

Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play

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S*ri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play* is the latest translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilāprasanga*, written by Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. This *Lilāprasanga* is the authentic, factual, descriptive, interpretative, and comprehensive biography of Sri Ramakrishna. I shall share with you an incident regarding the magnitude of this book. I asked Huston Smith, a well-known philosopher, to write a blurb for this book. He wrote on 15 December 2003: ‘Swami, I have just opened your book. It is magnificent, magisterial, awesome, sumptuous. I could add on superlatives “until the cows come home”, as the Missouri farmers used to say. If this was your only accomplishment . . . your life would have been well spent.’

Sri Ramakrishna’s life was written by Swami Saradananda in five volumes as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilāprasanga*. Earlier Ramakrishna’s conversations had been recorded by ‘M’ in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita*. But when we hear about an extraordinary personality we become curious to know more about the life of that person. It is natural because life and message go side-by-side. Ramakrishna’s life was his message. His life is vital. Here, in *Lilāprasanga*, we find an *avatār*’s life and message in detail. We don’t find this in any other *avatārs*.

Kathāmrita was translated by Swami Nikhilananda in 1942, and *Lilāprasanga* was translated by Swami Jagadananda in

1952. *The Gospel* of the Master is very important, but so is his biography. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play* serves that purpose. His life is now the beacon light in this age. In the West, people say, we have heard enough and read enough. Now we want experience. That is the trend of religion in this modern age.

In the 19th century the main focus of religion was reason. In the 20th century the main focus of religion was humanism. If a religion cannot do good to us, people thought, what good is that religion? In the 21st century, the main focus of religion is mysticism—direct experience. In 1992 I was invited to speak on ‘Contemporary Mysticism’ at Avila in Spain, the birthplace of St. Teresa. I spoke about Ramakrishna and tried to show how mystics all over the world speak in the same way. The language may be different, but they express the same truth. The Master used to say ‘All jackals howl alike’. In fact, the voices of the Russian jackal, the American jackal, or the Indian jackal are the same.

Swami Nikhilananda’s translation of the *Kathāmrita* is beautiful. But Swami Jagadananda’s translation of the *Lilāprasanga* is in a Victorian style and not very easy to understand. You see, language evolves. Language, they say, changes every forty years. We can observe the evolution of the English language—there is Chaucer’s English, Shakespearean English, Carlyle’s English, Somerset Maugham’s English, Christopher Isherwood’s English, and now

we find the English of the *Reader's Digest*. We see distinct changes. Similarly, we know how the Bengali language has changed over the years. We are aware of Vidyasagari Bangla, or the language used by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. That Bengali is not current today. In the same way, Bankim Chandra's Bengali language, as we see in his novel *Durgeshnandini*, is no longer used. The language of Rabindranath Tagore and that of Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay are standard and beautiful, and will not change for ages to come. Swami Saradananda's Bengali writing is very elegant and dignified. Nevertheless, it is not modern colloquial Bengali. That is why it is sometimes very difficult for modern readers to understand the *Lilāprasanga*. Although his language is elegant and somewhat Sanskritized, he tried to maintain at the same time the colloquial language of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he balanced both these aspects.

You see, language is very important. In the West, if people do not understand what is written, do you know what they say? 'Swami, it does not make any sense.' With this they will close the book and will read no further.

I tell you frankly, I have never undertaken such a difficult work in my life as that of translating the *Lilāprasanga*. I gave 275 classes, which means 275 hours on *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*. Afterwards, I realized that we need a new translation of *Lilāprasanga*.

The origin of *Lilāprasanga*

In 1896, Max Müller wrote an article in the journal *Nineteenth Century* about Ramakrishna entitled 'A Real Mahatman'. Swami Vivekananda met Professor Müller in England. In 1896, when Saradananda went to England, Swamiji asked him to help

Professor Müller write a book on Ramakrishna. Accordingly, Saradananda wrote twenty pages on Sri Ramakrishna's life and Max Müller added to it 375 teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus came out Max Müller's book *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*.

Before the *Lilāprasanga* was published, there were already in Bengali some books on Ramakrishna. Ramchandra Dutta wrote *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivan Vrittānta*. Akshay Kumar Sen wrote *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* and *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Mahimā*. 'M' wrote four parts of *Kathāmrita*, and Gurudas Burman wrote *Sri Ramakrishnacharit*. Some of these books were not accurate, and also some writers tried to highlight Sri Ramakrishna's miracles.

