

# LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

*B. V. Sarveswara Rao*

COMPILED FROM VARIOUS AUTHENTIC  
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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The aim of the book is to give to the public in English a short but comprehensive chronological account of the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Great as are the difficulties of faithfully delineating the life-history of any famous personage, they are almost insurmountable when the subject of the biography happens to be such a striking figure as Sri Ramakrishna. For it is a noteworthy fact that no man has been the subject of so many conflicting estimates as the Prophet of Dakshineswar. His personality was a combination of so many apparently contradictory elements that it is baffling to the superficial observer ; that is the reason that he has been so variously described as a maniac, a good soul, a devotee, a saint, a man of the highest realization, and an Incarnation of the Most High. It is impossible to give any presentation of his life that will be universally satisfying ; yet no one by words and actions satisfied so many as he. We are so accustomed to gauging everything by our pet standards that anything that does not measure up to them is summarily disposed of as fantastic or impossible. A biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, therefore, must content himself with adhering to the truth, and with the presentation of the actual facts, leaving it to the reader to form his own opinion of the Master.

This book closely follows the chronology and treatment of the great Bengali work in five volumes, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* ("Discourses on the Life of Sri Ramakrishna"), by Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of the Master, who is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. We have purposely omitted some of the masterly expositions of abstruse points relating to the Master's life, as being too philosophical for the ordinary reader. Additional facts have been collected from the following Bengali sources: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* by the late Ramchandra Datta, and the beautiful Life in verse by the late Akshay Kumar Sen, both disciples of the Master ; *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, compiled from authentic records by the late Priyanath Sinha, alias Gurudas Varman, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, with the assistance of the senior Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission ; and the epoch-making work of Babu

Mahendra Nath Gupta, better known as M.—*the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in four volumes, from which some valuable conversations have been taken in their entirety. The materials for the life-sketches of four of the living monastic disciples of the Master have been obtained at first hand. One or two other sources are mentioned in their respective places. To all these authors we express our deep indebtedness. Thus the present work combines the essential facts of all the authoritative books on the subject with important additions. Where our authorities have differed we have accepted the version most worthy of credence.

A word of explanation is necessary with regard to the free introduction of the "supernatural" element in the book. Our main reason is that we could not help it, for the supernatural is the domain of religion. What the microscope or the telescope does for the scientist, a pure and highly concentrated mind does for the Yogi. Both reveal the wonders of invisible worlds non-existent to the uninitiated—the man in the street. Everyone of the so-called supernatural visions recorded in the book is a fact, and as such demands recognition. Science, specially psychology, is as yet in its infancy, and it will be hampered in its progress if facts are withheld, simply because in its gropings it is not able to account for them. Instead of shutting his eyes to them, the seeker after truth will do well to work upon these data for new hypotheses of spiritual phenomena. We expect our readers to keep an open mind, and if any portions of the book are not to their liking, to pass them by, and confine their attention to parts which appeal to them, of which there should be no dearth in this Life.

We make no apology for inserting some rather lengthy conversations (abridged in places), for they will serve to give the reader a glimpse of the Master's wealth of thought and expression, although much of the charm of the original has of necessity been lost in the translation. For a wider knowledge of them we refer the reader to any of the collections of his teachings.

The accounts of the association of the different devotees with the Master will, we hope, be found interesting. But the amount of space given to any individual should not be taken as an index to his relative importance, for we were limited by our material, and were unable to maintain the right proportions.

Mahatma Gandhi has kindly written a Foreword in appre-



ciation of the Master, which, we dare say, will be read with interest. We have every reason to hope that the book in its present form will fill a long-felt want, and help to establish a feeling of amity among the jarring creeds and clashing interests of the modern world.

PUBLISHER

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this edition the book has been thoroughly revised. One or two inaccuracies which slipped our notice in the first edition have also been corrected. It is hoped that the book will be more acceptable to the public in its present form.

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*December 15, 1928*



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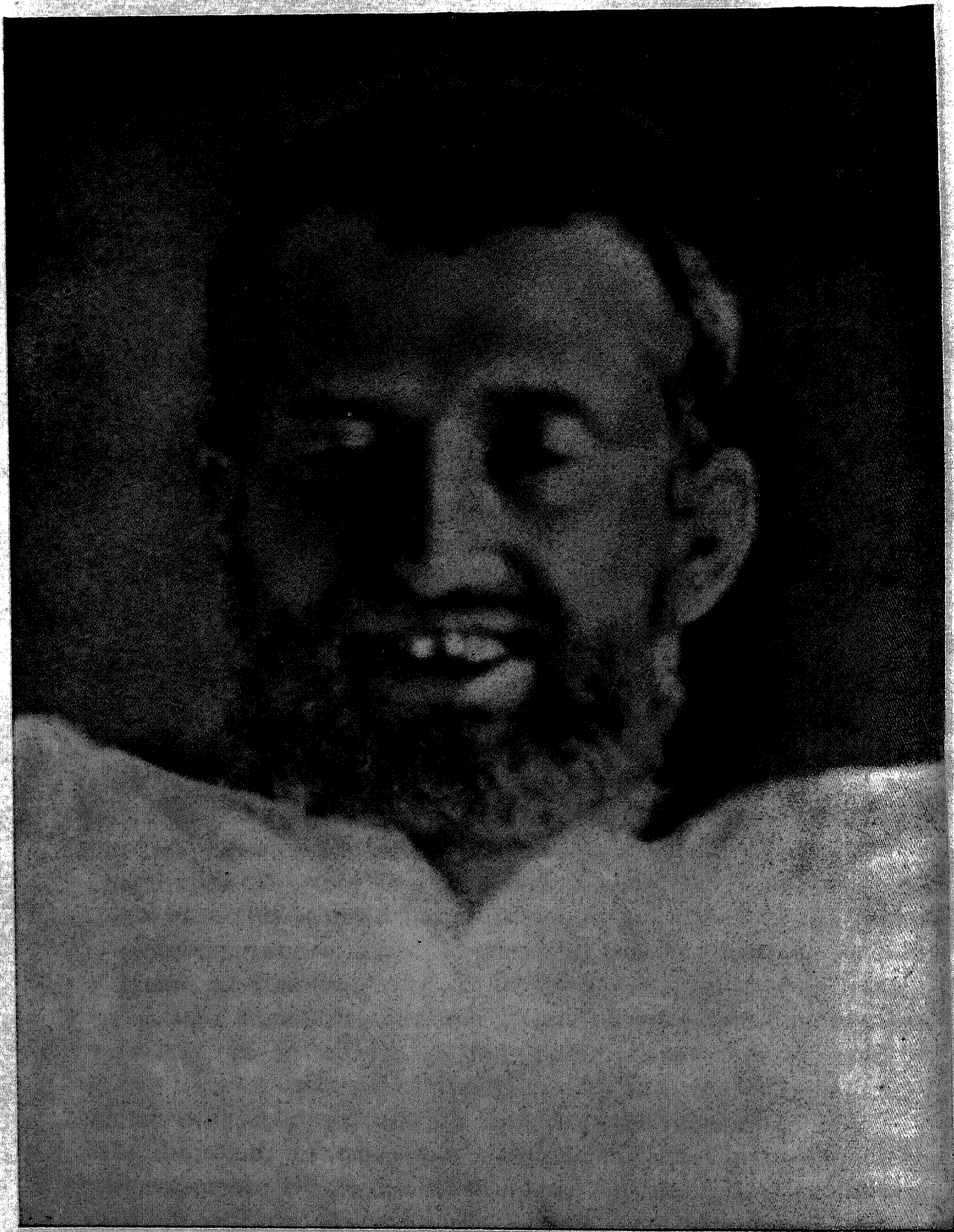
## FOREWORD

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 Ahimsa.<sup>1</sup> His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.

SABARMATI,  
*Margsheersha, Krishna I,*  
Vikram Samvat 1981<sup>2</sup>

M. K. GANDHI

(12-11-1924)





## ANCESTRY

In the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the village of Derey, District of Hooghly, Bengal, a Brahmin family, of which Manikram Chattopadhyaya (familiarly known as Chatterjee) was the head. The Chatterjees were God-fearing people and observed all the Hindu religious rites with the utmost exactitude and devotion. They had lived there for several generations and were respected by the villagers for their honesty, piety and straightforwardness. Sri Ramachandra was the tutelary deity<sup>1</sup> of the family as indicated by the use of "Rama" in naming most of its members. The Chatterjee family lived the typical Brahmin life of olden times, never deviating from the dictates of its conscience and always ready to lend a hand of succour to the needy and distressed of the village in times of calamity. Manikram was fairly affluent, with nearly fifty acres of land at his disposal, the produce of which, together with some outside income, was sufficient to maintain his family, and enabled him to help his poorer neighbours. In course of time, probably in the year 1775, he was blessed with a son whom he called Khudiram. He it was who later became the father of the remarkable being who is the subject of this chronicle. Two other sons and a daughter were born to him, all of whom were reared according to the family traditions, the sons being educated in the village Pathshala. After the death of Manikram the care of the family fell upon the shoulders of young Khudiram.

His qualifications eminently fitted him for this task. Of a kindly nature, with a strong sense of justice, unswerving honesty, even to a point detrimental to his own interest, and intensely devotional, he proved himself equal to the trust reposed in him, not only by his father, but by the Divine Mother, who was soon to give one of Her elect into his care.

He was more than blessed in his life partner, Srimati Chandramani, or Chandra, as she was called by the family. In addition to her faith in her husband and all his judgments, no matter what reaction they might have on her own life, she had a character of great simplicity and sweetness, intense faith in

<sup>1</sup> Among the Brahmins some aspect or aspects of God are chosen for household worship. The image is generally installed in a room set apart, and daily worship is performed at stated times. In families of other castes the services are usually conducted by the officiating priests.

and love for God and humanity. So universal was the latter that she was called the Mother of her little community. No one was ever turned away disappointed from her door ; the women of the village came to her in their trials and perplexities, knowing they would receive unselfish aid and advice.

Such were the unusual characteristics of the two who were chosen to be the custodians and guides of the early years of one of the greatest sages whose presence ever blessed this earth.

Nine years after the birth of his first son Ramakumar, Khudiram was visited in 1814 by a sudden stroke of misfortune. Ramananda Ray, the zemindar of the village, was a most tyrannical landlord, and the villagers were all afraid of him. One of them was guilty of some indiscretion, and Ramananda, to show his displeasure, entered suit on false charges and called upon Khudiram to give evidence in his (Ramananda's) favour. Khudiram not only had a horror of courts and avoided them whenever possible, but he knew as well that this was a concocted case ; if he acceded to the request, he would do violence to his conscience, perhaps for the first time in his life ; if he declined, he would incur the anger of Ramananda. After a severe struggle within himself, he decided to refuse to lend his support. Ramananda was very angry at Khudiram's audacity and decided to teach him a lesson. So he brought false charges against him too and Khudiram lost his ancestral property, including the huts which had so long sheltered him and his family.

Overwhelming as was this misfortune, he did not lose faith in the Lord Ramachandra, but bowed his head before His inscrutable dispensation. There was nothing for him to do but to leave Derey, and as his two brothers took refuge with their respective fathers-in-law, he felt free to accept the invitation of his friend Sukhlal Goswami of Kamarpukur to make his new home there. And of the once prosperous and prominent Chatterjee family of Derey there remained, after his departure, only the Shiva temple with its large tank and the affection and gratitude of the villagers.

The village of Kamarpukur is situated in the north-western promontory of the Hooghly District, adjacent to Bankura and Midnapore. The villages of Bengal fifty years ago presented quite a different aspect from that of today. Instead of desolate villages with inhabitants worn out by disease and starvation,

as may be seen since the invasion of malaria in 1867, healthy men and women passed their days in joyous affluence. Kamarpukur was no exception to the rule. The village landlords, descendants of a line of spiritual preceptors to the Maharajas of Burdwan, lived in that village, contributing, to a great extent, to its prosperity. Besides, it was situated on the road to the holy place of Puri or Jagannath. The villagers were mostly agriculturists and craftsmen. The village was famous for certain sweets and ebony pipes used in hubble-bubbles. There was also a thriving handloom industry, the products of which were sold even in the markets of Calcutta. Various religious festivals throughout the year added to the serene and innocent merriment of the village-folk. Sri Dharma,<sup>1</sup> the presiding deity of the village, was worshipped, specially during the Car Festival,<sup>2</sup> with great fervour. Three or four large tanks. Haldarpukur being the most noted, supplied the village with pure water. The flourishing condition of Kamarpukur is still evidenced by the debris of its old buildings and the ruins of great walls and temples. There still survives a large mango grove dedicated to public use by Manik Chandra Bannerjee. Manik was the zemindar of a neighbouring village and, because of his extensive charities, was lovingly called "Manik Raja" by the villagers.

At this time, Sukhlal Goswami, a kind-hearted and pious man, was the zemindar of Kamarpukur. The ruins of his brick-built residence and his tomb<sup>3</sup> are still to be seen. He died about the year 1824. His son, owing to adverse circumstances, had to sell the ancestral zemindary to the Laha family of the village, to whom it still belongs. It was at the invitation of this Sukhlal that Khudiram moved to Kamarpukur. Sukhlal gave him a portion of his own house, consisting of a few huts, and settled on him nearly half an acre of very fertile land known as the "Lakshmi Jala" or "Fortune's Meadow", for maintenance.

Khudiram entered his new house with his wife, his ten-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter, in his thirty-ninth year. The unjust eviction from his ancestral home and the subsequent welcome and shelter received at Kamarpukur left

<sup>1</sup> Probably a remnant of degraded Buddhism.

<sup>2</sup> The festival in which the Car of Jagannath is drawn with proper ceremonies through the streets of the city or village.

<sup>3</sup> The Goswamis are interred, according to the prevalent Vaishnava custom.

a profound and indelible impression on his mind. He was utterly disgusted with the world—its hypocrisy, malice, and greed. His love and devotion to God increased a thousandfold, and he learnt to lean upon Him more and more. The unexpected way in which he found shelter at a time when he was void of hope and nothing but ruin stared him in the face, filled his heart with calm resignation to the Divine will and a total indifference to all mundane things. He began to devote much of his time to prayer, meditation, and the worship of Sri Ramachandra. Sometimes whole days were passed in this way, for the fertile land of “Lakshmi Jala” did not make much demand on his time or energy. When the field was ready, Khudiram would transplant a few seedlings, with the words, “Glory unto Raghuvir”, leaving the rest to the labourers. The crops never failed him; there was always enough, even in times of drought or flood, to supply not only the simple needs of the family, but to help beggars and strangers as well.

At this time Khudiram came strangely into possession of the emblem of his tutelary deity Raghuvir. One day, while returning home from a neighbouring village where he had gone on business, he felt tired and sat down under a tree by the side of a paddy field, fell asleep, and dreamed a wonderful dream. His beloved Ishta,<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramachandra, in complexion like a young blade of grass, appeared as a boy and said, “Unnoticed and uncared for, I have been starving here for many days. Take me to your home. I am eager to accept your offerings.” Beside himself with joy, Khudiram replied, “My Lord, I am devoid of devotion and too poor to think of installing Thee in my hut. If I fail to show Thee proper respect, I shall suffer the agony of hell.” The boy Ramachandra reassured him and said, “Do not be afraid. I shall be satisfied with your service in spite of its defects.” Khudiram wept at this unsolicited mercy of the Lord and awoke from his sleep. As he looked about, he saw the place pointed out in his dream. With trembling limbs he slowly moved to the spot and to his amazement and joy found a Shalagrama or round stone emblem of Vishnu, sheltered under the hood of a venomous snake. He stretched forth his hands to take it, and snake disappeared. Calling aloud the name of Raghuvir, he clasped it to his breast.

<sup>1</sup> The aspect of the Lord chosen by an individual as his Ideal.

Examination showed the emblem to be of the type called Raghuvir. He took it home and regarded it as his own Ishta.

Khudiram soon attracted the notice and gained the respect of his neighbours at Kamarpukur for his intense devotion and unsullied purity. They sought his blessings, believing in their potency, and none would touch the water of the Haldarpukur when he was bathing there.<sup>1</sup> At this time he made an appreciable advance in spirituality. Keeping his mind on a plane of consciousness far above the world of sense pleasures, he began to have visions. Sometimes, while gathering flowers for his daily worship, he saw the goddess Shitala going before him in the form of an eight-year old girl, with a radiant smile and bedecked with various precious ornaments, as she helped him to pluck the flowers by bending the branches. At other times as he sat for meditation, tears of love trickled down his cheeks and his mind soared far away into higher regions where he found himself in close communion with his beloved Deity. Then, and when he uttered the Gayatri Mantra,<sup>2</sup> his face and chest became radiant.

The impression created by Chandra Devi in the village was equally great. Her kindness soon attracted attention. Beggars found that as long as there was a morsel of food in the house, she would share it. She was indulgent to the demands and importunities of boys and girls, and the village women came to her for help to solve their difficulties. Thus though the huts of Khudiram never smiled in affluence, they were a source of solace to many.

Sri Ramakrishna, later in life, referring to his parents, said to his disciples and devotees, "My mother was the very embodiment of rectitude and sincerity. She did not know much about the ways of the world and, being innocent of the art of concealment, would say what was in her mind. People loved her greatly for her open-heartedness. My father never accepted gifts from the Shudras.<sup>3</sup> He spent much of his time in worship, meditation and the telling of beads. Every day, while engaged in prayer as he invoked the goddess Gayatri his chest swelled and became radiant with a divine glow and tears rolled down

<sup>1</sup>As a mark of respect.

<sup>2</sup>A Vedic prayer to the Deity.

<sup>3</sup>The lowest of the four castes, according to the Hindu classification.



his cheeks. Again in hours of leisure, when he was not engaged in worship, he would make garlands for Raghuvir. He left his ancestral home to avoid giving false evidence. The villagers respected him as a sage."

After six years' residence in Kamarpukur, Khudiram married his son and daughter. Ramkumar attained proficiency in the Hindu code in the Tol<sup>1</sup> of an adjacent village, and soon was able to relieve, to a certain extent, his father's family burden. The Chatterjees had become comparatively prosperous. Ramkumar added to the income by giving opinions on disputed points of religious ceremonies or by assisting in the performance of specific rites. The story that Ramkumar had acquired supernatural powers still lives in the village. People looked upon his prophecies as infallible and related that after his initiation to the worship of the Shakti,<sup>2</sup> the Goddess bestowed on him miraculous powers in astrology, and that thenceforward he could tell whether a patient would live or die. Shivaram Chatterjee, Ramkumar's nephew, used to tell a story of his uncle's prophetic power. Ramkumar was in Calcutta on business and went to the Ganga to bathe. A rich man with his family was there also for the same purpose. In pursuance of the custom obtaining in some rich families for the strict maintenance of the purdah system, the wife was taken to the water of the Ganga in a palanquin. From that she was taking her bath. Ramkumar was standing near by and accidentally caught a glimpse of her beautiful face. With a deep sigh he remarked that the body which was being so scrupulously kept from public gaze would be consigned in the presence of all, the next morning, to this very Ganga as a lifeless corpse. The husband was greatly astonished, for his wife was young and strong. He invited Ramkumar to his home with a view to punishing him, should the prophecy prove to be false. But to the surprise and grief of all, the woman died.

On another occasion, in the case of his own wife, Ramkumar's vision was prophetic. This young woman, who was endowned with many auspicious marks,<sup>3</sup> seemed to bring with

<sup>1</sup> A school of the old type where Sanskrit learning in all its branches is taught.

<sup>2</sup> The Goddess representing the Creative Energy of the universe.

<sup>3</sup> Certain physiognomical marks which have been found by repeated observation to indicate future greatness, secular or spiritual.



her advent prosperity into the Chatterjee family and was loved by every one. But one day Ramkumar gravely told his relatives that, though everything appeared propitious, yet she would die at the birth of her first child. When she remained childless Ramkumar was relieved, but in the year 1849, at the age of thirty-five, she gave birth to a beautiful boy and expired.

With Ramkumar looking after the family, Khudiram had more time at his disposal and spent almost the whole day in meditation, worship, and religious discourses. He found that the only harbour of refuge in a distracted world was in continuous devotion to God. There arose in him the desire to go on pilgrimage, for did not the scriptures teach that God revealed Himself most in holy places frequented by devotees and sanctified from time immemorial by the presence of sages and anchorites?

It was probably in the year 1824 that Khudiram started on his long pilgrimage to Rameswaram in South India, a place highly venerated by the Hindus. It is associated with the sacred memory of Sri Ramachandra, who, on his return from Lanka, worshipped the God Shiva there. Khudiram travelled the whole distance of nearly fifteen hundred miles on foot, visiting various holy places on the way. This pilgrimage lasted about a year. Twelve months later, in 1826, his wife Chandra became the mother of a second son, who was named Rameshwar.

About nine years later Khudiram felt a strong inclination to go on another pilgrimage—this time to Gaya. Though advanced in years, he wished, according to the time-honoured custom of the Hindus, to redeem the souls of his departed ancestors by the reverential offering of Pinda, the oblation of barley balls, at the holy footprint of Lord Vishnu there.<sup>1</sup> In spite of his years, the journey of nearly two hundred miles on foot had no terrors for him. Khudiram started for Gaya early in the year 1835 and arrived there in the month of March.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts of service done in memory of departed relatives. While these are meant to satisfy the departed, the attitude of mind of the one performing such acts is the more important.

<sup>2</sup> Some are of opinion that Khudiram had already visited the holy cities of Vrindaban, Ayodhya, and Banaras, while at Derey, and named his first son and daughter—who were born not long after this event—Ramkumar and Katyayani, in memory of this pilgrimage. According to this version, he visited only Gaya this time. But others say that he visited first Banaras and then Gaya. No details of this visit to Banaras are available.

## 2

### BIRTH

Khudiram stayed about a month at Gaya, performing various ceremonies according to the scriptures. He went to the shrine of Vishnu, or Gadadhar, as He is called, and offered oblations to his departed forefathers. The joy which he felt on that day can better be imagined than described, for he had discharged one of his obligations as a son according to the scriptures. He felt that the spirits of his ancestors were blessing him. Full of humility and gratitude he thanked God again and again for giving him the opportunity of fulfilling his obligation. That night he had strange dream. He felt himself transported again to the temple of Gadadhar where in the solemn silence of the sacred precincts, he found his forefathers feasting with gladdened hearts on the oblations. Suddenly a divine effulgence filled the room, and the spirits of the departed fell reverently on their knees before a luminous Person seated on a throne. The effulgent One beckoned to Khudiram, who came forward and, with a heart full of devotion, prostrated himself. Addressing Khudiram in a tone of great sweetness, He said, "I am well pleased at your sincere devotion. I am born again and again to chastise the wicked and protect the virtuous. This time I shall be born in your cottage and accept you as My father." Khudiram was struck dumb with awe; when he regained the power of speech he said, "No, my Lord, I am not fit for this favour. Thou hast already shown me more than I deserve. I am too poor to serve Thee properly." The Lord consoled and reassured him. Khudiram awoke, his heart thrilled with joy. He understood that a divine being would bless his home, but he resolved to say nothing of his experience. He returned home about the end of April.

In the meantime, Chandra Devi was also having strange visions. One night she dreamed that a luminous person exactly resembling her husband was at her side. The vision persisted even after she awoke. She thought that someone must have broken into her room, and that the sound of footsteps had caused the dream. She arose, lit the lamp, but found the door bolted on the inside. She became so nervous that she was unable to

sleep the rest of the night. Next morning she called two of her friends, Prasanna, the daughter of Dharmadas Laha, and Dhani, her blacksmith neighbour, and told them what had happened. They laughed at her, told her not to repeat the absurd story, and assured her that it was nothing but a dream.

Another day when she was standing with Dhani before the Shiva temple adjacent to her house, she saw a flood of celestial light issue from the image of Lord Shiva and dart towards her. She was about to speak of the phenomenon to her friend, when the light entered her body and completely overpowered her, rendering her unconscious. Dhani nursed her back to consciousness and, hearing the whole story, was at first puzzled and then took it as a nervous disease. But Chandra felt as if she were with child.

The first thing that struck Khudiram after his return was the change in his wife. Her natural kindness of heart was increased to such a degree that it overflowed in every direction. More than ever she considered it her duty to help her neighbours in every possible way, supplying their needs from her own stores, even going without food, if necessary. And when she told Khudiram of her experience and that she felt that she was about to become a mother, he remembered his own visions at Gaya and was able to reassure her by telling her that they were going to be blessed with a divine child and that supernatural happenings were to be looked for in such a case. He advised her not to speak of her visions to any one. Chandra was greatly consoled and passed her days in complete resignation to the will of Raghuvir.

The present living members of the Chatterjee family relate that the prospective mother began to have visions almost daily. Sometimes she felt the presence of celestial beings ; at other times she heard voices. One day she awoke from sleep to hear the tinkling of bells from a child's anklets. Sometimes she was found speaking in whispers with invisible beings. She told of her strange experiences to her husband, saying that she had them not during prayer or meditation, but with her eyes wide open.

We make no attempt to explain the strange incidents narrated above. We shall only remind the reader that similar stories are associated with the advent of Prophets and Incarnations all over the world. The incidents here related are not

based on mere hearsay, but, as far as possible, have been gathered from authentic sources.

The blessed hour for which Khudiram and Chandra were anxiously waiting at last drew near. On the morning of February 17th, in the year 1836, Chandra told her husband that the time of her delivery was at hand, but the following night was wellnigh passed before, with the help of Dhani, she gave birth to a boy. The lying-in room where the august stranger was born was a small hut containing a husking machine and an oven for boiling paddy. It was the vernal season and nature had breathed new life into the world after the long winter. Birds with their sweet chirpings and flowers with delicious perfume heralded the advent of the new prophet, who with infinite love in one hand and infinite knowledge in the other came to deliver his message of hope to suffering humanity.

After giving the necessary assistance to the mother, Dhani turned her attention to the babe, which, to her surprise, was not where she had placed it. It had slipped into the adjacent oven, and was lying there half-covered with ashes, without uttering a cry! She picked up the infant and was astonished to find that it was as large as a child six months old. When the friends heard the glad tidings, there was great rejoicing, and blasts of conch-shells announced the blessed event to the outside world. Khudiram, an adept in astrology,<sup>1</sup> found that the infant was born at a most auspicious moment, giving promise of a brilliant future. Celebrated astrologers later corroborated this and prophesied a great and illustrious career for it.

