emerging world. It is condemned by political activists as if it were an adoption of the way of unconcern. The political activists have to go through self-searching to realize that much of the fever and scramble of politics is a symptom of sick spirit. The implementation of the great movement of democratic thought in the world is not simply a matter of equal opportunity to cultivate ambition. Democratic freedom must learn to respect the freedom to renounce. Perhaps it is true to say that in America today, austere forms of creative renunciation are virtually proclaimed illegal. A mendicant spiritual would be looked upon as a vagrant and a parasite. This is tragic. The excessively politicized intelligentsia in the modern world will hastily detect in Sri Ramakrishna an 'escapist quietism'. An observation on those lines will be

rejected by anyone who reads a substantial part of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In him we find a bustling renunciation full of excitement, but not escapism or quietism. His life is not one of escape for the soul, rather it is a life busy with fortification of the spirit. His ascetic exercises lead to his faith-building charisma. His experiments with psychology of religion are of both spiritual and scientific value for us. He is not running away from responsibilities in the world, he is handling them with eminent creativity. He exercises the privilege of inspired selection of occupation. He investigates the secrets of spirit and soul by turning to experienced men and women. He meditates and is an alert onlooker. He is not bookish but is assiduous in enquiries as a student of folk religion through listening to recital of sacred mythology, direct observation, rigorous introspection, conversation and, most of all, through devotion.

He does all that and does not ask anybody for a salary or a stipend as a reward. Nobody has a reasonable right to object to this arrangement.

Any society that bans renunciation and detachment of this kind is heading for impaired mental health and low level of faith. For it deprives itself of a needed source of holy contagion and vibrations of serenity. Every society needs a mixture of infection of animation and equanimity. Every society needs contagion of selflessness and meditative inspiration. ...

The soldierly masculine civilization of the West will have to go through long historical preparation to provide a natural place for the worship of Divine Mother among believers. Nevertheless the assertion of the feminine element has begun. The Western male is not yet effeminate, although perhaps the Western female has become somewhat masculine. ...

I pay tribute to Sri Ramakrishna's device to attain intimacy with Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian life. He demonstrated his

own kind of desires and overtures, as against other possible ways of going about the enrichment and broadening of experience. He went about it in a certain mystical way. It is valid, interesting, and meaningful because its motivation was pure. ...

There is a great deal of power politics connected with religion. The scientists and secularists have no doubt contributed much to the removal of dishonesty in religious leadership. But now some of the presumption which used to be the trait of some priests is manifest among many secularist men of science. The autonomy of science and intellect has been overdone. The time has arrived when forces of spirit have to be released. Insight and wisdom are lacking in the intellectual world of today. The faces of secularist scientists seldom have a radiance and magnanimity.

Was not the unsophisticated Sri Ramakrishna a gifted scientist in his own right? In his blissful life we find a happy union of religion and science. ...⁴²

MUHAMMAD SAHIDULLAH

Religion creates dissension between people. Truth is one. Man interprets it in different ways. Real uniqueness lies in discovering unity in diversity. Sri Ramakrishna alone on earth practised all religions on himself. Then he arrived at a conclusion that all religions have a fundamental unified truth. It was Sri Ramakrishna who pronounced a death knell for all divisions in religion. Ramakrishna is indeed our saviour. The Hindus venerate Him as an incarnation of God. Whatever may be our ways of venerating Him, He ushered in a new epoch for the whole humanity.⁴³

NICHOLAS K. ROERICH

We are in the deserts of Mongolia. It was hot and dusty yesterday. From faraway thunder was approaching. Some of

our friends became tired from climbing up the stony holy hills of Shiret Obo. While already returning to the camp, we noticed in the distance a huge elm-tree—‘karagatch’, lonely towering amidst the surrounding endless desert. The size of the tree, its somewhat familiar outlines, attracted us into its shadow.

* * *

Thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India—Sri Ramakrishna. Around this glorious name there are so many respectful definitions. Śrī, Bhagavān, Paramahansa—all best offerings through which the people wish to express their esteem and reverence. The consciousness of a nation knows how to bestow names of honour. And after all, above all most venerable titles, there remains over the whole world the one great name—Ramakrishna. The personal name has already changed into a great all-national, universal concept.

