

4. PERSONALITY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS IT EMERGES FROM THE GOSPEL

Swami Mukhyananda

Sri Ramakrishna's personality was as multifaceted as that of nature itself and it often transcended it. Otherwise how would we explain his constant divine inebriation, his mysterious conversations with the Divine Mother, his eating with Her, playing in Her lap and dancing in ecstasy? 'But to think of Sri Ramakrishna only as a *bhakta* of the Divine Mother, childlike, always soft and in-drawn and little aware of or unconcerned with the world and its affairs' is only to know a partial truth. In the following lines Swami Mukhyananda, Acharya, Probationers' Training Centre, Belur Math gives an account of the all-inclusive personality of Sri Ramakrishna as it emerges from his study of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

“...the personification of all the yogas and the spiritual life of all mankind.”

Sri Ramakrishna has been, as Christopher Isherwood has termed it in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, “a phenomenon”¹ in the religion-spiritual firmament of the world. He rose on the horizon like a spiritual sun whose morning glory enveloped the world within a few decades of his appearance. Those who had the poetic vision and sage insight to catch the beauty of that glorious dawn hailed it in wondrous words and announced it to mankind both in the East and the West.

Keshab Chandra Sen in the East and Max Müller in the West were among the earliest to scatter the brilliant rays of the life of Sri Ramakrishna over a wide circle by their writings and speeches. However, it was Swami Vivekananda, the illustrious disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who understood the full grandeur and vast scope of his seraphic Master's great and profound life and its immense meaning and lasting significance for the religious life of India and of humanity at large. Exclaimed Vivekananda:

“The time was ripe for one to be born, who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for every one in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India, but outside India, and bring a marvelous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence. Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years. There he lived, without any book learning whatsoever; this great intellect never learnt even to write his own name, but the most brilliant graduates of our university found in him an

¹ It is Swami Vivekananda who first used the word, though in a slightly different way, regarding Sri Ramakrishna. Says he: “But here is a man in whose company we have been day and night and yet consider him to be a far greater personality than any of them (Krishna, Buddha, Christ, etc.), Can you understand this *phenomenon*?” (*Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, 8th Edn. 1972, p. 484).

intellectual giant. He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the great Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfillment of the Indian sages; the sage for the time, one whose teaching is just now, in the present time, most beneficial.”²

“Without studying Ramakrishna Paramhansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the Bhagavata and the other Puranas. His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India... This man had in fifty years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations... His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all nations. People will come to know him by degrees... He is the latest and the most perfect (of the *Avatars*) – the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity and the desire to serve mankind.”³

Romain Rolland, the eminent sage and savant of France, was the best interpreter to the West of the profound message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda through his immortal study on them in two volumes: ‘*Ramakrishna the Man-God and the Universal Gospel of Vivekananda*’ (1926). Writes he:

“I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past... The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people... He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti.”⁴

While the limited and scattered utterances of Vivekananda about Sri Ramakrishna are profound and reveal the Great Master at his best, and the biography of Romain Rolland interprets the Life and Message of the Master superbly in the world-wide religious context, equating Sri Ramakrishna with Jesus Christ, it is in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, originally recorded by M. (Mahendranath Gupta) in Bengali, that we get the minute details of his varied moods and movements, his acts and attitudes, and his teachings and trances. Here the Great Master comes alive before us in all vividness; scene after scene of his ecstatic life unfolds itself before our mental vision, and we feel as one of the participants in the great drama of his life, in his sportfull *lila*.

In his Foreword to the Gospel, the English translation of M.’s Bengali ‘*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*’ by Swami Nikhilananda, which we make use of for the purpose of this study,⁵ Aldous Huxley writes:

“Never have the small events of a contemplative’s daily life been described with such wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity... what a scholastic philosopher would call the ‘accidents’ of Ramakrishna’s life were intensely Hindu and,

² Ibid., Vol, III, 11th Edn. 1973 pp. 267-8. ‘Sages of India.’

³ Letters of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, IV Edn. 1948, pp. 187, 155, 254.

⁴ Vol. I *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, ‘To My Western Readers’.

⁵ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras; 6th Edition 1974.

therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its 'essence', however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal. To read through these conversations in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oddest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance, and suspense of judgment."

Nikhilananda says in his preface to the translation:

"Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He never clothed his thoughts in formal language. His words sought to convey his direct realisation of Truth. His conversation was in a village *patois* (of Bengal). Therein lies its charm. In order to explain to his listeners an abstruse philosophy, he like Christ before him, used with telling effect homely parables and illustrations culled from his observation of the daily life around him... The words of Sri Ramakrishna have already exerted a tremendous influence in the land of his birth. Savants of Europe have found in his words the ring of universal truth. But these words were not the product of intellectual cognition; they were rooted in direct experience. Hence, to students of religion, psychology, and physical science, these experiences of the Master are of immense value for the understanding of religious phenomena in general. No doubt, Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu of the Hindus; yet his experiences transcended the limits of the dogmas and creeds of Hinduism. Mystics of religions other than Hinduism will find in Sri Ramakrishna's experiences a corroboration of the experiences of their own prophets and seers. And this is very important today for the resuscitation of religious values."

Many people know fairly Sri Ramakrishna as the Prophet of harmony of religions; some people comprehend his universal dimensions and his great role in the spiritual regeneration of mankind; maybe a few realize that he has opened up new vistas and horizons for spiritual attainments; but very few know the different aspects of his versatile, living, vibrant, divine personality. For Sri Ramakrishna *samadhi* (spiritual trance) was a constant and natural mode of divine knowledge and wisdom, (p. 175).⁶ In the Gospel, he is often seen to go into indrawn moods, ecstasies, and trances.⁷ An atmosphere of devotion, singing and dancing in divine emotion, and conversation centred on God and *bhakti*, pervades the Gospel, though other aspects are not lacking, as we shall see.⁸ But most people, devoid of broad understanding and keen insight, form the idea of Sri Ramakrishna only as a great *bhakta* of the Divine Mother, childlike, always soft and indrawn, and little aware of, or unconcerned with, the world and its

⁶ The page numbers in brackets refer to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

⁷ While even great saints strive hard to attain *samadhi* and ecstasy, we find Sri Ramakrishna striving to bring down the mind to the normal plane. He said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious. I should like to talk to the *sadhu* about Satchidananda. Mother, I want to be merry talking about Satchidananda." (p. 320). "The Master's natural tendency of mind was to soar into the plane of God-consciousness. He would force his mind to be conscious of the body." (p. 828).

⁸ The master was a *Vijnani*. He accepted both the Absolute and the Relative. He says: "A mere *jnani* trembles with fear. He is like the amateur *satranja* player. He is anxious to move his pieces somehow to the safety zone, where they won't be overtaken by his opponent. But a *Vijnani* is not afraid of anything. He has realized both aspects of God – Personal and Impersonal. He has talked with God. He has enjoyed the bliss of God... I don't press my arm to my side. Both my hands are free. I am not afraid of anything. I accept both the *Nitya* and the *Lila*, both the Absolute and the Relative." (p. 435) cf. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita* (XIII.2): 'क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञोद्गानं यत्तज्ज्ञानं मतं मम. (The Knowledge of both the Inner Reality – Self or God – and the universe is considered by Me as full Knowledge).

affairs. While such a view is partly true, this estimate overlooks the rather important dimensions of Sri Ramakrishna's many-faceted great personality and it shows lack of understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's deep interest in the spiritual welfare of mankind.⁹ We find in several speeches, write-ups and films on Sri Ramakrishna, that he is depicted as a goody-goody *bhakta* and we miss there the inner strength of his personality in his dealings with vastly varied types of people, and his leonine character. We get only the मृदूनि कुसुमादपि (softer than a flower) aspect of his great mind, but not the वज्रादपि कठोरणि (harder than diamond) aspect.