Khudiram was overjoyed that the prospective greatness of his son confirmed his vision at Gaya and explained the experiences of Chandra Devi. He named him Gadādhara because of his wonderful experience at Gaya.

<sup>1</sup> From ancient times in India it has been the custom to cast the horoscope of every new-born child. Through it the future could be foretold with tolerable accuracy.

### 3

#### INFANCY

From his very birth Gadadhar had a strange fascination not only for his parents and near relatives, but also for his neighbours who came to the cottage of Khudiram whenever possible.

The pecuniary condition of the family improved appreciably, Ramkumar's fame as an expert in the performance of all religious rites and ceremonies was spreading far and wide, bringing a fair income to the poor family in its hour of need. Besides, as soon as the happy news of the birth of Gadadhar was sent to Ranchand, Khudiram's nephew, he anticipated the needs of the family and presented it with a cow, in addition to his regular help of fifteen rupees a month.

Six months passed, and the time came for the celebration of the ceremony of the first rice-taking. At first Khudiram thought it prudent to perform it in a humble way, in the presence of a few relatives. But under the secret instructions of his friend Dharmadas Laha, the Brahmins of the village requested Khudiram to celebrate it with pomp. Khudiram had not the means to manage the festival on such a big scale, but he had to give way to their importunities. He consulted his friend Dharmadas, who cheerfully bore the greater part of the expenses, and the ceremony was performed in a befitting manner. A large number of beggars were fed, and they all blessed the boy.

Meanwhile, from the birth of the boy, various supernatural<sup>1</sup> phenomena took place which filled Chandra with alarm. Though at times she was sure that a great soul had deigned to be born as her son, yet her mother's heart was troubled by apprehensions of some future trouble to Gadadhar through the evil influence of spirits or ghosts, which was her way of explaining these extraordinary happenings. Sometimes the child seemed too heavy to carry, and she had to call to her husband for help. A moment later Gadadhar would be light as ever. As happenings of this sort became rather frequent, poor Chandra became very uneasy.

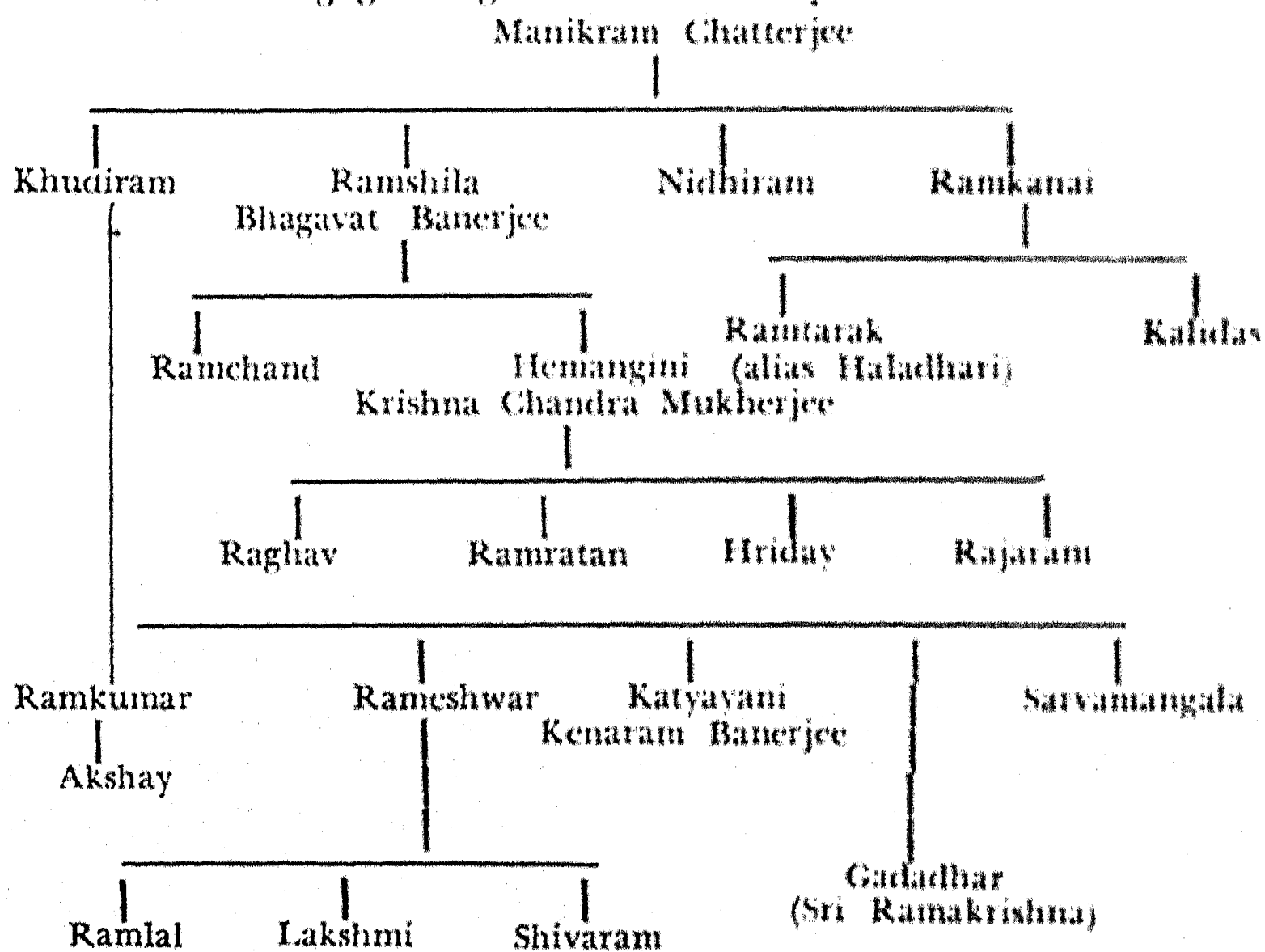
<sup>1</sup> Supernatural—from the standpoint of inexplicableness and ignorance of the laws of the subtle planes.



But Khudiram consoled her by saying that such incidents were not strange in the case of a divine child. Besides, their tutelary deity Raghuvir would always give protection. This, however, did not pacify the mother, and she fervently prayed to the gods for her son's welfare.

Three years rolled on, and in 1839 a daughter named Sarvamangala was added to the family.<sup>1</sup> Gadadhar was now five years old. He was a healthy boy, of exquisite grace. Khudiram was greatly surprised at his wonderful intelligence and memory even at this early age. The precocious boy learnt by heart the names of his ancestors, the hymns to various gods and goddesses, and tales from the great national epics. One hearing was enough; even after a great lapse of time he could repeat them. Young as he was, he showed great distaste for certain things, such as the rudiments of mathematics. He was an extremely restless boy; and, thinking that school might help him to control this, Khudiram sent him to the village school, where he was soon loved by both students and teacher. The classes were held in a spacious bungalow belonging to the Laha family, which on festive occasions was used for dramatic performances. There were morning and afternoon sessions.

<sup>1</sup> The following genealogical table will help the reader:





Khudiram's peculiar experiences before Gadadhar's birth had convinced him of the future greatness of his boy. From the very beginning he viewed him as different; the faults inexcusable in ordinary boys were overlooked in his case, and his spirit of waywardness was condoned. But there was a gulf of difference between the childish pranks of Gadadhar and those of other boys. Generally, when boys are detected in some mischief, they try to excuse themselves and refrain from repetition only through fear of punishment. Gadadhar was different. He freely confessed when caught, but nothing could intimidate him to the point that he would refrain from doing it again, did he so desire. Gentle and affectionate persuasions, however, always had their effects upon him and made him yield, and his sweet nature always prevented him from injuring any one.

At school Gadadhar made fair progress. He was able to read and write, but his aversion to mathematics continued as before. In those days minstrels used to go through the villages reciting mythological stories from the epics and Puranas; and the villagers, without any stage-setting, would enact them. Gadadhar never missed any of these performances and listened with rapt attention, noticing carefully the pose of the actors. Often he repeated such dramas before his friends almost verbatim—such was his wonderful memory. He learnt from the potters the art of moulding images of gods and goddesses and then made excellent ones at home. From the painters he learnt to paint them. This was his favourite pastime.

Thus instead of turning his attention to the acquirement of that learning for which he was sent to school, so that later he might earn his livelihood, Gadadhar directed all his energies to the study of the lives and characters of spiritual heroes. Constant study of those subjects often made him forgetful of the world and threw him into deep meditations. As he grew older, these turned into frequent trances whenever his religious feelings were aroused. Besides the great epics, he was interested in the folk-lore of his own and surrounding villages. Often he would make copies of some of the interesting incidents from books or manuscripts: some of these may still be seen at the Belur Math.

As he grew older, other traits of character began to manifest themselves. For example, he showed wonderful courage. The

places that other people shunned as being haunted, he visited without any year. Almost all the members of the Chatterjee family were open to psychic influences. This helped them into deep meditations, making them lose their identity completely in the thought of the Chosen Ideal. This often happened to Ramshila, Khudiram's sister, when she meditated on the goddess Shitala. At such times she was looked upon with respect and awe. Once when Ramshila was in such a mood, Gadadhar was standing by. Instead of being afraid at what he saw, he said afterwards with a smile, "It would be great fun if she who possessed my aunt got hold of me!"

But the chief characteristic of the boy, to which we have already referred, was his influence over everyone coming in contact with him. The boys with whom he used to play could not bear to be separated from him, and the villagers who had once seen him came again and again to Khudiram's house with sweets or fruits as an excuse to see him. This unusual power of attraction he retained throughout his life.

Manikram, a great friend of Khudiram, often invited the latter to his house. Once when Gadadhar was six years old, he accompanied his father. Manikram said, "Well, I don't think Gadadhar is an ordinary child. He has unusual marks on his body. His presence really gladdens my heart, and I wish you would often bring him with you." After that, if Khudiram were unable to go to see Manik, the latter would send for Gadadhar. The boy would spend the entire day with him, returning in the evening laden with presents.

We have already referred to the strong influence of religious books on the susceptible mind of Gadadhar. Whenever he read such books to the villagers, he did so with such feeling that for the time being he seemed to lose his own identity, and the audience would be spellbound. His relatives could not understand this and ascribed it to hysteria. Soon it was found that not only books, but beautiful scenery or some touching incident was sufficient to make him lose himself. And the village abounded in such stimuli. Nature's beauties and sublimities could be seen there in their primitive glory. One day an occurrence of this kind caused great anxiety to his parents and relatives. Sri Ramakrishna in later years narrated

this incident to his devotees in his usual poetic way. We give here the substance of what he said:

"In that part of the country (meaning Kamarpukur) the boys are given puffed rice for luncheon. This they carry in small wicker baskets, or, if they are too poor, in a corner of their cloth. Then they go out for play on the roads or in the fields. One day, in June or July, when I was six or seven years old, I was walking along a narrow path separating the paddy fields, eating some of the puffed rice which I was carrying in a basket. Looking up at the sky I saw a beautiful sombre thunder-cloud. As it spread rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes flew overhead in front of it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward sense, I fell down, and the puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Some people found me in that plight and carried me home in their arms. That was the first time I completely lost consciousness in ecstasy."

Though he seemed quite well when he regained consciousness, his parents were greatly frightened. Khudiram thought it wise to take precautions against a recurrence of this episode, lest it should do the boy bodily harm at his tender age. But Gadadhar reassured him by telling him that he had simply lost all outward consciousness as his mind was overpowered by an inexpressible emotion and unspeakable joy. However his parents kept him from school for several days.

## BOYHOOD

When Gadadhar was seven years old, the simple, quiet life of the Chatterjee family was suddenly interrupted by a sad event fraught with great consequences to Gadadhar. In the year 1843 Khudiram developed symptoms of indigestion, which soon turned into chronic dysentery. His strong body became emaciated, and in his sixty-eighth year he had not vitality enough to check the growth of the disease. The autumn season arrived. Every year Khudiram's nephew, Ramchand, celebrated with great pomp the Durga Puja festival at his home at Salampore. Khudiram usually attended. This year, apprehensive of the dark shadow looming in the future, he hesitated about going. But on second thoughts, he changed his mind, and set out with his eldest son, Ramkumar. A few days after his arrival at Salampore his illness took a serious turn, and on the fourth day of the celebration he became unconscious. Ramchand was greatly concerned. Realizing that Khudiram's last moment had come, he called to him the name of Raghuvir. At the mention of this holy name Khudiram suddenly became conscious and asked to be helped up to a sitting posture on the bed. He then uttered the name of Raghuvir thrice and expired. Ramchand and his family were overpowered with grief at the death of Khudiram. His body was taken to the bank of the adjacent river and the last rites were performed according to the usual custom.

The sad tidings reached Kamarpukur and cast an unspeakable gloom over the Chatterjee family. To a Hindu wife the death of her husband, who is her visible God on earth, is considered the greatest misfortune. Chandra Devi was now virtually dead to the world. Laying aside all the enjoyments of life—of which indeed she had very few—she concentrated her whole energy on prayer and meditation, and looked eagerly to the day when she would be united with her beloved in the other world.

This event unnerved Ramkumar as well, upon whose shoulders now fell the entire responsibility of the family. He had to look after his widowed mother, educate the younger brothers and manage the domestic affairs in keeping with the

traditions of the family. The death of Khudiram brought a great change in the mind of Gadadhar also. Every day he felt the loss of his father more and more. The striking contrast between his father's character and that of other people began to dawn on him. His naturally thoughtful mind became graver, though to the observer he still retained his usual air of youthful merriment. No one observed that the boy began to frequent the mango grove or the cremation ground in the vicinity alone and pass long hours there absorbed in thought, nor that his attention was focussed more than ever on Puranic recitals and the making of clay images of gods and goddesses.

Besides, there was a marked change in Gadadhar's behaviour towards his mother. Finding that she desired great solace from his company, he spent some time every day in helping her in her household work or in the worship of Raghuvir. He also became less exacting in his importunities, knowing she would be grieved if she could not supply his childish demands. He thought it his duty to lessen the burden of his mother's grief and to infuse into her melancholy life whatever joy and consolation he could.

The village of Kamarpukur, as stated before, was situated on the road leading to Puri, and in those days when there were few railroads, this route was much frequented by pilgrims, wandering monks, and others, mostly all on foot. The Laha family built a rest-house for these wayfarers. Gadadhar soon found a new source of pleasure in the company of the Sadhus; he delighted in their stories of various saints and different places, and prayers and songs. He knew already of their unconventional life, their indifference to bodily pain or pleasure, their devotion and resignation to God, and their contentment with whatever food came to them. The boy was beginning to be conscious of the transitoriness of the world. Contact with the monks strengthened this feeling. He delighted in spending hour after hour with them, listening to their religious discussions, learning songs from them, joining in their prayers, and sometimes even partaking of their meals and assisting them by fetching water or collecting fuel. They took a great fancy to him. Chandra Devi did not object. She rather rejoiced at this association of her son with the Sadhus and thought that their benedictions would be beneficial. But one day she was startled when the



boy came to her with his body smeared with ashes. He had torn his cloth into two and wrapped both pieces round his loins like Kaupins.<sup>1</sup> "Look, mother", he said with a smile, "I have become a Sadhu." The mother was anxious, for she had heard of pretended monks who in the guise of ascetics tempted boys and kidnapped them. She asked Gadadhar to shun their company. The boy, failing to convince his mother of the utter baselessness of her apprehensions, at last agreed to obey her and went to the Sadhus to bid them farewell. They were surprised and pained to hear of the mother's fears and went to her house to assure her of the safety of her boy.

Association with these itinerant monks and listening to their readings from the scriptures inclined the naturally emotional mind of the boy more and more to meditation. So we find him in his boyhood, long before he passed through the terrible asceticism in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, giving evidence of the transcendental nature of his mind—its difference from the ordinary one. The following incident furnishes an instance of his deep religious bent.

The goddess Vishalakshi, the presiding deity of Anur, a village close to Kamarpukur, was held in great veneration by the people of the neighbouring villages as well, who often went there to redeem their vows on the fulfilment of their particular desires. She was reputed to be a particular patron of the poor and outcast as well as of the cowherd boys. One day a party of women, amongst them Prasanna, the daughter of Dharmadas Laha, who was noted for her piety and great devotion, was on its way to Anur to worship Vishalakshi. Gadadhar insisted on accompanying them. Accordingly, he set out with them. As the party walked along, Gadadhar relieved the tedium of the journey with songs in praise of the goddess. Suddenly, he was overcome with religious emotion—his body became stiff and motionless, tears rolled down his cheeks, and he made no response to the women when they called aloud to him in their fright. Not being familiar with the trance state, they thought he must have had a sunstroke. Some splashed water on his face, others fanned him, but with no results. Finally, Prasanna in desperation called upon the goddess for help. The name of Vishalakshi had been repeated only a few times when the boy

<sup>1</sup> Sadhus' loin-cloth.



showed signs of returning consciousness, and presently he was himself again, with no evidence of any harm having come to him.

Gadadhar was now nine ; and it was time to invest him with the holy thread. This is the first memorable occasion in the life of a Brahmin ; in fact the scriptures consider him as a Shudra, a man belonging to the lowest caste, until this has been done. Then he becomes a true Brahmin and is permitted to utter the holy Mantras, and to worship the gods and goddesses ; he is supposed to enter a new life—a life of purity, sacrifice, truthfulness and great restraint—and is, therefore, called a Dwija or "twice born". Besides observing great restrictions in food and other enjoyments, the scriptures enjoin on him the strictest discipline in all phases of life, and condign is the punishment for any breach. Every Brahmin boy looks forward to this sacred ceremony ; Gadadhar was no exception.

A curious incident happened in this connection. After the investiture with the holy thread, it is the general practice with the newly initiated to take his first Bhiksha or alms from some relative, or person of equal rank. But it so happened that Dhani, the blacksmith woman of the village, had long ago prayed to Gadadhar to allow her the privilege of giving him the first Bhiksha, and the boy, moved by her genuine love, had agreed. Dhani waited with an expectant heart. After the ceremony was over Gadadhar told of his promise to his brother Ramkumar. Objections were raised on the ground that it was contrary to the custom of the family. But Gadadhar insisted on keeping his promise. The family was forced to give way ; and so it was from Dhani that Gadadhar took his first alms.

Reading this incident in the light of subsequent events, many ideas arise in the mind. First of all, it shows Gadadhar's great, undeviating love for truth. He had given his promise, and he was ready to keep it at whatever cost. At the same time it does not explain why he gave a promise which might bring social stigma on his family. Could it have been Dhani's sincere devotion that prompted him to do so ? May it not be that, even at that tender age, Sri Ramakrishna's every act had its meaning, and that his unerring intuition empowered him to recognise religious sincerity and to prefer it to social regulations, which, necessary as they are under ordinary circumstances,

must be set aside if the spirit of the law, instead of the letter, is to be honoured ?

So far, it was only the villagers who knew the great qualities of Gadadhar, although none had any idea of the great part that he was to play later. Shortly after the thread ceremony, an incident occurred bringing him for the first time before them as a teacher. He was then about ten years old. There was a great Shraddha ceremony in the house of Dharmadas Laha, to which a number of Brahmin scholars were invited. As generally happens on such occasions, the scholars were engaged in an animated debate over some subtle point. The argument lasted for hours. Their excited gestures and loud voices during the wordy warfare attracted a number of spectators, amongst whom was Gadadhar. While the other boys were chatting or imitating the gestures of the Pundits, he was listening with rapt attention. Finally, the boy whispered something to a Brahmin, asking if that might not be the answer. When the others heard it they accepted it at once as the only possible solution. Coming as it did from a boy of scarcely ten, they were amazed at such mental maturity in one so young.

Similar incidents are by no means uncommon in the lives of great ones such as Sri Krishna, Shankara, Sri Chaitanya, Christ, and others, who evidenced extraordinary powers at a very early age. It is said that before he was eight, the great Shankara had mastered the Hindu scriptures ; at sixteen he composed the masterpieces on Vedanta which take the man of ordinary intelligence a whole lifetime to read and digest. Sri Chaitanya, too, showed astonishing intelligence and memory when he was quite a boy. And we can cite a parallel instance from the life of Christ, who, in his twelfth year, confounded the learned Rabbis of Jerusalem with his wisdom—fully conscious at the time of what he was doing, as his answers to his parents clearly demonstrate. All this shows that by their very constitution they must have access to hidden reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom, not dreamed of by ordinary men and women. And in judging their actions we must show a spirit of humility and rid our minds of all preconceived ideas.

After his investiture with the sacred thread, Gadadhar was permitted to worship the family god Raghuvir. This filled him with great joy. He was aware of his father's great devotion

to Him. So when he sat down to worship Him, he thought of Him not as a stone emblem, but as God incarnate—the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the world. The hours he passed in worship and meditation raised his mind to a very high level, where he often had remarkable visions.

On a Shivaratri night, arrangements were made for a dramatic performance in the village, at the house of Sitanath Pyne, the theme chosen being a chapter from the life of Shiva. It is customary on such occasions for the devotees of Shiva to fast the whole day and keep vigil by prayer, worship, and songs in His praise. Four services are held in the four watches of the night. Young Gadadhar also fasted that day and resolved to pass the night at home in worshipping the Lord. The first watch was over, when Gayavishnu and some other friends came to him and said that his presence was needed at once at the house of Sitanath Pyne, because the man who was to play the principal part, the role of Shiva, had fallen ill, at the eleventh hour, and they must have a substitute, and Gadadhar had been selected. Gadadhar at first declined, saying he could not leave his worship; but his friends pointed out that there in playing the part he would have to think constantly of the Lord Shiva, and that that too was worship. So Gadadhar was prevailed upon to go and was taken to the green-room. While his friends were dressing him for the role of Shiva—smearing his body with ashes, matting his locks, and hanging Rudraksha beads and other accessories of the costume on him—his mind soared far from the consciousness of the world. When the time came for him to appear, he went on the stage with slow and measured steps and supported by his friends. His countenance was grave; and as he stood before the spectators he seemed the living impersonation of Shiva. The enthusiasm of the audience was unbounded. In the meantime the boy had completely lost himself in the divine glory of Shiva; his mind in its transcendental flight was transported into a region of calmness and serenity as immutable as the Lord Shiva Himself. The different phases of the great glory of Mahadeva, the God of gods, were revealed to him. Calm, sweet, self-forgetful, and oblivious of the pains and pleasures of the world, the great God appeared before him as the ideal of serene contemplativeness, immersed in Samadhi. There the boy stood, lost in the great sublimity

of Shiva, dead to the surrounding world. The manager of the performance with one or two elderly men of the village approached him and found that he was unconscious. He would have been taken for dead but for the stream of tears flowing from his eyes and the radiance of his countenance. The effect of this scene upon all pious hearts among the audience was tremendous. Finally his friends became alarmed and tried to restore him to consciousness, but in vain. The performance had to stop. He was taken home in that condition and did not recover outward consciousness till the next morning.

Such trances became rather frequent thereafter. While meditating or listening to a devotional song, his mind would be withdrawn from outside objects and remain long in a state of absorption. When questioned about this, the boy said that meditation on any deity brought the real form before his mind, and the emotions evoked thereby caused him to lose outward consciousness. His mother and relatives were at first much concerned at these trances, but the boy's unimpaired health and bodily vigour gradually set their minds at ease. Though he was often thus overpowered, there was no interference with his daily routine. He took great delight in all the religious ceremonies of the village, deriving equal pleasure from the worship of all forms of deity without distinction. This impartial love enabled him in the long run to realize that the same divinity was behind all images and religions.

Those few fortunate souls of Kamarpukur who were able to discern the greatness of Gadadhar actually worshipped him. One of these was Shrinivas, a low-caste Hindu whose family lived by making shell bracelets. The Master often spoke highly of this man's great piety and spirituality. He loved Gadadhar and took delight in his company, often holding animated discussions with him on the *Bhagavata*. One day, as he was making a garland for worship, Gadadhar came. Shrinivas at once brought some sweetmeats from the market and concealing them in his cloth, conducted Gadadhar to a secluded spot under a tree in the maidan. Looking about to be sure that he was not observed, he worshipped Gadadhar, hanging the garland on him and feeding him with the sweets. With eyes bathed in tears and a voice choked with feeling, he said, "I have become old and feel my end approaching. I shall not have the good luck



to see the many wonderful things that you will do in the world. I only pray that you will ever look with compassion upon this unworthy servant of yours."

We have spoken of the association of Gadadhar with the other boys of his village. They passed a great portion of the day together in play, often absenting themselves from school. Their favourite retreat was the mango orchard which has been dedicated by Manik Raja to the use of the public. They assembled there under a big tree to partake of the fried rice they brought from home. Gadadhar selected a number of young boys who could sing and formed a sort of dramatic company. The themes of their performances were episodes from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, which they heard often at the amateur village plays, which Gadadhar, owing to his retentive memory, could reproduce almost verbatim. He selected the part for every actor, himself taking the part of the hero of course. Gadadhar's favourite themes were the various incidents in the life of Sri Krishna, specially the *Vrajalila*, or the youthful sports of Sri Krishna with the cowherds and milkmaids of Vrindaban. The height of dramatic effect was reached when he sang the pastoral songs depicting the great exploits of Sri Krishna, or the pangs of Sri Radha at her separation from her beloved lover, while the other boys acted as Subal, Shridam, and other companions of Krishna. Young Gadadhar, with his fair complexion and flowing hair, a garland about his neck and a flute at his lips, would take the part of Sri Krishna; or as Radhika depict grief at separation from Krishna. Gadadhar, overwhelmed with the emotion associated with these themes, would fall into frequent trances. At times the whole mango grove would re-echo with the *Sankirtanas* which the boys sang in chorus. Soon the teacher learned that the boys absented themselves from school in order to spend their time in song and merry-making. One day he summoned them before him and asked them who was their ringleader. Gadadhar was pointed out, and the teacher asked him to repeat what he did in the mango garden with his friends. Boldly the boy sang a song, which so charmed the teacher that he forgot to punish them. Of these boys, the most intimate friend of Gadadhar was Gayavishnu. Gadadhar never forgot to share the sweets or fruits, presented by the village women, with him.