* * *

Light is especially precious during the hours of darkness. May the Light be eternally preserved! In his parables about the Good, Ramakrishna never belittled anyone. And not only in the Teaching, in parables, but in his own deeds he never tolerated bemeaning. Let us remember his reverent attitude towards all religions. Such broad understanding will move even a stony heart. In his broad outlook, the Blessed Bhagavān of course possessed a real straight-knowledge. His power of healing he in turn gave out freely. He never hid anything useful. He exhausted his strength in innumerable blessed givings. And even his illness of course was due to such constant self-sacrificing outpouring of his spiritual energy for the healing of others. And in these generous gifts Ramakrishna manifested his greatness.

In all parts of the world the name of Ramakrishna is venerated. Also is revered Swami Vivekananda, who symbolizes true discipleship. The names of Ramakrishna,

Vivekananda and the glorious host of their followers remain on the most remarkable pages of the history of the spiritual culture of India. The astounding depth of thought, which is characteristic of India, the beautiful manifestation of guru and *chela*—remind the whole world of basic ideals. Ages pass, whole civilizations change, but the guru and the *chela* remain in the same wise relationship, which was since antiquity established in India.

* * *

Not only the everlasting value of the Teaching of Good affirmed by Ramakrishna, but precisely the necessity of these words especially for our time is unquestionable. When spirituality, as such, is being so often refuted through wrongly interpreted formulae, then the radiant constructive affirmation as a beacon becomes especially precious.⁴⁴

PAUL BRUNTON

‘What do you want?’ asked Ramakrishna, the illustrious sage who lit up the nineteenth century darkness of India. Replied his famous disciple Swami Vivekananda : ‘I wish to remain immersed in mystic trance for three or four days at a stretch breaking it just to take food.’ Said Ramakrishna : ‘You are a fool ! There is a state which is even higher than that.’

Our quest of a valid source of knowledge can come to an end only when it will yield one that is universally and forever unalterable, which will be the same and hold to the same laws of verification at allowed times and in all conditions, not during meditation alone.⁴⁵

PHILIP GLASS

Sri Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836 in Kamarpukur, a village in rural Bengal. As a young man he took up service in the temple dedicated to Kālī, The Divine Mother,

at Dakshineswar, a village about ten miles north of Calcutta in those years. There he remained for the rest of his life, dying in the early hours of Monday, August 16, 1886. The Kālī temple at Dakshineswar is still there today, but is now surrounded by an ever-expanding and bustling Calcutta. By coincidence, it stands not far from the place established for the work and residence of the late Mother Teresa. Ramakrishna's home remains there, still embodying his spirit and worth a visit by anyone interested in knowing about his life and work.

As a young man, he was largely self-taught, having absorbed knowledge of the ancient tradition of India through reading and hearing the religious stories in the *Purāṇas* as well as his association with the holy men, pilgrims and wandering monks who would stop at Kamarpukur on their way to Purī and other holy places. In time he became famous throughout India for his ability to expound and elucidate the most subtle aspects of that profound and vast tradition. It was not uncommon in the years of his maturity for pundits from all over India to come and 'test' his knowledge. Invariably, they were astonished by the ease and eloquence with which he addressed their questions. It appeared that his first-hand spiritual experiences were more than adequate when it came to explaining the scriptures of ancient India. In this way he was able to remove all doubt about their meaning and, indeed, his own authority.

By the late nineteenth century India had been governed for almost four hundred years by two of the great world empires—the Mughals and the British. Each had fostered a foreign religion and culture in India which, in time, had been absorbed into Indian civilization. The genius of Ramakrishna was to restore and reaffirm the ancient Hindu culture from its spiritual source.