We may get some corrective to the above partial views of people from the presentation of the Master's personality in '*Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*'¹⁰ (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna-lila-prasanga* in Bengali) by Swami Saradananda. Further, as Vivekananda has said:

“According to one's own capacity one has understood Sri Ramakrishna and so is discussing about him. It is not bad either to do so... But if any of his devotees has concluded that what he has understood of him is the only truth, then he is an object of pity... But do not listen to such one-sided estimates. What he was, the concentrated embodiment of how many previous *avatars* – we could not understand a bit even spending the whole life in religious austerity. Therefore one has to speak about him with caution and restraint. As are one's capacities, to that extent has he filled one with ideas. One spray from the full ocean of his spirituality, if realized, will make gods of men. Such a synthesis of universal ideas you will not find in the history of the world again. Understand from this who was born in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. When he used to instruct his sannyasin disciples, he would rise from his seat and look about if any householder was coming that way or not. If he found none, then in glowing words he would depict the glory of renunciation and *tapasya*. As a result of the rousing power of that fiery dispassion, we have renounced the world and become averse to worldliness.”¹¹

What the *Bhagavata* (XI.8.5) says about the *Avadhuta* applies to Sri Ramakrishna very aptly in certain respects:

*Muniḥ prasannagambhīro durvigāhīyo duratyayaḥ,
Anantapāro hyakṣobhyaḥ stimitoda ivārṇavaḥ.*

– The holy sage, his mind fixed in the Self, is placid and profound, difficult to fathom and cross over; he is illimitable and imperturbable, like the ocean with calm waters.

However, if we delve deep into the Gospel, scan it intelligently, and piece together the various incidents and events connected with Sri Ramakrishna and ponder on his words and attitudes, we can get a very vivid, colourful, and balanced picture of Sri Ramakrishna in life. Let us, therefore, address ourselves to this task and see how Sri Ramakrishna emerges before our vision. As the *Gospel* is a huge work of over a thousand

⁹ The Master says, “it is being revealed to me that there is a greater manifestation of God in man than in other created beings.” God is telling me, as it were: ‘I dwell in men. Be merry with men’. (p. 356). “Man is Narayana Himself. If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also? God is born as man for the purpose of sporting as man.”(p. 356). “I have been feeling much inclined to the *Naralila* (sport of God as man). It is God Himself who plays about as human beings. If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through man?” (p. 358)

¹⁰ Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

¹¹ The Holy Mother recognized the quality of supreme renunciation in Sri Ramakrishna as the highest and placed it above his achievement of the Harmony of all Religions.

pages, recording the events of over four years (1882-1886) we shall primarily survey in detail the first chapter which treats of the first meetings of *M.* with, and his impressions of, the Master¹² and refer to some other events and incidents in other chapters in a general way.

The First Chapter, entitled 'Master and Disciple', records four visits of *M.* to the Master at Dakshineswar (near Calcutta), between February 26th (probable date of his first visit) and March 6th, 1882 (probable date of his fourth visit), covering about eight days in which *M.* unfolds the picture of the Master as he appeared to him. When *M.* entered Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar with his companion Sidhu for the first time:

"They found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God.¹³ The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence."

M. stood there speechless and looked on:

"It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup and other devotees."

"*M.* looked around him with wonder and said to himself: What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot."

M., however, goes round the temple-garden and returns to the room and finds the doors shut. Seeing Brinde, the maid, outside, he enquires of her about the Master and learns that he had been living there for a long time. The Master has no need to go on lecture tours. He had a commission from God. He spreads his fragrance from where he is. "The lotus opens and the bees come by themselves,"¹⁴ *M.* asked her, "Does he read many books?" "Books? Oh dear, no! They are all on his tongue."¹⁵

¹² Since this Memorial Volume is intended to commemorate the Centenary of *M.*'s first visit to the Master, from which date the record of the *Gospel* begins, it is apt that we should treat the First Chapter in detail. Further, it throws light on some of the salient aspects of the Master's personality.

¹³ We find the Master in the *Gospel* always with his beatific smile, 'with his usual beaming countenance'. (p. 19). Even during the days of his fractured arm and his last prolonged fatal illness, the smile never left him. The Master had two desires: "First, that I should be the king of the devotees, and second, that I should not be a dry *sadhu*." (p. 797). He was always full of joy and filled others also with joy. He laughed and made others also laugh. (p. 335).

¹⁴ The master said to Vijay Krishna Goswami: "The task of a religious teacher is indeed difficult. One cannot teach man without a direct command from God. People won't listen to you if you teach without such authority. Such teaching has no force behind it. One must first of all attain God through spiritual discipline or some other means. Thus armed with authority from God, one can be a teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives authority from God also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a teacher." (p. 100). Nobody can confound a preacher who teaches people after having received the command of God. Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning, a man becomes so powerful that before him big scholars seem mere earthworms... Such a preacher may not be a scholarly person, but don't conclude from it that he has any lack of wisdom. Does book-learning make one wise? He who has commission from God never runs short of wisdom... As he teaches people, the Divine Mother Herself supplies him with fresh knowledge from behind. That knowledge never comes to an end." (p. 420).

¹⁵ The master did not read books. "But how many scriptures I have heard!" he said. (p. 899). "During my boyhood I could understand what the *sadhus* read at the Lahas' house at Kamarpukur, although I would miss a little here and there. If a Pandit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it

M. was amazed that Sri Ramakrishna read no books. Sri Ramakrishna was no scholar or pandit. But yet, spiritual wisdom flowed through his lips spontaneously from the depths of truth. *M.* thought it perhaps was time for evening devotions of the Master. He asked Brinde to seek permission from the Master for himself and Sidhu to meet him. But Brinde replied, "Go right in, children, go in and sit down." The Great Master had no pretensions. He was simple and easy of access to all; no formalities. He did not consider himself a guru.¹⁶

M. and Sidhu salute the Master on entering. The Master bids them to sit and asks *M.* about his whereabouts. But *M.* noticed that:

"Now and then the Master seemed to become absent-minded. Later he learnt that this mood is called *bhava*, ecstasy. It is like the state of the angler who has been sitting with his rod: the fish comes and swallows the bait, and the float begins to tremble; the angler is on the alert; he grips the rod and watches the float steadily and eagerly; he will not speak to anyone. Such was the state of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Later *M.* heard, and himself noticed, that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into this mood after dusk, sometimes becoming totally unconscious of the outer world."

After a little conversation *M.* saluted the Master and took his leave. But Sri Ramakrishna did not fail to ask, "Come again", even though his mind was absorbed in the divine mood. It was not to show mere courtesy. It was affection towards those who went to him and his interest in their welfare.¹⁷ On his way home *M.* began to wonder:

"Who is this serene-looking man who is drawing me back to him? Is it possible for a man to be great without being a scholar? How wonderful it is! I should like to see him again. He himself said, 'Come again.'"