One day I asked Swami Bhuteshanandaji: 'Maharaj, it is hard to believe that while performing *Homa* (a fire sacrifice) Gauri Pandit kept one mound of wood on his left arm and poured oblations on it with his right hand. Western people think it is a miracle. But the Master said he saw that.' Then I said: 'Maharaj, how can I present these things to Western people?' He was amused and said: 'Ah! They believe in so many miracles of Jesus; they won't mind if there is one more miracle.'

Swami Saradananda had several reasons for writing *Lilāprasanga*. First, he had borrowed 11,000 rupees from some devotees to build the Udbodhan house for Holy Mother and for the Udbodhan publication department. How would he repay the debt? So he thought that he would write Sri Ramakrishna's life. Second, articles with all sorts of wrong information used to come for publication in the *Udbodhan* magazine, and he had to rewrite and correct them. He became frustrated and thought: During our very lifetime such wrong information is

spreading! And these errors will enter into the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature which is not right.

Moreover, some critics began to say that Ramakrishna's disciples had deviated from traditional Hinduism. So in the beginning of the third volume of *Lilāprasanga*, which was published first, Saradananda put 'Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna', an article written by Vivekananda, to prove that the followers of Ramakrishna belonged to Hinduism.

In 1909 Swami Saradananda started writing *Lilāprasanga* and completed it in 1919. It took ten years to write that magnum opus. But before he plunged into writing, he appealed to Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples and devotees who were still alive to send materials to him so that he could write an authentic biography of Sri Ramakrishna. Then materials began to pour in.

Once Swami Bhumananda wrote something about Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Saradananda read it and said that nobody should write a book on Sri Ramakrishna without receiving a command from the Master. Now, when Saradananda himself started writing *Lilāprasanga*, Bhumananda asked: 'Did you get a command?' Saradananda answered: 'That is none of your business.'

One day Girish Chandra Ghosh said: 'Look, Sharat, I asked Swamiji to write a biography of Sri Ramakrishna, and he replied: "Shall I make the image of a monkey while trying to make that of Shiva? I won't be able to do that. Sharat will write."' It seems that he did receive a command. He first wrote the chapter 'Sri Ramakrishna in Bhāvamukha', in volume three, where he elaborately discussed *vakalmā*, giving the power of attorney. He then showed it to Girish, who fully approved of it.

I shall now read a little of an eyewitness account that will give you an idea of how Saradananda wrote this biography. It is from Swami Bhumananda's reminiscences:

Getting up at daybreak, he took his morning bath from a bucket of water, which he carried himself to the bathroom. He always washed his own clothes after his bath. He then went to his room upstairs, changed his clothes, and spread his washed clothes in the sun on the roof. He would not take any help from anybody. Then he went to the shrine and bowed down to the Master. After that he went downstairs to his little office room to the left of the entrance of Udbodhan house, and sat on a carpet. He arranged his official things on a small low desk at his right side—a blotting pad, different stacks of letters, a container of cigarettes with a match box on its top, plus two small pots (one with ink and the other with water). He would wash the nib of his pen in the water pot and kept a piece of torn rag to wipe it. Every day he would clean his desk and the stacks of letter with a dusting cloth. At his left he had a hubble-bubble, which was presented to him by Swami Brahmananda. He smoked tobacco a few times a day. All this I visualize vividly even today.

Sitting calmly, he wrote the *Lilāprasanga* for hours together, and from time to time rubbed his chin slowly with the opposite side of his left palm. Sometimes he stretched his right leg out on the carpet. This was his method of giving himself a break to think and rest. When all at Udbodhan took tea, he also had some.

A few monks could not adjust themselves in some of the centres, so they would come and take shelter with Holy Mother and Saradananda at Udbodhan. They were often rowdy. One day some young monks were talking loudly. Golap-ma scolded them, saying, 'Sharat is doing serious work. You boys are shouting! Keep quiet.' Golap-ma had a very loud voice.

Sharat Maharaj told her: ‘Golap-ma, don’t scold them. They are boys. That is their nature. I have told my ears not to hear anything.’