It would be hard to overestimate the impact that the life, presence and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna had on the formation

of the modern India we know today. It was as if the sleeping giant of Indian culture and spirituality—certainly one of the foremost cultures of the ancient world—had been re-awakened and empowered to take its rightful place in modern times. Within a generation of his death, Gandhi’s ‘quit India’ movement was in full bloom. The poetry of Tagore as well as countless manifestations in theatre, music, philosophy and civil discourse were becoming known to the world at large. Over one hundred years ago Swami Vivekananda (the Narendranath of our text) travelled to the West to take part in the first Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1893. He established in America the first Vedanta Centres, which have spread throughout the world, with major centres in Southern California. Even today the influence of India (and ultimately, of Ramakrishna) can be heard in the poetry and music of Allen Ginsburg and the Beatles, to mention only a few artists. It is hard to imagine the emergence of India on the world stage without the spark that was provided by Ramakrishna’s brilliance. Perhaps, some may doubt that India—the most populous democracy of our time, brimming with vitality and creativity—could owe so much to one saintly man, long gone, who lived a life of such utter simplicity. Yet I believe that is exactly the case.

It has been said that when a great man dies, it is as if all of humanity—and the whole world, for that matter—were witnessing a beautiful, timeless sunset. At that moment ‘the great matter of life and death’ is revealed, if not explained and understood. By bearing witness to that event, perhaps we understand a little better our own mortality, its limits and possibilities. *The Passion of Ramakrishna* is meant to recount in this highly abbreviated work, his suffering, death and transfiguration as they took place during the last few months of his life.

In this work, the words of Ramakrishna are taken up by the Chorus. Sarada Devi was his wife and lifelong companion. M. (his real name was Mahendranath Gupta) was the disciple who kept a close record of his meetings with Ramakrishna, later published as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Dr Sarkar [Dr Mahendralal Sarkar] was his attending physician. The two disciples who sing small solo parts are unidentified in the text.⁴⁶

PITIRIM ALEXANDROVITCH SOROKIN

A successful growth of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Vedanta movements in the West is one of many symptoms of two basic processes which are going on at the present time in the human universe. One of these changes is the epochal shift of the creative centre of mankind from Europe to the larger area of the Pacific-Atlantic, while the other consists in a double process of continued decay of sensate culture and society and of the emergence and growth of the new—Integral or Ideational—socio-cultural order.⁴⁷

PRAMATHANATH TARKABHUSAN

(1)

Through the earthly body of Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavān Śrī Hari [Nārayaṇa] manifested His divinity in Bengal. ...Sri Ramakrishna appeared in a time full of surprising incidents. ...This period had witnessed the involvement of many talented personalities in developing and nurturing numerous new thoughts and the consequential conflicts as well. ...Sri Ramakrishna has his advent among all such luminaries, and led an apparently easy worldly life of a priest devoid of wealth or education. And that exactly was his unique and amazing feat—ignoring all the limitations he could achieve his revered place among the Indian spiritual giants. ...

... Sri Ramakrishna's influence on the world could hardly have the extraordinary and everlasting impact without Vivekananda. And Narendranath Datta, in obverse, would never have become Swami Vivekananda without the compassion and adoration— unsolicited but abundant, from Sri Ramakrishna. ...He gave his mantle to the Swami and through him inspired all pervading peace, harmony and spirituality around the civilized nations. It was he who did first realize how such massive benevolent work could have its fruitful end in the contemporary time, and awakened the required force within the enormously powerful and broad heart of the Swami. This in particular was the greatest aspect of the amazingly eventful life of Sri Ramakrishna.⁴⁸

(2)

To know and realize Brahman – the *ātman* taught in the Upanishads of India – is the highest goal of human life. This is the message of India. To teach this message to India in a new form adopted to the needs of times, and through India to human beings all over the World, who on account of ignorance have the misfortune to identify themselves with the body and suffer torment and worry, and thus lead them to freedom from all kinds of bondage, God appeared on earth as Paramahansa Deva. My countless salutations to the holy feet of Bhagavān Sri Ramakrishna, the visible symbol of the Lord, ushering in a synthesis of the religions of the world !⁴⁹

PROTAPCHANDRA MOZOOMDAR

My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me.