There *was* something ethereally attractive in the Master's personality. We find

myself." (p. 358). The Master could also converse in Hindustani (pp. 605-6). He quotes a Hindi couplet from Tulsidas regarding sticking to truth (p. 238) (cf. also p. 252 regarding Tulsi). "I have heard a great deal about Buddha" (p. 382). The Divine Mother also revealed to him "everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, Puranas, Tantras, etc." (p. 542). He also knew something of Nyaya and Panini (p. 607). He tells Bankim: "Analogy is one-sided. You are a Pandit; haven't you read logic? Suppose you say that a man is as terrible as a tiger. That does not mean that he has a fearful tail or a tiger's pot-face!" (all laugh) – (p.639).

¹⁶ The Master said: "There is no collection plate here; therefore all come." (p. 363). He did not touch money and was very open. He did not stand on the high pedestal of a teacher. He said, "As long as I live so long do I learn", and we see him in the *Gospel* going to meet many learned people and saintly persons to compare notes and to see if he can learn something from them. "Three words – 'Master', 'Teacher' and 'Father' – prick me like thorns. I am the son of God, His eternal child." (p. 600). "There is not a fellow under the sun who is my disciple. On the contrary, I am everybody's disciple. All are the children of God. All are His servants. I too am a child of God. I too am His servant. 'Uncle Moon' is every child's uncle!" (p. 855).

¹⁷ We can see at many places in the *Gospel*, the Master's concern and consideration for the devotees. "The Master lay down on the small couch. He seemed worried about Tarak. Suddenly he said to *M.*, 'Why do I worry so much about these young boys?' (p. 698)." "The Master suddenly addressed Mohini's wife and said: 'By unnatural death one becomes an evil spirit. Beware... That will be all right (staying with the Holy Mother at the Nahabat). But you talk of dying. That frightens me. And the Ganges is so near!' (p. 698). Sri Ramakrishna said to *M.* tenderly, "Come early in the morning tomorrow. The hot sun of the rainy season is bad for health." (p. 824) "How strange! Tears also appeared in the Master's eyes. He wiped them away with his hands. Hriday had made him suffer endless agonies, yet the Master wept for him." (p. 612). See also pp. 495, 571, regarding Master's concern for Haripada and Narayana, and footnote 46.

record of it in the *Gospel* on several occasions. The Master himself reminisces:

“Can you tell me why all these youngsters, and you people too, visit me? There must be something in me; or why should you all feel such a pull, such an attraction? Once I visited Hriday’s house at Sihore. From there I was taken to Shyambazar. I had a vision of Gauranga before I entered the village, and I realised that I should meet Gauranga’s devotees there. For seven days and nights I was surrounded by a huge crowd of people. Such attraction! Nothing but *kirtan* and dancing day and night. People stood in rows on the walls and even were on the trees. I stayed at Natavar Goswami’s house. It was crowded day and night. In the morning I would run away to the house of a weaver for a little rest. There too I found that people would gather after a few minutes.” (p. 495).

On his second visit, one or two days later, *M.* found the Master just like an ordinary man. As it was still winter (end of February) the Master had put on a moleskin shawl bordered with red.¹⁸ The barber had come and he was about to be shaved.¹⁹ The Master welcomed *M.* smiling. He stammered a little when he spoke. The Master showed keen interest and enquired where *M.* was staying and so on. He even knew Ishan Kaviraj, who he learnt was *M.*’s brother-in-law. Suddenly the Master’s eager interest switched over from Kaviraj (Ayurvedic physician) to Keshab Chandra Sen, who was ill and made anxious enquiries about his health. With utter simplicity the Master revealed:

“I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab’s recovery. Sometimes, in the early hours of the morning, I would wake up and cry before Her: ‘Mother, please make Keshab well again. If Keshab doesn’t live, whom shall I talk with when I go to Calcutta?’ And so it was that I resolved to offer Her the green coconut and sugar.”

Then the Master’s interest moves on to a foreigner, and he asks *M.*

“Tell me, do you know of a certain Mr. Cook who has come to Calcutta? Is it true that he is giving lectures? Once Keshab took me on a steamer, and this Mr. Cook, too, was in the party.”

The Master notices everything and remembers it; he brings it out at the appropriate time.²⁰ Next the Master bestows his attention on one Pratap’s brother. The

¹⁸ When Vidyasagar asked *M.*, what kind of Paramahansa the Master was, saying, “Does he wear an ochre cloth?” *M.* replied: “No, Sir; he is an unusual person. He wears a red-bordered cloth and polished slippers. He lives in a room in Rani Rasmani’s temple garden. In his room there is a couch with a mattress and mosquito net. He has no outer indication of holiness. But he doesn’t know anything except God. Day and night he thinks of God alone.” *M.* also records that the Master went to see Vidyasagar in a hackney carriage, and he did so whenever he went out to meet devotees. Ashwini Kumar Datta writes to *M.* (p. 1020) that when he visited the Master in the autumn of 1881: “He was sitting reclining against a *bolster*. He wore *black-bordered* cloth... Going nearer, I found him half leaning against the *bolster* with his hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. Then I thought: ‘Evidently he is not used to pillows as gentlemen are’...” Ashwini wrote his reminiscences probably in 1910, nearly thirty years after his visit and he has said he may have forgotten many things and confused the events. So it is likely, he may have confused a pillow for a *bolster* and the red-border of the Master’s cloth for *black border*, for the Master has disapproved of both as *rajasic*. (Cf. pp. 145, 606 for *bolster* and pillow, and p. 101 for *black border*).

¹⁹ The Master was not always with the beard as seen in the usual photograph is clear from this. In the photograph taken at the studio (given opp. to p. 700), he seems to have a smaller beard and is also fully dressed. We can also see the slippers and the border.

²⁰ Though the Master was mostly in a God-intoxicated state, he did not lack secular knowledge. “He sits in a tower, as it were, from which he gets all information and sees everything” (p. 958). He had been to the Registry Office (p. 327); he had witnessed a balloon going up (p. 507; he knew Golap had to be

Divine Master is not all sweet. He could be stern and critical too when the occasion needed it. He narrates:

“Pratap’s brother came here. He stayed a few days. He had nothing to do and said he wanted to live here. I came to know that he had left his wife and children with his father-in-law. He has a whole brood of them! So I took him to task. Just fancy! He is the father of so many children! Will people from the neighbourhood feed them and bring them up? He isn’t even ashamed that someone else is feeding his wife and children, and that they have been left at his father-in-law’s house. I scolded him very hard and asked him to look for a job. Then he was willing to leave here.”

The Master knew propriety well, and what course was appropriate for whom. “Man should possess dignity and alertness”, he said, (p. 830). Renunciation was not escapism from duties and responsibilities and one must have self-respect.²¹

Then comes *M.*’s own turn. Some searching questions follow to gauge the ins and outs of *M.* The Master’s keen eye examined all those who came to him, and he took

approached for a job (p. 725); He had seen the human skeleton in the Asiatic Society Museum (p. 859); he knew how if one takes service, one has to suffer humiliation (p. 100); He says to Vijay Krishna Goswami:

“You yourself perceive how far you have gone down by being a servant of others. Again one finds that people with many university degrees, scholars with their vast English education accept service under their English masters and are daily trampled under their boots. The one cause of all this is woman. They have married and set up a gay fair with their wives and children. Now they cannot go back, much as they would like to. Hence all these insults and humiliations, all this suffering from slavery.”

He knows a cheque and that it has to be passed (p. 241), and about the Bengal Bank (p. 300). The Master uses all this knowledge to give spiritual instructions in the course of his conversations.