Such control over the senses is the sign of a *sthitaprajna*, a person of steady wisdom. When you read the last part of the second chapter of the *Gītā*, you will find the description of a *sthitaprajna*, that is to say, how a person of steady wisdom, or an illumined soul, lives in this world. The disciples of Ramakrishna demonstrated this quality. They were all unique.

Swami Saradananda himself has described the adverse condition at the time of writing the *Lilāprasanga*. I shall read it to you. He says:

Holy Mother was living upstairs along with Radhu; I was surrounded by devotees and I had to keep the accounts also; the burden of the loan for the house was on me. I used to write the *Lilāprasanga* sitting in the small room downstairs. Then nobody dared to talk to me, as I had no time to chat for a long time. If anybody would ask for anything, I would say ‘be quick’ and finish the talk briefly. People would think that I was egotistic. I could not write much about the devotees [except Gopal-ma and Vivekananda], because there was so much material to write about the Master. When the mind was ready, only then could I write.

Saradananda started writing the *Lilāprasanga* in 1909 almost twenty-three years after the Master’s passing away. But then he reasoned that the book would become very big if he wrote about the Master’s relationship with all the disciples. Towards the end of the fourth part of the *Lilāprasanga*, he wrote about Gopal-ma. What a life! For thirty years she repeated the Gopāla mantra for sixteen hours a day, and finally had the vision of Child Gopāla. In the fifth part he covered Swamiji’s life and some

of his relationship with the Master—not all of it. When he was writing about Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda heard what Saradananda had written. He cautioned him: ‘Sharat, please don’t write about Maharaj in detail because he is still alive. If Maharaj knows about his true nature [as a companion of Krishna], he will give up his body.’ So Saradananda stopped.

The notebook

I have had the privilege of seeing the notebook in which he jotted down briefly the descriptions of incidents along with his sources of the information. He painstakingly gathered stories about the Master’s early life from the villagers of Kamarpukur and collected accounts of the Master’s *sāadhanā* from the Master himself, and also from his nephew and attendant Hriday. Hriday was the only person who really lived with the Master for twenty-five years—not his wife, not his father or mother, not anybody else. But the Master’s wife Sarada Devi, his relatives, his men and women devotees, and his disciples contributed many other stories and eyewitness accounts. Saradananda wrote in his Preface to the fifth volume: ‘When we first started writing about the Master’s divine play, we never imagined that we would proceed so far. It was possible only by his inconceivable grace.’ Indeed, this detailed biography of Sri Ramakrishna is unique in spiritual literature. We cannot find any similar detailed account for Krishna, Buddha, or Christ.

Whenever Sarada Devi was at Udbodhan, Sharat Maharaj used to go and read the manuscript to her. When Mother was at Jayrambati, one of her attendants would read it and she would approve it. Then the articles would come out serially in the *Udbodhan* magazine. Swami Saradananda initially had a desire to write a

sixth volume of the *Lilāprasanga*. He started collecting materials from Golap-ma, Jogin-ma, Rakhal Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), and others. In this way he was trying to collect more materials about the Master. These were later, after Saradananda's passing away, printed by Swami Nirlepananda in a small book entitled *Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsadeva*. I translated that book.

In 1982 I came to India. Swami Niramayananda was then the head of the Udbodhan centre. He gave me Swami Saradananda's diary. I was so excited, I cannot tell you. I took the diary, went to my room and closed the door. I did not sleep; I did not take any rest. I had my yellow pad. I started to copy out the whole diary. I wonder how Sharat Maharaj collected all that material! It is really amazing that these direct disciples of Ramakrishna were so faithful and careful about the accuracy of the incidents of the Master's divine life. They scrupulously avoided all sorts of embellishments and, particularly, miracles. Swamiji asked his brother-disciples again and again not to focus on miracles! 'Show the pure spirituality of Sri Ramakrishna', he stressed.

