
[THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS
ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT SINCE 1965

/ ANIL SOOKLAL 708

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Dedicated to:

HIS HOLINESS SRI SWAMI SHIVAPADANANDAJI MAHARAJ

and the selfless sannyasis and sadhakas

of the Ramakrishna Movement

MY PARENTS

- With Prem and Om

"As long as I live so long do I learn"

- Sri Ramakrishna

T 890147

AUM

May quietness descend upon my limbs,
My speech, my breath, my eyes, my ears;
May all my senses wax clear and strong.
May Brahman show Himself unto me.
Never may I deny Brahman, nor Brahman me.
I with Him and He with me — may we abide
always together.
May there be revealed to me,
Who am devoted to Brahman,
The holy truth of the Upanishads.
OM ... ~~Peace~~~~peace~~~~peace~~.

— Kena Upanishad

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SEAL OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
(See page 81)



Our Seal

"The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma, the lotus, of Bhakti, and the rising-sun, of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and awakened Kundalini, Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for the Paramatman. Therefore, the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained."

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA



(ix)

SRI SARADA DEVI



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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Subject of Study : The Ramakrishna Movement

Since the late 19th century the history of Hinduism has been dominated by the emergence of several Neo-Hindu movements. While many of these movements have faded into obscurity, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897, was to have a profound influence on contemporary Hindu thought.

Beginning with a known "saviour for this age", Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Ramakrishna Movement spread from a small band of disciples to one of the largest and most influential Hindu movements in the world today. Sri Ramakrishna, a multifaceted and mystifying figure has had a widespread and enduring influence on the religious life of India. The integrity and authenticity of what he came to personify became a central factor in the modern renewal of the Hindu religious tradition, inspiring in his followers both a conviction as to the vitality of their tradition and a capacity to nurture and develop that vitality. The very dynamism of the renewed tradition that sprang from Sri Ramakrishna, while making dramatically clear his greatness and significance, was also to exercise a marked influence on the development of Hindu religious thought in the modern era.

All living traditions naturally and inevitably reinterpret the sources of their inspiration as their contexts and concerns change. In these reinterpretations, certain aspects are highlighted while others are de-emphasized. The intent in a healthy tradition is not to obscure or distort the original, but rather to continue and extend its beneficial influence in the new circumstances.

The effects of the inevitable reinterpretation of Hinduism in the modern era were especially dramatic in the case of Sri Ramakrishna because his greatest and most ardent disciple, Swami Vivekananda, almost immediately projected on a world-wide scale the message of his Master, the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. To his world-wide audience, Swami Vivekananda emphasized his Master's teaching of the "Truth" within all religions; and it is with this "universalism" that Sri Ramakrishna and the Ramakrishna Movement are most commonly associated. While this universalism is an important facet of the Movement's teachings, it is the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda which is the most appropriate focal point for an understanding of the Ramakrishna Movement. Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Movement have presented their Master's life and teachings in terms of a systematic philosophy generally called Neo-Vedanta or Neo-Advaita, indicating that it is a reinterpretation of the classical Advaita Vedanta of the great philosopher Sankaracharya (c. 788 – 820 AD).

Since its inception the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has had as its major goal the revitalization of Hindu religion and culture within India. However, as a Mission it was also concerned with making an impact in countries outside India. Through the endeavours of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have spread to several parts of the world, including South Africa.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, an organisation independent of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India, was founded by Swami Nischalananda in 1942. The writer has chosen the Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa as his subject of study since it is his contention that the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa is playing an important role in the revitalization of Hinduism locally. In the past forty years the Movement has grown rapidly and has been exercising much influence on a sizeable sector of the Hindu community. While the primary concern of the Centre is to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda amongst all Hindus in South Africa, it does not restrict itself to this task alone. Although essentially a religious movement the Ramakrishna Centre is actively engaged in establishing a better social environment. This is evident in the Centre's deep concern with humanitarianism and total human development, as encompassed in the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. This study suggests that the Ramakrishna Centre is playing an important role in shaping the evolution of Hinduism in South Africa in recent times.

Although the Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa has been studied previously, this study is now outdated. C du P Le Roux's study "The Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa – A Socio-Religious Study" was completed in 1964. In the past two decades the Ramakrishna Movement has experienced its greatest growth and its scope of activities has widened tremendously under its present Spiritual Head, Swami Shivapadananda, who succeeded Swami Nischalananda upon his Mahasamadhi in 1965. The previous thesis on the Ramakrishna Movement did not entail a study of the emergence of Neo-Hinduism nor did it examine the Movement in India, issues that receive comprehensive attention in the present study. Further, Le Roux's thesis did not entail an in-depth study of Neo-Vedanta but rather a general survey of Hinduism. It is the writer's hypothesis that the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is one of the main hermeneutical keys to the understanding of the Ramakrishna Movement. A study of the Ramakrishna Movement to be comprehensively meaningful, will necessitate an examination of Neo-Vedanta which forms the fundamental bedrock upon which the entire superstructure of the Movement rests. The implications of Neo-Vedanta for the Ramakrishna Movement are reflected throughout the whole body of this study.

1.2 Aims of Study

The primary aim of this study is as follows:

1. To examine the religio-philosophical basis of the teachings

propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda which forms the foundation upon which the Movement was established.

2. To determine the manner in which the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of the Movement is manifested in the structure and functioning of the Movement in India and particularly in South Africa.
3. The study also aims to ascertain what impact the Movement has had in the religious and social spheres locally. This would naturally entail a detailed study of the religious, cultural and humanitarian activities of the Movement and the manner in which it influences the lives of those who come in contact with the teachings of the Movement.
4. Since this thesis entails a study of the Movement in South Africa since 1965 attempts are made to determine the factors responsible for the continued growth and sustenance of the Movement after the demise of its founder.
5. To determine the manner and extent to which the movement is influencing the development of Hinduism in South Africa.
6. Finally, this study aims to make a significant contribution

to the wider understanding of religious movements in general and to Hinduism in South Africa in particular.

1.3 Methodology

Over the last decade or so the cry for methodological clarification has repeatedly been raised. The number of papers, monographs, and conferences devoted to methodology has grown rapidly, previously developed methods have been criticised and found wanting and several new methods and theories about the study of religion have been proposed. There can be no doubt that a vigorous, if not always sufficiently rigorous debate about methodology has come into existence; at the same time many works are still being published which include little or no theoretical reflection at all. Without some kind of hermeneutic, some theory of understanding and interpretation, it is impossible to systematically order and account for the variety of religious data. The contemporary study of religion covers a wide range of interests and methods which often complement one another. The present study should be understood in relation to the wider "study of religion" because it seeks to describe and understand the nature of some aspects of Neo-Hinduism as reflected in the Ramakrishna Movement, rather than to merely explain them. In this regard the phenomenological approach has been employed by the writer in researching the field of study.

The phenomenological approach is not associated with any particular set of practical methods. It is polymethodic —

using the methods and ideas of many overlapping disciplines. At its simplest, phenomenology seeks to understand the phenomenon of religion or, rather specific phenomena of religion. The phenomenological method is summed up by the use of two distinct principles, derived from the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), namely the epoché and the eidetic vision. The epoché is often described as "bracketing", that is to say, a suspension of judgement on the part of the investigator as to the truth, value, and in some cases also, the existence of the phenomenon. The eidetic vision aims to grasp the essence of phenomena by means of empathy and intuition whereas the use of the epoché is pursued to achieve detachment and some kind of pure objectivity (King, 1983 : 36–38).