²¹ We also find the other types of stern attitude of the Master: When *M.* who had a sense of duty and was worried about his wife, asked: “What shall one do if one’s wife says: ‘You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide?’”

Master: (in a serious tone): “Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life, let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband’s spiritual life is an ungodly wife.”

Immersed in deep thought, *M.* stood leaning against the wall... Then, suddenly going to *M.*, he whispered in his ear:

“But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control – the king, wicked persons, and his wife. Sincere love of God on the husband’s part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example.”

This had a most soothing effect on *M.*’s worried mind.” (p. 54)

The Master tells Mani Mullick: “Don’t hurry me please... I can’t rush.” (p. 411); he asks *M.* not to eat at the Kali temple guest house, but to cook his own food (p. 279); referring to Dr. Sarkar, the Master says, “He is a villain. He pressed my tongue as if I were a cow. (p. 831)”; When Dr. Sarkar was saying, “Listen to me –”, the Master retorted: “Listen to you? You are greedy, lustful, and egoistic.” (p. 900; see also p. 906); When the Pundit was arguing vehemently with Mani Mullick, the Master remarked smilingly, “This is the *tamasic* aspect of *sattva*, the attitude of a hero. This is necessary. One should not hold one’s tongue at the sight of injustice and untruth.” (p. 441). “In that state of God-intoxication I used to speak out my mind to all. I was no respecter of persons. Even to men of position I was not afraid to speak the truth.” (p. 46). “Surendra approached the Master with a garland and wanted to put it around his neck. But the Master took it in his hand and threw it aside. Surendra’s pride was wounded and his eyes filled with tears... ‘Now (Surendra) realized it was all his fault. God cannot be bought with money; He cannot be possessed by a vain person. He has really been vain.’” (p. 1011).

The Master also scolded the devotees when occasion called for it. We do not propose to give all the details in this short article. Please refer to pages 285, 321, 376, 387, 669 of the *Gospel*.

persons into his inner circle or as disciples only after thorough testing.²²

Master: “Are you married?”

M.: “Yes, Sir.”

Master (with a shudder): “Oh, Ramlal! Ramlal! Alas, he is married.” The Master continued, “Have you children?”

M. whispered in a trembling voice: “Yes, Sir, I have children.” Master (very sadly): “Ah me! He even has children.”

But the Master, to soothe *M.*, explained his remarks affectionately, looking at *M.* kindly: “You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person’s forehead, his eyes and so on.”²³

Master (continuing): “Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under power of *avidya*?”

M.: “She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.”

Master (with evident displeasure): “And you are a man of knowledge?”

The Master did not mince words where correction was necessary. But it was all for good; there was no malice in it. He did not like to unsettle people’s minds, but only make them liberal.

When, next, the question turned on God with form and without form, *M.* said, he would like to think of God as formless. The Master emphasized. “Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.”

M. ventured: “Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!”

Master (interrupting): “But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.”

M. argued: “But Sir, one should explain to those who worship the clay image that

²² The Master told Keshab: “You don’t look into people’s nature before you make them your disciples, and so they break away from you. All men look alike, to be sure, but they have different nature. Some have an excess of *sattva*, others an excess of *rajas*, and still others an excess of *tamas*. You must have noticed that the cakes known as *puli* all look alike. But their contents are very different. Some contain condensed milk, some coconut kernel, and others mere boiled *kalai* pulse.” (p. 71)

²³ We find other instances in the Gospel regarding the Master’s way of judging persons by bodily signs. He says: “When Narendra first came here he was dressed in dirty clothes, but his eyes and face betokened some inner stuff.” (p. 494). “Sri Ramakrishna took Tarak’s hand into his own and seemed to feel its weight. A few moments later he said: ‘There is a little crookedness in your mind; but that will go.’” (p. 698).

See also *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, pp. 768 for details of the Master’s power of testing people by the bodily signs and how he tested Narendra in many ways.

The Master had the gift of judging persons in other ways too. He said: “Yes, I can see inside him (Pundit Samadhayai) through his eyes, as one can see the objects in a room through the glass door.” (p. 20) Regarding the young boys, Purna and younger Naren, the Master said: “A great soul! Or how could he (Purna) make me do japa for his welfare? But Purna doesn’t know anything about it.” ... “Look at him! How naive he (Naren) looks when he laughs, as if he knew nothing. He never thinks of these three things: land, wife and money.” (p. 714). “Narendra belongs to a very high plane – the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. So many devotees come here, but there is not one like him. Every now and then I take stock of the devotees. I find that some are like lotuses with ten petals, some like lotuses with sixteen petals, some like lotuses with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petaled lotus.” (p. 793)

it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay.”

The Master did not spare. He said sharply: “That is the one hobby of you Calcutta people – giving lectures and bringing light to others! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?”²⁴

However, the Master explained the significance of image worship satisfactorily and said; “God is our Inner Guide. He will be the teacher,” and admonished *M.*: “Why should you get a headache over it (image worship)? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself.”²⁵

This time *M.* felt his ego completely crushed. He concludes: “What a shame! How foolish I am! This is not mathematics or history or literature, that one can teach it to others. No, this is the deep mystery of God. What he says appeals to me.”

Then with what simplicity and wealth of common illustrations does the Master elucidate, without ambiguity, the questions of spiritual seekers, which engenders conviction in their minds! And how practical they are!

M. asked: “How ought we to live in the world?”

Master: “Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all – with wife and children, father and mother – and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.”

The Master supplements the answer with four more apt illustrations:

1. A maid-servant serving in the house of a rich man doing all her work diligently, but with her mind on her own children in the village;
2. The tortoise moving about in the water but with her thoughts on her eggs;
3. Breaking opens the jackfruit after smearing the hands with oil;
4. Preparing first butter from milk and then putting it in water so that it will not mix with the water.

Then he further elaborates it with instruction on the means of fixing the mind on God, by resorting to solitude occasionally and by the use of discrimination about the Real and the unreal etc.²⁶

²⁴ Though the Master was from a village, he knew the nature of Calcutta people. He says, “Don’t you know how easily the people of Calcutta get excited? The milk in the kettle puffs up and boils as long as the fire burns underneath. Take away the fuel and all becomes quiet. The people of Calcutta love sensations.” (p. 71)

²⁵ “Do you know my attitude?”, the Master queried and said, “As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows... There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidananda. He alone is the Teacher. My attitude towards God is that of a child toward its mother. One can get human gurus by the million. All want to be teachers. But who cares to be a disciple? ... Anyone and everyone cannot be a guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him. Therefore in every age God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity. Satchidananda alone is the guru.” (p. 24. See also p. 71)

²⁶ At other places in the *Gospel*, we find several other illustrations as well, such as of mud-fish living untainted in the mud; a loose woman doing all her work but with her mind on her paramour; a man with a carbuncle doing all his work while always aware of the pain; a dancing girl dancing with jars on the head; women talking and laughing while going with water-pitchers on their heads; etc.

The next question of *M.* was: “Is it possible to see God?” The Master answers assuringly without the least ambiguity: “Yes, certainly,”²⁷ and then in his own inimitable way explains how one can obtain God vision through longing, comparing it with the intense longing of the worldly people for worldly things, and giving other apt illustrations, like that of the kitten mewing for its mother with complete dependence on her. He interspersed the reply with a soul stirring song (which is a general characteristic of the Master’s way of instruction, and very effective) in his charming voice, and pointed out:

“Longing is like the rosy dawn. Afar the dawn, out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.”