Lilāprasanga, nevertheless, is not complete. Swami Saradananda himself admitted it. Swami Nikhilananda in his memoirs wrote:

Before we left for Varanasi [in 1925], Swami Shuddhananda asked Swami Saradananda in front of me to finish the Cossipore chapter of the *Lilāprasanga* [which would describe Sri Ramakrishna's last days]. He said that he had some notes but he was not well enough to write the article. Swami Shuddhananda then said, 'You can dictate it and Nikhilananda will write it.' He said he would see what could be done. I believe he took his notebook with

him. He did not feel well in Varanasi, so nothing was done. When we were leaving for Puri, Swami Shuddhananda reminded him about the article and again asked him to dictate the whole thing to me. Then the swami made the following significant remark: 'When Holy Mother was alive I felt a great deal of inner strength and began to write the *Lilāprasanga*. She died and I felt as if all my powers were gone. Then I saw Swami Brahmananda and began to feel strong again. When he died I felt my brain was completely paralyzed. I simply cannot finish the book.' Then he added: 'When I began to write the *Lilāprasanga* I thought I understood the Master. But now I clearly see that the life of the Master is very deep. I was merely hovering over the top branches; the root is far beneath the ground.'

One of Swami Saradananda's disciples also requested him to complete the *Lilāprasanga*. He said: 'Perhaps, it will never be completed. I am not getting any inspiration from within. The Master made me write whatever he wanted. Now when I read the *Lilāprasanga*, I wonder, have I written all these things? I have no more inclination to do anything. It seems the Master is doing everything.'

When I finished my translating work, Father Francis Clooney said: 'Swami, this book does not have any death account of Sri Ramakrishna. You must write it; you must complete it.' I said: 'No, it is not possible. It is Saradananda's book. How can I add anything there?'

Do you know what happened? I thought, well, if I cannot write I can do something. One morning at 3 o'clock, I was at Laguna beach, and there I visualized how I could show Sri Ramakrishna's death. Through pictures on four pages I showed it. On the first page was a photo of Sri Ramakrishna's room at Cossipore with a caption: 'Ramakrishna passed away in this room at

the Cossipore Garden House on 16 August 1886 at 1:02 a.m.’ Underneath was a great statement by Romain Rolland: ‘The man [Ramakrishna] himself was no more. His spirit had departed to travel along the path of collective life in the veins of humanity.’ On the next page, I put two group photographs with Thakur’s body. As you know, in our tradition we do not show Thakur’s dead body. So I asked my graphic artist what could be done. She said: ‘Swami, the original flowers which were put on Thakur’s cot I shall copy and cover Thakur’s body with them.’ Photoshop can indeed do magic! She covered Thakur’s body that way on both pictures. Thakur’s cot, bed, pillow—everything is there. On the third page, the picture of Ramakrishna’s monument at the Cossipore cremation ground has been shown. Swami Vidyatmananda (John Yale), an American monk, came to India in 1950. He took a wonderful picture, showing Ramakrishna’s monument at Cossipore with Ramakrishna’s temple at Belur Math, on the opposite bank of the Ganges. He said that though Ramakrishna’s mortal body ended there, he is truly established at Belur Math. On the fourth page, I put the picture of the marble statue of Ramakrishna at Belur Math. Below the picture, I put this caption: ‘On 9th December 1898 Vivekananda said to a disciple: “The Master once told me, ‘I will go and live wherever it will be your pleasure to take me, carrying me on your shoulders—be it under a tree or in the humblest cottage.’”’

Saradananda once remarked that even though several editions of *Lilāprasanga* were published, they were not shown to him. He said he had another thing to add in the section of Ramakrishna’s practice of *dāśya bhāva* (servant attitude toward God). While practising this *dāśya bhāva*, he saw with his

open eyes *janmadukhini* Sitā, the all-suffering Sitā. He also noticed Sitā’s bangles and later made the same jewellery for Holy Mother. Besides this, he saw Sitā’s sweet smile. That sweet smile we see on Sri Ramakrishna’s face, as if it were superimposed on him. It is amazing, all three photographs of Ramakrishna were taken when he was in *samādhi*, and show his face filled with joy.

When Swami Vijnanananda saw Ramakrishna for the second time, he saw his delightful smile in *samādhi*. He narrated the scene thus: ‘The Master was completely oblivious of his surroundings. He wore a white cloth. His face shone with a heavenly lustre and a smile played on his lips. His teeth were visible, and there was such a joyful expression on his face that it seemed as if it would crack—like a cracked melon! His eyes seemed to be gazing at something, and he appeared to be immersed in an ocean of bliss.’

I remember that once a sadhu wanted to go to practise *tapasyā* in Uttarkashi, in the Himalayas. Swami Saradeshananda advised that monk: First read the ‘*sādhak bhāva*’—the second part of the *Lilāprasanga* on the Master’s spiritual *sādhanās*—and then go for *tapasyā*. The Master’s *sādhanās* will guide you how to do spiritual practices.