Smart (1983 : 16) prefers to use the phrase "structured empathy" instead of the word "phenomenology". According to him empathy literally means "feeling in", it is getting at the feel of what is inside another person or group of persons. It is not quite the same as sympathy, "feeling with", for sympathy means I agree with the other. Empathy helps us to grasp the facts better – that is why empathy needs to be structured. We have to comprehend the structure of another's world, and in general we have to try to understand the structures of belief inside the head of the believer. Phenomenology asks that we step back and look afresh at our own feelings, perceptions, and the whole flow of consciousness.

At the simplest level one can distinguish between a descriptive phenomenology, more empirically grounded in the examination of data, and an interpretative phenomenology which seeks to grasp a deeper meaning of religious phenomena. In this study both approaches are fruitfully combined in addition to an explicitly hermeneutical phenomenology. Religious phenomena are here systematically studied in their historical context as well as in their structural connections.

Dhavamony (1973 : 27) underlines the close and systematic relation between theorising and experiencing in the development and use of the phenomenological method. He maintains that the phenomenological approach does not just yield a mere description of the phenomena studied, as is sometimes alleged, nor does it pretend to explain the philosophical essence of the phenomena; for phenomenology is neither merely descriptive nor normative. But it does give us the inner meaning of a religious phenomenon as it is lived and experienced by religious men. This inner meaning can be said to constitute the essence of the phenomenon; but then the word essence should be understood correctly; what we mean is the empirical essence that is in question here. Phenomenology of religion is an empirical science, a human science which makes use of the results of other human sciences such as the psychology, sociology and anthropology of religion. Still more, we can even say that phenomenology of religion is closer to the philosophy of religion, for it studies the religious phenomena in their specific aspect of religiousness.

The field-work for this study was conducted over a two-year period from May 1986 to May 1988. In this study it was necessary to use many of the practical methods often utilised in sociology and anthropology. As the writer wanted to gather material and information about religious symbolism, rites and ceremonies and its meanings, it was necessary to observe and question those involved. In some cases the writer was "a total participant", becoming an inconspicuous member of the Movement and observing, unbeknown to others, all that transpired. During most Hindu festivals and the weekly satsang gatherings the writer was "a participant as observer", partaking in the ceremonies but known by all to be studying the Movement. On other occasions the writer was "an observer as participant"; asking questions and interpreting the data collected but not taking part in a more active sense. In these three roles, as "a total participant", "a participant as observer", and "an observer as participant" — three of the four positions outlined by Gold (1970 : 370-380) to describe the researcher's form of interaction with his or her research material — it is impossible not to affect or influence the field. Thus, although the writer's aim has been to describe and understand, in doing this he also had a reflexive effect on the Movement under study, making devotees aware, for example, of their own "religiousness" or of the possible meanings of their actions.

In addition to observing and formal and informal interviews the writer employed various elementary enumeration techniques

in order to understand the belief-system and activities of the Movement. It was also necessary to work with primary sources, with literature in English produced by the Movement and with liturgical material in Sanskrit. In the case of the latter the writer was assisted by Sannyasis of the Centre.

Between May 1986 — May 1988 the Avoca Ashram of the Ramakrishna Centre, in Durban was the focus of the writer's field-work. In addition to attending the weekly satsang on a regular basis the writer also observed the major Hindu festivals celebrated at the ashram. In addition the proceedings of special gatherings such as the Yoga Camp, Youth Camp and Children's Rally, were recorded. Besides interviews with devotees and officials of the Centre, the writer also had numerous interviews with the Spiritual Head of the Centre as well as the other monks of the Centre, which led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Movement.

The writer, who lectures on Hinduism at the University of Durban-Westville and is actively engaged in Hindu community life in South Africa, was well-known to the Ramakrishna Centre prior to the commencement of this study, hence his bona fides and intentions were established with the Centre. This proved beneficial especially when interviewing devotees of the Movement since the writer was regarded as a "friend and associate" of the Movement and those interviewed did so freely and without any restraint or suspicion regarding the writer's motives.

The information gathered through observation and interviews was then enhanced with the primary and secondary source material. In this regard "The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda", Vol. 1 – 8, and "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna", were of invaluable assistance in gaining a deeper insight of the philosophy and the workings of the Movement.

Although the Avoca Ashram was the focus of the field-work for much of this study, the writer also visited most of the branch centres of the Movement in South Africa, observing and participating in their activities as well as interviewing devotees and officials of the branches.

Information pertaining to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India was obtained during the writer's two month sojourn in India (December 1987 – January 1988). During this period the writer visited over twelve Math and Mission branches in India as well as the Headquarters of the Movement in Calcutta. The writer was also resident at the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in Khar, Bombay, for several days during which he participated in the daily activities of the ashram as well as conducted interviews with devotees and Sannyasis of the Math and Mission. The writer also interviewed several senior monks of the Math and Mission including the General Secretary of The Ramakrishna Mission as well as members of the Board of Trustees of the Ramakrishna Math. While resident in Calcutta the writer made use of the library of the Ramakrishna

Mission Institute of Culture to gather primary source material on the Movement.

In order to gauge the influence of the Movement in India the writer conducted interviews with several prominent members of the Hindu community who are not associated with the Movement in any way. Interviews were also conducted with academics involved in the teaching of Hindu religion and philosophy, at several universities in India.

Finally, it should be noted that one of the primary aims of this study is to provide a phenomenological account of the Ramakrishna Movement with special emphasis on the South African context. This study constitutes one of the few phenomenological accounts of Neo-Hinduism in South Africa, seeking as it does to see the Movement not simply as a Neo-Hindu movement but as a "new" expression of traditional Hinduism.

CHAPTER TWO

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND RENASCENT HINDUISM

2.1 Historical

Numerous accounts have been written of the nineteenth century religious, cultural and social renaissance within the sub-continent of India.¹ Whether written from the perspective of the nationalist, the critic, or the assumed independent observer, they all testify to a process of movement and change wherein Hindu religion and Indian society experienced a new dimension of dynamic growth and progress.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, India as a geographical area was under the military-political control of Great Britain. This, and the equally well recognised encroachment of European civilization into the area, have sometimes served to obscure the religious-cultural-social condition at the time of the early British military success. Generally speaking, it was a situation in which what might properly be termed "Hindu" religion was existent but dormant, expressing itself in age-old ways with little cognizance of the resources at its roots or the foreign influences that were beginning to gather around it (Ashby, 1974 : 26).

After the Bhakti movement exhausted itself about the middle of the eighteenth century, Hindu religion and culture had reached a period of stagnation, fettered with numerous restrictions and customs which were looked upon as the "laws of God" (Sarma,

1966 : 48). There were no new or noteworthy developments in Hindu religion, art or literature. The Hindu society of the period suffered from a number of evil customs, such as sati, infanticide, child-marriages and forced widowhood, untouchability, purdah, the caste system and prohibition of foreign travel. Some of these customs had crept into Hindu society under the impact of centuries of Muslim rule. The purdah system for instance, which still survives in the Muslim community, had been devised partly as a measure of protection of womenfolk in troubled times, and partly as a mark of respectability — the custom had been prevalent among the wealthy Muslim families. Child marriage, too, probably had its origin in the sentiment of fear and caution. The enforcement of rigid caste rules was likewise a device to safeguard the Hindu community against the inroads of an alien creed and culture. The ban on foreign travel was an indication of the fear that the Hindus had developed, respecting everything remote and unknown (Devaraja, 1975 : 99).

It was during this period that what has been termed "Westernization" became more clearly apparent in the Indian sub-continent. The inrush of a totally different civilization put an end to all creative work for a time and an uncritical admiration for all things western took possession of the mind of the educated classes, coupled with a contempt for things of native origin. This was the first time perhaps that the Indian mind was thrown off its balance. Even the devastating Muslim invasions and conquests had not produced a result of this kind.