M. had been profoundly impressed by the first two visits to this wonderful man. He had been thinking of the Master constantly, and of the utterly simple way he explained the deep truths of spiritual life. Never before had he met such a man.

M. came on his third visit the next Sunday (5th March). The room was filled with devotees. The Master smiled as he talked and the conversation was about worldly men and how to deal with them. “They speak ill of the spiritually minded”, he said, and compared the latter’s attitude to that of an elephant which moves along the street without caring to look at the curs that bark at it.

The Master asked the spirited Narendra, about nineteen then (later Swami Vivekananda): “If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them?”

Narendra replied: “I shall think that dogs are barking at me.”

The Master smilingly corrected him, “Oh, no, you must not go that far, my child. (*laughter*). God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account.” (*laughter*).

Then, the Master elucidated its implications with the parables of the ‘Mahout-Narayana and Elephant-Narayana’ to keep away from the wicked, and with that of ‘the Brahmachari and the Snake’, to hiss at the wicked people to scare them away, but not to inject poison into, or to injure, them.

We see Sri Ramakrishna was an expert storyteller and used the parables with telling effect to the utmost advantage to drive home in simple way spiritual truths and their practical application in life. There is no dearth of parables, common telling illustrations and similes, and wit and wisdom to suit every occasion aptly.²⁸ They flow out spontaneously as he talks in a natural unaffected way. He does not pose as a teacher or a Guru standing on a high pedestal. He is the Great Master without being conscious of it.²⁹ All feel at ease in his company, whether rich or poor, high or low, young or old,

²⁷ The master was kind to the householders and often encouraged them and assured them. When a person asked: “Sir, is it ever possible to realize God while leading the life of a householder?” The master assured: “Certainly. But as I said just now, one must live in holy company and pray unceasingly. One should weep for God. When the impurities of the mind are thus washed away, one realizes God.” (p. 23)

²⁸ There are more than 70 parables mentioned in the Index to the *Gospel*. These do not include all the illustrations and similes, sayings and proverbs, analogies and anecdotes, allegories and mythological stories, etc., which the Master uses profusely.

²⁹ “A hollow piece of drift-wood somehow manages to float; but it sinks if even a bird sits on it. But Narada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across to the other shore but can carry many animals and other creatures as well. A steamship itself crosses the ocean and also carries people across,” (p. 435). Sri Ramakrishna was a huge steamship.

and men or women. Wherever he is there is a mart of joy.

The Master is fully aware of the nature of the worldly persons,³⁰ and very graphically describes their mentality comparing them to the fish caught in the net, which burrow themselves into the mud with the net in their mouths thinking they are quite safe. But he assures, replying to a question, that there is certainly hope for even these if they keep holy company, etc. and pray to God saying, 'Give me faith and devotion.' The Master does not reject anyone. He finds a way for all. He declares, "Everybody will surely be liberated. But one should follow the instructions of the Guru." (p. 23). "Once a person has faith, he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith." Then he goes on to recount the miracles worked by faith in the name of God and makes all laugh saying that even God Rama had to build a bridge to cross the sea, but Hanuman with one bound cleared it with Rama's name on his lips. He then sings a song in his charming voice to the Divine Mother glorifying the power of Her name.

The Master was an expert connoisseur of persons.³¹ He knows not only the nature of worldly-minded, but of great ones, and of spiritual geniuses too, and even of naughty boys. Pointing to Narendra, he said:

"You all see this boy. He behaves that way here. A naughty boy seems very gentle when with his father. But he is quite another when he plays in the *chandni*. Narendra and people of his type belong to the class of the ever-free. They are never entangled in the world. When they grow a little older they feel the awakening of inner consciousness and go directly towards God. They come to the world only to teach others. They never care for anything of the world. They are never attached to 'woman and gold'." (p. 12)

Then he illustrated the ever-free nature of Narendra with the legend of the 'Homa Bird', which always flies high up in the sky and whose young ones, newly hatched, develop wings before they touch the ground and fly up to the mother-bird in the sky. What an apt illustration! Then the Master extolled Narendra's talents:

"You see, Narendra excels in singing, playing on instruments, study and everything. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar and tore his arguments to shreds." (*All laugh*).³²

Here we come upon another aspect of the Master. He shows interest even in reasoning, though he is against vain argumentation. He asked *M.*: "Is there any book in English on reasoning? Tell me what it says."³³ *M.* explained; but while listening, the mood suddenly changed and the Master became absent-minded. *M.* sauntered in the garden and after a while returned to the Master's room. He describes the scene:

"There, on the small north verandah, he (*M.*) witnessed an amazing sight. Sri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees, and Narendra was singing. *M.* had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder; for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told *M.* that the Master was in *samadhi*. *M.* had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought: "Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a

³⁰ See pages 71, 558, 581, 609, 692 etc.

³¹ The Master freely bestows praise and appreciation wherever he sees laudable qualities. See pages 341, 365, 546, 571, 605-6, 610, 793, 799, 835, 907, 908, etc.

³² Regarding appreciation of Narendra see also pages 219, 227, 705, 793, etc.

³³ See pages 33, 212, 437, 639, 840 for the Master's ideas on faith and reasoning.

state!’ “

Narendra was singing a song on Lord Hari which described His peerless beauty. The Master was reflecting the sentiments in his person like a delicate spiritual instrument. Narendra sang:

‘Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,

.....

Ever more beauteous in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.’

“The Master shuddered when the last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, ‘that shames the splendour of a million moons’? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit?”

The song continued:

‘Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart;

With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.’

“Again that bewitching smile. The body motionless as before, the eyes half shut, as if beholding a strange inner vision.”

Next day when *M.* comes in the afternoon, quite a different scene opens. The Master (then about 46) is sitting on the small couch and with a smile is talking with Narendra, Bhavanath, and other young men, all about nineteen or twenty.

“The Master was having great fun with the boys, treating them as if they were his most intimate friends. Peals of side-splitting laughter filled the room as if it were a mart of joy. The whole thing was a revelation to *M.* He thought: “Didn’t I see him only yesterday intoxicated with God? Wasn’t he swimming then in the Ocean of Divine Love – a sight I had never seen before? And today the same person is behaving like an ordinary man! Wasn’t it he who scolded me on the first day of my coming here? Didn’t he admonish me, saying, ‘And you are a man of knowledge!’?”

Though Sri Ramakrishna was having great fun with the boys, no sooner *M.* entered the room, the Master laughed aloud and said to the boys: “There! He has come again.” They all joined in the laughter.³⁴ The Master explained the cause of the laughter:

“A man once fed a peacock with a pill of opium at four o’ clock in the afternoon. The next day, exactly at that time, the peacock came back. It had felt the intoxication of the drug and returned just in time to have another dose.” (*All laugh*).

M. thought this a very apt illustration. Even at home he had been unable to banish the thought of Sri Ramakrishna for a moment. His mind was constantly at Dakshineswar and he had counted the minutes until he should go again.

While the Master and the boys were having fun, his glance did not miss *M.* who was sitting in silence. The Master remarked to Ramlal: “You see, he is a little advanced in years (about 28), and therefore somewhat serious. He sits quiet while the youngsters are making merry.”

³⁴ The master was full of wit and humour and often made the youngsters laugh heartily. See pages 70, 71, 146, 232, 408, 787, 788, 903 for witty remarks and page 692 for mimicry.

From the great fun, suddenly the Master's mood changed and he drew their attention to Hanuman's intense longing for Sri Rama:

"Just imagine Hanuman's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God."