Before writing about the Master’s Tantra *sādhanā* in the *Lilāprasanga*, Saradananda himself practised Tantra after taking permission from the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda. He was initiated by his uncle, Iswarchandra Chakrabarty, an adept tantric, and through this *sādhanā* he realized the mystery of Shakti worship, which is the realization of the Divine Mother in every woman. You see, some people write about something but they have no direct experience of that subject. They take others’

ideas. So Saradananda himself practised Tantra. And what a pure and beautiful presentation of Tantra *sādhanā* he made in volume two of the *Lilāprasanga*. It is simply amazing!

Various *sādhanās*

Once Swami Nirvanananda told us that he asked Swami Saradananda: ‘Maharaj, in the second part of the *Lilāprasanga*, you have written the sannyasa mantras. Did you hear those mantras from the Master directly?’ The swami replied: ‘No, the Master did not repeat those mantras to us as I wrote them. But he told us that he received sannyasa from Tota Puri according to the rules of the *dashnāmi* sect of Shankara. I wrote the sannyasa mantras as they are given in the Puri monastic sect of Shankara.’

Once Swami Asitananda, an attendant of Swami Saradananda, asked him: ‘You have written about *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Have you experienced it?’ The swami replied: ‘Read the chapter on *samādhi* in *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*. I have not written anything about *samādhi* without experiencing it myself.’

While he was at Shashi Niketan in Puri, he wrote ‘The Quintessence of *Madhura bhāva*’. He considered this to be the best written chapter in the whole book.

In spiritual life we need some enthusiasm. It is worth seeing how the Vaishnava devotees create enthusiasm by practising different *bhāva*-s or moods: According to the Vaishnava tradition, *prema* or love for God increases from a lower state to a higher one and culminates in *mahābhāva*. Each *bhāva* has a special meaning: 1. *Sneha* (affection) manifests when intense love melts the heart and flows towards the Beloved, Krishna. 2. *Māna* (pique) develops when the lover’s genuine

love seems to be rejected or not reciprocated; the Beloved feels guilty and tries to please the lover. 3. *Pranaya* (friendship) creates the feeling of oneness; the lover feels the Beloved’s pain. 4. *Rāga* (intense love) is a tremendous passion for the Beloved that brings forgetfulness of one’s body and transforms pain into joy. 5. *Anurāga* (a constant feeling of fresh love) removes a monotonous state of the mind and generates ever-increasing waves of love for the Beloved. Ramakrishna manifested all these moods, and descriptions of them are recorded in the *Lilāprasanga* as well as in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Highlights of *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*

What are the highlights of this book? First, the contents. It took me one year alone just to translate the contents of this book that covers fifty-two printed pages. Even by seeing the ‘contents’ one can get a glimpse of the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

In addition to an account of the god-intoxicated life of Sri Ramakrishna, the reader will find in this book glimpses of mysticism, discussions on various religious and philosophical traditions of India, accounts of different religious leaders, and descriptions of social customs, the educational system, and the socio-religious movements of nineteenth-century India. It is really astounding how Sri Ramakrishna, who had no formal education, overwhelmed the great savants and religious leaders of India with his spiritual power. In this book the reader will see how Sri Ramakrishna, the *avatār* of our modern age, lived and behaved, how he practised *sādhanā* and taught spirituality, how he evaluated and trained his disciples by observing their physical characteristics and reading their

minds as one would a book, how he used parables and folktales in his teachings, how he laughed and cried, sang and danced, made jokes like an ordinary human being, and at the same time frequently experienced spiritual visions and *samādhi*. It is important to see how Sri Ramakrishna's divine life reflected his phenomenal renunciation, passion for truth, childlike simplicity, complete lack of egotism, longing for God, and love for humanity.

This book bears witness to Sri Ramakrishna's testimony that all religions are equally valid. He found a place for each one in his own life. He first realized God by following Hindu practices, and then by following the Christian and Muslim paths. Such a journey is unique in the religious history of the world. He afterwards proclaimed, "As many faiths, so many paths," thus establishing an ideal harmony of religions for our present age, in which religions are in conflict and hatred and violence are rampant. He taught a religion so badly needed today, a religion that is constructive and not destructive, scientific and not fanatical, practical and not theoretical, rational and not superstitious, universal and not parochial. Truly, Sri Ramakrishna worked to create unity in our time and he repeatedly stated that the goal of human life is to realize God.