Hinduism had held its own and had a continuous development from the Vedic age onwards (Sarma, 1967 : 61). The Muslims had little effect on the development of Hinduism, but the British, by breaking the isolation of India and bringing Hindus into contact with European history, science and literature, European political and social institutions, customs and manners, widened their outlook and made them discard many of the crude notions which had encrusted their religion during the medieval period (Sarma, 1966 : 44).

However, despite these setbacks Hinduism was soon to re-assert itself as the dominant religio-cultural force in India largely due to the inherent vitality of the religion. As J.N. Farquhar, the missionary-historian notes (1977 : 9), "every competent observer was deeply impressed with the extraordinary hold Hinduism had upon the people. Every element of life was controlled by it."

There is little if any indication of a conscious awareness at the end of the eighteenth century that a new era was about to begin. But already there were new forces working silently towards a great renaissance which came into full vigour in the early years of the present century. The most important of these forces was the spread of English education which broke the intellectual isolation of the Indian mind and brought it into contact with Western science, literature and history. According to D.S. Sarma (1967 : 61), the result produced by English education in India was revolutionary in the highest

degree. It led to a great mental expansion similar to that which the European nations experienced at the time of the Revival of Classical learning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Along with the new knowledge came the fierce attacks of the early Christian missions on Hinduism and Hindu society. The zealous missionaries who never failed to point their finger of scorn at Hindu religious and social institutions were educators as well as crusaders. The establishment of British paramountcy in India also saw a marked increase in missionary activities. As noted by Farquhar (1977 : 19): "The number of missionaries engaged in the Empire increased very greatly during those years (1828-1870), and the area covered by missions expanded with the Empire". The missionaries opened schools and colleges where they not only imparted the new secular knowledge, but also taught Christianity as the only true religion. These two forces acting in combination produced in the minds of the educated classes for a time either a thorough-going scepticism or a partial leaning towards Christianity, but ultimately they served only to raise Hinduism from its sleep. The innate vitality of Hinduism with its great and glorious past asserted itself. At first the revived faith was on its defence, rather cautious and timid in maintaining its position and inclined to compromise with the foreign faith. But soon it took the offensive, marched forward and asserted in ringing tones its right to live as one of the civilizing influences of mankind. In this task it was considerably helped by the labours of orientalist like Sir

William Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins and Monier-Williams who revealed the treasures of Indian wisdom to the educated classes in India and Europe through their translation of Sanskrit texts (Sarma, 1967 : 61-62).

As a result partly of these external forces, but largely of the inherent vitality of Hinduism's own long spiritual tradition, there arose in this period a number of reformers, teachers, saints and scholars who sought to purify Hinduism by denouncing some of its later accretions, and separating its essentials from its non-essentials and confirming its ancient truths by their own experience, and carrying its message to the West.

2.2 Renascent Hinduism

The period dating from about the mid-nineteenth century onwards has been referred to as the Age of the Reform Movements. However, some writers have characterized the Movement as the "Hindu Revival". The title has carried the implication that the movement sought to revive the superstitions and the many objectionable customs associated with Hinduism, which had begun to be looked upon as obsolete and otiose with the spread of the Western Enlightenment in India.

According to Rakhal Chandra Nath (1982 : 1), the notion Hindu Revival is incorrect and of doubtful validity. He is of the opinion that a more appropriate title would be "The New Hindu Movement" — a phrase actually used by one of the sponsors of the Movement, namely, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Chatterjee

coined the term "New-Hindu" to distinguish his interpretation of Hinduism from practices that were popular and orthodox; but the New-Hindu spirit was in fact a pervasive one. It was in fact the informing spirit of the whole epoch designated by the more popular "Hindu Revival"; and the spirit was potent enough to outstrip the bounds of religion properly so called and to irradiate at once the fields of Religion, Contemporary Literature, the Fine Arts, Music, History, Education and Politics. Indeed, the New-Hindu Movement had much to do with Religious Nationalism — the Swadeshi Movement. A clear understanding of Indian nationalism requires a close study of the ideas that constituted the New-Hindu Movement. The Movement itself had a far larger scope — it was in fact the embodiment of a vision of the New India as it could be made (Nath, 1982 : 2).

The ideas that went into the making of the movement and those that justify the new title can be grouped under three heads: the idea of a Rational Religion, that of Personal illumination through Religion, and that of an ancient Indian Civilization which was thought to be of paramount relevance to the India that was going the Western way.

The spirit of rationalism transmitted through Western education coupled with the challenge of evangelism of the Christian missionaries had shocked the Hindus into an awareness of the imperfections prevalent in the Hindu society of the period. The Christian missions had been active in India ever since the

Portuguese set foot in Calicut towards the close of the fifteenth century. It is related that when the Portuguese first landed at Calicut, one of them was asked what they had come for and replied: "We have come to seek Christians and spices" (O'Malley, 1968 : 44).

Writing about the activities of the missionaries between 1790-1840 A.I. Mayhew (1968 : 325) states: "A frontal attack on Hinduism, all along the line with special attention to the higher castes, was the order of the day. The means of attack were essentially education on western lines, Bible teaching, and street and village preaching ... Indian salvation depended in their eyes essentially on what the West could give, and particularly the Bible : on a departure from all that Hinduism involved rather than on the adaptation and refinement of Hindu life, thought, and customs."

Confronted with these challenges Hindu society of the nineteenth century was in dire need of guidance and astute leadership. The call for change came from the Indian leaders themselves, chief among whom was Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), the founder of the Brahmo Samaj and the pioneer of the present Hindu Renaissance. The founding of the Brahmo Samaj and later the Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj were the first dramatic indication of the beginning of a possible new course for Hinduism.

2.2.1 The Brahmo Samaj

Much has been written about the Brahmo Samaj and its founder, Ram Mohan Roy.² The episode of its inception, ideals and subsequent stormy history is in large measure an account of the development of what has been properly termed the liberalizing current in nineteenth century and subsequent Hinduism (Ashby, 1974 : 28–29).

We are not concerned here in making a detailed survey of the history of the Brahmo Samaj and its leaders. One thing that these leaders had in common was their admiration for Christianity. All these leaders were staunch monotheists, all of them disapproved of idol-worship in every form; they were all opposed to such social evils as polygamy and child marriage. Ram Mohan Roy was largely responsible for getting the law against sati passed in 1829. As a religious leader he wanted to restore Hinduism to its original purity. He fought in defence of what he considered true Hinduism against both the orthodox Hindu pundits and the Christian missionaries of his day (Sarma, 1966 : 44). He took his stand on the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras as authoritative textual sources of the Hindu religion. He believed that the Vedas did not teach idolatry. Practically all the Brahmo leaders were theists, and did not accept the Advaitic teaching of the identity of the individual soul with Brahman. Debendranath Tagore, who succeeded Ram Mohan Roy as leader of the Brahmo Samaj, found the Upanishadic doctrine of the identity of Atman and Brahman quite unacceptable (Devaraja, 1975 : 101).

Keshub Chander Sen, the next important leader of the Brahmo Samaj, who later separated from the parent body, was a great admirer of Christianity. He denounced idol-worship and the doctrine of avatars more vehemently than his predecessors; he denounced scriptural authority and caste distinctions; he repudiated theories of karma and rebirth. As a consequence of all these rejections the Brahmo Samaj in its two principal forms, the Adi Brahmo Samaj led by Debendranath Tagore, and the Brahmo Samaj of India led by Keshub Chander Sen, alienated itself from the parent Hindu society, and so failed to revitalise Hindu religion. On account of these developments the Samaj lost a considerable part of its influence which remained largely confined to a small number of intellectuals in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal (Devaraja, 1975 : 102). Furthermore, the Brahmo response to the challenge of European rationalism never addressed the larger question – whether religion had any satisfactory answer to the sort of rational scepticism that questioned the very basis of religion (Nath, 1982 : 2).