As he grew older, Gadadhar's distaste for the routine work of the school increased, though he loved to read the epics, Puranas and other sacred books. There he would find a response to the great spiritual fervour in his heart. Sometimes he read aloud the lives of Prahlada, Dhruva, or other great devotees to the villagers. The more his attention was turned in this direction, the more he neglected his studies. Because of his frequent trances, his eldest brother thought it wise to allow him freedom, so that he might not feel the strain of any sustained work.

Meanwhile the monotony in the life of the Chatterjee family was broken by various incidents, one of which at least greatly influenced the future career of Gadadhar. Rameshwar and Sarvamangala, who were now grown up, were married. The wife of Ramkumar was soon to be a mother, but this instead of causing any joy filled the family with apprehensions of coming danger. Her actions were very strange. She broke the traditional rule of the family of abstaining from food before the worship of Raghuvir; when taken to task by her husband or mother-in-law, she was resentful. In the year 1849 she gave birth to a male child, who was named Akshay, and expired soon after, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Ramkumar. From this time there set in an adverse tide in the pecuniary condition of the family. Rameshwar, though an expert in the Smriti and other subjects, could barely earn a decent living. Ramkumar's income was also unexpectedly diminished, and he was too old to find new ways of increasing it. He had scarcely recovered from the great shock of losing his dear wife, the loving companion of thirty years, when he was called upon to face financial difficulties. Forced into debt which he had no way of paying, he resolved to go elsewhere, to some place where he might turn his qualifications to a better account. Upon the advice of friends he decided to go to Calcutta and open a Tol at Jhamapukur, in the central part of the city.

The burden of the family now fell on Rameshwar. Young and inexperienced as he was, he tried to accommodate himself to his new situation. He had to look after an aged mother, a younger brother, and his own wife, as well as the motherless boy of Ramkumar. Gadadhar's aversion for education filled Rameshwar with great concern for his future. But he inherited Khudiram's precious trait of looking to God in everything and

resting satisfied with what was ordained by the Divine will. So though at times his spirits drooped, at others he forgot everything in the company of the pilgrims and ascetics in the rest-house of the Laha family. He knew that "God hammered so fiercely at His world, trampled and kneaded it like dough, cast it so often into the blood-bath and the red hell-heat of the furnace," because human nature was "still a hard, crude and vile ore which would not otherwise be smelted and shaped." And somehow he managed to support the family.

The death of Ramakumar's wife threw Chandra Devi into a sorry predicament. When her daughter-in-law was the housewife, Chandra Devi was to a great extent free from the concerns of the family and spent her time mostly in prayer. Now at the age of fifty-eight, she was hurled back into the world. Besides taking care of Akshay, she had to help in the cooking, the worship of Raghuvir, and other domestic affairs. In the grip of old age and infirmity, she must again pick up courage, leave her rosary aside, and give herself to the service of the family.

## ON THE THRESHOLD OF YOUTH

These changes in the Chatterjee family left an indelible impression on the emotional mind of Gadadhar. The death of his brother's wife, the unkindness of fortune, the diminishing income—all these strengthened his conviction as to the fleeting nature of worldly enjoyments. Even at that tender age he was disgusted with the world. His dislike for academic education increased. He found that men ran after worldly knowledge because it would help them to earn money or to gain prestige—the transitory nature of which was but too evident to him. He resolved to pass a life of meditation, prayer, and worship; and though he still performed the routine work of the day, the chief item of which was helping his aged mother in her household duties, he spent a great portion of his time in worshipping Raghuvir or in reading passages from the holy books.

We have already said that the neighbouring women were greatly attracted by Gadadhar's amiable character. After the departure of Ramkumar for Calcutta, the boy, owing to the nature of the duties he took upon himself, had to spend much time indoors, which afforded them greater opportunities of enjoying his company. They thronged Chandra's house after the day's work and grouped themselves about the boy, hoping to hear him sing or recite some holy text. So persistent were they that presently those things became part of his daily duty. In those days Bauls<sup>1</sup> and many Vaishnavas lived at Kamarpukur. Gadadhar learnt their devotional songs by heart and would entertain his mother's visitors by singing them as well as enacting some of the village dramas, he himself taking the different parts. He had a wonderful knack of imitating voices, especially woman's, and was a good mimic as well. When he found his mother or any of her friends in low spirits, he would cheer them up with his impersonations. There could be no trace of melancholy in the presence of this sprightly, ingenuous boy.

The companionship soon deepened into intimacy. The ladies knew of the extraordinary circumstances attending the birth of Gadadhar and were aware of his great spiritual fervour

<sup>1</sup> A sect of wandering religious singers.

and unflinching devotion. His simplicity, uprightness, piety and unbounded faith in the gods charmed their heart. Aged women like Prasannamayī regarded him as the boy Gopala, younger ones thought he was endowed with some of the characteristics of Sri Krishna. His great naturalness and perfect adaptability made them forget his sex, and they had no hesitation in confiding their secrets to him. His nature at this time became amazingly feminine, doubtless due to his study of the folk dramas and lyrics of the Vaishnavas, which deal mostly with the life of Sri Krishna and his relations with the cowherd boys and the milkmaids of Vrindaban.

The pathos underlying the attraction felt by the Gopis for their beloved cowherd Friend, the intensity of that love which, as it were, consumed them bit by bit, the pangs of separation, the supreme felicity at the reunion, and lastly, the great idealism at the back of these episodes made a lasting impression upon the mind of Gadadhar. Often in his yearning for God he would transmute himself, so to speak, into a milkmaid of Vrindaban, forgetting his real self. The pious young women of the village, who were mostly devotees of Vishnu, reminded him of the Gopis of Vrindaban, and, therefore, he sought their company. He knew that the Gopis were able to realize Krishna as their husband and feel the bliss of his eternal reunion, because they were women. He in his eagerness for the same goal would regret that he was born a man and was inclined to think that his masculine form was a great barrier separating him from his Beloved. If he were to be born again, he would like to be a child widow in a pious Brahmin family, who would only think of Krishna as her husband. With barely enough to maintain herself, she would have a milch cow, a spinning wheel and a plot of land about her hut to grow vegetables. An old woman would act as her guardian. She would prepare various sweets from the milk of her cow and preserve them for her Beloved. After finishing the day's work she would sit by the wheel and while spinning, give vent to her feelings in a rapturous song. Then in the mellowed light of the evening Sri Krishna would enter the hut stealthily as the cowherd boy and take those sweets. Thus would his fancy wander.

This ideal of Gadadhar was not literally fulfilled; but he realized Sri Krishna in this very life in the form he wished, as

we shall see afterwards. While enacting female parts, he would dress himself accordingly, and his representation was perfect. Often out of fun he would go in the guise of a girl to the Haldarpukur, carrying a waterjug after the fashion of the country women, and though he walked with people who had known him since birth, they scarcely recognized him. Sitanath Pyne, whose house was close to Khudiram's had seven sons, and eight daughters with him at Kamarpukur, even after their marriage. This family lived in terms of great intimacy with Chandra. Gadadhar spent long hours there reciting stories from the Puranas. Many of the village women visiting, with the ladies of the house, had the opportunity of hearing these recitations and of enjoying Gadadhar's boyish pranks.

A neighbour of Sitanath's, named Durgadas Pyne, was a strict advocate of the purdah system. He boasted that no male outsider had ever penetrated his women's quarters. One day Gadadhar overheard him and told him that by education and devotion to God alone could the chastity of women be preserved, not by confining them within a zenana. "Besides", he added, "I can easily gain access to yours." Durgadas challenged the boy to do it. "All right, we shall see" he replied and went away smiling.

One evening Durgadas was chatting with a number of friends, when a poorly dressed woman, her face hidden under a veil and with a basket on her arm, came and stood before them. She introduced herself by saying that she belonged to a weaver family of an adjacent village and had come to the market to sell yarn. Her friends had all gone home leaving her behind, and as it was impossible for her to return alone at that hour, she prayed that she might be allowed to pass the night in his family. Durgadas asked the woman a few questions and then said, "All right; go inside and speak to the ladies." The woman expressed her gratitude and went inside. The women, finding her young and of great simplicity, invited her to stay the night and gave her something to eat. She seated herself near by, and while partaking of the refreshments, scrutinized every room in the house, joining, now and then, in the conversation. Some three hours passed in this way. In the meantime, Chandra missed Gadadhar; when some hours elapsed and he was still absent, she became very anxious and sent Rameshwar



in search of him. Rameshwar went first to Sitanath's house, for it was there that the boy spent most of his time. But he was not there. He sought him elsewhere calling his name aloud as he went. As he passed Durgadas's house, a voice from the women's quarters answered: "I am coming, brother." The women were amazed to find that the stranger was none other than Gadadhar in disguise. Durgadas, thus outwitted, was at first annoyed but later entered into the fun of the situation and congratulated the boy on his success. The ice being thus broken, the ladies of this family, too, began to frequent Sitanath Pyne's house when Gadadhar was there. And when he would fall into trances during the devotional songs, they would worship him, thinking that Krishna or Gauranga was manifesting in that pure body. Later, they presented him with a gold flute and a complete outfit for both male and female parts. The women of the Pyne family cherished his memory during their whole lives; and when, in 1893, some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to Kamarpukur, Rukmini, one of Sitanath's daughters, then sixty years old gave the following interesting account of their association with Gadadhar: "You see our house there, a little to the north. It is now in a dilapidated state; and very few members of our family survive. I was then seventeen or eighteen years of age. Ours was a thriving family. Sitanath Pyne was my father, and we were altogether seventeen or eighteen sisters and cousins, all of about the same age. Gadadhar used to play with us from his very boyhood. We were, therefore, in terms of close intimacy with him. Even after we had married and come of age, he used to visit our house; and though he had grown up, he had free access to our inner apartments. My father loved him dearly and adored him like his own Ishta. 'You have so many girls at home,' complained some neighbours to my father, 'and Gadadhar is not young; why do you allow him to visit your family so frequently?' 'Don't you worry,' my father would reply, 'I know Gadadhar too well to think ill of him.' Gadadhar used to recite stories for us from the Puranas as we went about our daily household duties. How can I describe the bliss that we enjoyed in his company? If perchance he missed a day, we became extremely restless, thinking that he might be ill. One of us would go to Chandra Devi's on some pretext or other,

whilst the others waited at home for news. His every word was a delight to our ears ; the days he was unable to be with us we spent in talking of him."

Not only did he make an abiding impression on the women of the village, but he influenced the men also by his amiable character and versatile genius. He often joined them in the evening when they congregated for Kirtana or to read passages from the *Bhagavata* or other holy books. There were several such centres in the village. No one in the village could read as he did or explain so lucidly. His fervour, frequent ecstatic moods, melodious voice, and graceful dancing sent a thrill of joy into the hearts of the villagers. And his merriment and jests were enjoyed by all.

Though Gadadhar was restless, buoyant, and merry, they were not blind to his wonderful intelligence and deep insight ; and he often amazed them with his wisdom. He had the unusual power of seeing everything from a different angle, and was often able to solve questions when the wisest among the men of the village were unable to do so. He never hesitated to say exactly what he meant, which made hypocrites shun his company for fear of exposure. There were some few amongst the villagers who were fortunate enough to be able to recognise his great spiritual potentialities, and predicted a great future for him, although not the direction in which he would develop. An instance of this kind has already been narrated in connection with Shrinivas.

It was about this time that the idea seems to have come to him that he was destined to fulfil some great mission in life, he did not know what, though the realization of God was to him even then the only purpose worthy of consideration. The monastic life had a strong attraction for him. Much as he would have liked to have taken up the begging bowl and renounced everything for the Lord's sake, the thought of the plight of his mother and brothers made him forgo his desire. In the struggle between the two ideas he was powerless to decide, and could do nothing but resign himself to the guidance of Raghuvir, fully believing that He would show the way out when the time came.

His aversion to school was becoming daily more pronounced, and he would have given it up but for his friends

there, specially Gayavishnu. But a way to leave school without causing distress to any one unexpectedly presented itself. An amateur dramatic company was formed in the village, and Gadadhar was asked to join it and take the chief roles. As he did not have time for both school and study of the various dramatic presentations, he chose the thing that appealed to him, and was thus able to give up school with a clear conscience. The mango grove of Manik Raja was the place selected for rehearsals. Gadadhar not only played the chief roles, but took upon himself the task of training the other boys. Incidents from the lives of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna were dramatized. From the start, the project was a success. Gadadhar was in his element, and we are told of his frequent trances during the performances.

At this time Gadadhar showed marked talent in painting and clay modelling, though he had had no special training. His powerful concentration and intuitive idealism were great help. He would often surprise professional moulders by pointing out inaccuracies in the execution of some delicate part of an image, the eyes, for instance, and would direct them how to set them aright. In his ecstatic moods he saw various divine forms ; and these visions, coupled with his artistic faculty, developed his critical faculty and enabled him to produce figures of great beauty.

Gadadhar was now seventeen years old, and Ramkumar was finding that he could not manage all his duties in Calcutta alone. Besides teaching in the Tol, he had to conduct the worship in a number of families. This increased his work so much that he felt the need of an assistant. On one of his visits to Kamarpukur he marked Gadadhar's peculiar indifference towards school ; and when he learnt that Gadadhar had given up his studies and was roaming the village with his friends and companions, he decided, after hurried consultation with his mother and Rameshwar, to take him to Calcutta, where he might supervise his studies and have his help in his household duties. Gadadhar readily agreed to this proposal, and on an auspicious<sup>1</sup> day he set out for Calcutta with the blessings of Raghuvir and his mother.

As he bade farewell to Kamarpukur and all its happy

<sup>1</sup> From the standpoint of Hindu astrology.

memories extending over a period of seventeen years, his heart was overpowered with grief. The future, with all its undisclosed possibilities, lay before him ; and he was making a step forth into the unknown, leaving behind the security of home and the love of all his childhood friends, to say nothing of the aching void in the hearts of the men and women to whom he had come to mean so much.

This, in short, is the first of the four great acts in the drama about to unfold itself at Dakshineswar. To put it differently, it marked, as it were, the first stage of development of a gigantic banyan, the numerous branches of which were destined to afford shelter and comfort to millions of weary travellers in the wilderness of the world.

## “BREAD-WINNING EDUCATION”

Gadadhar began to assist Ramkumar in his daily work. In the Tol Ramkumar taught astrology and Hindu law. The income from the school was not much ; he could ill afford to forgo the money derived from officiating as family priest, little time as he had for it. When Gadadhar came to Calcutta, he was, therefore, entrusted with the duties of the priest, which he was glad to discharge. In a short time he made his influence felt in the families he visited. The heads of these families, particularly the women, found striking contrast in his behaviour to that of his predecessors. Instead of hurrying through his work, he would perform it with great diligence and conspicuous devotion ; his honesty, rectitude, devotion, and purity of heart impressed all who came in contact with him. He would pass hours in these families either singing by request his favourite songs or rendering little services. The simplicity and integrity of his character removed all barriers to free association with them. Here, too, he soon formed a circle of friends and admirers, all belonging to respectable families, like that of the late Raja Digambar Mitter, in whose company he delighted to spend his time. Hence he did not have much leisure for his studies, and Ramkumar found that one of the objects in having the boy with him was being frustrated. For the first few months he gave the boy liberty, for he knew he was unaccustomed to any repression. In his native village he used to roam at will and do whatever he liked. Now he was in new surroundings and amongst strange faces ; and Ramkumar thought it best to be indulgent until his old friends and associations of Kamarpukur were forgotten. So he allowed him to enjoy the new friends so that he might forget the sorrow of separation from the old. But when, after some months, Gadadhar still showed no interest in his studies, Ramkumar thought it unwise to countenance any further laxity. The fortunes of the once prosperous Chatterjee family were fast dwindling, and it was necessary that Gadadhar become independent and add to the family income as well. Rameshwar, though a man of attainments, was not a money-maker. Gadadhar's



behaviour did not warrant the hope that he would be any better. On the contrary, he manifested a complete indifference to worldly matters. One day Ramkumar took the boy aside and admonished him for his apathy towards education and his general indifference.

"Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education?"—was the spirited reply of the boy, "I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and getting which one is satisfied for ever." Ramkumar did not realize the full import of this laconic answer, for he was ignorant of the inner psychology of this wonderful, precocious boy. Gadadhar looked at the world with a different eye. His brother's experience had somewhat reconciled him to the selfishness of the world. At home Gadadhar saw that the aim and purpose of average humanity was towards the senses; things seemed no different to him in Calcutta. A few months' stay in this city showed him clearly the drift of the people's minds as well as their motives. They were running after the-transitory pleasures of the world and dying for name and fame. Enjoyment and the survival of the fittest were the watchwords of the day, and this precious human life was being wasted. God, spirituality, and religion were so many words the import of which had long been forgotten; and the holy books were the legacy of a superstitious ancestry, not worth the paper on which they were written. The education which Gadadhar was receiving tended in the same direction. Obviously it could not satisfy his mind, in which, in the midst of all his daily occupations, the idea was always uppermost that life had a deeper meaning. He realized more and more that he was born for purposes different from those of the ordinary run of men, that he must lead a life commensurate with those purposes. He asked himself, "Shall I obtain piety, devotion, and divine fervour by pursuing this education?" "No," was the emphatic reply. "Will it enable me to be as God-fearing and upright as my father?" "No," the reply echoed from his heart. "Shall I be able to realize God and escape from universal ignorance and clinging to the senses?" Again a negative answer. "Then what shall I do with this education which cannot help me to see God or to transcend the miseries of the world? I would rather remain ignorant all my life than throw away my cherished ideals by not following the path to God"—

was the conclusion the boy reached. Bread and butter could not be the object of human life ; they did not help towards release from disease, infirmity, and death. So the boy longed to acquire that wisdom which would take him across this ocean of life and death. In vain did he look for illumination in the pile of books in his brother's room, or in the scholars of the day: nothing but impervious darkness greeted his eyes. They could not show him the way to reach the goal.

So without a moment's hesitation he gave that reply to his brother's gentle reprimand. Ramkumar could scarcely believe his ears and was puzzled to know what to do. In vain did he try to convince the boy of the utility of learning, painting in glowing colours its bright prospects and the easy and happy life of the educated man of the city. These arguments made no appeal to Gadadhar's reason, nor did they cause him to budge from his position. Ramkumar had to give way for the time being.

Two years rolled on. Ramkumar's pecuniary condition instead of improving became worse ; he found that sooner or later he would have to incur debts which he had no prospects of repaying. The hereditary profession of priesthood and teaching was not very lucrative, but knowing nothing else he had to cling to it. But he surrendered himself to the will of Raghuvir and let himself drift along the current of events, as he found it futile to struggle against it. When matters were approaching a climax, a new event, with far-reaching consequences in the life of young Gadadhar, coming from a most unexpected quarter, gave Ramkumar fresh courage.

## THE DAKSHINESWAR TEMPLE

In the Jaun Bazar quarter of Calcutta there lived a rich widow named Rani Rasmani, with four daughters. On the death of her husband, Rai Raj Chandra Das, she had inherited immense properties, and so carefully and intelligently did she administer the affairs of the estate that she bequeathed it to her successor with increased revenues. Besides her business ability and courage, she was remarkable as well for devotion to God, faith in religion, and love and sympathy for the poor. To this day her extensive charities are still spoken of, and various charitable works in and near Calcutta remain to testify to her generosity.

She was fortunate in having as son-in-law Mathura Mohan or Mathura Nath Bishwas, her peer in every respect and a competent assistant in the management of her affairs. He was married to the Rani's third daughter, on whose death he took the fourth, Jagadamba Dasi, as wife.

The goddess Kali was Rani Rasmani's special object of devotion, her image even appearing on the seal of the estate. For many years she had the desire to make a pilgrimage to Banaras, and had even set aside money for the purpose, but the heavy burden of administration of the estate always stood in the way. But when Mathur signified his willingness to shoulder the burden, she proceeded to make arrangements to fulfil her heart's desire. Everything was in readiness, and the Rani had a dream in which the goddess appeared to her, ordered her to abandon the journey, and told her to build and dedicate a temple to Her on the bank of the Ganga. If this were done, She promised to manifest Herself there in the image set up.

Another account says that Rasmani had actually set out on the pilgrimage, and on her boat on the Ganga beside the village of Dakshineswar she had her dream. Whatever the truth of the matter might be, she abandoned the idea of the pilgrimage and set about carrying out the divine injunction. In the year 1847 twenty acres of land at Dakshineswar on the Ganga was purchased from Mr. Hastie, an Attorney of the

Calcutta Supreme Court ; and the temple buildings, which took some eight years to complete, were begun.

Dakshineswar is four miles to the north of Calcutta. The Ganga flows by the west side of the temple garden, where its bathing ghat is located. A visitor coming by boat to see the temple first ascends these steps and enters a large open portico which is placed in the middle of a row of twelve Shiva temples, on the north and south of it. East of these there is a paved court, in the centre of which are two large temples, the one on the north, dedicated to Krishna and Radha and that on the south to the goddess Kali. In the latter, on a beautiful thousand-petalled silver lotus, lies the prostrate figure of Shiva on whose breast, facing the south, stands the Divine Mother known as Bhavatarini or the "Saviour of the world" chiselled out of a single piece of basalt. There are nine domes with spires to this temple. In front of it is the spacious music hall, a rectangular court, the gorgeous terrace of which is supported by stately pillars. On the south, east, and north sides of the courtyard are rooms used as quarters for the temple-staff, and store-rooms, kitchens, etc. In the north-west corner of the courtyard and immediately to the north of the row of Shiva temples is a chamber which is of special interest to us, for it was here that Sri Ramakrishna lived while in the temple. This room has a semi-circular verandah on the west, whence he could view the Ganga. In front of this balcony is a path running north and south ; further west is the flower garden, and just beneath that flows the Ganga. Outside the temple compound proper, lying to the north of it, is a building which is used by the members of Rasmani's family when they visit the garden. There are two concert-rooms, one on the south-west and the other on the north-west corner of the temple compound. The garden is provided with two tanks, and many trees and plants add to its beauty. The most noticeable of these trees is the large banyan which played so conspicuous a part in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and next in importance is the Bacl tree on the northern extremity of the garden. We shall have occasion to refer to them later on.

The day fixed for the installation of the statue of the goddess was May 31st, 1855, a sacred day, known as Snanayatra. Everything was ready, and the Rani's heart was filled with joy

at the thought that the fulfilment of the Mother's promise to manifest Herself there and to bless her was so close at hand. But at the last moment, certain unforeseen obstacles arose which seemed to destroy her plans.

In this bustle of preparation for the dedication an important fact had been overlooked. The Rani was a Shudra by caste, and, therefore, no orthodox Brahmin would officiate as her priest, or partake of sacramental food in her temple, for according to the orthodox custom it was derogatory to a Brahmin to worship for a Shudra or to accept gifts from him. The Rani was in a dilemma, for not only could there be no installation ceremony without a priest, but a purpose she had secretly cherished for a long time of making an offering of cooked rice to her beloved Kali would be defeated as well, for the right of offering cooked rice was essentially a Brahminical one, not shared with the other castes ; and if no priest could be found to dedicate the temple or to make the offering for her, things would be at a deadlock. But she was a woman of courage and determination, not to be daunted by even the greatest difficulties, and she sought the sanction of the Shastras, writing to many Pundits for opinions. None of the replies was favourable. The Rani was in despair. The plans of a lifetime seemed to be coming to naught. It was at this moment that a letter came from Ramkumar in which he expressed the opinion that if the Rani made a gift of the Kali temple to a Brahmin, endowing it with sufficient funds for maintenance, it would be in keeping with the injunctions of the Shastras, and no Brahmin would be considered degraded by acting as priest or partaking of the food offered there. Though there was some grumbling amongst the Pundits at this opinion, the Rani was much pleased, not only at the liberality of the views expressed, but also at the opportunity it gave her to carry out her plans. Indeed such an opinion was heretical, and it required great courage on Ramkumar's part to voice it.

But the Shastric sanction alone was not sufficient. The Rani had to get a Brahmin sufficiently learned in the scriptures to perform the Puja ceremony in accordance with their injunctions. There were many difficulties in the way because of the rigidity of the caste system. A temple built by a Shudra woman was regarded with suspicion, and no high caste Brahmin



would worship there, to say nothing of accepting the office of priest. Even though the Kali temple had been given over to a Brahmin, one acting as priest for a Shudra woman would lose honour with his fellow Brahmins.

It was Mahesh Chandra Chatterjee of Sihore, a friend of Ramkumar and an employee of Rani Rasmani, who cut the Gordian knot. He appointed Kshētra Nath, his elder brother, priest to the Radhakanta temple, knowing that if one Brahmin were willing to accept office there, others would follow his lead. To find a priest for the Kali temple was more difficult. In his extremity he thought of Ramkumar, whose scholarship and devotion he knew. But the difficulty with him was that he came of a very orthodox family that adhered rigidly to the rules and practices enjoined by the scriptures. But there was no time to lose, for the day of the consecration of the temple and the installation of the goddess was drawing near. Accordingly, Mahesh went to Rani Rasmani and asked her to send to Ramkumar through him an invitation to become priest of the Kali temple. The Rani wrote to Ramkumar as directed, saying that as it was due to his advice and suggestions that the consecration of the temple to Kali had been made possible, she depended upon him to extricate her from another awkward position, that of having no competent person to perform the opening ceremonies. She said further that such a sacred and responsible task could not be entrusted to every Brahmin, and that a pious and learned person such as he was indispensable. Armed with this letter Mahesh went to see Ramkumar and explained the situation. He asked Ramkumar to take the place only until a competent priest would be found. Ramkumar agreed on this condition; but charmed by the kind and respectful treatment of the Rani and Mathur, he remained there till his death.

The day of consecration arrived. The ceremony was performed with great pomp. Thousands of beggars were fed sumptuously. Learned Brahmins were invited from afar to grace the occasion, and they were duly honoured. It is said that the Rani spent altogether nine lakhs of rupees for the construction of the temple and its opening ceremony. She further bought a large zemindary for two lakhs and twenty-six thousand rupees in the District of Dinajpur from Trailokya Nath Tagore, and set its income apart for the maintenance of the Kail temple

by a deed of gift which she executed before her death.