What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, shrunken, unpolished, diseased, half-dressed, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Müller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines, I who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Brāhmo Samāj,—why should I be spellbound to hear him? And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same. He has been interviewed and examined by many, crowds pour in to visit and talk with him. Some of our clever intellectual fools have found nothing in him, some of the contemptuous Christian missionaries would call him an imposter, or a self-deluded enthusiast. I have weighed their objections well, and what I write now, I write deliberately.

The Hindu saint is a man much under forty. He is a Brahmin by caste, he is well formed naturally, but the dreadful austerities through which his character has developed have permanently disordered his system, inflicted a debility, paleness, and shrunkenness upon his form and features that excite the deepest compassion. Yet in the midst of this emaciation, his face retains a fullness, a child-like tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and smile that I have seen in no other face that I can remember. A Hindu saint is always particular about his externals. He wears the *geruā* cloth, eats according to strict forms and is a rigid observer of caste. He is always proud and professes secret wisdom. He is always a *guruji*, and a dispenser of charms. This man is singularly indifferent to these matters. His dress and diet don't differ from

those of other men except in the general negligence he shows towards both, and as to caste, he openly breaks it every day. He most vehemently repudiates the title of being called a teacher or guru, he shows impatient displeasure at any exceptional honour which people try to pay him, and emphatically disclaims the knowledge of secrets and mysteries. He protests against being lionized, and openly shows his strong dislike to be visited and praised by the curious. The society of the worldly-minded and carnally-inclined he shuns carefully. He has nothing extraordinary about him. His religion is his only recommendation. And what is his religion? It is Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for that is the saint's name, is the worshipper of no particular Hindu god. He is not a Śaiva, he is not a Śākta, he is not a Vaiṣṇava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is all these. He worships Śiva, he worships Kālī, he worships Rāma, he worships Kṛṣṇa, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantist doctrines. He is an idolater, and is yet a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms *akhaṇḍa Saccidānanda*. His religion, unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu *sādhus*, does not mean the maturity of doctrinal belief, or controversial proficiency, or the outward worship with flower and sandal, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental perception, his whole nature burns day and night with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire, and lasts for long hours. While his interlocutors are weary, he, though outwardly feeble, is as fresh as ever. He merges into rapturous ecstasy and outward unconsciousness often during the day, oftenest in conversation when he speaks of his favourite spiritual experiences, or hears any striking response to them. But how is it possible that he has

such a fervent regard for all the Hindu deities together? What is the secret of his singular eclecticism? To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being Who is unchangeable in His blessedness and the Light of Wisdom.⁵⁰

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

পরমহংস রামকৃষ্ণদেব

বহু সাধকের বহু সাধনার ধারা
 ধ্যানে তোমার মিলিত হয়েছে তারা।
 তোমার জীবনে অসীমের লীলাপথে
 নূতন তীর্থ রূপ নিল এ জগতে;
 দেশ বিদেশের প্রণাম আনিল টানি
 সেথায় আমার প্রণতি দিলাম আনি।^{50a}

To the Paramahansa Ramakrishna Deva

Diverse courses of worship
 from varied springs of fulfilment
 have mingled in your meditation.
 The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite
 has given form to a shrine of unity in your life;
 Where from far and near arrive salutations
 to which I join mine own.^{50b}

RADHAKAMAL MUKERJEE

The strangest paradox was that this unsophisticated and unostentatious man of God, around whom gathered the nineteenth-century intellectuals of Calcutta, worshipped Christ and Mohammed.

Sri Ramakrishna's religion was beatific vision, his worship the perennial realization of the immanence of the Divine in every object and relation, his whole nature the image of God in all its

To the Paramhansa

Ramakrishna Deva

Diverse courses of worship
from varied springs of fulfilment
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to which I join mine own.

Rabindranath Tagore

purity, love and beauty. When he affirmed that he followed the paths of the different sects and creeds and practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, there were a strange passion and certitude from which there could be no escape even of a scoffer and an iconoclast.