2.2.2 The Arya Samaj

In 1875 Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883) a dynamic sannyasi from Gujarat, founded the Arya Samaj. A great scholar of Sanskrit and the Vedas, unacquainted alike with the English language and Western culture, Dayananda presented a striking contrast to the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. Having made Hindi the medium of his lectures and discussions, he was able to come into closer contact with the general public,

particularly the middle class. His acceptance of the Vedas as sacred scriptures and his approval of the doctrines of karma and rebirth linked his teachings to the great Hindu tradition (Chamupati, 1969 : 634-635). Swami Dayananda was fired with an intense zeal for the "purification" of Hinduism. In his zeal he denounced not only the 'evil' customs that plagued the Hindu society of his time but also the doctrine of avatars and idol-worship. With rare courage and consistency he rejected the whole corpus of Puranic literature that supported the above doctrines and attendant practices. A dualist in his eclectic ontology and metaphysics he also refused to recognise the Upanishads as revealed or sacred texts; nor did he acknowledge the authoritativeness of the Bhagavad Gita (Devaraja, 1975 : 102).

The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj had been more or less apologetic and timid in their defence of Hinduism. As against this Dayananda exemplified the maxim "attack is the best form of defence" in his justification of the Aryan creed. He trenchantly criticised the missionary activities of both Christianity and Islam in his well-known work Satyarthaprakasa. He thereby generated a new self-confidence in the Hindu mind, and stemmed the tide of conversions of Hindus to Christianity. He also propagated the idea of Suddhi, ie. a re-conversion to Hinduism of those who had espoused other faiths.

N.K. Devaraja (1975 : 103) is of the view that the Arya Samaj with its enthusiastic slogan "Back to the Vedas" was frankly



revivalistic. In its zeal to make Hinduism appear "modern" in a narrow sense, and a worthy rival to the creeds by which it was being threatened, the Arya Samaj sacrificed all that was distinctive of the ancient Sanatana Dharma – its doctrinal variety and richness, its spirit of tolerance and synthesis, its mystic depth no less than its intellectual, metaphysical maturity.

However, despite its "shortcomings" the Arya Samaj is an important instrument in the revitalization of Hinduism in the modern era. As noted by Sarma (1967 : 101): "The Arya Samaj is the church militant in the Hindu fold. It is also a true expression of the militant personality of its founder. It has withstood persecution as Dayananda withstood persecution during his lifetime. Its philosophy may be inadequate, its cry of "Back to the Vedas" may do scant justice to the continuity of the Hindu spiritual tradition and its interpretation of the Vedas may be arbitrary, but there is no denying the fact that it has played and is still playing a glorious part in the regeneration of Hinduism in modern times."

2.2.3 The Theosophical Society

An outstanding instance of a religious group that contributed to the growing religio-cultural consciousness of the Hindus was the Theosophical Society founded in New York in 1875 by non-Indians. Under the guidance of its founders, Madame Helena Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott, it later transferred

its activities to India. Its concern with the religious occult was claimed to be founded upon the revelations given to Madame Blavatsky by mysterious great masters hidden from ordinary mortals in the recesses of the Himalayas and Tibet.

Greatly enamoured of things Indian and Eastern, Theosophy expressed its teachings publicly in the language of Indian religion and philosophy (both Hindu and Buddhist), contending that Indian philosophic speculation and Hindu spirituality were the most rewarding means of achieving universal human insight into the ultimate truth (Ashby, 1974 : 36-37).

Under the subsequent leadership of Mrs Annie Besant (1847-1933) the Theosophical Society played an important role in the growing religious, cultural and political self-consciousness of the Indian people. At a time when Hinduism was being unjustly attacked on all sides, the eloquent defence and adoption of Hinduism by an Englishwoman of genius, who had once been a free thinker, had a tremendous influence. Mrs Besant not only delivered innumerable lectures on Hinduism but also translated and popularised the Bhagavad Gita and started a Hindu college in Banaras, which has grown into the present Banaras Hindu University, a renowned centre of Hindu learning even to this day. Under Mrs Besant, Theosophy not only praised the cultural heritage of India but also sought by concrete religious and educational activity to make that heritage more visible and more vital to the Indians themselves. In so doing it gave the educated Indian a sense of pride in India's culture and religion (Sarma, 1966 : 45).

Aided by the rapidly developing European-Indian scholarly awareness of India's past, Theosophy and religious groups more specifically Hindu were at the forefront in calling attention to the values, and often the superiority, of things Indian. The educated Indian had found a cultural and religious base from which he could proceed with pride as he began with renewed strength to make his claim for full political stature as a free person. It was in his culture and his religion, his Indian Hinduness that his worth and that of the Indian nation was to be found (Ashby, 1974 : 37-38).

2.3 The Master : Sri Ramakrishna

There are two men of the nineteenth century who together epitomise the New-Hindu spirit which was to permeate and shape contemporary Hindu thought, namely, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. Many scholars are of the opinion that the true renaissance of Hinduism in the modern period begins with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna (Sarma, 1966 : 46).

The New-Hindu Movement was in essence a movement aiming at the resurgence of the whole Hindu society and as such its primary concern was its spiritual awakening. This, the Hindus sought to achieve by purifying their own religion by means of ideas derived from itself. These ideas included a new conception of bhakti, which included selfless action, Nishkama karma, for one's country and for humanity at large as a central truth of religion; they included "love for all creation" as the fundamental ethical truth of Hinduism; and they showed a way

in which to attain "personal illumination", through the practice of religion. They did not denounce other religions as false but looked upon their own as true enough and broad enough to include them all — in other words, as being the most universal of them all. This was the root idea of Swami Vivekananda's conception of "aggressive Hinduism" by means of which Hinduism was sought to be propagated all over the world without attempting to suppress any other religion. This was a programme far more ambitious in its scope than the programme of the reforming sects, which at its best, was one of eradicating some particular evils in Hindu society. Whatever verdict we may pass on the success of this aspect of the New-Hindu programme there can be no under-rating the fact that it was primarily Swami Vivekananda's preachings which roused the consciousness of the whole of India to the two prime questions of reform in national life: that of raising the masses of India, and bringing the women of India to the forefront of the national life (Nath, 1982 : 8-9).

A great deal of literature³ has been produced depicting the life and spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) one of the greatest saints that the Hindu religion has produced. Sri Ramakrishna's life lacks the wealth of events and striking achievements that are commonly associated with the lives of great men. The aristocratic dignity of Debendranath Tagore, the reputed oratory and majestic personality of Keshub Chander Sen, and the vast erudition and polemical zeal of Swami Dayananda were all in striking contrast to the humble

and unostentatious life of Sri Ramakrishna. Neither aristocracy of birth nor wealth, nor academic distinction, nor power and prestige in the temporal sense had anything to do with his career. Yet this humble life had something of immense value and significance for the history of Hinduism in the modern era (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 657).

The life of Sri Ramakrishna represents the entire orbit of Hinduism, and not simply a segment of it, such as Theism or Vedism. He was a jnani as well as a bhakta. To him God was both personal and impersonal. He laid equal emphasis on both the householder's life of good works and the sannyasin's life of renunciation and Yoga (Sarma, 1967 : 122). Although Sri Ramakrishna had no formal education, he was well acquainted with the essentials of Vedantic Hinduism and with Puranic lore. The teachings of the Vedanta and the stories of devotees recorded in the Puranas were to him living truths, and he had a genius for inventing parables through which these truths could be conveyed. In his two lectures delivered in America and England and published under the title "My Master", Swami Vivekananda, the Master's beloved disciple explains Sri Ramakrishna's mission as follows (1965 : 76):

"To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realised that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of the one eternal religion."