In Sri Ramakrishna's life can be found a synthesis of four yogas: *karma*, *jnāna*, *bhakti*, and *rāja*. And the philosophies of the three main schools of Vedanta—dualism, qualified nondualism, and nondualism—were blended in his teachings. He lived his life at the crossroads where many religious sects of India met. He never spoke a harsh word against anyone's faith. He was so all-embracing that members of every sect thought that he was one of them. His all-

encompassing love and compassion transcended all sectarian narrowness and bigotry. Truly, Sri Ramakrishna's life is a bridge between the ancient and the modern, between the East and the West.

As I mentioned earlier the *Lilāprasanga* is not a complete biography. Saradananda did not write about the Master's last days. But later he wrote three articles—'Cossipore Uddyānbati', 'Cossipure Sevāvrata', and 'Ātmaprakāshe Abhaydān' for the *Udbodhan* magazine. In 1935, these three articles were incorporated in part five.

Translation is an art. You have to know both languages, and you must love that book and identify yourself with the author's mind. Moreover, you should not have any ego—which means you should not add your own ideas. At the same time, it should not be too literal so that it does not flow. The translation should be beautiful and faithful, readable and understandable. While working on the *Lilāprasanga*, I faced the problem of translating the word 'kāmīni-kānchan'. In the *Gospel*, Swami Nikhilananda translated it as 'woman and gold', which is not acceptable to Western women. So I translated it as 'lust and gold'. Once I asked an American woman: 'Do these words bother you?' She said: 'Oh! no, no. When "woman and gold" comes, I change it in "man and gold."' I explained that the very person who said that 'kāmīni-kānchan are māyā,' his chosen deity was a woman—Mother Kālī. Also his guru, Bhairavi Brahmani was a woman, and his first disciple, Holy Mother, was a woman. Sri Ramakrishna preached the motherhood of God. How could he show disrespect towards women? He loved, respected, and worshipped them as the Divine Mother.

It is my personal belief that Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences will

play a vital role in this 21st century. Why? Because in organized religions, there is often much commercialism, politics, power struggles, and lack of renunciation and purity. All organized religions have these problems. In Europe it is worse. Many people do not go to the churches. I remember a story: Dr Radhakrishnan once asked Stalin why he did not believe in God. Stalin replied: ‘These preachers are hypocrites. If St. Thomas Aquinas comes, I shall be a Christian the next day.’ Sri Ramakrishna’s life and message are the beacon light in this age.

If you ask what my impression is of the *Kathāmrita* and *Lilāprasanga*, I shall say they were written by Ramakrishna through ‘M’ and Saradananda. No human being could write that way. They themselves also admitted it. I also believe it wholeheartedly.

I felt the same way when I was translating the *Lilāprasanga*. Let me tell you my experience. People go to Uttarkashi for *tapasyā*. I was thinking that I could not go to the Himalayas. What could I do? So putting that Bengali book (the *Lilāprasanga*) in front of me, I plunged into the work of translating it and went on working for ten to twelve hours a day. That was my *tapasyā* for seven years. And I am blessed that the Master worked through me. I believe *Sri Ramakrishna’s Divine Play* is a very important book in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, so I have shared some of my thoughts with you about this book. Ramakrishna’s message is spreading not only in India, but also through other languages in different parts of the world. I pray to the Master: May his life illumine the hearts of millions of people. ■

* This article is based on the transcribed text of a lecture delivered by Swami Chetanananda at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture on 22 February 2014. Swami Chetanananda is Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, U.S.A.

The wretched fish

Well, Shivanath [an eminent Brahmo devotee] is always in trouble and turmoil. He has to write for magazines and perform many other duties. Worldly duties bring much worry and anxiety along with them.

It is narrated in the *Bhāgavata* that the Avadhuta had twenty-four gurus, one of whom was a kite. In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish, about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite

flew with the fish, the crows followed it. The kite flew to the south and the crows followed it there. The kite flew to the north and still the crows followed after it. The kite went east and west, but with the same result. As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: ‘That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace.’ ■

— From *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*