India needed a tolerant and universal religion like that of Sri Ramakrishna that might found a new social ethics for our evolving welfare State on the spiritual intuition of the indwelling God in the common man, absolutely every common man, and foster infinite charity and compassion for all. Such an ethics, equalitarian, buoyant, and dynamic, emerged from every parable, every imagery, and every song of this God-intoxicated man who was as powerful in his gentle persuasions as in his unfathomable silence.⁵¹

RAMESH CHANDRA MAJUMDAR

The truth of the theoretical speculations of Bankim was demonstrated by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the greatest saint of the 19th century. Both by precept and example of his own life Ramakrishna brought home to an incredulous world, held under the spell of natural science, the reality of spiritual life and of the means to attain it as described in ancient Hindu scriptures, both Vedic and post-Vedic. He held that not only all the different forms of Hindu religion, including the Puranic and Tantric, but all religions, such as Islam and Christianity, are true in their essence and may lead to salvation, if properly pursued. This he demonstrated by himself practising with success the diverse modes of *sāadhanā* or spiritual discipline prescribed in the different religious cults mentioned above. ...Ramakrishna proved in his own life that the worship of Puranic deities through their images was as good a means of salvation as the worship of one God without any form. He gave a moral sanction, a

philosophical basis and a new spiritual significance to the neo-Hinduism which laid the foundation of Hindu nationalism on a secure foundation.⁵²

RICHARD SCHIFFMAN

If Kṛṣṇa was enough for Mīrā, and Jesus sufficient for Saint Francis, then why did Ramakrishna feel the need to cry out in turn to Kālī, to Kṛṣṇa, to Rāma, to Sītā, and even ... to Christ and the God of Mohammed? The mystics of the past had gone into the candy shop and made a single selection. Ramakrishna, on the other hand, had exited with hands and mouth and pockets overflowing.

In reflecting upon this mystery, Ramakrishna's disciples would probably say that the Master wanted to demonstrate through his actions that all embodiments of God are great, and that devotion to any one of them ultimately reaches the one Ineffable—God beyond all names and forms, God in all names and forms. This seems reasonable enough. But still, we must wonder whether Ramakrishna was being an intentional and premeditated as all that. Or was he simply driven by a hunger that he would not have tried to rationalize or understand? One thing is certain : the spirit of creedal narrowness that seeks to imprison the Infinite within a single approved symbol for worship was completely alien to his nature. And so was the complacency that tests content with what it already knows. Even in the future, when men gathered at his feet, treasuring his every word, Ramakrishna would ask the newcomer to tell *him* about God, and, if he spoke from genuine experience, the Master would listen rapt with wonder.

Ramakrishna was, by nature, incapable of holding himself aloof. From the moment a newcomer arrived, the Master would be chatting with a transparent sincerity. Invariably, after the

briefest civilities, the conversation would turn to God, and devotion ; everything else seemed insipid to him. It was not unusual that within minutes Ramakrishna would be taking perfect stranger into his confidence, speaking of his most intimate visions and other spiritual experiences in the same easy manner that others talk about the weather ... but always without a hint of pride or boasting. Like the child of God he was, the Master would say, 'Mother showed me this Mother told me Mother revealed. ...'

Ramakrishna's influence on those who lived within his orbit was manifested at every level, from the most mundane to the most metaphysical. His was a flame that burned and enlightened and that melted down the fixed metal of the whole person, only to remould it again in a simpler, truer form.

This transformation of character was Ramakrishna's greatest miracle and his most enduring legacy.

To one and all, Ramakrishna offered a vision of hope. God is not only for the chosen few who become *sannyāsīs*, but for anyone who cries out to Him with sincere longing. 'Wherein is the strength of a devotee?' he once asked rhetorically. 'He is a child of God, and his devotional tears are his mightiest weapon.'⁵³

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Allowing for differences of country and of time, Ramakrishna is the younger brother of our Christ...

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality

concentrating in himself the diversity of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the labour of generations. And with his victorious sign he marks a new era.

The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years, his soul animates modern India. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and Gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine *Śakti*, of whom Vidyāpati, the old poet of Mithilā, and Rāmāprasāda of Bengal sing.