Sri Ramakrishna's entire life was a marvellous web of spirituality. He was named Gadadhar upon birth on 18 February 1836 in Kamarpukur, a village in the Hoogly district in Bengal. When he was seventeen years old his elder brother took him to Calcutta to assist him in his duties as a family priest and later got him appointed as a temple priest in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar.

It was at Dakshineswar that Sri Ramakrishna underwent a process of spiritual transformation. His intense sadhana over a period of twelve years coupled with a deep desire, since childhood, to see God finally resulted in his having a vision of the Divine Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna later described his first vision of the Divine Mother to his disciples. To quote his words (Prabhavananda, 1981 : 335):

"House, walls, doors, the temple — all disappeared into nothingness. Then I saw an ocean of light, limitless, living, consciousness, blissful. From all sides waves of light, with a roaring sound, rushed towards me and engulfed and drowned me, and I lost all awareness of outward things."

When Sri Ramakrishna regained consciousness, he was uttering the words "Mother, Mother". Henceforth God was a living reality for Sri Ramakrishna. However, this was only the first of numerous mystical experiences. The most remarkable feature of the purificatory period of Sri Ramakrishna is that he was not satisfied with any one system of discipline. He was an unwearied experimenter in religion. He experimented with the

spiritual disciplines of different sects and religions, and ascertained for himself the truth of the essential unity or oneness of all religions (Devaraja, 1975 : 111). In succeeding periods, Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Rama as the Divine Child, experienced mystical union with Radha and then with Krishna himself (Pangborn, 1976 : 103). He also took to the practice of Tantric Hinduism and finally under the guidance of Tota Puri, a Vedantic monk of the Sankara order, he took to the practice of Advaita Vedanta which resulted in his attaining Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the non-dual unitary consciousness.

The practice of spiritual disciplines, however, did not stop with the Vedantic experience. Sri Ramakrishna had travelled the paths of devotion, yoga and knowledge, and he had realized the truths taught in Tantrism, Vaisnavism and Vedanta. But his heart longed to enjoy the divine life of those outside the pale of Hinduism. A Sufi mystic living at Dakshineswar initiated Sri Ramakrishna into the Islamic faith. In Sri Ramakrishna's own words (Prabhavananda, 1981 : 340):

"I began to repeat the holy name of Allah, and would recite the namaz regularly. After three days I realized the goal of that form of devotion."

It was some years later that Sri Ramakrishna decided to follow the spiritual disciplines of Christianity, after a deep love of Christ had filled his heart. From the innermost recesses of Sri Ramakrishna's heart came the realization: "This is

Jesus who poured out his heart's blood for the redemption of mankind. He is none other than the rishi Christ, the embodiment of love." The Son of Man then embraced Sri Ramakrishna and became merged in him. At this the master went into samadhi. Thus was Sri Ramakrishna convinced that Jesus was an incarnation of God (Prabhavananda, 1981 : 341).

One may reasonably point out that one of the great religions of the world, namely, Buddhism, is missing in the unparalleled itinerary of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual travel. A little scrutiny will make it clear, however, that he had really travelled along this road while carrying on his practice of the Advaita Vedanta. Regarding Buddhism and its mighty sponsor, Sri Ramakrishna himself said (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 674):

"There is not the least doubt about Lord Buddha's being an incarnation. There is no difference between his doctrine and those of the Vedic jnana-kanda."

For the early saints whom the Jains call their Tirthankaras and for the ten successive gurus who established Sikhism, Sri Ramakrishna also had "profound respect" (Pangborn, 1976 : 103).

Although Sri Ramakrishna did not practise varied spiritual disciplines with the specific purpose of bringing harmony among the many faiths, his life demonstrated that harmony. In this connection Sri Ramakrishna states (Nikhilananda, 1952 : 35):

"I have practised Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and in Hinduism again, the ways of the different sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths."

He further states:

"... He who is called Krishna is also called Siva and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well — the same Rama with a thousand names ... The substance is one under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God — peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him."

Sri Ramakrishna's religious training thus complete, he now began to feel that his mission henceforth was to rouse the religious feelings of the worldly-minded and reaffirm the ancient truths of Hinduism by an appeal to his own experience. He could carry out his mission effectively, only by gathering round him a faithful band of disciples. Of the moment of Sri Ramakrishna's readiness for aspirants, Swami Vivekananda, speaks thus (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 4, 1985 : 177):⁴

"All the struggles which we have in our lives were past for him (Sri Ramakrishna). His hard earned jewels of spirituality, for which he had given three-quarters of his life, were now ready to be given to humanity, and then began his mission."

Sri Ramakrishna's first disciple was his wife Sri Sarada Devi,

who is now respectfully designated the Holy Mother. That this holy couple always met on the plane of spirit and never on the plane of sense is evident from what Sri Ramakrishna used to say of her (Sarma, 1967 : 132):

"After marriage I anxiously prayed to the Divine Mother to root out all sense of physical enjoyment from her mind. That my prayer had been granted I knew from my contact with her during this period."

It is also recorded that once when Sri Sarada Devi was massaging the Master's feet, she asked him, "What do you think of me?" He replied at once,

"The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the Mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the concert-room and she again is massaging my feet at this moment. Verily I look upon you as the visible representation of the Blissful Mother" (Pavitranda, 1980 : 19).

From 1879 onwards numerous disciples began to gather around Sri Ramakrishna until his mahasamadhi in August 1886. Sri Ramakrishna talked incessantly, pouring out the treasures of his heart and thus trained a devoted band of disciples, who later renounced the world to carry on this work.

Sri Ramakrishna's life demonstrates that he was a man of the highest realisation, both by the test of miracles and by the test of purity and innocence of his external conduct. Operating within the framework of traditional Hinduism, he achieved his

own mystical experience and the freedom from worldly attachment which is the mark of a sannyasi. Not only were other religions viable paths to spiritual realization but Sri Ramakrishna showed that within Hinduism itself the various paths — jnana, karma, bhakti and yoga — all lead to the same goal, if followed with steady zeal and application (Tejasarananda, 1963 : 45). This emphasis upon universalism within Hinduism itself and the rejection of personal barriers to spiritual or religious attainment were the two primary factors that were to give the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the work of his followers the dynamism and broad appeal they still possess today (Ashby, 1974 : 39).

By his deep and extensive spiritual experience of the entire range of Upanishadic truths, Sri Ramakrishna has surely heralded an epoch-making Hindu renaissance. He discovered the wonderful spirit of catholicism within the bosom of Hinduism, and released it through his own realizations to spread all over the world and liberalize all communal and sectarian views. By touching the entire gamut of spiritual experiences, his life and message, more so than the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj, have their appeal for all men of all countries. This is why the late French savant, Dr Sylvian Levi, rightly observed (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 691):

"As Ramakrishna's heart and mind were for all countries, his name too is a common property of mankind."

The general picture of Sri Ramakrishna which emerges is that on the practical and religious side he was a bhakta of a Personal God, Saguna Brahman, but that on the ultimate and philosophical level he was a jnani of the Absolute Nirguna Brahman, of Advaita (Neevel, 1976 : 85).