The temple was consecrated. The Divine Mother who is Life and Consciousness itself was invoked to be permanently present in the beautiful stone image there. The dream of Rasmani was fulfilled, and her devoted heart was overjoyed. Her great devotion as well as the deep reverential attitude of the gifted priest soon made the image instinct, as it were, with life. The temple of Dakshineswar has ever since been a haven of peace to many. With its atmosphere of purity, its sequestered groves and bowers, the sacred Ganga flowing by, and above all, the presence of a God-man who was soon to come to it and bless it for ever, this temple has become a place of pilgrimage and a favourite resort for thousands of devoted and contemplative devotees. Even now the lofty spires of the temples and tops of the tamarisk trees are pointed out to strangers by the boatmen as monuments to the piety of Rani Rasmani, and the pilgrims bow their heads in reverence before the Divine Mother and Her hallowed sanctum.

Sri Ramakrishna used often to tell of the events incident to the consecration ceremony to his disciples. He corroborated the stories of the Rani's arrangements for the pilgrimage to Banaras, the collection of a fleet of about one hundred boats filled with the necessary equipment, and the abandonment of the journey at the injunction of the Divine Mother in a dream the night before departure. He further used to say that Rani Rasmani's search for a suitable place near Bally, Uttarpara, etc., on the west bank of the Ganga—considered very holy—proved futile, as the zemindars of those places, even when offered enormous prices, refused to permit a ghat on the Ganga within their jurisdiction. He used to remark that the plot selected at Dakshineswar for the temple happened to be an abandoned cemetery and had a convex surface, which according to the Tantras were good features for a place of Shakti-worship. He also told of how Rani Rasmani, from the beginning of the moulding of the image, practised the utmost austerity in food, sleep, and general mode of living, and performed worship and Japa, etc., to the best of her power, that she was forced to fix the date of consecration hurriedly on a full-moon day—which was more appropriate to the worship of Vishnu than that of Shakti—as the image of the goddess, which was locked up in a

box, for some unknown reason was covered with a deposit of mist, and the Rani was told in a dream by the goddess to have the installation ceremony at an early date, as She could no longer endure the box. The Master also confirmed the truth of the story that the Rani conveyed the temple to her spiritual guide to overcome the difficulties arising from her being of a low caste. He would tell of the great pomp with which the ceremony was performed, of the gorgeousness of the illumination etc., of how the whole place rang with Kirtanas, dramatic performances and recitals from the sacred books.

Sri Ramakrishna—henceforth we shall call him by this more familiar name<sup>1</sup>—though he enjoyed the festival, did not partake of any food in the temple, but purchased and ate a piece worth of puffed rice in the evening before his return to the Tol at Jhamapukur. When he found that Ramkumar, instead of returning to his school work, stayed on at the temple, he was much disturbed. He went to Dakshineswar to ascertain the reason and found that Ramkumar, unable to withstand the importunities and kindnesses of the Rani, had accepted the permanent office of priest there. He tried to influence his brother against such a course reminding him of his father's steadfast observance of the traditions of the Chatterjees, and telling him that he would be the first to tarnish the fair fame of their family, which had always been revered for its refusal of gifts from the Shudras, to say nothing of accepting any position from them. Ramkumar was adamant and quoted from the scriptures to justify himself, trying by every means in his power to make his brother agree with him, but to no avail. As a last resort they drew lots after the fashion of country folk; and Ramkumar won. Accepting this as final Sri Ramakrishna still refused to take food in the temple. At last Ramkumar told him to take rice and vegetables from the temple stores and to do his own cooking on the bank of the Ganga. Ramakrishna yielded. From this time on, he stayed at Dakshineswar with his brother, but he continued to cook and eat his food apart for some time.

He soon accommodated himself to his new surroundings.

<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna is the name, supplanting his old one, which gained currency during the Master's stay at Dakshineswar. No definite information as to its origin is available. Most probably it was given by Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, as Ramlal, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, says on the authority of his illustrious uncle himself.

The holy atmosphere of that sequestered place, the affectionate care of his elder brother, the respect of Rani Rasmani and Mathur, and lastly his conviction of the presence of the goddess there captured his heart.

Throughout his life Sri Ramakrishna cherished a great devotion to the Ganga. He would often say, "The water of the Ganga is as pure as Brahman. Even an agnostic attains devotion if he but lives on its banks. The whole area over which the wind charged with particles of its water blows is sanctified, and the residents of that area are spiritually awakened without any effort." If any one of his devotees indulging in wordly talk or associated with worldly people, the Master would ask him to drink a little Ganga water. If any spot were vitiated by the touch of an exceptionally worldly man, he would have it sprinkled with Ganga water. This devotion to the Ganga was ingrained in him from boyhood. So when Ramkumar appealed to him in the name of the Ganga, all doubts regarding the food disappeared from his mind. Some may condemn this attitude of Sri Ramakrishna towards the temple Prasad, calling it bigoted. But it was nothing of the sort. It was due to his steadiness in devotion (Nishtha) to the ideas inculcated by his caste and family as well as by the Shastras. Nevertheless, it was this devotion to the ideal as understood at the time that eventually carried him to the point where he perceived that anything offered to and accepted by the Mother, must, of necessity, be pure. As his knowledge increased and his vision enlarged, all differentiating ideas of caste and creed automatically dropped off. What an object lesson for us is this seemingly trifling incident!

## BEFORE THE DIVINE MOTHER

It was not long before Mathur noticed the presence of a strange young man of fair complexion and striking devotion in the Kali temple. As he observed the youth going about his daily duties, he felt strangely drawn to him. This attraction towards a poor, humble, unostentatious Brahmin boy puzzled Mathur. He made inquiries about Sri Ramakrishna and found that he was the youngest brother of Ramkumar. A desire arose in his mind to connect Sri Ramakrishna, too, in some way with the work in the Kali temple, and he even spoke of his desire to Ramkumar. The latter was not very enthusiastic, for he knew his brother's strange psychology, his indifference to pecuniary gain and personal pleasure, and the spirit of independence and desire for freedom which made him dislike routine work. Though discouraged, Mathur gave up the idea for the time being only, hoping that later some opportunity would come which would enable him to gratify his desire.

It was at this time that Hriday, a young man destined to be a close companion of Sri Ramakrishna for twenty-five years, a faithful attendant during the stormy days of his Sadhana, a sincere friend in all his troubles of this period, and a mute witness of his various divine realizations, appeared on the scene. He was the son of Hemangini Devi, who was the daughter of Khudiram's sister. He was slightly younger than his uncle and had been one of his boyhood chums. As a boy Sri Ramakrishna went often to Sihore to visit him. At the time of which we are speaking, Hriday was sixteen years of age. He could find no employment in his native village; in the nearest town of Burdwan he had no better luck. Then he remembered that his uncles were living in the newly established Kali temple of Rani Rasmani and thought that through their influence some employment might be offered to him. So he joined them at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted. Hriday, knowing his uncle's nature, made no comment on any of his actions. As he said later, he felt the magnetism of his uncle's towering personality and followed him about like his shadow. They performed all their tasks together, separating only at mealtime.



Sri Ramakrishna, cooked the food (prepared for him by Hriday) on the bank of the Ganga while Hriday took his dinner in the Kali temple.

It seemed almost a divine dispensation that Hriday Ram came to Dakshineswar. He was a very clever man, with great presence of mind, exceptionally energetic and always ready to bear cheerfully any personal discomfort if thereby he could help his uncle. And he became quite indispensable to Sri Ramakrishna during his period of God-intoxication, when, lost in Samadhi, he was absolutely incapable of taking care of his body.

At this time, Sri Ramakrishna became aware of the fact that Mathur was keeping him under observation, and of his designs to make him one of the Kali temple priests ; so he avoided him whenever possible. But one day, as he was worshipping, in the compound of the Kali temple, an image of Shiva moulded by himself, Mathur, taking advantage of his absorption, was able to come close enough to see the image. The perfection of its modelling impressed him so much that he made inquiries as to who was the sculptor. When he learnt that it had been made by Sri Ramakrishna, he was delighted, and begged that the image might be given to him after the worship was over. He again approached Ramkumar on the subject of attaching his brother to the Kali temple staff, and in spite of a second refusal, was more determined than ever to acquire the services of Sri Ramakrishna in the worship of Kali.

Sri Ramakrishna's apathetic attitude towards work in the temple was due to his intense conviction that nothing was worth doing but the conquest of the flesh, renunciation of wealth, and the attainment of God-consciousness. But this avoidance of Mathur could not go on for ever. Living as Sri Ramakrishna did in the temple garden, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, they would meet. One day the encounter took place. Mathur saw Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday talking together near the Kali temple ; before Sri Ramakrishna could make his escape, he sent for him. When Sri Ramakrishna hesitated Hriday asked him why he was reluctant to respond to the command. "When I do so, he will ask me to take up some duties in the temple," said Sri Ramakrishna. "What harm is there in that ?" asked Hriday. "He is a good and pious man, and it is no discredit to work for him." Sri Ramakrishna quietly said, "I have no

intention of being bound for life. Besides, the service in the Kali temple implies a heavy responsibility, for I would have to take charge of the valuable ornaments of the goddess, and it would worry me. If you agree to take that responsibility, I may accede to Mathur Babu's request." Hriday agreed, for he had come to Dakshineswar in search of suitable employment, and here it was. Sri Ramakrishna spoke with Mathur and, when requested to accept service in the Kali temple, agreed to do so on the above terms. These were accepted, and Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday were appointed to the positions. Sri Ramakrishna took over the dressing and decorating of the Divine Mother, Hriday assisting Rankumar and Ramakrishna.

Soon after his appointment in the Kali temple, an incident occurred which enhanced the worth of Sri Ramakrishna in the eyes of Rani Rasmani and Mathur. It was the custom in the Dakshineswar temple to put the images of Krishna and Radha in the next room between services. They were replaced on the throne in the morning and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. On the day following the Janmashtami<sup>1</sup> festival, the priest, Kshetra Nath, was taking the image of Krishna to the retiring room, when he slipped on the marble floor, and one leg of the image was broken. This gave rise to a great commotion in the temple. Poor Kshetra Nath was immediately dismissed for carelessness. The incident was considered an evil omen for the family. A broken image could not be worshipped; and when the news was sent to Rani Rasmani, she was greatly disturbed. She consulted Mathur and convened a gathering of the Pundits to advise her what to do. After a great deal of discussion the conclusion was reached that it was contrary to the scriptures to worship the Lord in a broken image, that the Rani must throw it into the Ganga and install a new one in its place. A new image was at once ordered. But the Rani was extremely reluctant to consign the object of her former worship to the Ganga, and at the suggestion of Mathur, who had been deeply impressed by Sri Ramakrishna's trances, she sought the latter's opinion on the matter. After hearing the whole story Sri Ramakrishna in an exalted mood exclaimed, "Their solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rani fractured his leg, would she discard him and put another in his stead? Would she not rather arrange

<sup>1</sup>The anniversary of Sri Krishna's birthday.

for his treatment? Why not do the same thing here? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before." When this startling solution was communicated to the Pundits they were puzzled. Because it proceeded straight from the heart, it was so convincing, although so simple. It did not satisfy the scholars at first, but they finally had to yield. Rani Rasmani was jubilant. She had already seen the proof of the young priest's skill in sculpture, so she begged him to mend the broken image. He consented and repaired the limb so adroitly, that even careful scrutiny did not reveal where the break had been. When the new image arrived, Mathur took it to Sri Ramakrishna and asked if it were exactly like the original; Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance and said, "No, it is not." So it was set aside. A new priest was needed to fill the vacancy caused by the dismissal of Kshetra Nath, and Mathur requested Ramkumar to persuade Sri Ramakrishna to accept the post. Sri Ramakrishna consented. Hriday was appointed to help Ramkumar to dress and decorate the image of Kali.

## FIRST VISION OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

Silently and secretly they come into the world, like a flash of lightning, survey it, and in the twinkling of an eye disappear: few see them, fewer understand them, and still fewer follow their advice. This is the life-history of most great men—prophets, seers, and Incarnations—in all ages and in all climes. Christ died on the cross like an ordinary felon. Of his twelve disciples, one denied him in the hour of trial. Now millions accept him as their ideal. Buddha left behind him only a handful of followers, and today after twenty-five centuries one-third of the world pays him homage. Yet why should we wonder at the world's lack of comprehension? How can we understand them with our limited vision? The strong alone can understand strength: it is not the barn-door fowl but the elephant that understands the lion. Only grandeur appreciates grandeur: and God realizes God. Though the real Christ and Buddha are in us, it is not until we realize that fact, that we can envisage a Buddha or a Christ. But let the perception come that liberation or bondage, virtue or vice, knowledge or ignorance, beauty or ugliness, truth or falsehood, pleasure or pain, and all the other pairs of opposites which seem so real to us are nothing but the creation of the mind—the obverse and reverse of the same coin—and a change will be made in the angle of vision, a shifting of the mental focus, and the whole series of phenomena—father, mother, home, me and mine—will vanish, to give place to another series of phenomena, another creation, and another world, to which the Great Ones have easy access, and where they would have us dwell.

We are now about to enter a new chapter in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the beauty, grandeur, loftiness, and pathos of which will fascinate the readers as they follow step by step the progress of this eager aspirant from the early outpourings of his heart in devotion at the feet of the Divine Mother, through the period of his unquenchable thirst to see Her, on to the consummation of his Sadhana in the realization of God, and the establishment—or rather rediscovery—of his relation to him—a sublime achievement equalled only by that of the other Great

Ones of the world. We wish we might be able to express an infinitesimal part of his throbbing renunciation, tremendous sincerity, and passionate search for God. So great was his yearning for God that twelve strenuous years passed in a state of divine intoxication, during half of which period he did not close his eyes in sleep. Unconscious of hunger, thirst, or any of the cravings of the body, or of the things happening around him, Sri Ramakrishna, during that period of Sadhana, was almost like a madman. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he was immersed in the depths of that intense spiritual fervour.

Sri Ramakrishna was appointed priest of the Radhakanta<sup>1</sup> temple. Mathur found that his mode of worship was different from that of the ordinary Brahmins, in that he looked upon the image as the veritable representation of God and treated it as such. When he sat down to worship, a curtain of oblivion separated him from the outside world: he was totally unconscious of the presence of those who usually gathered to attend the services. Sometimes he would sit motionless for hours, being recalled with difficulty to ordinary consciousness. While uttering the various Mantras he could distinctly see those phenomena which to the ordinary priest were but phantoms of the imagination. Thus while chanting the mystic syllable *Rang*, which directed the priest to conceive of a wall of fire around him, Sri Ramakrishna really found himself in the midst of a circle of fire guarding himself and the place of worship from all evil influence. He could actually feel the mystic power called the Kundalini, or the "coiled up", rushing from its place of rest at the lower extremity of the spinal column, along the channel of the Sushumna, to what the Yogis called the Sahasrara or the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain, and could visualize it passing on its upward way through the six centres of the body in the spinal cord, turning the hanging buds of the "lotuses"<sup>2</sup> into erect, full-blown flowers. The radiant glow of his face at the time of worship, his deep concentration and the atmosphere of purity about him suggested to the onlookers the idea that the very spirit Brahmanahood as described in the sacred books was

<sup>1</sup> Radhakanta is another name for Krishna.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the path of Raja-Yoga which has to do with the development of the different centres of the spinal cord. In mystical language these centres are called lotuses.



being manifested there. None had ever seen such intensity of feeling and devotion.

Sri Ramakrishna adapted himself to his new station and forgot everything else. Ramkumar was gratified, for it gave him time to direct his attention to the welfare of the family; besides he felt that his end was approaching; and if one of his brother succeeded him, the future of the family would be assured. But he was troubled by Sri Ramakrishna's love for solitude and growing indifference to the world. He hoped that it was a passing mood, and that he would begin to take part in the festivities of the Kali temple, instead of passing his leisure hours in the thick groves of the temple garden, sitting silent under a tree far away from the bustle, or worse still, taking long solitary walks in the quiet of the early morning or before dusk, along the bank of the Ganga. He resolved to teach him the elaborate procedure of the worship of Kali, so that, later, he might assume the task. As it was not considered advisable to undertake the worship of Shakti or Kali without being properly initiated, Sri Ramakrishna decided to be initiated. At this time there was a Brahmin in Calcutta named Kenaram Bhattacharya, who was noted for his devotion and experience, and Sri Ramakrishna decided to accept him as Guru. A day was fixed, and the ceremony took place. It is said that as soon as the sacred Mantra was uttered in his ears, Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with religious fervour, gave a shout and plunged into a deep concentration, which greatly astonished the Guru.

From this time on Ramkumar asked his brother now and then to take over the worship of the Divine Mother, while he himself worshipped at the altar of Radha-Kanta instead. Mathur noticed this and one day requested Sri Ramakrishna to take over the permanent worship of Kali. "Sir, I do not know the procedure of that worship," he replied, "so how can I perform the sacred task according to the injunctions of the Shastras?" But Mathur humbly said, "You do not require any Shastric code; your great devotion and sincerity alone will satisfy the goddess. Whatever you offer at the feet of the Mother with love, She will accept. Because of your devotion the Mother will surely manifest Herself through this image." Sri Ramakrishna, touched at the implicit faith of Mathur, agreed, and Ramkumar was transferred to the temple of Radha-Kanta. Ramkumar was

aged now, and the sustained labour at the temple garden was telling on his health ; he decided to go home for a change. Mathur agreed to engage Hriday for a few months during Ramkumar's absence, and the latter arranged to start home as soon as possible. But he was destined never to see his home or dear relatives again, for he breathed his last at a place a few miles north of Calcutta, where he had gone on urgent business. He had served in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar for only a year.

The death of Ramkumar left an indelible impression upon the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He was so young at the time of his father's death that all his filial affection was given to his elder brother. His death, therefore, came as a great shock to him, for it occurred at a time when his mind was in a state of upheaval—when he was fast realizing the transitoriness of the phenomenal world and all his energies were given to the search for something that was real and imperishable. Convinced that man could transcend all miseries and evils and reach immortality only by knowing the sweet and perennial fountain of all bliss, his yearning to realize God and the pangs of separation from Him became inexpressible. While those about him were wasting time in all sorts of frivolity, he was burning day and night with this consuming thirst for God. It was at this time that he was asked to conduct the services of the Divine Mother. After his initiation, Kali became his favourite Deity. Every day at the time of worship he decorated Her image with flowers and sandal-paste ; to him it was not inert stone but Mother Herself. All who have seen it agree that the lovely figure, with its divine expression, is a rare piece of sculpture. The Mother wears a gorgeous Banaras cloth and is decorated with precious ornaments from head to foot. From Her neck hangs a garland of skulls and round Her waist is a girdle of human arms—made of gold. In Her lower left hand She holds a decapitated human head, also made of gold, and in the upper a sword. With Her lower right hand She offers boons to Her devotees ; with the upper is symbolized, "Fear nothing!" The skulls and the sword represent Her terrible side, and Her right hands offering boons and fearlessness the benign side. She is both terrible and sweet—like Nature—alternately destroying and creating. This is the Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped, the Preserver as well as the

Destroyer. But to him She was ever the affectionate Mother—the Repository of all blessedness and power—sweet, tender, and full of motherly solicitude, the Mother who with loving care protects Her devotees from harm. To Her he offered a whole-hearted devotion, regarding Her as the only true guide in darkness and confusion.

So sensitive was he becoming, that he was forced to avoid all contacts with so-called worldly people. He passed the quiet hours of the afternoon alone. At night, when everyone was asleep he would arise and go out, returning after daybreak, with eyes swollen as though with much weeping, or showing the effects of prolonged meditation. To all inquiries as to where he had been he gave evasive answers. Hriday determined to watch him and solve the mystery.

The plot of land lying to the north of the temple, where Sri Ramakrishna passed long years in meditation and asceticism, now known as the Panchavati, was not then as it is now. It was a dense jungle of low, uneven land thickly grown with shrubs and prickly plants, where the sunshine scarcely ever penetrated. Its having been a graveyard kept people at a respectful distance, and none had ever dared to explore it. Sri Ramakrishna chose this place for his spiritual practices and used to spend his afternoons and nights in meditation in the shade of a large Amalaka tree which grew there.

Hriday loved his uncle and took care of him day and night like a devoted servant. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of the workings of his mind; but for the most part, he shared the popular opinion that Sri Ramakrishna's strange actions were due to too intense devotion to God. So when to unmindfulness of food or drink or the comforts of the body was added the passing of the whole nights without sleep, Hriday was much concerned and felt that he was justified in watching his uncle to find out where he went at night and how he spent his time. Knowing that opposition or protest was futile, he waited his opportunity; and one night, when Sri Ramakrishna left his room, he followed. What was his horror to see him entering the jungle!

Hriday was afraid to follow him, so he remained at a distance and began to throw stones in order to frighten Sri Ramakrishna, but without success. The following morning, when

questioned by Hriday as to what he did in the jungle, Sri Ramakrishna replied quietly, "There is a large Amalaka tree there, and under it I meditate on Kali. Such a place is highly suitable for meditation." Hriday was not satisfied with this explanation and continued to spy upon and throw stones at Sri Ramakrishna whenever he went into the jungle. Sri Ramakrishna made no remonstrance. Finding that intimidation was fruitless, Hriday gathered up his courage and determined to enter the jungle at dead of night to see for himself what was going on. He was startled to find his uncle, without clothes or the sacred thread, under the tree in deep meditation. In spite of a feeling of awe with which this sight inspired him, Hriday said to Sri Ramakrishna, "What is this, uncle? Why have you taken off your cloth and the sacred thread?" There was no response. It was as if he were addressing a statue. When Sri Ramakrishna returned to ordinary consciousness, Hriday repeated the question. "Why, don't you know," Sri Ramakrishna replied, "that this is the way one should think of God, free of all ties? Since our very birth we have the eightfold fetters of hatred, shame, pedigree, culture, fear, fame, caste, and egoism. This sacred thread means that I am a Brahmin and, therefore, superior to all. When calling upon the Mother, one has to set such ideas aside. So I have removed the holy thread, which I shall put on after I have finished meditation." Hriday listened and quietly left the place.

Thus the realization of God—the vision of the Divine Mother—became the one passion of Sri Ramakrishna. Strange was the method of worship of this most wonderful devotee. The singing of devotional songs composed by such devotees as Ramprasad and Kamalakanta of Bengal was one of its salient features. They seemed to open the flood-gate of his heart, and he would weep profusely like a child sore at heart at the separation from its mother. "O Mother! Where art Thou? Reveal Thyself to me. Ramprasad saw Thee and obtained Thy divine grace. Am I a wretch that Thou dost not come to me? Pleasure, wealth, friends, enjoyments—I do not want any of these. I only desire to see Thee, Mother." Tears flowed continuously from his eyes. The day would pass; and when the peal of evening bells in the temple announced the close of day, he would become sadder still and cry, "Another day is spent in

vain, Mother, for I have not seen Thee ! Another day of this short life has passed, and I have not realized the Truth !” He would often rub his face against the ground in his agony. His plaintive moans would attract crowds of people, who whispered to one another, “Poor young man ! Has he really lost his mother ? His pathetic cries move one to tears.” In another mood he would sit before the image of Kali and say to Her, “Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all a fiction of the mind—mere poetry without any reality ? If Thou dost exist, why can I not see Thee ? Is religion, then, a phantasy, a mere castle in the air ?” Scarcely would these words pass his lips when in a flash he would recollect the lives of Ramprasad and other devotees who actually saw God in this very life. “She can’t be a mere freak of the human imagination,” the young worshipper would think, “there are people who have actually seen Her. Then why can’t I see Her ? Life is passing away. One day is gone followed by another never to return. Every day I am drawing so much nearer to death. But where is my Mother ? The scriptures say that there is only one thing to be sought in this life, and that is God. Without Him life is unbearable, a mockery. When God is realized, life has a meaning, it is a pleasure, a veritable garden of ease. Therefore in pursuit of God sincere devotees renounce the world and sacrifice their lives. What is this life worth if I am to drag on a miserable existence from day to day without tapping that eternal source of Immortality and Bliss ?” Thoughts like these would only increase his longing, and make him redouble his efforts to realize God.

Referring to this tremendous thirst for God Sri Ramakrishna would often say to his disciples later on, “Oh, what days of suffering I passed through ! You can’t imagine my agony at separation from Mother. That was only natural. Suppose there is a bag of gold in a room and a thief in the next with only a thin partition between. Can he sleep peacefully ? Will he not run about and try to force the wall to get at the gold ? Such was my state. I knew that the Mother, full of infinite bliss, compared with which all earthly possessions were as nothing, was there, quite close to me. How could I be satisfied with anything else ? I had to seek Her. I became mad for Her.”

What tremendous faith, what intense conviction that God



alone is the source of all bliss ! This it was that carried him through and sustained him in many bitter trials and afflictions—the philosophers' stone that turned his sufferings into the bright and shining gold of God-consciousness. It is to faith such as this that the miracles in the spiritual history of the world, in all countries are due. Without a teacher, guide, or helper, with no great knowledge of the scriptures, and even without passing through the prescribed forms of asceticism, Sri Ramakrishna carried everything before him by this adamant faith and sincere yearning to realize God.

He could no longer conduct the worship regularly. He would sit before the image like a stone. At one moment he behaved like a demented person, at the next he would cry like a child. While meditating in the course of worship, he would put a flower on his head and sit silent for a couple of hours; or while offering the food, he would gaze at the Mother as if She were actually partaking of it. In the morning he would pluck the flowers for garlands and spend hours in decorating the image. During the evening service, when waving lights before the goddess, he would lose all idea of time and forget to bring the ceremony to a close. His strange actions were beginning to attract the attention of the temple officials. He was ridiculed at first ; but steady devotion ended by commanding respect and admiration, though some still regarded him as unbalanced. Mathur was charmed. Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly indifferent to what people thought and directed all his energies to the realization of the goal he had set for himself. He took less food and slept very little. His chest and face were always flushed from excessive emotion, the eyes often bathed in tears.