Very few go back to the source. The little peasant of Bengal by listening to the message of his heart found his way to the inner Sea. And there he was wedded to it, thus bearing out the words of the Upanishads :

‘I am more ancient than the radiant Gods. I am the first-born of the Being. I am the artery of Immortality.’

It is my desire to bring the sound of the beating of that artery to the ears of fever-stricken Europe, which has murdered sleep. I wish to wet its lips with the blood of Immortality.⁵⁴

SARAT CHANDRA BOSE

This great teacher [Sri Ramakrishna] was Bengal’s contribution to the world in the last century. ...We and the rest of the world came under the influence of his teachings during his early pilgrimage and even more so, after he had completed his journey. ...To my mind, Sri Ramakrishna’s mode of approach to

different systems of worship inculcated in the different religions of the world is his special contribution to the history of the progress of religions in the present age. ...Sri Ramakrishna's teachings did not disturb a single religion of the world. ...He left no new religion as his legacy unto us. He did not ask anybody to change his religion with a view to realizing God. ...His teachings prove that each religion gives ample scope and opportunity to realize God. That was the distinctive peculiarity of his teachings. Towards the end of his sojourn into this world Swami Premananda, one of his disciples, heard him pray, 'Mother, do not let me become famous by leading those who believe in beliefs! Do not expound beliefs through my voice.'⁵⁵

SAROJINI NAIDU

In the garden of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, there stands an empty temple made of stone and one day, when I was giving the Kamalā Lectures to the University, the last day it was, I walked with him in his garden. He said to me, 'Have you found the text of today's address?' I said, 'No.' Then he said, 'You will find the text of your address here.' I walked with him and looked at the birds, trees, statues and at last I stood before that empty temple, when he said, 'Poet, have you found your message?' I said, 'I have.' Here is an empty temple in which there is no image because every worshipper must find in the empty temple the knowledge that he creates God in the image of his own soul. That is the message to the world of all great saints and prophets of the world and that was the message of Sri Ramakrishna. For him the temple was always empty, because it was always ready. It was always ready for him to place his deity, no matter whether for a moment he projected himself into the soul of the Mussulman or the Christian or the Confucian or the Zoroastrian or the Sikh or any other faith. He said, 'Here is a temple of

humanity and humanity must have a God. Where shall I find Him? Shall I produce Him in my limited individual consciousness? Or God shall be so infinite and so diverse that I shall seek Him in the image of the Infinite as He appears to his children in the deserts of Arabia, or on the mountaintops, in the caves and in the forests of many lands.’ And Sri Ramakrishna taught us that the temple remains empty because love alone can create an image of God and with that love, you are not limited, you become a part of the great humanity that worship God by many names.”⁵⁶

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN

While the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna did not penetrate so much into academic circles, they found their way into lonely hearts who have been stranded in their pursuit of pleasure and selfish desires. Under the inspiration of this great teacher there has been a powerful revival of social compassion. ...He has helped to raise from the dust the fallen standard of Hinduism, not in words merely, but in works also.⁵⁷

SATIS CHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAYA

Sri Ramakrishna lived a life of manifold spiritual realization. He approached Reality along numerous paths and had very varied experiences of it. ...This is a sort of experimental verification of the truth that while Reality is one and is formless and nameless in one aspect, it may have many forms and faces in another. On the strength of such indubitable spiritual experiences and firm convictions, Sri Ramakrishna taught many truths for the good of mankind. He lived in an age in which the world was torn by conflicts of creeds and cultures, dogmas and doctrines, theologies and philosophies, and the relation between any two religious sects or communities was embittered by intolerance,

jealousy and contempt of each other. It was the mission of his life to end these conflicts and bring about a reconciliation.

...In Sri Ramakrishna's teachings we have a solution of the vexed problem of God and the Absolute, which is more satisfying than any to be found elsewhere. ...Sri Ramakrishna not only preached the harmony of all religions, but his life itself was a harmony of all religions. He taught it and demonstrated it in his life by following many different religions and realizing the same God through each of them. ...He taught that all religions from crude image-worship to contemplation of the pure, formless Brahman are true and that they are all capable of leading their followers to the highest end of the religious life, namely, God.⁵⁸

SAYED MUJTABA ALI

Like him [Sri Ramakrishna] none had ever spoke in such a simple language. His words and the way of talking have their closest similarity with that of Christ. ...He was determined to attach greatest value to the folk religion, customs, rituals and language, and, hence, had continually used peoples' language and the mode of talking with heart's content.