2.3.1 The Essential Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna

The essential teachings of Sri Ramakrishna may be summarised as follows (Sarma, 1967 : 135-140):

1. He is never weary of pointing out that realization of God is the essence of religion and the aim of human existence. In the words of Swami Vivekananda the message of Sri Ramakrishna to mankind is: "Be spiritual and realise the truth for yourself" (CW4, 1985 : 187).
2. All religions are paths that lead to the same goal. Swami Vivekananda states: "To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master" (CW4, 1985 : 187).
3. Though both jnana and bhakti lead to the same goal, the latter is to be preferred especially in this iron age, (kali yuga).
4. Love of God should take precedence not only over knowledge, but also over good works. Social service is no doubt necessary and good, but it should be part of divine

service. Sri Ramakrishna's realization of the divinity of man was the basis of his commitment to humanitarian service. He was firm in his view that one could certainly realize God by serving Him through man as through an image. Sri Ramakrishna maintained that every person should first get rid of lust and greed before thinking of helping others. Thereafter the spirit of renunciation should be cultivated. Renunciation should be internal in the case of a householder and both internal and external in the case of a sannyasin.

5. Sri Ramakrishna disapproved of those who preached that this world is a dark and miserable place. On the contrary, he stated that, to those who cling to God in weal and woe this world is a mansion of joy.

It was these teachings which Swami Vivekananda, who was Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple and most beloved pupil, presented to the world in a manner in which it could be understood by all. Narendranath Dutta (1863–1902), (the pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda), was to serve as the organiser, spokesman, formulator, and disseminator of the electrifying message of Sri Ramakrishna.

2.4 The Disciple : Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding and influential figures in the recent history of Hinduism. His influence is so pervasive that it is a difficult and almost

impossible task to separately identify and extricate the elements which he contributed to the contemporary understanding of Hinduism. Not only did he largely formulate this interpretation, based on the teachings of his Master, but he also gave it the language in which it is articulated. There is very little in modern Hindu, particularly Vedantic writing, which does not carry the clear imprint of Swami Vivekananda's influence. The fact that Swami Vivekananda was a representative of the system of Advaita did not weaken the impression which he made on the whole of Hinduism. Because Advaita, through Swami Vivekananda, was the first system to be so elaborately presented to the West, its comprehension has considerably shaped the approach to Hinduism in India and abroad. This was fostered by Swami Vivekananda's vision and presentation of Advaita as the culmination of all Hindu religious thought. From his basis in Advaita, he generalized in his lectures and writings about the nature and features of Hinduism as a whole. In his own time he was represented and perceived as the spokesman and champion of Hinduism and not of any specific tradition within it (Rambachan, 1985 : 53).

The formative career of Swami Vivekananda encountered diverse influences, social and religious, which he critically analysed and assimilated. At home, he became the heir of two different cultures, the Eastern and the Western. He imbibed his mother Bhuvaneswari Devi's religious outlook and his father Biswanath Dutta's appreciation of social and liberal outlook of the Muslim and the European life. Biswanath was a liberal Indian

with a synthetic mind. It is largely as a result of this that his children became "radicals" in ways of thinking (Datta, 1954 : 102).

As a young college student, Narendranath had been an agnostic, if not a downright sceptic. Under the influence of the leaders and preachers of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, of which he was a member, he used to scoff at Hindu ideas about gods and goddesses and the one Absolute regarded as identical with the individual self. The study of European philosophy widened the horizon of Narendranath's rational outlook. He looked at society from the rational point of view and denounced the social and religious weaknesses of India. But he found no solace in the intellectual dryness of the Samaj and marched into the spiritual abode of Sri Ramakrishna (Reddy, 1984 : 2).

The story of how Narendranath was gradually converted to the mystic creed of Sri Ramakrishna and was transformed into Swami Vivekananda reads like a fairy tale. Full of sceptical questionings and doubts he had gone to see Sri Ramakrishna. This was his second visit. The following is his own description of this eventful meeting (Rolland, 1970 : 333-334):

"I found him sitting alone on the small bedstead. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on the bed. But the next moment I found him overcome with a sort of emotion. Muttering something to himself with his eyes fixed on me, he slowly drew near me. I thought he might do something queer as on the preceding occasion. But

in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void. I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself, I cried out, "What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home!" He laughed aloud at this and stroking my chest said — "All right let it rest now. Everything will come in time."

Narendranath, however, was not converted even after this vision. It was only after several more visits to the Master that he finally surrendered himself to him. The result of the contact of these two great personalities, Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath, was Swami Vivekananda, who was to become the heart of a new India, with the ancient spiritual perspective heightened, widened and strengthened to include modern learning — old ideas assimilating the new. The intense activity of the West was to be combined with the deep meditation of the East. Asceticism and retirement were to be supplemented by work and service to others. From the merging of these two currents came Renascent Hinduism, the faith of a glorious tomorrow in which all should be fulfilment and nothing denial (Reddy, 1984 : 2-3).

Of all the influences that moulded Swami Vivekananda, the foremost was his Master, Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda,

despite the exuberance of his intellectual richness, humbly admitted that every word he uttered was his Master's. After his discipleship at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda embarked on a pilgrimage wandering through the length and breadth of his vast motherland as a wandering monk, as a parivrajaka, when he arrived at the southern-most tip of India and sat down to meditate on the rock at Kanyakumari — which is now known as the Vivekananda Rock bearing a magnificent memorial to him — the main subject of his meditation was not, as it was the case of all past religious teachers, a God sitting above or in one's own heart, or any transcendental reality, but man below on earth, his problems and prospects, and how to restore him to his dignity and glory as man, as a "child of immortal bliss" — amritasya putrah — as the Indian sages had realized and experienced the truth about man (Ranganathananda, 1983 : 6).

During the period of his two year pilgrimage of the motherland, Swami Vivekananda witnessed India's abject poverty and was fascinated by the deep piety of her poorest children. It was an experience he never forgot and in his later years he was never tired of pointing out the contrast between the poor in the West and the poor in India. In the West, he thought, poverty meant vice and all manner of moral degeneration. But in India the poorest of her children were the repositories of her spiritual greatness. This was Swami Vivekananda's great discovery and it was realistic enough to unfold its full significance to him only after the terrible helplessness of

those of his poor brethren and the thousands of Indian women ("the emblems of the Divine Mother") had been revealed to him as a sort of unique experience as powerful as the one induced in him by the touch of his Master. It was this new experience which inspired Swami Vivekananda to give to his Master's teaching an interpretation that changed the whole course of his life (Nath, 1982 : 118-119). He took the sacred vow that he would throw away even the bliss of the nirvikalpa samadhi for the liberation of his fellowman in India and abroad. Indeed, Swami Vivekananda's entire life was one prolonged cry for the upliftment of the toiling, starving masses. He aimed to make the masses strong and self-reliant, thereby realising their own importance and power. In this regard he "socialised" the doctrine of personal illumination by transforming the gospel of liberation of one's own self to one of dedicated humanitarianism. This is not to say that he favoured the one for the other — quite the contrary. In the watchword for all future monks of his Master's Order he united the two, "Atmano mokshartham Jagaddhitaya Cha" — for one's own liberation and for the liberation of all — this was the watchword of the Order. Swami Vivekananda's entire life was a struggle to achieve this unity and he gave himself wholeheartedly to his life's mission, even to the detriment of his own health and well-being which resulted in his premature death at the young age of 39 years in 1902 (Nath, 1982 : 125).