But he was not to be tossed much longer on the waves of despair and hope. One day, in his intense longing to see the Mother, he cried, "Mother, why dost Thou not listen to me? I have prayed long to Thee. Thou didst bless Ramprasad. Why dost Thou not bless me also by revealing Thyself to me?"—when, suddenly, his desire was fulfilled. We shall describe this first vision of the Divine Mother in his own words:

"I was then suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the Mother. I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered by a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to

realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation any longer: life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped up like a madman and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. What happened after that externally, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted, bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother."

On another occasion he gave the following description of the same experience:

"The buildings with their different parts, the temple and all vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead was a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of Consciousness or Spirit. As far as the eye could reach, its shining billows were madly rushing towards me, from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! In the twinkling of an eye they were on me and engulfed me completely. I was panting for breath. I was caught in the billows and fell down senseless!"

Whether or not he saw in this ocean of effulgence that blissful form of the Divine Mother which was so dear to his heart, he did not make clear. It is probable that he did, for as soon as he regained consciousness, he called aloud, "Mother! Mother!"

From this time on, his constant prayer was that he might have a repetition of this vision. Sometimes his desire would become so intense that he would roll on the ground, crying, "Mother, be gracious unto me and reveal Thyself once more." He would cry so bitterly that people gathered about him to see. "I scarcely realized their presence," the Master afterwards said, "they looked more like shadows or painted pictures than real objects, and I did not feel the least abashed at displaying my feelings before them. But the moment I lost outward consciousness in a paroxysm of pain at separation from the Mother, I would find Her standing before me in Her matchless radiant form, granting boons to Her devotees and bidding them to be of good cheer! I used to see Her smiling, talking, consoling, or teaching me in various ways."

## GOD-INTOXICATED STATE

The period subsequent to Sri Ramakrishna's first realization of the Divine Mother was quite naturally replete with thrilling incidents of a spiritual nature. He was just stepping into a new realm, vast and limitless. Every day he had extraordinary visions, some of them while in the trance state, others in normal consciousness. Though he lived and moved in this world, he belonged in reality to another region and held communion with strange invisible beings. He was often seen conversing with the stone image of Kali as if it were fully conscious. To the people of the Kali temple all this looked like madness pure and simple. His nephew concluded that the great nervous strain of his Sadhanas had caused some derangement in the brain, and the physician to the Rajas of Bhukailas was consulted. Sri Ramakrishna remained under his treatment for some time, but with no benefit.

The physical shock of the first vision of the Mother was so great that for a time he lost control over his body. When he was calmer and attempted to conduct the worship of the goddess, it would always take unexpected turns. Strange visions and thoughts flashed before him. Before beginning to meditate he would say to himself, "I shall sit silent and unmoved like that image of Bhairava."<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna afterwards described what would happen: "I could distinctly hear strange rattling sounds in my joints from the ankle upwards, as if one were locking them up one by one, so that the body might remain fixed. I remained perforce in that position till the end of the meditation, when the same rattling sounds would again be heard as the joints were unlocked in the reverse order. Not until this was done could I move or stand up. Sometimes I saw specks of light like a swarm of fireflies before my eyes, at other times a veil of luminous mist would envelop me. Again I would see, with closed as well as open eyes, luminous waves like molten silver pervading everything. Not knowing what these meant, or whether they were helpful or detrimental to my spiritual

<sup>1</sup> A stone image which was set like a sentinel on the parapet of the hall in front of the Kali Temple.

progress, I would lay open my heart to Mother saying, 'Mother, I don't know what these things are. I am ignorant of Mantras and all other things requisite to realization of Thee. Teach me, Mother, how to realize Thee. Who else can help me? Art thou not my only refuge and guide?' This was my earnest prayer night and day. I used to weep bitterly in the extremity of my grief."

Though the young priest was blessed with the vision of his Divine Mother, the goal of his endeavours, yet it did not give him unmixed joy, for it was not continuous. He could get a glimpse of Her only in meditation or through some effort; to him this could only mean one thing—that his realizations were not true, else they would surely be without effort and uninterrupted. Could it be that his thirst after God, intense as it was, was half-hearted? Thoughts such as these made him redouble his efforts and increase his prayers to the Divine Mother.

From this time onward his attitude towards the Mother changed. He became like a little child, confident that his inability to see Her whenever he wished was because She, in a playful mood, was purposely hiding Herself. He felt that, ere long, She would take him in Her arms, that he would no longer be permitted to stray in the labyrinths of the world. He was learning to resign himself to Her will, to check the impulses of his own ego and to let Her will direct him. His self-surrender was complete. "O Mother," he would pray day and night, "I have taken refuge in Thee; teach me what to do or say. Thy will is paramount everywhere and is for the benefit of Thy children. Merge my ego in Thy will and make me Thy instrument." His actions were much criticized. But what was that to him? Was not the Mother leading him by the hand? This material world was fast losing its reality for him, and the presence of the Divine Mother was the only thing he cared for.

As his realization deepened, the vision of the Mother became continuous. Formerly at the time of meditation it was with difficulty that he gained a glimpse of Her beautiful hand, feet, or face; now he saw Her entire form as She spoke to him and directed him in his day's work. Heretofore, while offering food to Her, a luminous ray from Her eyes would touch it, merely taking its essence; now he saw Her partake of the food even before it was offered in the regular way. Formerly he regarded

the stone image of Kali as possessed of consciousness ; now the image disappeared, and in its stead there stood the Living Mother Herself, smiling and blessing him. "I actually felt Her breath on my hand," the Master used to say later on. "At night when the room was lighted, I never saw Her divine form cast any shadow on the walls, even though I looked closely. From my own room I could hear Her going to the upper storey of the temple with the delight of a girl, Her anklets jingling. To see if I were not mistaken, I would follow and find Her standing with flowing hair on the balcony of the first floor, looking either at Calcutta or out over the Ganga."

It was thus that Sri Ramakrishna became a God-intoxicated man. The separation between him and the Divine Mother was gradually vanishing, and he was fast attaining to a state of uninterrupted vision of Hers. And his zeal was commensurate with this great development ; his earnestness overcame all obstacles. He forgot all the formalities of the scriptures in his intimate communion with the Mother. He gave up the elaborate forms of prayer with which the novice tries to approach God ; it became instead a ceaseless outpouring of his heart, in a persistent demand to see Her, or a passionate exchange of words with Her. He no longer kept himself at a respectful distance from the image, or approached it with a timid heart, or made prostrations as he entered the temple. Who acts thus with his own mother ? Is she an object of awe to her son ? We cannot establish the sweet filial relation with the Divine Mother—more loving, more affectionate, and more indulgent than any earthly mother can ever be—if we associate the ideas of fear and dreadfulness with Her. As the Mother She is no longer grim and fearful as in Her dance of death, but appears to Her devotees in a majestic, gracious form full of sweetness and love, showering benediction upon all and opening up their understanding.

This was the blessed Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna Deva had realized. Hriday was able to give many interesting details of those days. He used to say, "Whenever one entered the temple, a thrill would be felt, specially when my uncle was worshipping, as though there were a living Presence there. I could never resist the temptation of watching him. His strange manner of worship filled me with wonder and reverence, at the same time



I often questioned his sanity, for his actions were contrary to the injunctions of the Shastras. I was much afraid also of what Rani Rasmani and Mathur Babu would do if the news of his conduct reached them. But Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly insensible to my feelings, and even when told of how strange his actions seemed, was indifferent. Nor could I talk freely as heretofore with him about such matters, for an inexplicable constraint checked me, and I felt a deep gulf between him and me. So I served him as best as I could, fearful lest his extraordinary ways should bring on disaster."

Of Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship, he would say, "I noticed that my uncle, taking flowers and Bael leaves in his hand, touched his own head, chest, in fact, the whole body, including the feet, with them and then offered them at the feet of Kali. At other times, with eyes and chest flushed, like a drunkard he would move with tottering steps from his seat to the throne of the goddess, touch her chin as a sign of endearment, and begin to sing, or talk, joke, laugh, or even dance, taking the image by the hand ! Sometimes he would approach the throne with a morsel of food in his hand and putting it to Her lips entreat Her to eat. Then would follow this interesting conversation, 'Well, Thou wishest me to take it—shall I eat now ? Very well, I shall do so !' Then he would eat a portion of it and put the remainder to the mouth of the goddess and say, 'Well, I have eaten—now it is Thy turn.' One day a cat near by was mewling as he was making the food-offering. He tenderly addressed it saying, 'Mother, art Thou eager to eat ? Here, Thou mayst have it,' at the same time giving the food to the cat. Sometimes at the end of the evening service, when he had invoked the Mother to retire, he would say, 'Well, Thou dost wish me to lie down ? Very well, I shall do it,' and would lie for some time on the silver bedstead meant for the Mother. Again, at the time of worship he would become so deeply absorbed in meditation that there would be no sign of external consciousness. Every morning, as he picked the flowers for the Divine Mother's garlands I saw him speaking to, or caressing somebody, or laughing, or indulging in merriment ! He never closed his eyes during the night ; whenever I awoke I found him in exalted mood, talking to someone, singing, or sitting in deep meditation where the Panchavati is now.

All these but confirmed the belief of the local authorities that Sri Ramakrishna must be mad. What they saw amounted to sacrilege. Offering flowers to the Divine Mother after touching one's feet with them, partaking of the food before it was offered to Her, lying in the bedstead of the Mother—not to speak of his weeping, laughing, or talking to the image—were proof enough to them of derangement. Though they thought it unwise to have him in the temple, they could do nothing. So they sent a detailed report about these things to Mathur at Jaun Bazar. Mathur wrote in reply that he would come himself to investigate ; meanwhile there was to be no interference with Sri Ramakrishna's mode of worship. The officials were convinced that as soon as Mathur saw the eccentricities of the young priest, he would dismiss him summarily. Soon after this Mathur paid an unexpected visit to the temple for he feared that some overzealous temple official might maltreat Sri Ramakrishna. He silently entered the Kali temple, when Sri Ramakrishna was worshipping, and was struck with wonder at what he saw. Sri Ramakrishna was putting his whole soul into the worship with no idea that he was being observed. It did not take Mathur long to decide that Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship was the outcome of a genuine and profound love for the Divine Mother, the like of which is seldom encountered. Convinced that the object of building and maintaining the temple—the manifestation of the Mother Herself in the image there—was attained, he returned to his home and sent an order the next day to the temple superintendent that the young priest was to have freedom to worship in any way he chose, and that he was not to be molested.

Mention is made in the scriptures of two kinds of devotion. In one, man worships God in accordance with the injunctions laid down in the Shastras. He bathes so many times a day, observes fasts, uses this or that Mantra, waves lights in a certain fashion, and lays the greatest stress on the various disciplines prescribed by the scriptures. In the other kind of devotion one does not observe any such forms ; one feels such intimacy with God, is so near to Him that one forgets all rules and regulations and acts according to the promptings of the heart. The first kind of devotion (Bhakti) is called Vaidhi-Bhakti, the second is known as Prema-Bhakti. The former is the stepping stone to

the latter. One is blessed with Prema-Bhakti only when one's devotion to God is mature, the outcome of following the course laid down in the scriptures. It is thus apparent that the phenomenal changes in the mental outlook of Sri Ramakrishna which the ignorant ascribed to insanity, were due to the development of Prema-Bhakti. It was "the state of being blasted by an excess of Light." This transformation came in such a natural way that Sri Ramakrishna himself was scarcely conscious of it. He felt himself completely at the mercy of a tremendous force. He often wondered at his own conduct and questioned if he were on the right track. Hence we find him going to the Kali temple and weeping before the Mother, seeking Her advice. As we shall see, his trust in Her was never betrayed.

Owing to the great strain of God-realization his body became subject to various ailments. One of these was a burning sensation over the entire body, as if his skin had been painted with a caustic. He described it thus later on: "At the time of worship I tried to think according to the directions of the Shastras that the sinner in me was burnt, and that I was pure and perfect. Who knew then that in every one there actually lies hidden a personification of evil that can be destroyed? I began to feel a burning sensation in my body from the beginning of my Sadhana period. What might this be?—I thought. Medicines were administered, but all proved futile. One day I was practising in the Panchavati grove, when a red-eyed man of a black colour came out of this body, reeling as if drunk and began to walk about in front of me. Shortly after, there emerged from my body another human figure of a placid mien, wearing the ochre robe and holding a trident in his hand. He attacked the former and killed him. A few days after that vision, I was relieved of the burning sensation which had tormented me for six months." As we shall see, he had two recurrences of this sensation later.

The scriptures dealing with devotion lay down five different methods of worship. The first is Shanta—the placid attitude of mind towards the Divinity cultivated by certain ascetics and anchorites who, having learnt from the Vedas and other sources that God resides in the heart of every one, withdraw their senses from the objects of the world and concentrate their minds on Him as the only reality and the innermost Self of the universe.

These sages live far from the turmoil of the world and lead a simple, retired life, eating roots or fruits. There is generally a tinge of Jnana<sup>1</sup> in this form of worship. The Vedic Rishis are examples of this kind of devotion. The next way is called Dasya on the relation of servant to master. Reflection on the complex scheme of the universe naturally leads to the conception of a Lord, with infinite power, knowledge, and mercy, governing in accordance with fixed laws. Many desirous of pleasing this God with loyal service, give up all considerations of personal comfort for His sake, thinking to establish thus the relationship of master and servant. The devotion of Hanuman, the monkey-god, for Sri Ramachandra is an example. He is regarded as the model of faithful service. The third way is by Sakhya or friendship. The devotee looks upon his Chosen Ideal as his dearest friend, feels no constraint in his presence, and is satisfied with simply making his friend happy. Arjuna and the cowherd boys of Vrindaban regarded Krishna thus. The fourth method is known as Vatsalya or the relationship between parent and child. There is no element of awe in it, for the devotee looks upon the deity as his own child, and considers himself stronger than the object of his love. The parents of Sri Krishna are cases in point. Lastly, there is Madhura or the relationship which exists between two lovers. This is the most intense form of attachment, in which the least idea of separation is unbearable. The Gopis of Vrindaban are examples. God in this form of Sadhana, is one's sweetheart, a part and parcel, as it were, of one's very being. It is higher than all the foregoing modes of worship and includes them all.

Sri Ramakrishna passed through all these phases of devotion, realizing the same goal through every one. His Dasya Sadhana, which we shall describe in detail is particularly interesting in that through his endeavours to enact the role of Hanuman, he was blessed with the vision of Sita, the divine consort of Rama.

It was shortly after his vision of Kali that his attention was directed to Rama, the king of Ayodhya, who is regarded as an incarnation of the Lord Himself. Convinced that the quickest way to realize Him would be to become thoroughly imbued with

<sup>1</sup> Monism.

the spirit of His greatest devotee, Hanuman, he took upon himself the task of reproducing as faithfully as possible Hanuman's attitude towards Rama—that of the faithful servant towards the master. The following are his own words about the process and results of this form of practice: "By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them, they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth round the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, 'Raghuvir !' My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, my coccyx enlarged by about an inch. It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of the mind had passed on the completion of that course of discipline. In short, everything about me was more like a monkey than a human being."

At the end of this Sadhana he had a wonderful vision, so exceedingly vivid and so different from any of his previous ones, that it remained long in his memory. Referring to it the Master said, "One day I was seated in the place now known as Panchavati in quite a normal state of mind—not at all entranced—when all of a sudden a luminous female figure of exquisite grace appeared before me. The place was illumined with her lustre. I perceived not her alone, but also the trees, the Ganga and everything. I observed that it was a human figure, being without such divine characteristics as three eyes and so on. But such a sublime countenance, expressive of love, sorrow, compassion, and fortitude, is not commonly met with even in goddesses. Slowly she advanced from the north towards me, looking graciously on me all the while. I was amazed and was wondering who she might be, when a monkey with a cry suddenly jumped and sat by her. Then the idea flashed within me that this must be Sita, whose whole life had been centred in Rama and who had misery only as her lot ! In an excess of emotion I was about to fall at her feet crying, 'Mother,' when she entered into my body, with the significant remark that the smile on her lips she bequeathed unto me ! I fell unconscious on the ground, overpowered with emotion. This was the first vision I had with



eyes wide open, without meditation on anything. Is it because my first vision of Sita was of her grief-stricken aspect, that my subsequent life contained so much suffering? Who knows!"

The secret of his success in these diverse Sadhanas (it must be remembered that it takes the ordinary person many lives to achieve the goal of even one form of Sadhana) was—in one word—sincerity, a complete correspondence between thought and action—an entire absence of duplicity. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for success in any pursuit one must live exactly up to one's ideal. As we proceed further we shall see how he carried it out in his own life.

In the foregoing pages we have narrated certain events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna which may seem impossible or supernatural, so difficult are they of explanation from the standpoint of reason or science. But they cannot be as lightly dismissed as that. All saints and sages, of every age and clime, claim to have had experiences inexplicable by reason, and up to the present at least, by science. At the same time none of them has said that his visions or extraordinary powers were beyond Nature or the reach of the rest of mankind—on the contrary, all have invited the rest of the world to test these experiences by experiment along the same lines, to demonstrate for themselves that they are as much within the realm of Nature as any of the phenomena of physical science. The only difference is in the degree of subtlety. Physical science deals with the comparatively gross manifestations of Nature, while religion—which is philosophy made practical—deals with its finer forms. If after patient and sincere research these transcendental experiences are found to be untrue, then alone have the right to reject them and the authority to pronounce them delusions been won. Here we would like to emphasise the fact that these visions are not in any way necessary for religious progress, nor are they the *sine qua non* of divine realization. The highest spiritual experiences may and often do come unattended by them. At best, they are but milestones on the path of religious progress, of importance in proportion as they make a man purer, stronger, more loving, and more self-sacrificing. The right vision is that which transforms a fool into a sage; where contrary results are produced, we have only delusion.

We have seen that Rani Rasmani was attracted to Sri

Ramakrishna. Convinced that he had been blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother, she felt that his strange behaviour bespoke the fullness of devotion, rather than any mental derangement. One day she came to Dakshineswar and after bathing in the Ganga entered the temple to worship and meditate. She took a seat near the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was there, and the Rani, according to her usual custom, requested him to sing. Sri Ramakrishna agreed and filled the place with the ecstasy of his songs. After a time, noticing that the Rani was inattentive, he exclaimed, "That anxiety even here!" and slapped her twice. The temple servants were confounded, but none dared to punish the offender. The only two people who were calm were Sri Ramakrishna and Rani Rasmani. His attitude was that of a father chastising an indiscreet child, while the Rani was abashed as if caught in some naughtiness. She was amazed to find that the young priest had the power to perceive that her mind was preoccupied with a pending lawsuit rather than with the songs of devotion. Realizing the gravity of the situation, and apprehensive that the temple-staff might assume the right of punishing Sri Ramakrishna, she gravely forbade them to ever mention the incident to him.

Rasmani retired to her room. When her attendants complained of Sri Ramakrishna's insolence towards her, she answered, "You do not understand it; the Divine Mother Herself punished me and thus illumined my heart."

There is a great deal of significance in the above incident. It shows that Sri Ramakrishna considered himself only a tool in the hands of the Divine Mother. Had he had any other idea, he would not have dared to run the risk of jeopardising his position in the temple by insulting the Rani. It also throws a flood of light on the Rani's mentality allowing us to see the deep spiritual vein in her nature which made her recognize the justice of the rebuke and accept it cheerfully.

One day about this time Sri Ramakrishna in the presence of Mathur made Hriday his substitute saying that the Divine Mother would be as well pleased if thenceforth Hriday conducted the worship. Mathur took this to be as the will of the Mother and agreed to it cheerfully.

We have already mentioned the Panchavati,<sup>1</sup> the place where Sri Ramakrishna used to meditate. There was a small tank near by, which was soon after re-excavated, and the surplus earth was utilised in filling up the pits about this place. The Amalaka tree was sacrificed to this change. One day Sri Ramakrishna proposed to Hriday to build a suitable place for his spiritual practices. Hriday agreed and chose a spot near the Master's old place of Sadhana, where the latter himself planted an Ashwattha tree, and Hriday planted four others. Then a hedge of Tulasi and Aparajita plants was planted, which soon grew thick and tall enough to hide the place from the view of passers-by. One day some cattle destroyed the hedge and injured the young plants ; this made Sri Ramakrishna anxious to protect it against further attacks. It is said that soon after a strong flood-tide in the Ganga brought to the bank near the temple a bundle of wooden posts, with rope, a bill-hook and everything necessary for a fence.

We have already seen that Mathur always looked after Sri Ramakrishna's comfort and saw that no harm came to him from people who did not understand his mental state. But even he began to suspect that there might be some nervous trouble. The incident of his slapping Rani Rasmani strengthened this suspicion. So he arranged for Sri Ramakrishna's treatment by an expert physician, Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen of Calcutta. The treatment, though continued for some time, brought no relief. Mathur also tried to persuade Sri Ramakrishna to keep his feelings within bounds and to regulate his life in accordance with fixed standards. One day he said, "God too must abide by his own laws. He has no power to transcend them." "What an absurd proposition !" replied Sri Ramakrishna, "One who has made a law can repeal it at pleasure or make a new law in its place." "How can that be ?" said Mathur, "A plant that produces only red flowers cannot produce flowers of any other colour—white, for instance, for such is the law. I should like to see God produce white flowers from a plant bearing only red flowers." "That, too, He can easily do," answered Sri Ramakrishna, "for everything depends on His will." Mathur was not convinced. The next day, in the temple garden, Sri Ramakrishna

<sup>1</sup> It means a cluster of five sacred trees. Such a place is considered very holy and helpful to meditation. The five trees are Ashwattha, Bael, Amalaka, Ashoka, and Vata or the banyan.

came across a China-rose plant with two flowers on the same stalk, one of which was red and the other snow-white. He broke off the branch to show it to Mathur. As Mathur came in closer touch with Sri Ramakrishna, his doubts gave way to a growing conviction that here was a most remarkable man, a perfected sage, association with whom would confer untold blessings. He was coming under the magic spell of this strange man of realization, and inwardly began to look up to him as a Guru. We shall presently see how this feeling of regard deepened into an absolute self-surrender at the feet of the humble priest of Dakshineswar. We shall conclude the account of this brilliant period in the life of Sri Ramakrishna by mentioning a few more incidents which happened during these four years (1855-1858) of his Sadhana.

Though Sri Ramakrishna during this period of divine madness could not bear association with worldly men, he did not shun the companionship of devotees. On the contrary, he was eager to be with them and join in their worship and Kirtana. Now and then he would go to Baranagore to visit the Dashamahavidya, or to Kalighat to worship the Divine Mother, and participated almost every year in the greatest religious festivity of Panihati, a few miles from Dakshineswar. It was in this latter place that Vaishnav Charan, son of Utsavananda Goswami and a great Vaishnava devotee of the time, first met Sri Ramakrishna. It was in the year 1858 Sri Ramakrishna attended by Hriday had gone to witness the festival and was seated in the temple of Mani Mohan Sen, when Vaishnav Charan arrived and immediately recognized Sri Ramakrishna as a man of rare spirituality. After a little while he offered five Rupees to Sri Ramakrishna, who refused to accept them. Vaishnav Charan being insistent Sri Ramakrishna told Hriday to accept the money and to buy mangoes and other things for offering with it. Then they all began to sing Kirtana, encircling Sri Ramakrishna, who fell into a trance. Vaishnava Charan tried to make Sri Ramakrishna eat of the offerings, but he could not swallow; the remainder was eaten by all as sacred Prasad. On the way back to Calcutta Vaishnav Charan, who had ascertained where Sri Ramakrishna lived, stopped at Dakshineswar to see him, but he was not there. A few years later, he met Sri Ramakrishna again, and, as we shall see, under exceedingly interesting circumstances.

At this time Sri Ramakrishna had to undergo an ordeal which Rani Rasmani and Mathur engineered rather thoughtlessly, although in good faith. They were greatly concerned at his failing health and thought that deviation from the rigid observance of continence might be beneficial. They knew that any such proposal would be rejected with scorn. So they contrived to tempt him secretly. Accordingly they hired two women of ill fame to enter the room at Dakshineswar and tempt this child of the Divine Mother. The moment he saw them, with all earnestness he sought shelter at the feet of the Mother. Hearing the name of Mother the women were abashed. Another day Mathur took Sri Ramakrishna for a drive to Calcutta and stopped at a house in Mechuabazar, where several beautiful girls were waiting. He retired leaving Sri Ramakrishna alone with them. Instantly Sri Ramakrishna became like a child, lost outward consciousness in repeating the name of Mother, and remained in that marvellous state—the very embodiment of purity and self-control. The effect of this on the minds of the girls was electric. They realized their folly, and afraid of the consequences of trying to tempt a saint, they implored his forgiveness. When Mathur, attracted by the noise, entered the room, he was struck dumb at this astonishing proof of Sri Ramakrishna's mastery over his passions, and as he hastened him from the scene, he met with a volley of reproaches from the infuriated agents of his design. He was smitten with shame, and needless to say, his regard for Sri Ramakrishna was redoubled.



## HALADHARI

At this time there came to Dakshineswar another man who was to be closely connected with the life of Sri Ramakrishna for a period of eight years. His name was Ramtarak, or more familiarly Haladhari, who lived at Dakshineswar probably from 1858 to 1866. He was a cousin of Sri Ramakrishna, being the eldest son of Khudiram's youngest brother. He came to Dakshineswar in search of employment, and Mathur, knowing him to be related to Sri Ramakrishna, was glad to engage him in the worship of Mother Kali till his cousin recovered from his divine madness. Haladhari was well versed in the *Shrimad-Bhagavata* and *Adhyatma Ramayana*, and was a master of the Gita and Vedanta. Though a devotee of Vishnu, he undertook, at the request of Mathur, to worship Kali. As he insisted on cooking his own food on the bank of the Ganga, Mathur remarked, "Why are you so particular? Sri Ramakrishna and your nephew Hriday do not object to taking the food offered to the Divine Mother." To this Haladhari replied, "My cousin has attained a certain state of realization, and he can do so. But as I have not yet reached that state, in my case it would be a sin." Mathur was pleased at this straightforward answer and allowed him to do as he pleased.

