

God's Work

SWAMI SUPARNANANDA

To our minds, Sri Ramakrishna is a perpetual wonder. If he is God, he is a democratic God, a God of all people, since he belongs to all and none can deny him or run away from him. The great organization founded in his name on 1 May 1897, one hundred and twenty-five years ago, by Swami Vivekananda at the ancestral house of Balaram Bose, Bagbazar, Kolkata in the presence of his brother disciples and a few prominent lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna is based on the Master's ideals and ideas, acceptable to all irrespective of caste and creed. The Ramakrishna Mission embodies the religion of Sri Ramakrishna. In this way, the two, Sri Ramakrishna himself and the Ramakrishna Mission are inextricably linked. To say that the Ramakrishna Mission is an organization that produces a Ramakrishna is to make a claim that borders on blasphemy. Such an assumption has been sometimes made on the ground that Holy Mother repeatedly prayed to Ramakrishna for a place where he would have his seat firmly established and where his disciples would live together to preach his Gospel for the amelioration of mankind. To be sure, she wanted his disciples to build a Math (Monastery) and a Mission at the same time for the well-being of all people. But that does not mean that the organization or the Mission is more important than Sri Ramakrishna himself. Things, in due course, moved just the way she had prayed for and we receive the twin

organizations, the Math (*Sangha*) for personal salvation of the aspirants from the bondage of repeated births and deaths and the Ramakrishna Mission as a means to attaining that goal. Therefore, Ramakrishna Mission was intended *ab initio* to serve people, taking them as Shiva in disguise. The work done in a spirit of sacrifice is called 'Seva Yoga', in the words of Swamiji, and it liberates us. The twin mottos of the Mission are, therefore, *Ātmano mokshārtham jagat-hitāya cha*, which means attaining the ultimate goal of liberation of the self through doing good to the world knowing that the world is also a manifestation of the divine.

Ramakrishna's direct disciples laughed out of court the queer notion that Ramakrishna Mission had produced a Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna was, in fact, the outcome of the prayers of millions of people over thousands of years. He is there because the Mother of the universe has willed it so. He, too, willed the formation of the Math and Mission following the prayers by the Holy mother. It is His will that has made the Ramakrishna Mission possible and not vice versa. Ramakrishnanandaji once answered this question at Madras. It has been recorded as part of Mr. P. Ramalinga Sastry's reminiscences in the book, *Swami Ramakrishnananda As We Saw Him* (p. 301), that Ramakrishnanandaji's response was: 'All that you read in the papers (about the Mission) is froth, *thu, thu*,

(spittle). *Ramakrishna Mission is that which has produced a Ramakrishna!* God will give you money when you want’.

Swami Akhandananda, too, in his presidential address on the 3rd day of the first Convention of Ramakrishna Mission held in 1926 on the Belur Math premises said that many had formed a wrong opinion of the Seva Dharma by reading only the popular messages of Guru Maharaj. They even went to the absurd extent of criticizing Swamiji for his introduction of the New Doctrine of Karma. He said that the disciples had seen how Sri Ramakrishna himself would inspire his wealthy devotees to launch ‘Seva Karya’ by looking upon the distressed as Narayanas. He once decided to sit among the Santhals at Deoghar who were very poor and told Mathur Babu to arrange for their food, clothes and the other things they required. Mathur Babu tried to resist but he had his way. There are other similar incidents in Ramakrishna’s life which Swami Akhandananda cited to affirm that what Swamiji did by introducing missionary activities was in perfect tune with Ramakrishna’s ideal. The Holy Mother, too, whole-heartedly praised Mission’s work after seeing the medical services being rendered by the Sadhus at the Varanasi Sevashram. Doubts arose in the minds of many because people saw that through what Swamiji was doing Hinduism was becoming for the first time a missionary religion. Swamiji was born to change our history as Sri Aurobindo observed and with his two strong arms pulled us out of the ‘well’ of selfish struggles for personal salvation and threw us into the vortex of work for collective liberation.

Since 1897, the Ramakrishna Mission has been developing steadily towards adulthood. Through the combined efforts of devotees and the monastics, the organization has been able to serve humanity the world over in both secular and religious spheres of life.

We have till date as many as 256 centres, of which 191 are within, and 65, outside the country. The Math and Mission carry out public charity, relief and rehabilitation programmes, offer services in the field of education from the primary to the highest levels in both technical and general streams, and also in that of public health. Preaching of values—moral, ethical and spiritual, publication of books, running libraries are being done in right earnest. Total cost involved was around Rs. 851.36/- crore in the 2021-2022 financial year. We put in our efforts to the best of our abilities. Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are now two living entities in the world of thought and action. It is the youngest, the poorest and the smallest (the number of monastic members being barely above 2000) spiritual organization in the world.

In conclusion, once again we remind ourselves that there is no room for ambiguity about the relevance of the philosophy behind the Seva Yoga introduced by Swamiji. Ours is not a social organization; it is a spiritual organization through and through. Seva Yoga is all about plunging headlong into the work of serving the suffering people. Underlying it is the Vedantic concept of the fundamental unity of all creation. That is why Swami Akhandananda spoke out so empathically, ‘Swamiji did the entire brainwork for us. Our task would be to carry out his plans’. ■

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