The vision of a new India stimulated Swami Vivekananda's determination to travel to the West to carry the universal

message of his Master and to obtain in exchange the material resources for feeding the hungry of his own race so as to make them physically fit for the struggle of life. His sojourn in the West also helped to broaden his social and political outlook. He admired their social equality and encouragement of the individual initiative and freedom. He appreciated their organisational ability and efficiency and knowledge of science. His comparative study of Western society and India revealed to him the spiritual poverty of the West and environmental weakness of India. He noticed that Europe ignored organism whereas India ignored environment. Therefore, he envisaged a synthesis of science and religion, organism and environment. He stood for mutual exchange of spiritual knowledge of the East and scientific knowledge of the West (Reddy, 1984 : 3). For Swami Vivekananda the ideal society was that which combined the spiritualism of India and the scientific spirit of the West. He saw clearly the excellences and limitations of each of these two human legacies which he embraced as two integral elements of a total human culture, and proclaimed the modern age as the era of their synthesis (Ranganathananda, 1968 : 288).

Swami Vivekananda recognised that modern scientific culture, while associated with the West, was not in itself an attack upon the traditional Hindu religious-cultural values but was, rather, a neutral element; it could enrich rather than weaken life (Embree, 1963 : 519-524). He believed that Hindu philosophy found support from the latest findings of science.

Thus, addressing the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, he said (CW1, 1984 : 6):

"From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu religion."

Swami Vivekananda maintained that science coupled with Vedanta was the ideal of the future humanity. He visualised the evaluation of a new civilization in which the various types of cultures would be harmoniously blended and still would have adequate scope for full play and development.

Swami Vivekananda realised that the best way to awaken his countrymen to the consciousness of their infinite possibilities and to open their eyes to the richness of their own cultural heritage was to spread the light of education among the grovelling masses from one end of the country to the other. And the education, to be rendered fruitful and effective, must not be limited to the knowledge of religious truths alone but should be comprehensive enough to embrace all aspects of human culture both secular and spiritual.

It further dawned on him that it would be suicidal if the Indians raised a war-cry against everything foreign in as much as no nation could live a life of self-sufficient

exclusiveness without spelling disaster to itself. The world was fast moving towards a synthesis of ideas and ideals and the life of every race or nation was bound to be interlinked with that of the rest of the world. The only course left to the Indians was to incorporate the best elements of Western civilization into the texture of their own thought and culture (Tejasananda, 1963 : 75).

Swami Vivekananda, more than any of the many religious and political leaders of his time and before, more clearly, and for his time, more usefully asserted India's greatness. He accepted the Hindu tradition in all its complexities and richness, thereby removing the feeling of insecurity and humility that marked the thinking Indian of the time. He also restored to the Hindu a sense of pride in his culture and religion. The defensive spirit that had characterised Hindu leadership was removed by Swami Vivekananda's assertion that Indian life was as adaptable as western society to scientific discovery and implementation (Ashby, 1974 : 40). Swami Vivekananda was fully alive to the challenge thrown to Hinduism by Christianity and, in a far more formidable way — by the western enlightenment. He faced the challenge not defensively, but aggressively, in the manner of "a conquering hero, throwing the whole weight of his super-powerful body against a hostile world" (Nath, 1982 : 129).

Swami Vivekananda dreamed of conquering the world, and if he succeeded in making only a very modest beginning, he certainly

imbued Hinduism with a sense of unprecedented aggressiveness. Hitherto Hinduism was apologetic and thought nothing of borrowing, from other religions, ideas that were supposed essential for its own recovery. With the arrival of Swami Vivekananda a point was reached where, in the traffic of ideas started by Ram Mohan Roy, as between Hinduism and other world religions the former's place was no longer on the receiving end of the line but on the donor's (Nath, 1982 : 133-136).

Swami Vivekananda lived at a time of tumult and trauma in the history of Hinduism resulting from the impact of the west. In his dynamic interpretation of the Hindu tradition, as reflected in his Neo-Vedanta philosophy, he responded to and incorporated many of the diverse influences which were exerting themselves at the time. In a very short career (1863-1902) he injected a spirit of confidence into Hinduism, and his many positive achievements must be acknowledged.

Notes

1. A partial listing, for example: Aurobindo, G. The Renaissance in India, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1966; Bose, N.S. The Indian Awakening and Bengal, Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960; Karuna Karan, K.P. Religion and Political Awakening in India, New Delhi, Meenakshi Prakasan, 1965; Pannikar, K.M. The Foundations of New India, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963.
2. Among the many writings on Ram Mohun Roy and the Brahmo Samaj the following are helpful: Joshi, V.C. Rammohun Roy, and the process of Modernization in India, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1975; Kotwala, M.C. Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Indian Awakening, New Delhi, Gitanjali Prakashan, 1975; Majumdar, B.B. History of Social and Political Ideals from Rammohun to Dayananda, Calcutta, Book Land Private Ltd., 1967; Maxmuller, F. Rammohun to Ramakrishna, Calcutta, Susil Gupta Ltd., 1952.
3. The list of writings about Sri Ramakrishna by Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission and others is almost endless. The following is only a brief sampling, (excluding those cited in the Bibliography): Isherwood, C. Ramakrishna and His Disciples, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1969; Nikhilananda, Swami Ramakrishna : Prophet of New India, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1948; Saradananda, Swami Sri Ramakrishna — The Great Master, Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1963; Vivekananda Swami, Ramakrishna and His Message, Howrah, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971.
4. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda will henceforth be referred to as CW, followed by the number of the relevant volume, ie. CW1, CW2, etc.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEO-VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

3.1 Neo-Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna

The basis of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy was laid by Sri Ramakrishna and its superstructure was built by Swami Vivekananda. They both emphasised the practical nature of Vedanta. By the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda is meant the New-Vedanta as distinguished from the old traditional Vedanta developed by Sankaracharya (c. 788-820 AD). Sankara's Vedanta is known as Advaita or non-dualism, pure and simple. Hence it is sometimes referred to as Kevala-Advaita or unqualified monism. It may also be called abstract monism in so far as Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is, according to it, devoid of all qualities and distinctions, nirguna and nirvisesa. According to Rathna Reddy (1984 : 18-19), Neo-Vedantism is a re-establishment and re-statement, reconstruction and re-valuation, reorientation and reinterpretation of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara with modern arguments, in modern language, suited to modern man, adjusting itself with all the modern challenges.

The Neo-Vedanta is also Advaitic inasmuch as it holds that Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is one without a second, ekamevadvitiam. But as distinguished from the traditional Advaita of Sankara, it is a synthetic Vedanta which reconciles Dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism and also other

theories of reality. In this sense it may also be called concrete monism in so far as it holds that Brahman is both qualified, saguna, and qualityless, nirguna, it has form, sakara, and is also formless, nirakara (Chatterjee, 1963 : 260).

The germs of Neo-Vedantism as also the rationale and beginning of its practical application are to be found in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was left to Swami Vivekananda to develop them into the philosophy of Neo-Vedanta and lay the foundation of practical Vedanta. The fundamental principles on which Neo-Vedanta and its practical application rest may be traced to the Vedas and Upanishads. But it was Sri Ramakrishna who demonstrated and synthesised the teachings through his manifold spiritual experiences. In my analysis of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy I shall examine the distinctive features of Neo-Vedanta as it characterised his life, teachings and works, and as currently embodied by the Ramakrishna Movement internationally.

Swami Vivekananda was confident that his rational interpretation of his Master's ideas was thoroughly consistent with his Master's spiritualism. It has been very aptly said that Swami Vivekananda is a commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. But the commentator with his giant intellect and profound understanding made such distinctive contributions that his commentary becomes itself a philosophy. Swami Vivekananda had before him a living model, as it were, of a new type of Vedanta, in Sri Ramakrishna. He lived long enough in the inspiring presence

of Sri Ramakrishna, and understood him well enough to be in a position to build-up the super-structure of Neo-Vedantism with its practical application (Chatterjee, 1963 : 267-268).