Haladhari could not bear to see the animal sacrifice in the Kali temple. After nearly a month's service he was meditating one evening, when Kali appeared to him and told him to leave the temple, and that as a result of his half-hearted worship he would soon lose his son. Shortly afterwards, Haladhari's son died. After telling the entire circumstances to Sri Ramakrishna he took up the service of Radhakanta instead.

Haladhari belonged to that degraded cult of the Vaishnavas which trying to practise the Madhura Bhava in its extreme form, does so not through meditation as it should, but through secret relations with women. The matter soon leaked out, and people began to whisper about it among themselves, though none dared to accuse him publicly lest he should curse them, and there was a current belief that his curse always came true. When, however, the news reached the ears of Sri Ramakrishna, he in

his outspoken manner spoke to Haladhari of what was being said about him and his practices. This infuriated Haladhari, who said, "You are my cousin and younger, and yet you dare to slight me thus ! As a punishment for this, blood will come out of your mouth." Though Sri Ramakrishna tried to appease him, saying that his object in warning him was to save him from criticism, Haladhari remained unmoved and did not retract his words.

Now that the Kali temple and its accommodations became known, many Sadhus used Dakshineswar as a halting place on their way to Gangasagar. It is probable that from some one of these Sri Ramakrishna learnt the secrets of Hatha-Yoga, which he now practised. One evening soon after the above incident, he felt an irritating sensation in his palate, which after a minute began to bleed. Sri Ramakrishna described the incident: "The colour of the blood was dark like the juice of bean leaves. It was so thick that only a little portion fell to the ground and the rest clotted and hung like a rope from my teeth. I pressed one end of my cloth against the place to stop the bleeding, but without success. I was sorely perplexed. Many people gathered round me. Haladhari, too came in all haste from his evening services. I told him weeping, 'See, cousin, what you have done to me by your curse.' Seeing me in such a plight he, too, began to weep. Fortunately, at that time there was staying in the Kali temple a Sadhu who, hearing of the incident, came and examined the colour of the blood and the place from which it came. He said, 'Thank God ! There is no cause for anxiety. This haemorrhage has done you great good. I see you were practising Yoga. This opened your Sushumna canal and a quantity of blood was rushing to the head. It is excellent that this blood, instead of reaching the brain, made a passage through the palate ; or you would have entered the Jada Samadhi<sup>1</sup> from which you could never again come down to the plane of ordinary consciousness. It must be that the Divine Mother has some great mission to be done through you, and She has saved your body.' I was reassured by his words and was at peace."

Being an orthodox Brahmin, with great respect for the traditions of the Chatterjee family, Haladhari could not bring

<sup>1</sup> Another name for Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the highest form of concentration mentioned in the Yoga-Shastra.

himself to justify the peculiar ways of Sri Ramakrishna. Though he lived with his cousin during the stormiest period of his Sadhana, yet being book-bound, he grossly misunderstood his cousin's exalted spiritual state and naturally concluded, like other people, that his actions were more the outcome of a deranged brain than of any spiritual realization. Not having the breadth of vision which would enable him to look at things in their proper perspective, he would sometimes say to Hriday, "Look here, Hriday, it is really a blot on Ramakrishna's character that he has given up the sacred thread. Again, is it not awkward that he should remain naked before all? It is exceptionally good fortune to be born a Brahmin. Yet you see how Ramakrishna slights this rare privilege! I don't see that he has attained to such a high state of spiritual exaltation that he can afford to make light of the caste observances so recklessly. He does not take anybody's advice, excepting yours to a certain extent. You ought to see that his actions are more orthodox. In my opinion, you should use force even to prevent him from repeating these profanities."

But at times his ideas about Sri Ramakrishna would change. If perchance he were present when the Master was in the sanctum of the Divine Mother, he would be struck at the sight of his cousin's unique devotion and earnestness and passionate prayers. Seeing this divine fervour—a thing of which he had had no experience in spite of his book-learning—Haladhari would revise his opinions and find an excuse for the inconsistencies. Then he would run to Hriday and say "Ah, you must have seen something divine in Ramakrishna otherwise how could you serve him with such constancy? Hriday—a somewhat changed man now—would answer with a smile, "Yes, you are right, uncle. Don't you see, I could not bring myself to serve others in such menial ways?"

So Haladhari was tossed between doubt and partial conviction regarding his cousin's state of mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Many a time Haladhari being struck by my devotion and zeal would say 'Ramakrishna, this time I have found you out.' I would retort, 'Take care that you do not get confused again.' 'You cannot deceive me any more,' he would reply, 'surely the Lord is manifesting Himself through you.' I would smile and say, 'Let us hope so—we live and learn.' But while

studying in leisure hours some such book as the *Bhagavata* or the *Adhyatma Ramayana* with the occasional stimulation of snuff, he would again be inflated with pride. Throwing all humility to the winds, he would assume an air of great superiority, look at the world as a mere mud-puddle, arrogate to himself the position of a great scholar, and thrust his opinions upon all. Sometimes I went to him and said, 'What you have read in the scriptures, I have realized in life. So I can understand the import of the Shastras.' Haladhari would flare up and reply in a swaggering tone, 'Go to, you are an egregious fool. That you should say that you understand these abstruse things !' I would reply, 'Believe me, the Divinity that you acknowledged to be residing in me teaches me everything.' At this Haladhari would become frantic with rage and reply, 'How foolish ! What scripture teaches that God would incarnate Himself again in this Kali-Yuga except when He comes in the person of Kalki ? You have verily become insane, or how could you entertain such thoughts ?' I would remind him with a smile, 'Why, did you not say a few hours ago that there would be no further confusion in your mind about me ?' But Haladhari would not be in the mood to listen to it then. We had many repetitions of this amusing scene. Then one day, as he saw me sitting naked on a branch of the banyan tree in the Panchavati, he was thoroughly convinced that I had been possessed by a Brahmadaitya !"<sup>1</sup>

Haladhari, we have said, was a Vaishnava, and ever since the death of his child through the curse of Kali he came to look upon that goddess as being of a Tamasika or dire nature. One day he even remarked to Sri Ramakrishna, "Can one get spiritual elevation by worshipping a Tamasika form ? Why do you bestow so much attention on the worship of Kali ?" Sri Ramakrishna did not answer him then ; but he was pained at the disrespect shown to his favourite Deity. He at once went to the Kali temple and asked the Divine Mother with tearful eyes, "Mother, Haladhari is a scholar, versed in the scriptures, and he says Thou art possessed of Tamasika attributes. Art Thou really so ?" The Mother Herself enlightened him on the point. With a heart full of joy he ran to Haladhari who was engaged in the

<sup>1</sup> A Brahmin earth-bound for some reason for a period after death.

worship of Radhakanta. Excited, he at once climbed on his shoulders and exclaimed again and again: "Dare you call my Mother Tamasika ! Is She ? No. She is everything. She has all the three Gunas ; again She is full of Sattva alone !" Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch illumined Haladhari's heart—the scales fell, as it were, from his eyes. In a moment he understood the folly of his remarks—realized his own littleness. He bowed his head in reverent submission, found in Sri Ramakrishna the manifestation of the Mother of the universe, and taking flowers and sandal-paste, made an offering at his holy feet. Shortly after, Hriday met him and asked how it was that he stooped to worship Sri Ramakrishna—specially as he believed him to be insane and possessed by an evil spirit. "Oh, I can't tell you how," replied Haladhari, "On returning from the Kali temple he overwhelmed me altogether. I forgot everything and saw in him the clear manifestation of divinity ! Whenever I visit him in the Kali temple, he has that kind of influence over me. Really it is a mystery which I cannot solve." So in rare moments of illumination Haladhari saw divinity in his cousin, but he forgot this when he went back to his books.

Haladhari's conduct confirms the truth of the Master's statement that books are but "knots on the heart"—they stifle our cravings for God-realization. The reader already knows that beggars used to be fed at the Kali temple. One day Sri Ramakrishna—like the true Vedantin that he was—ate a little of their leavings, considering these poor people as veritable representations of the Lord. When Haladhari saw him doing so, he, being an orthodox man, was upset and said, "What are you doing ? You have lost caste. Now who will marry your daughters in future ?" These incongruous words from the lips of a professed Vedantin like Haladhari roused the indignation of Sri Ramakrishna, who exclaimed, "You rogue ! Do you not always quote from the scriptures to say that the world is an illusion and God is the only reality, and glibly recommend people to look upon all beings as Brahman ? And you think that I like you would preach that the world is a myth and at the same time have children ? Fie upon your knowledge of the scriptures !"

One day Haladhari cast aspersions on the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's God-visions and said on the authority of the scriptures that God is beyond the reach of the human mind. That gave



rise to grave doubts in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He thus described his feelings and the subsequent experience to one of his disciples, Swami Premananda: "I asked myself the question: Are the various divine visions which I have had and the words I have heard from the lips of the Mother Herself all false? Have they been mere fancies of my mind? Is it that I have been fooled by the Divine Mother? To me the very thought was painful and blasphemous. I was greatly perplexed. With sobs I prayed to the Mother: 'How couldst Thou have the heart to deceive me like that because I was a fool?' A stream of tears flowed from my eyes. Shortly after I saw something like a volume of mist rising from the floor and filling the space before me. In the midst of it appeared a fair face, calm and highly expressive, with a flowing beard. Fixing its steady gaze upon me the figure solemnly said, 'Well remain on the threshold of relative consciousness!' Repeating this thrice the face gently disappeared in the mist, which also dissolved. This vision reassured me."

Another day such a doubt—and that, too, owing to the confusing arguments of Haladhari—crossed his mind. On that occasion, too, the Master, as he sat down to worship, begged of the Mother to dissolve it. She appeared before him in the form of a certain woman known as Rati's mother, beside the sacred jar used in worship and repeated the same words.<sup>1</sup> A third time he heard the same voice after he had come down from the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. But of this later.

<sup>1</sup> The events described in this chapter were scattered over a period of eight years.

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RETURN TO KAMARPUKUR AND  
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Misfortunes seldom come singly. Chandra Devi had already experienced many. She had hardly recovered from the pangs of bereavement for her eldest son, when the news reached her at Kamarpukur that Gadadhar, her youngest and dearest son, had given up worship and all other duties in the Dakshineswar temple and was behaving to all intents and purposes like a madman. She heard that he shunned company and frequented lonely places, and that his every act bespoke insanity. Naturally the news made Chandra Devi as well as Rameshwar extremely anxious. They ascribed this malady to nervous prostration, symptoms of which, they thought, had been manifested during his boyhood and youth by his trances. Chandra again and again wrote to Dakshineswar asking Sri Ramakrishna to come to Kamarpukur, where under her maternal care and in the salubrious climate of the country his strained nerves might be soothed and his health regained. Sri Ramakrishna obeyed the call. The anxious mother found him restless, and indifferent to the affairs of the world, with a veil of sorrow and gloom overshadowing his once bright face. He was no longer attracted by anything agreeable; his former companions and friends were of no more interest to him; and the village of Kamarpukur, which once seemed so lovely and picturesque, appeared now dull and commonplace. His buoyancy had left him, and in its stead there was pain and anguish of mind—manifested in his weeping and the frequent calls for "Mother". Poor Chandra was totally upset. She did not know the cause of this new illness, and all her attempts to console her dear son proved futile. In conjunction with medicine, various occult cures were tried; religious rites were performed to avert any probable disaster; and exorcists were consulted to pronounce on his case. Notwithstanding all these efforts, Sri Ramakrishna was at times overwhelmed with the same feelings as those of the Dakshineswar days when he was struggling to obtain a vision of the Divine Mother. The agonising burning sensations of Dakshineswar were repeated. Never before had the people of Kamarpukur

marked in him such great zeal for God, such absence of fear, such indifference to everything worldly, such determination to surmount every obstacle that stood in the way of attaining his goal.

Chandra Devi in her anxiety consulted an expert exorcist. The Master told of this later: "One day an exorcist came and gave me some charmed water to smell, saying that if I were under the influence of an evil spirit, it would instantly leave me. But the experiment was a sad failure. Then with the help of some specialists a spirit was invoked. It said to the exorcists present that I was neither under the influence of any spirit, nor had I been suffering from any illness. Then it warned me against using too much betel-nut, since I wanted to be a Sadhu. Really I was very fond of it, but I gave it up after this admonition."

We have already said that there are two cremation grounds at Kamarpukur. These are generally shunned by the villagers even at day-time as haunted places. Consequently they are very lonely and as such exceedingly fit for spiritual exercises. Being places where the last vestige of the human body is dropped, not only do they always remind one of the evanescence of this world and all its enjoyments, but at the same time automatically turn one's mind to thoughts of God and the other world. Hence cremation grounds have in India always been invested with a sort of unique holiness, and they are often selected as places for meditation, specially by the Tantrika Sadhakas. It is the favourite abode of Kali, the all-destroying Mother of the universe, and devotees believe that by practising in such sacred places they will reach their cherished goal sooner.

Sri Ramakrishna intended to practise stern Tapasya and chose one of those places for this purpose. He began to spend whole days and a great part of every night there in worship and meditation. Gradually his relatives and neighbours came to know of this and of his many extraordinary visions while meditating there. The anxious mother often sent Rameshwar to call him back. Rameshwar dared not approach the place and called him from a distance.

A few months' stay at Kamarpukur did Sri Ramakrishna much good, and he recovered his normal state of mind. His

restlessness subsided, and he ceased to weep. It is not difficult to divine the cause of this, for from his own utterances and from the testimony of his relatives we can infer that, as a result of his strenuous Sadhana, he must have had visions of the Divine Mother again.

His mother and relatives were greatly relieved. Of course he had certain peculiarities yet, such as passing much time in the cremation ground, sitting naked while worshipping or meditating, manifesting annoyance if disturbed at devotions, and showing a particular fondness for spiritual pursuits; but these had been characteristic of him.

Sri Ramakrishna was now twenty-three years of age, and he was as indifferent as ever to all worldly concerns. His mother and brother began to plan to interest him in domestic affairs. Their first thought was, naturally, of marriage—a tie which he could not disregard. Once married, his mind would not soar so high, and the responsibility of maintaining a family would soon, they thought, steady him. So they began to search for a bride, and blamed themselves for not having thought earlier of this solution for their troubles.

Messengers were sent to the neighbouring villages in search of a bride, but with no success. According to the prevalent custom of society, it was impossible for them to secure a girl of the type they desired, without a proper dowry; and they were too poor for that. The search was vigorously continued, but with no better result. This threw Chandra Devi and Rameshwar into despair. Gadadhar had purposely been kept in the dark about these negotiations lest he should take them amiss. But he was too clever for them. He was not long in discovering the whole plot; but far from thwarting it, he seemed to welcome the idea. He made merry as boys do at the prospect of some happy incident in the family. Was it because he already knew that such was the Divine Mother's dispensation, or was it in mere spirit of fun? Though the average person may take the latter view, we have weighty reasons to believe that the former hypothesis alone was true.

Sri Ramakrishna found his mother and brother in a dejected state, and inquiring into the matter learnt that their failure to get a bride for him was the cause of their worry. At this he said in a semi-conscious mood, "It is useless to try

here and there. Go to Jayrambati,<sup>1</sup> and there you will find the bride providentially reserved<sup>2</sup> for me in the house of Ram Chandra Mukhopadhyaya." Though his mother and brother did not attach much importance to this statement, they sent a man to that village, who returned with the report that it was true that Ram Chandra had a girl, but though she might otherwise be a good match for Sri Ramakrishna, she was too young, being only five years old. But Chandra agreed to accept the girl as no other bride was available. Everything was settled in a few days, an auspicious day was fixed for the ceremony, and Sri Ramakrishna was married to the girl,<sup>3</sup> whose name was Saradamani Devi. Rameshwar had to pay a dowry of three hundred rupees.

After the ceremony was over Chandra Devi was greatly comforted. She firmly believed that the marriage would be good for Sri Ramakrishna ; and she was glad that her "mad" son had gone through the ceremony cheerfully. But her happiness was marred a little by a trifling incident. Being poor, she had borrowed some ornaments from her friends in the Laha family and with them bedecked the bride on the night of the marriage. When, a few days later, the time came for returning those ornaments, she had not the heart to take them from the unsuspecting girl. She was thinking over the matter, when Sri Ramakrishna said he would look to it. When the young wife was asleep, he took those ornaments from her so cleverly that she did not know it. The ornaments were sent back to the Laha family. The girl on awakening complained that her ornaments were missing. Chandra Devi took her in arms and comforted her with tearful eyes saying, "My darling, Gadadhar will give you better ornaments hereafter." The girl's uncle who had come to see her that day was much displeased at this incident and took her home at once. All this pained Chandra Devi very much ; but Sri Ramakrishna said jokingly, "Whatever they may say or do now, they cannot annul the marriage any way !"

After his marriage Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Kamarpukur

<sup>1</sup> A village three miles to the north-west of Kamarpukur.

<sup>2</sup> The expression he used was characteristic. He said, "Marked as it were with a straw." The reference is to the custom among rural people of reserving the best fruit for offering unto the Lord. To distinguish it, they tie a piece of straw round it.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, it is understood that this was really a betrothal ceremony.



for about a year and a half. Chandra Devi would not allow him to leave her until he was completely cured, for she feared that he might have a relapse. Once during this period he went to his father-in-law's house and after a few day's stay there brought his bride home. He was becoming anxious to return to Dakshineswar to resume his work there. The poverty at home must have urged him to do so. Taking leave of his mother and brother he set out for Dakshineswar.

## BACK TO DAKSHINESWAR

On his return to Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna again took charge of the worship of the Divine Mother, but after a few days he was seized anew with the madness of God-realization. The aged mother, the struggling brother, the young wife, the pecuniary condition of the family, all were forgotten in this desire for the vision of the Divine Mother. The same meditation and prayer day and night, the same flushing of the chest, the same painful, burning sensation all over the body, the same repugnance to worldly matters, and the same insomnia reappeared. But having experienced them once, he was not worried by them now.

Mathur and others became anxious, thinking that he had a relapse, and placed him again under the treatment of Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen, but as before with no results. Hriday took him regularly to the Kaviraj. One day another physician<sup>1</sup> of East Bengal was present when Sri Ramakrishna came. When he heard the particulars of the case he said, "It appears from the symptoms that this is a case of divine madness, the after-effect of some Yogic practices, and medicines will be of no use." Sri Ramakrishna himself said later on that this was the first physician to diagnose the true nature of his case. But nobody attached any importance to this statement at the time. Mathur and others went on trying new methods of treatment for Sri Ramakrishna in spite of which the symptoms were gradually aggravating.

The news of his illness slowly filtered to Kamarpukur. The anguish of Chandra Devi can better be imagined than described. Finding no other way, she resolved to invoke the blessings of God through personal austerities. The Lord Shiva of Kamarpukur was famed for fulfilling the desires of His devotees. Chandra Devi repaired to His temple, determined to remain there without food and water until the gracious Lord granted her prayer. In a vision she was directed to approach the Shiva of Mukundapur, who would answer her prayer. Chandra faithfully obeyed the injunction. She had starved and prayed for a

<sup>1</sup> Some say that it was Durga Prasad Sen, brother of Ganga Prasad.

couple of days, when the great God appeared to her in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid, your son is not mad. He is simply passing through a state of God-realization." The anxious mother was consoled and thanking the Lord returned home.

It was a momentous period in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He was athirst day and night for the Divine Mother. "O Mother, have pity on me, reveal Thyself to Thy unworthy son. I do not want comfort, nor do I hanker after wealth or prestige. I only want Thee and Thee alone"—was his constant cry.

Referring to this state, Sri Ramakrishna often said afterwards, "No sooner was one state transcended than another took its place. Before that whirlwind, the sacred thread was blown away. Not only that, even the wearing cloth hardly remained. Sometimes I would open my mouth—the jaws touching as it were the heavens and the nether worlds—and earnestly cry, 'Mother!'—thinking I must pull Her like a fisherman hauling fish with a drag-net. Oh, through what states of mind I passed in those days! Everyone thought I was mad. A slight stimulus from outside stirred the depths of my spiritual consciousness. Even a street girl appeared to me as Sita, going to greet her victorious husband. One day I saw an English lad standing cross-legged against a tree. Immediately the thought of Krishna was suggested to my mind, and I went into deep meditation. At one time I would roam in the temple premises with a bamboo on my shoulder. At another time I would feed a dog and eat the leavings. The idea of caste lost all meaning for me. A low-caste man sent me a curry cooked by his wife, which I ate with relish. In the Panchavati I would sit in deep meditation with my body perfectly still—losing all consciousness of the outside world. At that time, for want of proper care, my hair was matted. Birds would perch on my head and peck the grains of rice left there during the time of worship. Often snakes would crawl over my motionless body—and neither I nor the snakes knew it. Oh, what visions flitted past my eyes, day and night!"

About his wonderful experiences of this period he said, "As I sat down to meditate, I would find a Sannyasin emerging from my body with a trident in hand and directing me to concentrate my mind on God, leaving aside all other thoughts. He threatened to plunge his weapon into my body if I did not

do so. When the Papa-Purusha (the personification of sin) came out of my body, it was the same Sannyasin who killed him. When I wished to see some deities in distant places or participate in religious chantings held far off, I would see this shining figure step out of my body, go along a luminous path to those places, and re-enter my body after fulfilling the particular desires."

On another occasion he said, "A young Sannyasin exactly resembling me would come out of my body and instruct me in all matters. At those times I might retain a little outward consciousness, but more often I lost it completely in my absorption in watching the movements of this strange person. When he re-entered this body, I recovered my normal state.

"The ordinary man could not have borne a fraction of that tremendous fervour, his body would have shattered by a quarter of that emotion. I could forget my indescribable pangs only by seeing the Mother in some form or other for the greater part of the day and night. Otherwise this body could not have survived. For six years these eyes remained wide open, not a wink of sleep visited them. I could not close the eyelids, however much I might try to do so. I had no idea of time, nor of the body. When the mind, at rare intervals, came down to a lower plane and I had a faint idea of the body, a shudder of pain would pass through me at the thought that I was going mad. Standing before a mirror I would put my finger into my eyes to see if the eyelids would close, but they would not. Horrified, I would often burst into tears and pray, 'Mother, is this the result of praying and wholly surrendering myself unto Thee? Ah! Thou hast visited me with a fell disease!' But the next moment I would say, 'Let it be as Thou wishest. Let this body go to pieces, but leave me not. Reveal Thyself to me, be kind to Thy helpless son, O Mother, I have taken shelter at Thy lotus feet. Thou art my only refuge.' As I prayed thus, my mind would again be stimulated, this body would seem a trifle, not worth thinking about, and the blissful Mother would appear before me and console me with Her gracious words."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when in the course of spiritual practice the aspirant's mind becomes sufficiently purified, it acts as the Guru. In the light of this statement we can understand to a certain extent the meaning of his extraordinary

vision about the "double" coming out of his body. It betokened a high degree of concentration, where the contents of the mind took a concrete form and lived and moved like an embodied being.

One of his Sadhanas of this interesting period consisted in banishing from his mind all attachment to wealth. Sitting on the bank of the Ganga, he took some earth in one hand and a few rupees in the other, weighing their value mentally as he passed them from hand to hand. Money, he said to himself, can at best give only a comfortable living and some facilities for charity—that is all. It cannot give realization of God, which is the only thing worth having in life. Hence it has no more real value than this handful of earth. Firmly impressing this idea on his mind, he finally consigned both to the Ganga. Again, for the complete effacement of a sense of superiority from his mind, he washed unclean places like an ordinary sweeper, viewing alike all objects of the world as but modifications of matter. Following out this idea he taught his mind to regard sandal-paste and filth as the same, and he would touch them both with equal indifference.

Mathur's regard for Sri Ramakrishna was deepening day by day. He was ever careful about his comforts, as the following incident will show. One day Sri Ramakrishna entered one of the Shiva temples at Dakshineswar and began to recite the *Shiva Mahimnah-Stotram*, a beautiful hymn in praise of Shiva. Soon he was overpowered with emotion at the thought of His great glory and forgot the world. Coming to a particularly beautiful stanza in which the glories of the Lord are declared as altogether indescribable, his feeling rose to a climax, and he was brought face to face, as it were, with the great God. He no longer remembered the order of the lines or the stanzas composing the hymn, and even forgot its language. "O Lord, how can I describe Thy infinite glory?"—were the only words that came from his lips. Tears began to flow profusely from his eyes. His strange conduct caused people to gather around him, though he was not conscious of them. Mathur, who happened to be present at Dakshineswar, hurried to the spot. He stood by, mutely watching the spectacle. An officious employee suggested that this "mad" man be removed from the proximity of the Deity, whereupon Mathur said that any one touching Sri Rama-



krishna would do so at his peril. This silenced the men present. After a long time Sri Ramakrishna gradually recovered normal consciousness. He was astonished to see so many people looking at him. Seeing Mathur, he asked him in a childlike way if he had done anything wrong in a state of unconsciousness. "Oh, no," replied Mathur, "you were only reciting a hymn, and I stood here to see that nobody disturbed you."

Some time after this, a remarkable incident happened which greatly increased Mathur's regard for Sri Ramakrishna. One day, in the long verandah on the east side of his room, the latter was pacing to and fro, absorbed in deep thought. Mathur was seated alone in his room, whence he could have a good view of the Master. For a long time he watched, the latter not being at all conscious that he was being observed. Suddenly an unexpected thing happened. Mathur ran to him, prostrated himself and began to weep like a child at his feet. Sri Ramakrishna was taken aback and said, "What is this? You are the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani. What will people think if they see you behave like this? Be calm and get up." But Mathur still wept. When he regained his composure a little, he explained the reason for his emotions: "I watched you as you were pacing in the verandah. When you went one way, I saw you in the form of the Blissful Mother; when you turned in the opposite direction, you took on the form of the Lord Shiva! At first I thought it was hallucination. I rubbed my eyes and looked again; but to my astonishment every time I saw the same phenomenon." As he spoke, Mathur wept, so overwhelmed was he with emotion. "But I know nothing of it," reiterated the Master in his characteristic way. Referring to this incident he said later on, "Mathur would not be comforted at the time. I felt nervous lest Rani Rasmani should learn of it and think I had hypnotised him." Then he would add, "Was it for nothing that Mathur respected and looked so much after the comforts of this body (meaning himself)? Mother showed him many wonderful things time and again. It was written in his horoscope that his Ishta (Chosen Deity) would be always gracious unto him, nay, would move in flesh and blood with him."