The Master sang a song about Hanuman, and even as he was singing he went into samadhi.

"Again the half-closed eyes and motionless body that one sees in his photograph. Just a minute before, the devotees had been making merry in his company. After a long time the Master came back to ordinary consciousness. His face lighted up with a smile and his body relaxed; his senses began to function in a normal way. He shed tears of joy as he repeated the holy name of Rama. *M.* wondered whether this very saint was the person who a few minutes earlier had been behaving like a child of five!"

Note the quick and complete change in the moods and attitudes of the Master. Again the scene changes – The Master said to Narendra and *M.* "I should like to hear you speak and argue in English." "They both laughed... It was impossible for *M.* to argue any more before the Master." And yet *M.* was a learned man and Sri Ramakrishna an illiterate! Behold the power of the Master's personality!

In the afternoon *M.* suddenly came upon the Master talking to Narendra. He was saying:

"Look here. Come a little more often. You are a new-comer. On first acquaintance people visit each other quite often, as is the case with a lover and his sweetheart." (Narendra and *M.* laugh).

Nothing escapes the Master, though he was always intoxicated with God. He even knows the ways of the sweethearts and uses the illustration aptly.³⁵ Then he told *M.* about how the peasants select bullocks with mettle and spirit by touching their tails. Those, which meekly lie down, they reject, and those that frisk about and show their spirit they select. And he continued, "Narendra is like a bullock of this latter class. He is full of spirit within." The Master liked such spirit. He did not like namby-pamby fellows. He continued:

"There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk – soft and mushy. No inner strength."³⁶

The Master had a scientific mind. He did not depend entirely on his own views. He always sought confirmation. He said to *M.* "Go and talk to Narendra. Then tell me

³⁵ The Master said regarding Bhavanath: "Bhavanath is married; but he spends the whole night in spiritual conversation with his wife. The couple pass their time talking of God alone. I said to him, 'Have a little fun with your wife now and then.' (p. 690). cf. You see, he (Rakhal) has renounced his home and relatives and completely surrendered himself to me. It was I who sent him to his wife now and then. He still had a little desire for enjoyment." (p. 494).

³⁶ The Master sometimes exhibited his spirit. He said to the other devotees: "Captain forbids me to go to see Keshab." Captain: "But, Sir, you act as you will. What shall I do?" Master (*sharply*): "Why shouldn't I go to see Keshab? You feel at ease when you go to the Governor General's house, and for money at that. Keshab thinks of God and chants His name. Isn't it you who are always saying that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings? Doesn't God dwell in Keshab also?" (p. 218). The Master did not hesitate to scold the devotees when needed: Vijay (p. 100); *M.* (p. 285); Haladhari (p. 321); *M.* and Harish (p. 376); Adhar (p. 387); Niranjan (p. 402); Ishan (p. 577) etc.

what you think of him.”³⁷

M. had been fascinated by Sri Ramakrishna’s personality³⁸ and had been enchanted by the Master’s sweet music. When the time for departure came, he felt reluctant to go and instead went in search of Sri Ramakrishna. *M.* saw him in the *Natmandir* (hall in front of the Kali temple), pacing up and down, and asked him with hesitation if there would be any more singing that evening. The Master replied, “No, not tonight.” But he added, “I am going to Balaram Bose’s house in Calcutta. Come there and you will hear me sing.” The Master was keenly interested in the welfare of the devotees. He was not content that they come to him at Dakshineswar. He himself graced their places and this also provided opportunities for the neighbouring people and those who could not go so far to Dakshineswar to meet him. When *M.* felt some hesitation whether he would be welcome at a stranger’s place, the Master assured him, “Oh no, why should you think that? Just mention my name. Say that you want to see me; then someone will take you to me.” The Lord is very easy of approach.

Again, like a scientist, he wanted to know what *M.* felt about himself, since he appeared to be so fascinated.

Master: “Let me ask you something. What do you think of me?” When *M.* remained silent the Master repeated, “What do you think of me? How many *annas* of knowledge of God have I?”

M. replied. “I do not understand what you mean by ‘*annas*’. But of this I am sure. I have never before seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in God, renunciation, and catholicity anywhere.”³⁹

The Master laughed like a child. *M.* bowed low before him and took his leave.

He had gone up to the gate but remembering, he came back to Sri Ramakrishna

³⁷ Sri Ramakrishna’s innate rational and scientific mind is evident in his going to several people to compare their realizations with his own. He had the scientist’s humility. If someone cast doubts on any of his realizations, he would try to verify it. He laid emphasis on practical *sadhana*. He used to say, by mere saying ‘*siddhi*, *siddhi*’ you won’t have intoxication; you must get some, make a paste of it and drink it mixed with water. (p. 547) He would also point out, though the almanac may forecast rain, if you squeeze it not a drop of water will come. Similar is the case with more theoretical knowledge of scriptures. He also declared that God can be seen and talked to by all if they undergo the necessary discipline and fulfill the conditions, and that he himself had seen God and talked to Him. (See pages 146, 175, 287, 357, 413, 600, 497, 780, 815, 818, 954, etc. for what the Master has said on himself and his experiences).

We also see the Master had knowledge how a photograph was taken (p. 182); about telegraph (p. 578), medicine (pp. 23, 174, 826 – cf. Sri Ramakrishna’s medical knowledge – a series of articles in Bhavan’s Journal by a Doctor in 1979-80). We can see the Master’s spirit of enquiry, when he enquires of *M.* about Pandit Shashadhar (p. 448); Narayana Shastri about Keshab (p. 835); and *M.* about Dr. Sarkar (p. 836) and the whole conversation with Dr. Sarkar (founder of the Science Association) is very illuminating (pp. 907-8). He also desired to visit the Science Association (p. 895). His remarks on science as incapable of revealing God is also interesting: “And what does your ‘science’ say? This combined with this produces that; that combined with that produces this. One is more likely to lose consciousness by contemplating those things – by handling material things too much.” (p. 907). He also recounts his experiences to Dr. Sarkar and others and allows himself to be tested (pp. 830-31).

³⁸ The Master not only was fascinating, he also attracted devotees: “I found that the Doctor (Dr. Sarkar) will have spiritual awakening. But it will take some time. I won’t have to tell him much. I saw another person while in that mood. My mind said to me, ‘Attract him too’.” (p. 902).

³⁹ At another place *M.* says: “You are as infinite as He of whom we have been talking. Truly, no one can fathom your depth.” (p. 56). (For the estimates of the Master’s personality see also page 19.) “If you want to see a grog-shop, then come with me. You will see a huge jar of wine (bliss) there.” (*M.* told Kali Krishna about the Master; 175; 254, 278, 306, 324, 387, 463, 836, 897, 958-9, etc.

who was still in the Natmandir, and saw:

“In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the Self as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.”

“In silent wonder *M.* surveyed that great soul.”

* * *

We see from the foregoing that a wonderful many-faceted personality of the Master stands out before us even in the account of the first few days of *M.*'s visit to the Master. If we survey the whole *Gospel* on the lines of the First Chapter, we can see a good number of other important aspects of the Master's personality emerging, and those which we have already come across reinforced and enriched.⁴⁰ Swami Vivekananda used to say that the Master's moods were inexhaustible:

“Sri Ramakrishna had an infinite breadth of feeling. He had infinite moods and phases. Even if you might form an idea of the limits of Brahma-jnana, the knowledge of the Absolute, you could not do the same with the unfathomable depths of his mind. Thousands of Vivekanandas may spring forth through one gracious glance of his eyes! Sri Ramakrishna is not exactly what the ordinary followers have comprehended him to be... *He only knows what he himself really was; his frame was only a human one, but everything else about him was entirely different from that of others.* Truly, I tell you, I have understood him very little.”