...If for reasons of spiritual, social or political discord different sects living within the same society refuse to be cohesive among themselves, it results in an irreparable loss to that society as a whole, which may, even, lead to its enormous extinction. How many of the virtuous people in those days [We doubt] were aware of this truth?

...Paramahansa Deva decided to do away with such discords, so he never avoided the pointless and unpopular discussion centring the Form and the Formless. As a proof of that we frequently see that he was not satisfied with the company of his Hindu disciples and followers alone, and has earnestly

kept on asking – where is Vijay [Vijaykrishna Goswami], Sivanath [Sivanath Sastri] has assured me that he would come, Keshub [Keshub Chandra Sen] is very dear to me. But he hardly was willing to convert his Brāhmo disciples to Kālī-worship. With his entire heart he only yearned that the conflict should disappear. It is my firm belief that for obviating the conflict, Sri Ramakrishna deserves the unique glory.

The sage who could harmonize *Gītā*'s doctrine of *Karma*, *Jñāna* and *Bhakti* is, as it were, the man absolute – the Supreme man. ...Ever since these three ways were introduced in the *Gītā*, no fourth method has yet been discovered. He, who could harmonize these three ways, becomes the companion of Kṛṣṇa – and his name is Sri Ramakrishna.⁵⁹

SIVANATH SASTRI

The impression left in my mind by intercourse with him [Ramakrishna Paramahansa] was that I had seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst for spiritual life was so great and who had gone through so many privations and sufferings for the practice of religion. Secondly, I was convinced that he was no longer a *sādhaka* or a devotee under exercise but was a *siddha puruṣa* or one who had attained direct vision of spiritual truth. The truth, of which he had direct spiritual vision and which had become a fountain of noble impulses in his soul, was Divine Motherhood. ... Yet this conception of Motherhood stretched far beyond any idol or image into a sense of the Infinite. ...He would say, only fools make distinction between Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, they are the manifestations of the same Power.

Speaking of the spirituality and catholicity of his conception, one incident comes to my mind. A Christian preacher of Bhowanipore, who was my personal friend, once accompanied

me on my visit to Ramakrishna. When I introduced my friend to him, I said—‘To-day I bring a Christian preacher to you, who having heard of you from me, was very eager to see you’, whereupon the saint bowed his head to the ground and said, ‘I bow again and again, at the feet of Jesus.’ Then took place the following conversation :

My Christian friend—How is it, Sir, that you bow at the feet of Christ? What do you think of him?

Ramakrishna—Why, I look upon him as an incarnation of God.

My friend—Incarnation of God! Will you kindly explain what you mean by it?

Ramakrishna—An incarnation like our Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. Don’t you know there is a passage in the *Bhāgavatam* where it is said that the incarnations of Viṣṇu or the Supreme Being are innumerable?

My friend—Please explain further ; I do not understand it quite.

Ramakrishna—Just take the case of the ocean. It is a wide and almost infinite expanse of water. But owing to special causes, in special parts of this wide sea, the water becomes congealed into ice. When reduced to ice it can be easily manipulated and applied to special uses. An incarnation is something like that. Like that infinite expanse of water, there is the Infinite Power, immanent in matter and mind, but for some special purposes, in special regions, a portion of that Infinite power, as it were, assumes a tangible shape in history, that is what you call a great man ; but he is properly speaking a local manifestation of the all-pervading Divine power, in other words, an incarnation of God. The greatness of great men is essentially the manifestation of divine Energy. ...

During the last few years of the saint's life, my visits became less frequent than they were before. ...

At last when the news of his fast declining health was brought to me one day, I left all work and went to Dakshineswar. ...