After this, Mathur's regard and devotion increased a thousandfold. Henceforth he counted it as a rare privilege to be of

the least service to the Master, and always complied with his wishes. And we shall see later on how he was intimately associated with a great part of the Master's subsequent Sadhanas.

We now come to a noteworthy event in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. It was the death of Rani Rasmani, which took place on the 19th of February 1861. Before passing away she had the satisfaction of seeing two of her great desires fulfilled, namely, the consecration of the temple at Dakshineswar and a permanent arrangement for its future efficient management. The part she had to play in the divine drama of which Sri Ramakrishna was the hero, was done, and the time was come for her exit. She fell ill with fever and stomach trouble, which developed into a chronic dysentery of a serious type. It is said that her last days were embittered by the refusal of her eldest daughter, Padmamani Dasi, to sign the document waiving her claims to the property of the Kali temple. A few days before her death Rani Rasmani was taken to her house at Kalighat on the bank of the sacred Adiganga. Shortly before her death she was brought to the Ganga. Seeing some lamps lighted before her, she exclaimed, "Remove those lights. How tame they look now ! Ah, my Mother is coming—the halo of Her form has illumined the whole place." After a slight pause she said, "Mother, art Thou come ? Well, Padma refused to sign, will that do any harm, Mother ?" Uttering these words she passed away quietly, and her soul, leaving behind the fret and fever of this world, soared high into Divine Realms.

On the death of Rani Rasmani, Mathur became the sole executor of the estate. He sought to place himself unreservedly at the disposal of the Master and since his great vision, it was his one desire to live always near him. Not only would he arrange the trips which Sri Ramakrishna desired to make, but would often, as in the case of his visit to the Panihati Fair, go himself in disguise, with a few attendants, to look after him.

On the eve of his embarking on a varied course of Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna felt the necessity of support from some one who could supply him with the requisites for those practices. He even prayed to the Mother for such a one. Later on, the Master spoke of Mathur as the first of the five supporters, engaged for him by the Divine Mother. Whenever any desire arose in his mind, he would speak of it to Mathur, who was

only too glad to fulfil it at once. At the same time, Sri Ramakrishna was very kind to Mathur. Yet on questions of vital importance, where some principle was at stake, he never yielded to the latter or hesitated to say what he deemed to be the right thing. His treatment of Mathur was characterised by a spirit of independence as well as of simplicity. It never occurred to him to try to curry favour, for he knew that the Omniscient Mother would in time fulfil his desires. One day some ornaments were stolen from the images of the Deities in the Radhakanta temple. Mathur heard of it and in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna apostrophised the gods, "Ah, you were powerless to protect your own ornaments from the thief!" This at once elicited a rebuke from the Master, who said, "What nonsense you speak! God cares very little for these clods of earth which you call jewels. They are precious to you, not to Him, for is not Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, His servant-maid?"

Mathur one day proposed to Sri Ramakrishna that he would set apart a large estate in his name. At this Sri Ramakrishna thundered, "What! Do you intend to make me a worldly man!" Mathur often invited him to his residence at Jaun Bazar and spent many delightful days with him there. In the evenings he would take him out for a drive. He bought costly utensils of gold and silver for the use of the Master and many costly robes. But Sri Ramakrishna remained the same child of the Divine Mother, perfectly unattached. One day a very expensive shawl was purchased for him. He took it cheerfully and like a boy showed it to others. But his discriminating mind soon began to argue, "What is there in it? Nothing but goat's wool. Like every other thing it is also a modification of matter. It protects one from cold no doubt, but this can be done as well by a blanket or quilt. And like other material things it does not help one to realize God. Rather it makes its owner assume an air of superiority. He thinks himself rich and is proud. So it takes a man away from God." As he was weighing thus in his mind the evils which the shawl was likely to produce, he threw the beautiful shawl on the ground and began to trample and spit on it. Not content with this, he was about to burn it, when some one rescued it. On hearing of the incident Mathur said with a smile that it was well done.

Mathur had a family priest in the Kalighat temple, named

Chandra Halдар. For some days he had been noticing Mathur's devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. Wishing to monopolize the rich man's favour, he was alarmed to find a competitor in the field. He determined to put a stop to it. One day Sri Ramakrishna lay in an outer room of Mathur's Jaun Bazar house in a half-conscious state, when the priest suddenly came in. There was no one near by. The man pushed the Master several times and said, "Well, tell me how you hypnotised Mathur Babu." Sri Ramakrishna kept silent, for he had not the power to speak then. The priest getting no answer to his repeated queries was exasperated and kicked the Master thrice before he went away. Sri Ramakrishna knew what the consequences would be if the matter were reported to Mathur. So he kept it to himself.

Thus Mathur was impressed with Sri Ramakrishna's invulnerable purity and simplicity in all circumstances and found him to be absolutely proof against lust and wealth.

## BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI

One morning Sri Ramakrishna was plucking flowers in the garden of Dakshineswar, when he saw a country-boat coming towards the smaller bathing ghat of the temple. A woman with a small bundle in her hand stepped out of the boat. Middle-aged, beautiful, and with long dishevelled hair, she appeared from her ochre-coloured robes to be a Sannyasini. All her belongings consisted of a few books and one or two pieces of cloth. Though nearly forty years of age, she looked much younger. Sri Ramakrishna must have been attracted to her at the very first sight, for as soon as he espied her, he went to his own room. Calling Hriday he gave him a description of the woman and asked him to bring her from the Chandni<sup>1</sup> to his presence. "She is a stranger. Why should she come even if invited?" replied Hriday, rather surprised, for he had never before seen his uncle eager to speak to any strange woman. "Go and tell her about me, and she will come"—that was all he said.

Without another word Hriday went to the Chandni, where he found the nun or Bhairavi, as she was called, seated. He gave her his uncle's message. The Bhairavi at once complied with his request, which again surprised Hriday.

As soon as the Bhairavi met Sri Ramakrishna, she burst into tears of joy and surprise and said in a tender voice, "My son, you are here! Knowing that you were somewhere on the banks of the Ganga, I have been searching for you so long, and now I have found you."

"How could you know about me, mother?" asked Sri Ramakrishna.

She replied, "Through the grace of the Divine Mother I had come to know that I was to meet three of you. Two I have already met in East Bengal, and today I find you."

She spoke with emotion, as though she had found her long-lost treasure at last. Sri Ramakrishna, too, was visibly moved.

After a while, she spoke of herself. Born of a Brahmin family in the District of Jessore (Bengal) she had come to know

<sup>1</sup>The roofed court which is the main entrance to the temple compound.



through Yoga power that there were three great personages in Bengal to all of whom she was to deliver a certain message. The two she had already met were named Chandra and Girija, both from the District of Barisal. Sri Ramakrishna sat close by her, and like a boy opening his heart to his mother, related to her every incident of his Sadhana—his wonderful visions, his total loss of outward consciousness in the meditation of God, the burning sensation all over the body, his sleeplessness and other symptoms. He further said that people looked upon him as insane, because his actions differed so widely from those of the common run of men. He asked repeatedly, "Can you tell me what these symptoms are? Am I really mad? And is this the result of my praying day and night to the Mother?" The Sannyasini listened to his recital with feelings of joy and wonder. Full of motherly tenderness, she again and again consoled him, "Who calls you mad, my son? This is not insanity. Your state is what is called Mahabhava<sup>1</sup> in the Shastras. It is because people do not understand this blessed state of yours that they call you mad. Sri Radha experienced this state and so did Sri Gauranga. All these are recorded in the Bhakti texts. I have these books with me, and I shall show you that whoever has sincerely yearned for God has experienced this state, and everyone doing so must pass through it." These words reassured Sri Ramakrishna.

Finding that the day had already advanced, Sri Ramakrishna gave her some Prasad from the Kali temple, and knowing that, with her maternal attitude towards him, she would not take it unless he partook of it first, ate some. She went around the temples, took the Prasad, and later came to the Panchavati with doles of raw foodstuffs to cook and offer to her Chosen Deity, Raghuvir, a stone emblem of whom she always kept with her.

The cooking over, she placed the food before Raghuvir and closed her eyes in meditation while offering it. Soon she had a divine vision, and sunk in deep meditation, she became totally unconscious of the world. Tears of joy trickled down her cheeks. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna had felt a strong

<sup>1</sup>An extraordinary state of religious ecstasy mentioned in books of Bhakti, attended with nineteen external characteristics such as shedding of tears, tremor of body, standing of hair on end, perspiration, etc.

urge to come to the Panchavati and appeared there in a semi-conscious mood. He advanced to the place where the Bhairavi sat absorbed in meditation. Like a sleeping man, he unconsciously began to take the food offered to Raghuvir. Soon after she opened her eyes, and a thrill of rapture passed through her as she saw Sri Ramakrishna taking her offerings, for there was a curious similarity between her vision and the scene that was being enacted before her. Yet she could hardly believe her eyes. Sri Ramakrishna, when he recovered his normal state of mind, felt abashed for what he had done. He apologised saying, "Really I do not know why I do this kind of thing in a state of unconsciousness." She consoled him with the words, "You have done well, my son. It is not really you, but He who is within you that has done this, as He always does. In my meditation I clearly realized who did it and why. I have come to understand that there is no further need for my formal worship, which has borne fruit at length." Then without the slightest hesitation she took the remnants of the food as sacred Prasad, and later on she consigned to the Ganga the emblem she had so long devoutly worshipped, for she had found her beloved Deity in the person of Sri Ramakrishna !

"Mother, I shall learn if Thou alone teachest me," this prayer of Sri Ramakrishna to the Mother of the universe was fulfilled by his meeting with the Sannyasini or "Brahmani" as he used to designate her—who came at the psychological moment when he needed confirmation from the scriptures for his various realizations, ridiculed as vagaries of a diseased brain. To Sri Ramakrishna this was an additional proof that the Divine Mother was guiding him.

The relation of mother and son which sprang up between them from their very first meeting deepened as they became better acquainted. The Brahmani took up her residence in the Dakshineswar temple. Both passed a great part of the day in the Panchavati, in religious conversation. The Brahmani had dived deep into the various Hindu scriptures, specially the Tantras and the Vaishnava literature. Besides, she had long practised religious exercises, which gave a great practical value to her book knowledge. The Master's questions as to his various experiences she would settle by quoting from authoritative texts wherein are recorded similar experiences of previous

seekers after truth. All this had a reassuring effect upon Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

Scarcely a week had passed when it struck Sri Ramakrishna that people might misunderstand his close association with the Brahmani. One day he threw out a hint to her to the effect. She agreed with him and decided to put up somewhere in the village whence she could come and go every day. She fixed her abode on Devamandal's Ghat at Ariadaha, a couple of miles north of the Dakshineswar temple. There was no difficulty about her food and requirements, for she soon won over the village people by her amiable personality. She used to go to see Sri Ramakrishna daily. The Brahmani, who was a Vaishnava devotee of a high order, was soon overpowered with Vatsalya Bhava (motherly attitude) towards Sri Ramakrishna. She loved to feed him with various sweets and milk preparations, as Yashoda did her son, Sri Krishna. In her room she would often wait with cream and butter in her hand and cry "Gopala" in an excess of feeling, while tears fell from her eyes. At that moment Sri Ramakrishna would feel a strong urge to see her, and like a boy pining for his mother, he would run to her. Then he would sit by her and take the cream and butter. Or again, the Brahmani would put on a silk cloth and various ornaments—which she procured for this purpose—and in company of other women of the locality lead a procession to Dakshineswar, singing songs descriptive of Yashoda's love for her boy, and with the sweets she brought she would feed Sri Ramakrishna. These touching scenes, with the holy associations they evoked, made a profound impression on the hearts of the spectators, and Krishna's mother would be recalled to their minds.

Judging from what Sri Ramakrishna had told her, the Brahmani concluded that his extraordinary experiences were the result of his extreme love of God. Every day she saw him go into trance as they talked on spiritual matters. From his loss of outward consciousness in meditation, his ecstasy during Sankirtanas, and various other traits of his character, she was convinced that he had scaled the ultimate heights of spiritual realization. She had read in the *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, the *Chaitanya-Bhagavata*, and other books treating of Sri Gauranga's life, that the Lord would incarnate Himself again

to redeem the people from their misery and ignorance. This idea came to her mind when she found such a strange analogy between the life of Sri Chaitanya and that of Sri Ramakrishna. Both were mad after God; both developed the same extraordinary symptoms, including the power of transmitting spiritual fervour to others by touching them while in a state of ecstasy. These and many other incidents common to these two lives indicated to the Brahmani that the Lord has incarnated again in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Another incident happening at this time confirmed the belief of the Brahmani. We have already referred to the burning sensation from which Sri Ramakrishna suffered. This trouble reappeared during his second period of divine madness, that is, shortly after the Brahmani's advent, and continued with more or less intensity. All the efforts of physicians failed to alleviate it. The pain began with sunrise and increased as the day advanced. At noon it was so intolerable that Sri Ramakrishna had to plunge into the Ganga and cover his head with a wet napkin. Three or four hours every day were spent this way. Fearing that too long immersion might lead to other troubles, he would come out of the water and lie on the marble floor, after cooling it by rubbing with a wet cloth. Though experts and laymen all ascribed this malady to some internal disorder, the Brahmani found another cause for it. She diagnosed it as the effect of his strong yearning for God. She added on the evidence of scriptures that this symptom had been manifested in Sri Radha and, in recent history, in Sri Gouranga Deva, when a tempest of divine emotion had blown over their minds. On scriptural authority, again, she prescribed a curious remedy for it. The patient had only to wear a garland of fragrant flowers and paint his body with sandal-paste. Of course everybody ridiculed the idea as being preposterous. But Mathur thought that there was no harm in trying it; accordingly it was done. Great was the astonishment when Sri Ramakrishna completely recovered under the treatment in three days. Many would not give credit to the Brahmani's treatment and called it an accident. The incident was a further help to the Brahmani in identifying the soul that dwelt in Sri Ramakrishna's body. And when she heard of Sri Ramakrishna's vision of two boys coming out of his body on the way to Sihore,



it made her assurance doubly sure. She concluded and told Sri Ramakrishna that this time Sri Chaitanya had appeared in the frame of his comrade Nityananda.

A few days after, another symptom, of a different kind but no less troublesome, made its appearance. Sri Ramakrishna himself described it thus: "I was seized with a ravenous appetite which no amount of food could satisfy. No sooner had I taken something than I again felt hungry. Day and night one thought alone possessed my mind, and that was what to eat. 'What may this new disease be', I anxiously thought. When I consulted the Brahmani, she replied, 'My son, don't worry. Those who advance on the path of spirituality pass through such abnormal states. Wait, I shall cure it.' She asked Mathur to store in a room a large quantity of edibles of all sorts. When it was done she told me to remain in that room day and night and eat whenever and whatever I liked. I did so—moving about and taking every now and then a bit of something or other according to fancy. After three days I was cured."

This sort of appetite has been recorded in the lives of other aspirants. Sri Ramakrishna experienced this abnormal craving for food several times in his life.

These successful experiments, the strange coincidence of the various realizations of Sri Ramakrishna with the recorded evidence of the scriptures, and the wonderful experience she had on the very first day of her meeting, left no doubt whatsoever in the mind of the Brahmani as to the truth of her bold hypothesis about the Master's real personality. Now she openly asserted that Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary devotee, nor even a superman with lofty spiritual realization, but that he was an Incarnation of God born into this world for some inscrutable purpose. When she was convinced that her conclusions were correct, she began to speak of them freely not only to Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday, but to many others.

One day Sri Ramakrishna was seated with Hriday and Mathur in the Panchavati, when he casually remarked to the latter, "You see, a Brahmin lady has come here. She calls me an Incarnation of God." "How can that be," replied Mathur, "since the scriptures mention only ten Incarnations, and there is no room for an eleventh one? But I admit you have obtained the grace of the Mother Kali."



"She says, she finds the distinguishing marks of an Incarnation on my body and in my mind," said the Master. "She is well versed in the scriptures, and she has also a lot of books with her."

They were talking thus, when they saw the Brahmani approaching with a plate of sweetmeats. Mathur asked the Master if she were the one of whom he had been speaking. Sri Ramakrishna nodded in reply. Mathur found her in a half-abstracted mood—as Yashoda used to be when feeding her darling. As she drew near, she saw Mathur and, controlling her emotions with some effort, gave the plate to Hriday. Pointing to Mathur the Master said to the Brahmani, "I was just telling him of what you say about me. But he says that the scriptures mention only ten Incarnations and no more." Mathur bowed to her and awaited an answer. "Why," she quickly replied, "the *Bhagavata* actually records twenty-two and then makes room for an infinite number of them. Besides, it is clearly mentioned in the Vaishnava scriptures that Sri Gauranga would be incarnated again, and there is a striking resemblance in many points between him and Sri Ramakrishna." She added that a Vaishnava scholar would settle the point, and that she was prepared to prove her case. Mathur remained silent.

The Brahmani's bold declaration made a profound impression in the Kali temple. The man who had hitherto been looked upon as a lunatic was emphatically declared to be an Incarnation of God, and the scriptures supported this contention ! The very man who had been ridiculed and slighted by everybody, was being ranked with Sri Krishna, Ramachandra, or Buddha ! He became the burning topic of the hour. Mathur was puzzled. Torn between faith and doubt, he found himself in a dilemma. From his own experiences with Sri Ramakrishna during the past few years he had to admit that he possessed many superhuman traits. But he was not ready to think of him as God Himself. So the momentous declaration of the Brahmani raised a storm in his mind. Besides her disinterestedness, which was in her favour, the Brahmani was ready to verify her statement by scriptural authority. She had sent out a challenge. She was prepared to meet any scholar to prove her contention. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, was eager to have the meeting. Partly to satisfy his own curiosity and to settle his own doubts, and

partly to humour Sri Ramakrishna as well as to convince him of his eccentricities, Mathur consented to invite some of the scholars of the day to the garden of Dakshineswar to test the soundness of the Brahmani's contention.

It was decided to invite Vaishnav Charan and Gauri Kanta, two famous scholars. A great devotee, Vaishnav Charan at that time was one of the leaders of his society, an adept in various philosophies and scriptures—specially in books on devotion. A real Sadhaka,<sup>1</sup> he was eagerly sought by the people of his sect for advice in their respective paths of Sadhana. By inviting him, Mathur had chosen the right man. And Gauri, too, was pre-eminently fitted for the task he was called upon to perform.

In a few days Vaishnav Charan arrived at Dakshineswar with other scholars and devotees, and a small meeting was held in which the Brahmani, Mathur, and Sri Ramakrishna were present. Addressing the Pundits, the Brahmani explained to them what she had heard about Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices and what she herself had observed, the conclusions of the scriptures on this point, and lastly, what she thought about the real nature of Sri Ramakrishna. Turning to Vaishnav Charan she said, "This is my honest conviction about this God-man based on the interpretation of certain facts according to the scriptures. I really believe him to be an Incarnation of God. Now please state your reasons if you differ from me." Like a heroic mother, she held herself in readiness to answer all objections. And what about the man around whom this discussion pivoted? Sitting in the midst of that assembly, he looked like a boy, perfectly indifferent to the verdict, as if it did not concern him at all. We can picture him sitting at ease, immersed in his own blissful thoughts, sometimes smiling, sometimes taking a pinch of spices from a pouch, or again saying to Vaishnav Charan, "Look here, sometimes I feel like this, or that." The result of the meeting was that Vaishnav Charan subscribed heartily to all the conclusions of the Brahmani. Further he asserted that the supreme devotion known as the Mahabhava seemed fully manifest in Sri Ramakrishna. It was really wonderful, he added, that while in certain extraordinary cases only a few of its divine characteristics had been noticeable, in Sri Ramakrishna all of them seemed to be fully manifest. Mathur

<sup>1</sup>One actually engaged in religious practices and discipline.

and others were struck dumb at this bold assertion of Vaishnav Charan. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, said to Mathur, "To think that he should say so ! It pleases me to learn that after all it is not disease."

That Vaishnav Charan did not say these things out of mere sentiment was proved by his attitude towards Sri Ramakrishna. With every day of their acquaintance, his regard and esteem for the Master deepened. He became a frequent visitor to the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, where he sought the advice and guidance of the Master in spiritual matters. He occasionally invited other devotees of his order to accompany him, so that they, too, might consult Sri Ramakrishna. Vaishnav Charan belonged to the Kartabhaja<sup>1</sup> sect of the Vaishnavas. At a place a few miles north of Calcutta, he had a number of devotees, of both sexes, who practised Sadhana under his guidance. At his request Sri Ramakrishna visited there a number of times. But the familiarity between the sexes in this sect—the real cause of its degeneration—was always repugnant to him. He shuddered at the licence prevalent among them and could not reconcile their professions with their actual practice. But even here there were some sincere devotees, which led him to revise his opinion of this cult. Thenceforth he concluded that a man, though engaged in some apparently reprehensible form of Sadhana, could progress spiritually and ultimately attain to the goal if he only performed it sincerely as a religious practice. As days went on, Vaishnav Charan was so impressed with Sri Ramakrishna's pure character and wonderful spiritual life that he felt no scruple in proclaiming him to be an Incarnation of God.

A few days after this memorable meeting, Pundit Gauri Kanta Tarkabhushan of Indesh, District of Bankura, arrived at Dakshineswar. He was a great Sadhaka of the Tantrika school, and every year during the Durga Puja worshipped his own wife as a representation of the Mother. He had a strange method of making sacrifice (Homa). Instead of arranging the sacrificial faggots on the ground, as is the usual custom, he would pile them—a weight of some eighty pounds—on the palm of his outstretched left hand. Then he would set fire to them with his right hand and hold them in that position till the ceremony was

<sup>1</sup> A small sect in Bengal, the adherents of which look upon their Guru as God.

over. Sri Ramakrishna himself saw him do it and used to say it was one of his extraordinary powers.

On the arrival of Gauri Pundit at Dakshineswar an amusing incident occurred, which Sri Ramakrishna would often narrate to his devotees. Gauri was far-famed as a great scholar, and nobody could stand before him in debate. People ascribed this to his miraculous powers. Whenever challenged in a meeting of scholars, he would enter the hall thundering the refrain of a hymn to the Divine Mother, adding some martial syllables in order to inspire awe. It is said that this chanting served a two-fold purpose, that of unnerving his opponents and awakening a strange power in him. Sri Ramakrishna would say that when he entered in this belligerent manner, it was impossible for anybody to defeat him in argument. Gauri entered the precincts of the Kali temple in the usual fashion. Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his own room and did not know anything about the Pundit's powers, but he was impelled by some power within him to utter the same words as Gauri was intoning, but in a louder voice. At this the latter raised his voice to a higher pitch, to which the Master replied by shouting louder. This competition between the two seemed so like the raid of a gang of dacoits that the guards ran from all sides with their clubs. But to their surprise they found that it was nothing but a contest between the Pundit and their mad priest as to the respective strength of their lungs ! Gauri, not being able to raise his pitch higher than Sri Ramakrishna, had to acknowledge defeat and entered the compound with a sullen countenance. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards said that the Divine Mother had transferred to him the great powers which had made Gauri invincible in debate, but which acted at the same time as a barrier to his realization of God. In the course of a few days Gauri was charmed with the wonderful character of Sri Ramakrishna and surrendered himself wholly to him.

A few days after the arrival of Gauri, Mathur convened another assembly of the Pundits, to which, of course, Vaishnav Charan was invited. The object of the meeting was, as before, to test the mental and spiritual state of Sri Ramakrishna by the touchstone of the scriptures. The meeting was to take place in the morning, and the place chosen was the big hall in front of the Kali temple. Seeing that Vaishnav Charan was late in coming,

Sri Ramakrishna proceeded towards the appointed place with Gauri. Before taking his seat in the hall Sri Ramakrishna entered the Kali temple and bowed before the goddess. He was coming out of the temple overwhelmed with emotion when Vaishnav Charan appeared and touched his feet. Sri Ramakrishna at once fell into a trance, and sat on the latter's shoulders. A thrill of divine joy passed through Vaishnav Charan's heart, and thinking himself greatly blessed at the holy touch, he began to praise the Master by composing then and there a Sanskrit hymn. The radiant countenance of Sri Ramakrishna and the reverent pose of Vaishnav Charan as he uttered the melodious verses in his exuberance of joy, filled everybody with bliss. After a while the Master returned to his normal state, and all slowly moved on to the place of meeting.

The proceedings commenced. Gauri said, addressing the assembled Pundits, "Vaishnav Charan is really fortunate. He has received divine favour today ; so I shall not argue with him. Even if I did, I should certainly be defeated. Besides I find that we both agree on the main issue and have both arrived at the same conclusion regarding Sri Ramakrishna. Any debate, therefore, is superfluous." Not that Gauri was afraid of his opponent's scholarship, but the fact was that he himself had come to feel, through his own spiritual insight, that Sri Ramakrishna was no ordinary saint. One day the Master by way of testing him said, "Vaishnav Charan tells everybody that God has incarnated Himself in this body. How it is possible? What do you say?" "Is this all he says about you?" replied Gauri gravely. "Then he has said too little. I am firmly convinced that you are that mine of infinite spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which appears in the world from time to time in the form of Incarnations."

"Ah," said Sri Ramakrishna with a smile. "you seem to outbid him in this matter. What do you find in me which leads you to entertain this idea?"

"I feel it in my heart," replied Gauri, "and the scriptures are on my side. I am ready to prove my contention to anybody who challenges me in the matter."

"Well, it is you who say so," Sri Ramakrishna said like a boy. "but believe me, I know nothing about it."



Thus the two great scholars who came to test Sri Ramakrishna ended by surrendering themselves at his feet.

This was the first important episode in the life of Sri Ramakrishna since his meeting with the Brahmani. In the swift march of events that followed, it is impossible for us to fix our attention on the more important and deeper currents of thought which left a profound impress on the lives of both Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmani. The relationship gradually became deep and intimate. Sri Ramakrishna accepted her as one of his Gurus and under her guidance practised a most difficult course of Tantrika Sadhanas. The spiritual outlook of the Guru herself was considerably broadened, as we shall see, by contact with her wonderful disciple.