Note what even the great Vivekananda says!

Consider the great spiritual power and inner strength of the person who could hold the sustained interest and devotion of so large a number of persons of high calibre and varied natures that we come across in the *Gospel*. There was the great and learned Keshab Chandra Sen, who was held in high esteem even in the West, an admired leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a great orator, and considered the idol of ‘Young Bengal’, and yet he came under the sway of the Master, and became the first instrument in spreading the Master's divine life and message. Then pursue his visit and the brilliant and profound conversation with so eminent a person and so great a Pandit as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The unlearned priest of Kali is in his natural elements. Wit, humour, and divine wisdom flow out of him spontaneously. Never for once is he in hesitation for words or ideas or quick repartee. He is in divine intoxication, and yet quite appreciative of the greatness of Vidyasagar.⁴¹ Even the Pandit admitted openly that he learnt something new from Sri Ramakrishna, which he had not heard before: that of all entities Brahman alone is not made *ucchishhta* (defiled).

Then see the variety of other eminent personalities that flit across the pages of the *Gospel* who were like little boys before the Master. To name only a few – Rani Rasmani, Mathur Nath Biswas, Pandit Narayana Shastri, Pandit Padmalochan, Pandits

⁴⁰ This short pioneering article of its type cannot comprehend all the aspects of the Master's personality which a systematic and thorough analysis of the *Gospel* would yield. We have drawn attention to some salient aspects and tried to enrich some by way of footnotes. It has not been possible to give the details in all cases lest the article should become too long. We have contented ourselves by giving page references and seek the indulgence of interested readers to consult the *Gospel* for details as well as for further exploration.

⁴¹ The Master in his talks often made acknowledgement to persons from whom he learnt or heard certain ideas and facts; and he often encouraged others to recount while he listened. One may refer to pages 230, 341, 405, 522, 605-6, 835, 836, 838-9, 899.

Shashadhara Tarkachudamani and Samadhyayi, Vijaya Krishna Goswami, Trailokya Nath Sanyal, Col. Viswanath, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Ashwini Kumar Datta, Hirananda of Sindh, Nitya Gopal, Dr. Rajendra Lal, Dr. Bhadhuri, Adhar, Jadulal Mullick, Shambhulal Mullick, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Williams, etc.⁴² And how even a rationalist and a man of science like Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, who founded the Indian Association for the cultivation of science, was captivated by Sri Ramakrishna! The number of persons of all ages and classes who find place in the Gospel in association with Sri Ramakrishna is legion, and we find that a host of devotees from all sects and creeds and of all stations in life came to him for inspiration. There are also those who became his famous householder disciples such as Ramachandra Dutta, Manamohan Mitra, Suresh Kumar Mitra (Surendra), Durgacharan Nag, Akshaya Kumar Sen (who wrote the *Ramakrishna Punthi*), Devendra, Kalipada Ghosh, Balaram Bose, and *M.* himself, the author of the *Gospel*, and several others who spread the message of the Master and advanced his divine mission.

Above all, is it the work of any but a great spiritual dynamo to tame and hold together about a score of the intelligent and spirited youths of the University, well versed in modern sciences and rationalism, and inspire them with renunciation and dedication to the service of God and man? See the *Gospel*, how he gradually built up the cluster of his future great *sannyasin* disciples like Rakhal, Baburam, Shashi, Sarat, Tarak, and others and made a Vivekananda of Narendra and an Adbhutananda of an illiterate servant boy, Latu. And how he subdued that terrible *Bhairava*, the dramatist genius Girish Chandra Ghosh, the father of Bengali stage, but an inveterate drunkard who led a fast life, and transform him into one of the greatest devotees endowed with unflinching faith, so much so that he hailed openly Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God!

Sri Ramakrishna's moulding of persons into greatness was not confined to men only. His greatest gift to the world is the Holy Mother. He transformed the simple Saradamani, his wife, into his first *sannyasini* disciple and into the Holy Mother of the Ramakrishna-world, who guided his great disciples and the destinies of the Ramakrishna Order and ministered to a large number of devotees, for thirty-four long years after the passing away of the Master. Then there was Gopal-Ma, who had the living experience of Bala-Gopala (Child Krishna) playing with her, due to the Master's blessings. Many were the other women devotees whom the Master guided who find reference in the *Gospel*. Gauri-Ma later started an ashrama for women and schools for girls. Though Sri Ramakrishna emphasized on the '*kamini-kanchana tyaga*' and advocated that spiritual aspirants of either sex should not mix closely with each other, we find in the *Gospel* Sri Ramakrishna held all women as the embodiments of the Divine Mother and commended this attitude to all.⁴³

⁴² See the large number of names of persons who were associated with Sri Ramakrishna from the Index to the *Gospel* as also the list given on pages 7 and 8 of the *Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (original English version in part by *M.*), published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

⁴³ A devotee asked the Master: "Sir, shall we hate women then?" The Master replied: "He who has realized God does not look upon a woman with the eye of lust; so he is not afraid of her. He perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself." (p. 100). However, he held that spiritual seekers, especially sannyasins, must keep aloof from women (p. 558). Naturally the opposite advice was given to women spiritual seekers, for the attraction between the sexes is very strong and brings down the mind to the physical level. Regarding the Master's attitude to women: He considered even prostitutes as manifestations of the Divine Mother (p. 225); "I cannot bear to see women fast." (p. 384); "I look on women as my mother" (51); His love for his mother (pp. 535-6).; He scolds *M.* and Harish for neglecting their mothers (p. 376); etc.

Sri Ramakrishna's moods varied from that of a feminine one (p. 780) to that of a child. He would sometimes throw off his clothes and pace up and down like a five-year old child (p. 818). Then, he could perfectly mimic several types of male and female characters and send the young devotees into roars of laughter.⁴⁴ Sometimes, he would be in the heroic mood. When Adhar mentioned to him the cause of the grief of his friend who was bereaved (p. 143), the Master sang the song:

“To arms! to arms! O Man! Death storms your house in battle array!
 Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion;” . . .
 Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love, . . .
 Fight your foe from the Ganges' bank and he is easily slain.”

And then said, “What can you do? Be ready for Death. Death has entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name.”

Then what a variety of songs does the Master sing! From the light and frivolous song to entertain children (p. 477), with whom he was very happy:

Come; let me braid your hair,
 Lest your husband should scold you,
 When he beholds you!

to the most intoxicating devotional songs! Every sentiment is represented: there are those depicting the pangs of separation, and those inculcating intense renunciation, highest discrimination, and supreme knowledge; and those describing the union of *Shakti* in the *Muladhara* with *Shiva* in the *Sahasrara*, passing through the six *Chakras*. And there are songs for every occasion. Songs are there in the name of Shiva, Shakti, Kali, Durga, Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, Gauranga and Nityananda, etc. There are more than 200 songs of all types recorded in the *Gospel* sung by the Master and others composed by Ramaprasad, Kamalakanta, Premadasa, Trailokya, Madan, Nareshchandra, Meerabhai, Nanak and others. All this wide variety reveals the versatility and breadth of Master's mind and talents. The Master's singing was unusually melodious and charming, often interspersed with his improvisations and accompanied by his ecstatic trances and inspiring dances.