That was my last interview with him, after which he was removed from Dakshineswar, was placed under the treatment of the most distinguished physicians of the town, and was devotedly nursed by his disciples ; but nothing could stay the progress of his disease and he passed away, leaving behind him a memory that is now spiritually feeding hundreds of earnest souls. My acquaintance with him, though short, was fruitful by strengthening many a spiritual thought in me. He was certainly one of the most remarkable personalities I have come across in life.⁶⁰

* * *

...রামকৃষ্ণের সঙ্গে মিশিয়া এই একটা ভাব আমার মনে আসিত যে, ধর্ম এক ; রূপ ভিন্ন ভিন্ন মাত্র। ধর্মের এই উদারতা ও বিশ্বজনীনতা রামকৃষ্ণ কথায় কথায় ব্যক্ত করিতেন। ইহার একটি নিদর্শন উজ্জ্বলরূপে স্মরণ আছে। [এরপর পূর্বে উল্লিখিত ঘটনাটি শিবনাথ শাস্ত্রী বর্ণনা করেন]...

রামকৃষ্ণের সহিত মিশিয়া আমি ধর্মের সার্বভৌমিকতার ভাব বিশেষরূপে উপলব্ধি করিয়াছি।...⁶¹

[After coming into contact with Ramakrishna, this one idea used to come to my mind that religion is one, only its forms are different. Every word of Ramakrishna gave utterance to this catholicity and universality of religion. I remember very clearly one of his illustrations in this connection. (Sastri then narrates the same incident as stated before)...

It was after mixing with Ramakrishna I have especially realized the spirit of universality of religion. ...]

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

From Vivekananda I turned gradually to his master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Vivekananda had made speeches,

written letters, and published books which were available to the layman. But Ramakrishna, who was almost an illiterate man, had done nothing of the kind. He had lived his life and had left it to others to explain it. Nevertheless, there were books or diaries published by his disciples which gave the essence of his teachings. ... There was nothing new in his teaching, which is as old as Indian civilization itself, the Upanishads having taught thousands of years ago that through abandonment of worldly desires alone can immortal life be attained. The effectiveness of Ramakrishna's appeal lay, however, in the fact that he had practised what he preached and that...he had reached the acme of spiritual progress.⁶⁵

TARASANKAR BANDYOPADHYAYA

Sri Ramakrishna's teachings propagate the purest and simplest truths which transcend the bounds of India and become all time relevant for the whole world.

Never has He recorded any of his teachings, nor has he ever felt the necessity of it. His teachings echo the spirit of Jesus's gospel.

Sri Ramakrishna has presented us the true character of religion and explained it to all to get both the Society and our minds rid of all vices and impurities. Swami Vivekananda is His gift to the world. And we owe a world of debt to Him for this. Our love for Him is boundless. It is spontaneous.⁶⁶

THOMAS MERTON

You have to see your will and God's will dualistically for a long time. You have to experience duality for a long time until you see it's not there. In this respect I am a Hindu. Ramakrishna has the solution. Don't consider dualistic prayer on a lower level. ... There are no levels. Any moment you can break through to the

underlying unity which is God's gift in Christ. In the end, praises. Thanksgiving gives thanks. Jesus prays. Openness is all.⁶⁴

WILL DURANT

[Ramakrishna] taught his followers [that] each [religion] is a way to God or a stage on the way adapted to the heart of the seeker. To be converted from one religion to another is foolishness; one need only continue on his own way, and reach to the essence of his own faith. [He said,] 'All rivers flow to the ocean and let others flow too.' He tolerated sympathetically the polytheism of the people, and accepted humbly the monism of the philosophers, but in his own living faith, God was a spirit incarnated in all men, and the only true worship of God was the loving service of mankind.

Many fine souls, rich and poor, Brāhmaṇa and pariah, chose him as guru and formed an order and mission in his name.⁶⁵

WILLIAM DIGBY

During the last century the finest fruit of British intellectual eminence was, probably, to be found in Robert Browning and John Ruskin. Yet they are mere gropers in the dark compared with the uncultured and illiterate Ramakrishna of Bengal, who knowing naught of what we term 'learning', spoke as not other man of his age spoke, and revealed God to weary mortals.⁶⁶

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