The thing that comes uppermost to our minds in this connection is the strange fact of his accepting a woman as a Guru. Happening in the life of a man whose chief advice later to his devotees may be summed up in the phrase, "renunciation of woman and wealth", and who seemed to consider the presence of a woman the greatest obstacle to a man in the path of Sadhana, this incident is all the more significant and deserves careful consideration. In spite of his warning against association with women, the Master accepted one as his spiritual guide and sat at her feet for instruction. He demonstrated thereby that there is nothing innate in a woman that obstructs a man's spiritual progress—rather it is the attitude of the man towards her that helps or hinders. If one loves a woman for her physical charms only, she degrades instead of ennobling, but if one looks to the divinity of her nature and sees the Mother of the universe manifesting through her, she will help to cut the bonds of matter and show the way to bliss. Woman cannot be shunned, for in this world you cannot escape her. So long as there is the idea of sex, it will follow you everywhere. You can evade it only by regarding woman as mother or sister or daughter—that is, in the purest of relationships. But if you insult her—use her as a toy for pleasure—the nemesis of her wrath will follow you even to the outermost limits of the world. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his life the proper attitude of man towards woman and *vice versa*, a precious boon to humanity for all time to come.

Secondly, from the time of this contact Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana took a new direction and flowed through new channels.

Hitherto he had tried to realize God without any eternal help or guidance. He had received no help from his first Guru, Kenaram Bhattacharya, except at the moment of initiation. By his own tremendous efforts, under the guidance of the ever-wakeful Teacher concealed in the hearts of all, Sri Ramakrishna had achieved the apparently impossible feat of transcending all the limitations of finite existence, and uncovering his true relationship with the One Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, in the compass of a few short years. By his zeal and devotion to God, his reunciation of worldly things, phenomenal perseverance, and unflagging determination, he removed the last barrier of nescience from his mind, and divine Truth stood revealed before him in all its purity and splendour. We learn from his Sadhana that in attempting to realize the divine we do not aspire after something new or extraneous. What does not really belong to us, can never be ours. By our struggle we only discover what in reality belongs to us. And for this glorious culmination, the first thing that is needed is zeal. Without this element in the struggle, without tenacity of purpose, no amount of spirituality injected from without, no amount of spiritual knowledge, pilgrimage, association with devotees, prostration, or genuflection will be of any avail. But the idea is too abstract—too high and sublime—for the average person. Therefore we see myriads of scriptures and endless processes of Sadhana, which take the aspirant step by step to the supreme goal. The lives of saints, prophets, and Incarnations of God serve only to awaken in our hearts a burning desire to get rid of ignorance.

In the person of the Brahmani Sri Ramakrishna found a living Guru under whose guidance he proceeded, as we shall see later on, along the path marked out by the scriptures, to arrive ultimately at the same truth which he had realized before by his own unaided efforts.

Thirdly, it is clear from Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with the Brahmani that all necessary help is brought to the sincere soul at the proper time; and if he only fervently prays to God, he is looked after. It teaches us the lesson that all that we require in religious life is to kindle a great zeal for divine realization, and the rest will be added unto us when necessary. Impatience only mars the peace and sweetness of life without helping us in any way.

And the last, though not the least, important point about this historic meeting was the correct evaluation of Sri Ramakrishna's personality and his potential greatness. Up to then everybody had measured the depth of this unique life by the foot-rule of his own shallow experience. Even Mathur was no exception. So while the realizations of the Master were being weighed in the balance by incompetent judges, it was the Brahmani who turned the scale overwhelmingly in his favour by her declaration. The matter, perhaps, would have stopped there, had she not challenged the world to disprove her if it could. What the result was we already know.

Thus the recognition of Sri Ramakrishna's greatness may be said to date from the time of the Brahmani's arrival at Dakshineswar. It was she who strung together and found a meaning for the hitherto isolated and neglected facts of his life, and pointed out their tremendous significance. She was the first to be convinced of his great mission—the role he was to play in the future adjustment of the world's spiritual ideas—and she knew her own part in it too. She set herself to work for the fulfilment of this divine purpose and faithfully contributed her own quota of service towards the unfoldment of this wonderful life.

And a word about the man who was suddenly transported by her from a region of ignominy to one of universal homage. From the opprobrium of supposed lunacy to the supreme honour of Avatarahood is a jump sufficiently long to turn the head of any mortal, however sane. But simple child of the Divine Mother as he was, this adoration and praise did not affect him in the least. He kept his gaze fastened on the lotus feet of the Mother and yearned only for Her guidance and inspiration. A crown was offered to him and he set it aside—not like a Caesar as we see in the play, but actually and definitely. For praise or blame—acceptance or rejection—is nothing but a phantom of Maya to him whose mind always soars in the transcendental region of Eternal Truth.

## TANTRIKA SADHANA

Man has natural tendency to enjoyment and does not welcome renunciation. He finds it difficult to call upon the Lord in a pure and simple way, and instinctively hugs to his bosom some illusion in the midst of truth. Even when renouncing lust and wealth, he would like a passing glimpse of them. Hence it is that we find in the sacred books immediately after the definite statement that the worship of the Divine Mother should be performed in the purest way possible, room is made for sensuous songs on the plea that these will be pleasing to the goddess. There is nothing to be wondered at in this tendency of the human mind. It only shows how strong are the ties of sense-attraction with which the Mother of the universe has bound Her creatures. The painful idea is perceived that unless She out of Her infinite grace leads us out of this intricate maze, we are powerless. It is not flattering to our vanity to realize that She alone knows the way out.

In tracing the origin of the Tantrika mode of worship, we have to go back to the Vedic times when both enjoyment and renunciation were sought to be combined in the Karma-kanda or the ritualistic portion of the Vedas. The goal of human life in that age seems to have been the regulated enjoyment of sense-objects, by propitiating the gods through prayers and sacrifices. When in this way the mind was somewhat purified, and divested of lower desires, then the man took up the higher course of discipline prescribed in the Upanishads. But with the advent of the Buddhistic age things took a different turn. The methods of worship which were suited to pure-souled recluses alone were prescribed for the ordinary householder, irrespective of his taste or capacity, and the laws of the state lent countenance to this. The result was that the Vedic sacrifices, which had in view the object of gradually weaning the aspirant's mind from the enjoyment of the senses, were replaced by a system of clandestine worship—conducted in dreary, out of the way places, at dead of night—so that outsiders, and specially the emissaries of law, might get no clue. There seems to be a good deal of truth in the statement that the Tantrika rites were introduced by the

Lord Shiva in place of Vedic rituals, which in the course of time had fallen into disuse. For not only do they combine enjoyment and renunciation like the Vedic rites of old, but one also finds in them an intimate connection between the ritualistic portion and philosophy—which were distinct branches in the Vedic age. Every act of worship according to the Tantras necessitates some sort of meditation on the unity of the aspirant with the Lord—of the Jiva with the Paramatman. For instance, sitting down to worship, one has to mentally raise the Kundalini Shakti—the resultant of the past impressions or the entire potentiality of a man supposed to be coiled up at the lowest extremity of the spinal column—to the “thousand-petalled” lotus in the brain, and think of this symbol of the aspirant himself as identified with God residing there. Then he is to imagine himself as separate from Him, with the spirit of the Lord condensed into a luminous form of god or goddess which is to be worshipped. He projects Him out of himself on the image or symbol before him and worships Him. After the worship is over he mentally withdraws the deity into himself. Now, on reflection it will be found that in this process of worship a fine attempt has been made to realize the ultimate object of human life, viz identification with the Lord, through love. It is true that only one in a thousand may be able to perform the above meditation in a proper way, but none can deny the fact that all at least may try to do so, and this effort in itself is a slow advance towards the goal. Thus, every Tantrika rite invariably directs the mind of the worshipper to the underlying unity of existence.

Again, the Tantras teach the motherhood of God and, simultaneously with it, a glorification of woman. Neither in the Vedas nor in the Puranas do we come across this idea. In some portions of the Vedas it appears in a rudimentary form, where the husband is instructed to look upon the body of his wife as sacred and to worship the gods therein, so that she may be the mother of a worthy child. The Tantras sublimated this old idea and developed it along new lines, with conspicuous results, for it was found suited to certain temperaments of the age. This may have been the origin of the Virachara form of Tantrika practice in which wine and woman play a part. The authors of the Tantras were right in their assumption that the average man should have a share of the good things of life. And as he



enjoys he is to see God in the objects of enjoyment. Then he will not be carried away by his pursuit of the senses, and at some time or other he will set himself to cultivate self-control and renunciation. Hence they declared that the woman's body is sacred, that one should always look upon a woman as a goddess and, realizing her as one of the manifestations of the Mother of the universe, treat her with all respect. Maltreatment of women was strictly forbidden.

But in spite of this forethought on the part of the inaugurators of this system, its followers with the lapse of time, became slaves to passion and, instead of trying to realize God, they sought to acquire small physical powers with the aid of the Tantrika rites. This marked the origin of grotesque ghost and demon worship and led to the abominations which we find in the Tantras of today. Hence in every Tantra one meets with a higher and a lower form of worship, and every one chooses according to his taste.

The main idea of the Tantras, then, is the deification of the objects of the senses, which ever lure man and bind him in an endless chain of births and deaths, preventing his realization of God. They seek to accustom the struggling soul to look upon these sense-objects as visible representations of the Lord, so that his inordinate attachment to them may be curbed. According to the qualifications of the aspirants, the Tantras prescribed three different modes of practice. They are called Pashubhava, Virabhava and Divyabhava—or animal, heroic, and divine attitudes—in an ascending order. In the devotee of the first type there is a predominance of animal propensities. For him the instruction is that he should avoid all objects of temptation as far as he can, and engage himself in Japa and such other practices with strict regard to purity. In the second class of aspirants, who are comparatively advanced, the devotion to God supersedes the cravings of the senses, and the sense-attractions only heighten the longing for God. They are advised to live in the midst of temptations and try to concentrate on the Lord, unshaken by the jarring elements of the outside world. The third and highest type of Sadhaka is he who is far above the reach of the sense-impulses, who has been swept away from them by a tidal wave of yearning for God-realization, and to whom the practice of truth, forgiveness, compassion, contentment, and such

other attributes have become as natural as respiration. From the above the readers will perceive that the practices of the Tantras bear fruit only when the aspirant makes self-control the bed-rock of his endeavours.

The Tantrika influence permeates every system of worship in India at the present day, including Vaishnavism. Only, the Vaishnavite teachers have introduced certain changes in the worship of the Tantras which are worth nothing. They consider dualistic teachings more beneficial to men, and accordingly have laid stress only on that portion of the Tantrika rites, viz their theory of Mantras and external worship. Into this worship they have infused a new spirit and advise people to serve the Lord according to the promptings of their hearts. The Tantrika gods purify the offerings made to them by merely looking at them; and the devotee by partaking of this consecrated food gradually becomes purer in mind. The Vaishnava reformers taught not only that the gods take the essence of those offerings, but that, in certain cases depending on the devotion of the aspirant, they may also partake of the material offering as well. Amongst the many changes these teachers introduced into the method of worship, the most important was the emphasis they laid on the preliminary course of Tantrika worship, Pashubhava, and they gave strict injunctions about purity being observed in every act of the aspirant—in his food, mode of life, and everything. They also laid great stress on Japa or repetition of the Lord's name as a means to God-realization.

But in course of time evils crept into this cult also. Forgetting the inner significance of the masters' teachings, the followers adopted measures to suit their own tastes. The Acharyas had cited the great attraction between a lover and his mistress as an example to emulate in their quest after God. But they went to the length of carrying it into actual practice, debasing the old, pure form of worship with their own tendencies. It is the same story everywhere.

From the above sketch another thing will have struck the reader. It is this, that for the criticisms usually levelled against the Tantras—or for the matter of that, any abused form of practice—not the Tantras, but the innate tendency of man to gravitate towards enjoyment is responsible. The Tantrika rites can be practised without wine or sex-indulgence, as is amply

proved in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Evidently it was to equip him as a supreme teacher for modern times that the Divine Mother made him undergo the Tantrika practices.

It has already been stated that the Brahmani, from the very first, bore a motherly affection towards Sri Ramakrishna. Though she believed in the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna, yet under the promptings of motherly solicitude she forgot the aspect of grandeur in the Master, and treated him as a son. But she never forgot the divine mandate she had received to deliver her message to him, and she did her best to act as spiritual guide to Sri Ramakrishna.

But Sri Ramakrishna himself, as he stated later on, undertook this new course of Sadhana only after he had sought and received the permission of the Divine Mother. He set himself to it with the zeal characteristic of him. The Brahmani collected the rare ingredients necessary for the Sadhana and brought them to Dakshineswar. Two Asanas or seats were made, according to the Tantrika books, one in the Panchavati and another under the Bael tree, at the northern extremity of the garden. Referring to this period the Master would afterwards say, "The Brahmani would go during the day to places far from Dakshineswar and collect the various rare things mentioned in the Tantrika scriptures. At nightfall she would ask me to come to one of the seats. I would go, and after performing the worship of the Mother Kali I would begin to meditate according to her directions. As soon as I would begin to tell my beads, I would be always overwhelmed with divine fervour and fall into a deep trance. I cannot relate now the varieties of wonderful visions I used to have. They followed each other in quick succession, and the effects of those practices I could feel most tangibly. The Brahmani put me through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantra books. Most of these were extremely difficult Sadhanas—some of them so dangerous that they cause the devotee to lose his footing and sink into moral degradation. But the infinite grace of the Mother carried me through them unscathed."

The many fiery ordeals through which he passed during this period testify in the highest degree to his complete conquest of his passions. They proved once for all that the Master was firmly established in the eternal truth, and that the passing

phenomena of the world with all their varied charms could not make him deviate from his one-pointed devotion to the Mother. With the utmost swiftness and ease he ascended the steps of this difficult course of exercises till he reached the topmost rung of the ladder. His mind was always pitched to the highest level of spirituality, and from that lofty altitude he could find nothing that did not, somehow or other, remind him of the Mother. The universe appeared before his clarified vision in its true perspective. By the very nature of the Tantrika rites he had to witness scenes which would have tested to the full the fortitude and self-control of the most stalwart of men, but the impression they carried to his mind was always that of divine bliss unalloyed by any worldly taint. To him, as he floated in a limitless ocean of divine beatitude, there remained nothing evil. The Brahmani declared that her divine disciple had attained perfection in this system of Yoga and had passed through its extreme tests successfully, a thing which very few Sadhakas indeed could do. Throughout he kept intact his ideal of motherhood in all women, and never partook of wine. Woman, to him, was always the emblem of the Divine Mother, and the very mention of the word Karana,<sup>1</sup> the technical term for wine, would suggest to his mind the great Mother of the universe, the First Cause, and inebriate him with a divine joy which made him forget all about the world.

At this time he lost the sense of distinction between holy and unholy. Even a street-girl reminded him of the Mother. Words grossly offensive to the ordinary man appeared to him as but a group of letters—and every letter, he believed in accordance with the verdict of the Shastras, was a symbol of the Divine Mother. Nay, these would sometimes throw him into Samadhi—as was repeatedly observed later—on account of their suggestion of the Blissful Mother. He would find himself wrapped in the flames of knowledge, both inside and out. But his most remarkable experience during this period was that of the upward march of the Kundalini Shakti. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards described it thus in his own inimitable way: "Something rises with a tingling sensation from the feet to the head. So long as it does not reach the brain I remain conscious, but

<sup>1</sup>The primary meaning of the word Karana is cause. By usage it has come to mean wine as well.



the moment it does so, I am dead to the outside world. Even the functions of the eyes and the ears come to a stop, and speech is out of the question. Who should speak? The very distinction between 'I' and 'thou' vanishes. Sometimes I think I shall tell you everything about what I see and feel when that mysterious power rises up through the spinal column. When it has come up to this, or even this (pointing to the heart and the throat), it is possible to speak, which I do. But the moment it has gone above this (pointing to the throat), somebody stops my mouth, as it were, and I am adrift. I make up my mind to relate to you what I feel when the Kundalini goes beyond the throat, but as I think over it, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end of the matter!" Many a time did the Master attempt to describe this state, but failed every time. One day he was determined to tell and went on until the power reached the throat. Then pointing to the sixth centre, opposite the junction of the eyebrows, he said, "When the mind reaches this point one catches a vision of the Paramatman and falls into Samadhi. Only a thin, transparent veil intervenes between the Jiva and the Paramatman. He then sees like this—," and as he attempted to explain it in detail he fell into Samadhi. When his mind came down a little he tried again, and again he was immersed in Samadhi! After repeated fruitless attempts he said with tears in his eyes, "Well, I sincerely wish to tell you everything, but Mother won't let me do so. She gagged me!"

Referring to the different ways in which the Kundalini rises to the brain, the Master often said, "Well, that which rises to the brain with a tingling sensation does not always follow the same kind of movement. The scriptures speak of its having five kinds of motion. First, the ant-like motion; one feels a slow creeping sensation from the feet upwards, like a row of ants creeping on with food in their mouth. When it reaches the head, the Sadhaka falls into Samadhi. Second, the frog-like motion; just as frogs make two or three short jumps in quick succession and then stop for a while to proceed again in the same way, so something is felt advancing from the feet to the brain. When this reaches the brain the man goes into Samadhi. Third, the serpentine motion; as snakes lie quietly, straight or coiled up, but as soon as they find a victim, or are frightened, they run in a zigzag motion, in like manner the 'coiled up'



power rushes to the head, and this produces Samadhi. Fourth, the bird-like motion ; just as birds in their flight from one place to another take to their wings and fly, sometimes a little high and sometimes low, but never stop till they reach their destination, so that power reaches the brain and Samadhi ensues. Fifth and last, the monkey-like motion: as monkeys going from one tree to another take a leap from one branch to another and thus clear the distance in two or three bounds, so the Yogi feels the Kundalini go to the brain and produce a trance."

These experiences he would explain at other times from the Vedantic standpoint as follows: "The Vedanta speaks of seven planes, in all of which the Sadhaka has a particular kind of vision. The human mind has a natural tendency to confine its activities to the three lower centres—the highest being opposite the navel—and therefore is content with the satisfaction of the common appetites such as eating and so forth. But when it reaches the fourth centre, that is, the one opposite the heart, the man sees a divine effulgence. From this state, however, he often lapses back to the three lower centres. When the mind comes to the fifth centre, opposite the throat, the Sadhaka cannot speak of anything but God. While I was in this state I would feel as though struck violently on the head if anybody spoke of worldly topics before me. I would hide myself in the Panchavati where I was safe. I would fly at the sight of worldly-minded people, and relatives appeared to me like a yawning chasm from which there was no escape if I once fell. I felt suffocated in their presence—almost to the point of death, and would be relieved only when I left them. Even from this position a man may slip down. So he has to be on his guard. But he is above all fear when his mind reaches the sixth centre—opposite the junction of the eyebrows. He gets the vision of the Paramatman and remains always in Samadhi. There is only a thin transparent veil between this and the Sahasrara or the highest centre. He is then so near the Paramatman that he imagines he is merged in Him. But really he is not. From this state the mind can come down to the fifth, or at the most, to the fourth centre, but not below that. The ordinary Sadhakas, classed as 'Jivas', cannot come down from this state. After remaining constantly in Samadhi for twenty-one days, they break that thin veil and become one with the Lord for ever. This

eternal union of the Jiva and the Paramatman in the Sahasrara is known as going into the seventh plane."

Sri Ramakrishna also saw the Ultimate Cause of the universe as a large luminous triangle which was giving birth every moment to an infinite number of universes. He often heard the Anahata—a great solemn sound like the Om, produced by the conglomeration of the infinite variety of sounds in the universe. Some say that they heard from the Master himself that he could understand at this time the language of beasts and birds.

As an added result of his spiritual realization, he had free use of the eight Siddhis or supernatural power which make man a god—almost omnipotent. But the Mother showed him in a vision that for a real devotee these powers were worthless. From that time he always thought of them with repugnance and used to warn his devotees against them.

It was at this time that he had a vision of the Divine Maya—the inscrutable way in which the Lord brings about the projection, preservation, and dissolution of the Universe. He saw a woman of exquisite beauty ascend from the Ganga and slowly approach the Panchavati. Presently he noticed that she was about to be a mother. In a short time she gave birth to a lovely child and was nursing the babe with the utmost tenderness. A moment later he observed that she was no longer tender, but had assumed a terrible aspect. She put the child between her grim jaws and crushed it to pieces! Swallowing it she again hid herself in the Ganga! This is the way the Divine Enchanter hypnotises the world again and again with the phenomena of birth, growth, and death, and it perceives not Him who befools it with this never-ending game.

He also saw innumerable goddesses; some of them talked to him and advised him in various ways. He used to say that though all of them possessed exceptional beauty, yet Shodashi or Rajarajeshwari surpassed all others in loveliness.

As a result of his success in the Tantrika practices, he became like a child. He could not keep on the wearing cloth or even the sacred thread. In spite of him they would drop off.

For some years from now, his complexion was so beautiful that he attracted attention everywhere. He used to wear a gold amulet on his arm, and it could hardly be distinguished from

the golden colour of his body. Sri Ramakrishna himself said, "People used to stare at the loveliness of this form. The chest and face were always flushed, and the whole body seemed to be luminous. To escape public notice I had to wrap a stout sheet round my body. I prayed to Mother, 'Take back Thy outward beauty, Mother, and give me instead Thy inner beauty, and purity of the spirit.' I used to stroke the body gently and repeat, 'Dive inward.' After a long time the exterior became dull as it is now."

The revelation came to him about this time that later on many devotees would seek his guidance in spiritual matters. He spoke about this to Mathur, Hriday, and others. Mathur rejoiced and said, "Very well, we shall all be happy in your company."

The most remarkable feature about Sri Ramakrishna's Tantrika Sadhana is that he attained perfection in every course in an incredibly short time—three days being sufficient. Needless to say, it was because he had already realized the Mother of the universe that all subsequent Sadhanas became so easy. It was like the case of a master musician who feels himself at home, no matter how difficult is the music he is called upon to play. Not only was Sri Ramakrishna's perfection in this Sadhana unique and unprecedented, but it is also to him that the restoration of the purity of the ancient Tantrika practices was due. Therein lay his greatness.

## IN THE COMPANY OF DEVOTEES AND SCHOLARS

The reader will remember that the Brahmani was commissioned to convey a divine message to two other devotees. She would often say to the Master, "If you are willing, I shall write to them to come here." One day he gave her the permission, and in due course Chandra came. The Master was invited that day to visit the Brahmani, though she had kept Chandra's arrival secret. She and Chandra were talking together when he entered the room. The Brahmani greeted him, and shortly afterwards he fell into a trance. Suddenly he shouted, "Ah, here is Chandra ! Is this not Chandra ?" Then he became motionless. Chandra took hold of his hands and called him loudly by name three or four times. The Master soon came back to normal consciousness. "You seem to know me," said Chandra, "why did you forget me so long ?" "It was the Lord's will," replied the Master. They conversed for some time. Chandra was a great devotee, and Sri Ramakrishna loved him. He said that Chandra was endowed with some of the power of the Lord Vishnu, and it was because of this that he could restore the Master to a normal state of mind from Samadhi so easily. But he looked so insignificant that Hriday seriously doubted his spiritual greatness, and called it in question. Sri Ramakrishna silenced him. But one day when Chandra came to see Sri Ramakrishna the latter said to Hriday, "Just put an ochre cloth on him and then mark the result." When this was done Chandra was overwhelmed with a strange emotion. With a smile Sri Ramakrishna drew Hriday's attention to the transformation. He had acquired, in course of Sadhana, a power through which he could become invisible.

Sri Ramakrishna said that Girija, the other protégé of the Brahmani, had similar powers. He too, came to Dakshineswar. One evening he accompanied the Master to the neighbouring garden of Shambhu Charan Mallick, who was a great admirer of Sri Ramakrishna and thought it a rare privilege to be of service to him. All three were so engrossed in spiritual discussion that they did not notice that evening had deepened into

night. When the Master and Girija turned their steps towards Dakshineswar, it was so dark that they stumbled. Sri Ramakrishna was particularly distressed. Seeing him in this plight, Girija suddenly stopped and said, "Wait a bit, brother, I will give you light." Then he turned his back and from it a powerful light was emitted which lit the way up to the gate of the Kali temple. The Master said that he easily found his way with the help of that light. "But," he concluded the narration, "neither Chandra nor Girija retained those powers. While they lived with me, the Gracious Mother took them away, so that they might turn their attention without distraction to the realization of God."<sup>1</sup>

We have already said that the Kali temple of Dakshineswar was a favourite resort of devotees and Sadhus because of its seclusion and holy association, as well as of Rani Rasmani's liberality. Pointing to some of his disciples of English education, Sri Ramakrishna once said, "It was only after the coming of Keshab Chandra Sen that 'Young Bengal' began to frequent this temple; but long before that, innumerable monks, ascetics, and devotees of various orders used to stream in here. They would stop here for a few days on their way to Gangasagar or to Puri. That was before the opening of the railways. At special times, Sadhus of a particular class would congregate in large numbers. Once monks belonging to the Ramayat sect of Vaishnavas began to come. Their devotion, faith, and steadfastness to service beggar all description. It was from one of them that I got Ramlala.<sup>2</sup> Another Sadhu belonging to this sect had a wonderful faith in the name of God. All he had was a water-pot and a book. The book was his treasure. He worshipped it

<sup>1</sup>In the year 1899, soon after the Swami Vivekananda's second departure for the West, a gentleman came to the Belur Math and gave himself out as Chandra. Swami Brahmananda, President, was there at the time. They used to hold long conversations in private. He said that all the prophecies of Sri Ramakrishna about him had come to pass. Only one remained to be fulfilled, and that was the Master's promise to meet him at his death. He used to pass long hours in meditation and prayer at the chapel with tears running down his face. He would gladly relate those incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's life which he knew. He was a plain-looking, quiet man and loved to sit in a retired corner of the Math. The first time he entered the chapel he was extremely moved on seeing the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna and addressed him as brother. He said that he had made pilgrimages to various holy places in India. Swami Brahmananda invited him to live in the Math permanently, but he went home on business and did not return. He probably was the 'Chandra' referred to above.

<sup>2</sup>The incidents about Ramlala are described in the next chapter.