And what to speak of his tireless dancing, intoxicated with the divine mood, often going into rapturous *samadhi*! You meet these scenes often in the *Gospel*. At the festival of Panihati, *M.* records (p. 193):

“Sri Ramakrishna entered by turns into all the moods of ecstasy. In deep *samadhi* he stood still, his face radiating a divine glow. In the state of partial consciousness he

⁴⁴ Sri Ramakrishna was in the happiest mood with his young and pure devotees. He was seated on the small couch and was doing funny imitations of a *kirtani*. The devotees laughed heartily. The *kirtani* is dressed lavishly and covered with ornaments. She sings, standing on the floor, a coloured kerchief in her hand. Now and then she coughs to draw people's attention and blows her nose, raising her nose-ring. When a respectable gentleman enters the room, she welcomes him with appropriate words, still continuing her song. Now and then she pulls her sari from her arms to show her jewels. The devotees were convulsed with laughter at this mimicry by Sri Ramakrishna. Paltu rolled on the ground. Pointing to him, “The Master said to *M.*: ‘Look at that child! He is rolling with laughter.’ He said to Paltu with a smile: ‘Don't report this to your father or he will lose the little respect he has for me. You see, he is an “Englishman”.’ (p. 692). See also pp. 793, 824.

Regarding the Master's habits, moods, simplicity, and humanness see pages 40, 146, 493, 608, 786, 788, 813, 841.

danced, sometimes gently and sometimes with the vigour of a lion.”

“Again, regaining consciousness of the world, he sang, himself leading the chorus:

‘Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari’s name,... See how all Nadia is shaking under the waves of Gauranga’s love!...’

“The crowd, with the Master in the centre, surged toward the temple of Radha-Krishna. Only a small number could enter. The rest stood outside the portal and jostled with one another to have a look at Sri Ramakrishna. In a mood of intoxication he began to dance in the courtyard of the shrine. Every now and then his body stood transfixed in deep samadhi. Hundreds of people around him shouted the name of God, and thousands outside caught the strain and raised the cry with full-throated voices.”⁴⁵

Does this not remind one of the ‘*Rasa-dance*’ of Sri Krishna! We also find in the *Gospel* that Sri Ramakrishna’s knowledge of the various religious sects, of saints and seers, and the various *Yogas* and other religious disciplines was quite wide (see the Index). There are also references to *Ramayanas* of Valmiki and Tulsidas, *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Ashtavakra Samhita*, *Bhaktamala*, *Bhagavata*, *Gita*, *Chandi*, *Tantras*, *Manu Samhita*, *Narada Pancharatra*, *Panchadashi*, *Panini*, *Puranas*, *Smritis*, *Prabodhachandrodaya*, *Vivekachudamani*, *Yogavasishtha*, and other works, all of which go to show the wide interest and horizon of the Master.

Then we find that the Master witnesses the religious dramas at the Star Theatre (of Girish Ghosh), goes to see a circus, and is interested how a photograph is taken. He knows the Maidan, Museum, Zoo, Asiatic Society, Bengal Bank, Fort William, and is interested in visiting even the Science Association of Dr. Sarkar. And every one of his experiences provides him enough material to draw spiritual lessons to communicate in his brilliant conversations. The Master is ever active visiting the houses of devotees, participates in Brahma festivals, goes on a boat-trip on the Ganges with Keshab and his Brahma party, and attends Ratha-yatra at Balaram Bose’s house, etc. Everywhere he creates a surcharged divine atmosphere. No page of the *Gospel* is drab or dull. We have the whole gamut of human emotions of a higher type displayed there by Sri Ramakrishna. We see the high states of the Master, his intense detachment and his joyful moods in spite of his fractured arm or the intense pain in the throat. To the very end we see his interest in the spiritual development of all those who came to him and his deep sympathy and love for all⁴⁶.” And he is particularly interested in pure youngsters.

⁴⁵ See, ‘the description of the Master’s extraordinary dance’ (p. 697) and ‘the dance in bhava-samadhi’ (p. 824) by Swami Saradananda in his *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*.

⁴⁶ “On the morning of 23rd December (1885), Sri Ramakrishna gave unrestrained expression to his love for the devotees. He said to Niranjan, ‘You are my father: I shall sit on your lap.’ Touching Kalipada’s chest, he said, ‘May your inner spirit be awakened!’ He stroked Kalipada’s chin affectionately and said, ‘Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious devotions will certainly come here.’ In the morning two ladies received his special blessing. In a state of samadhi he touched their hearts with his feet. They shed tears of joy. One of them said to him, weeping, ‘You are so kind.’ His love this day really broke all bounds. He wanted to bless Gopal of Sinthi and said to a devotee: ‘Bring Gopal here.’” (p. 924)

For the Master’s concern and consideration for the devotees, see him doing japa for young Purna’s welfare (p. 714); depressed about Hriday’s illness (p. 214); worried about the grief of Mohini’s wife on the death of her son (p. 696); worry about young boys (pp. 494, 698); concern for Hriday (p. 612); his heart writhed in pain at the death of devotees (p. 731); concern for the younger Naren (p.798) and Surendra (p. 411); for Girish Ghosh (p. 819); for the coachman (p. 828).

His compassion for all is also seen here: “In spite of his illness the Master keenly felt the sorrow and suffering of men. Day and night he thought about their welfare. The devotees wondered at his

Here he advises the householders how to live in the world, and there he expatiates on the glories of renunciation. He is at home with the young and the old, the learned and the ignorant, children and women, the poor and the rich, ordinary clerks and high officers, doctors and scientists, artists and philosophers, devotees and saints. Here he discusses with the Vedantists, there with the Vaishnavas or Shaktas or again about different sects and religions. He brings God face to face to us, exhorts us to consider Him as our very own and very near to us and to strive to realize Him in life. Nowhere anything is jarring, nowhere anything narrow, and nowhere the interest slackens. One is lifted up into an ethereal atmosphere of divine harmony. Verily he was the personification of all the *yogas* and the spiritual life of all mankind.⁴⁷ No wonder Vivekananda sang in a hymn composed by him on Sri Ramakrishna, who was the combined incarnation of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna:

Advayatattvasamāhitacittam
 projjvalabhaktipaṭāvṛttam ,
 Karmakalevaramadbhutaceṣṭam
 yāmi gurum śaraṇam bhavavaidyam.
 Naradeva deva jaya jaya naradeva!

– I surrender myself to the Guru, the Man-God, the physician for the malady of this *samsara* (relative existence), whose mind ever dwelt on the Non-dualistic Truth (*Advaita*), whose personality was covered by the cloth of supreme devotion, who was ever active (for the good of humanity) and whose actions were all super-human.

Victory unto that God of all mankind!

Victory unto that Man-God!

Om śrīrāmakṛṣṇārpaṇamastu!

compassion. The assurance of Sri Ramakrishna that no sin can touch a man if he gives up his body while praying to God was deeply impressed on their minds.” (p. 904).

The Master does not reject drunkard Surendra (p. 527); Master’s illness is due to taking the sins of others (p. 897); “Don’t take more people than your horse can draw”, the Master says (p. 443); asks devotees to give alms to the beggar woman (p. 609).

47. For the Master’s realization of and equal regard for different religions see pages 18, 497, 800, etc. For his breadth of outlook and spirit of equality see pages 225, 435, 571, 604, 837, 854, etc. For his universal vision see page 290, etc.