3.2 Brahman

For Swami Vivekananda, Brahman as Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss, sat-chit-ananda, is the ultimate reality and the only reality. These are the only attributes that can be ascribed to Brahman, and they are one. It is without a name, without a form or stain, being beyond space, time and causation. It is one without a second. It is all in all. None else exists. "There is neither nature, nor God, nor the universe, only that One Infinite Existence, out of which, through name and form all these are manufactured" (Vivekananda, 1980 : 292). Swami Vivekananda maintains that the Advaita clearly postulates one reality only, that is, Brahman; everything else is "unreal", manifested and manufactured out of Brahman by the power of Maya. To reach back to that Brahman is our goal. We are, each one of us, that Brahman, that Reality, plus this Maya. Brahman is an indeterminate, impersonal Being without qualities and distinctions, without any relation to any object or the world of objects. This means that Swami Vivekananda's Brahman is perfectly formless, qualityless and distinctionless, nirguna and nirvisesa, like Sankara's and that there is no difference between them on this point. However, this is only one aspect of Brahman as viewed by Swami Vivekananda. For in Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic thought there are two movements, a negative and a positive.

The description of Brahman given above is the result of the negative movement of his thought. It is the traditional approach to Brahman by the path of negation, neti-neti. But as complementary to the negative path, he follows also a positive path and re-affirms all that was at first negated, in a new light and with a new meaning (Chatterjee, 1963 : 269).

To understand Brahman, Swami Vivekananda states, "We have to go through the negation, and then the positive side will begin. We have to give up ignorance and all that is false, and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we give up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light, and become deified. They will have become sublimated, and then we shall understand them in their true light. But to understand them we have first to get a glimpse of truth; we must give them up at first, and then we get them back again, deified" (CW2, 1983 : 166-167).

For Swami Vivekananda, the aspect of the Absolute as Ishvara, the Personal God, is none other than the relative aspect of Brahman. He points out that it is the same sat-chit-ananda who is also the God of love, the impersonal and Personal is one. The Personal God worshipped by the bhakta is not separate or different from Brahman. All is Brahman, the One without a second; only Brahman, as unity or absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped; so the bhakta chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is Ishvara,

the Supreme Ruler (Vivekananda, 1978 : 11). The Personal God as we conceive of Him is in fact a phenomenon. The very idea of causation exists only in the phenomenal world, and God as the cause of this universe must naturally be thought of as limited, and yet He is the same Impersonal God. The Impersonal instead of doing away with the Personal, the Absolute instead of pulling down the relative, only explains it to the full satisfaction of our reason and heart. The Personal God and all that exists in the universe are the same Impersonal Being seen through our minds (CW2, 1983 : 338-339).

Swami Vivekananda maintains that the world of objects is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not, as is the case with Sankara's Advaita, that Brahman alone is real and the world is false or illusory, brahman satyam, jaganmithya, but that in a sense the world is also real. Swami Vivekananda states that the Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. What it seeks to teach is the deification of the world and not its annihilation — giving up the world as we ordinarily think of it, as it appears to us and to know what it really is. As Swami Vivekananda states (1980 : 132): "Deify it (the world), it is God alone"; and he cites the opening verse of the Isa Upanishad which says (Gambhirananda, 1957 : 4):

"Isavasyam idam sarvam yat kim ca
jagatyam jagat"

All this — whatsoever moves on the earth —
should be covered by the Lord."

He further explains (CW2, 1983 : 146-147): "You can have your

wife, it does not mean that you are to abandon her but that you are to see God in the wife." So also, you are to "see God in your children. So in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery the Lord is equally present. The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what Vedanta teaches."

As further evidence of Swami Vivekananda's affirmation of the world in God, we may consider what he says with regard to the way and the attitude with which we are to work in the world. This, he says, is the Vedantic way and the Vedantic attitude. We are to work by giving up the apparent, that is, the illusive world. This means that we are to work by seeing God everywhere. The sum total of all souls, which, as he put it, is "the only God I believe in, and above all my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races" (Nath, 1982 : 125). Desire to live a hundred years, he says, have all earthly desires, if you wish, only deify them, convert them into heaven. Thus working, you will find the way out. There is no other way. If a man plunges headlong into foolish luxuries of the world without knowing the truth, he has missed his footing, he cannot reach the goal. And if a man curses the world, goes into a forest, mortifies his flesh, and kills himself little by little by starvation, makes his heart a barren waste, kills out all feelings, and becomes harsh, stern and dried up, that man also has missed the way. These are the two extremes, the two mistakes at either end. Both have lost the way, both have missed the goal. So work, says the Vedanta,

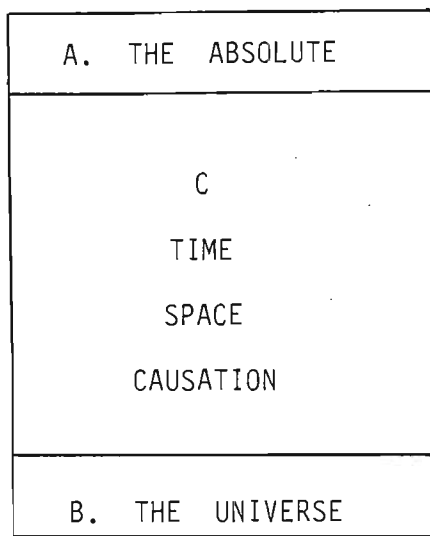
putting God in everything and knowing Him to be in everything (Vivekananda, 1980 : 137-138).

Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta makes no difference between the sacred and the secular life. As world is Brahman, worldly activity too is sacred and all selfless work is worship. Therefore, selfless activity is not only social but also spiritual. As long as man lives in the world he must perform worldly activity with the spirit of detachment. Thus Neo-Vedanta encourages individual freedom and selfless activity on the part of the individual, and social equality and oneness in society (Reddy, 1984 : 19).

3.3 The Universe

We may now consider Swami Vivekananda's affirmation of the world from the side of Brahman. "This Absolute", he says "has become the universe by coming through space, time and causation. The universe is the reflection of that One Eternal Being on the screen of Maya – the triad of space, time and causation. These are only ideas or concepts of our mind and have no place in Brahman. The world is a creation of name and form, of Maya. We are looking upon the One existence in different forms and under different names, and creating all these images of objects upon it.

Swami Vivekananda graphically illustrates how the infinite Brahman, the Absolute became the finite (see diagram) (Vivekananda, 1980 : 108).



The Absolute (A) has become the Universe (B). However, by this is meant not only the material world, but the mental world, the spiritual world – heavens and earths and in fact everything that exists. Mind is the name of a change, and body the name of another change, and so on, and all these changes compose our universe. This Absolute (A) has become the Universe (B) by coming through time space and causation (C). Time, space and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when it is seen on the lower side, it appears as the universe (Vivekananda, 1980 : 108–109). There is neither time, space, nor causation in the Absolute, it is beyond them all. They have no real existence, yet they are not non-existent, since it is through them that all things are manifesting as this universe. Further, they sometimes vanish. Swami Vivekananda illustrates this in terms of the wave and the ocean. The wave is the same as the ocean, and yet we know it as a wave, and as such different from the ocean. What makes it different from the ocean are its names and forms.

If the wave subsides, the form vanishes in a moment, and yet the form was not a delusion. So long as the wave existed the form was there, and you are bound to see the form. This, for Swami Vivekananda is Maya (Chatterjee, 1963 : 270-271). The differentiation is in the form, not in the substance. You may destroy the form and it disappears for ever; but the substance remains the same.

Swami Vivekananda explains that Maya is not illusion as it is popularly interpreted. He states "Maya is real, yet it is not real". It is real in that the Real is behind it and gives it its appearance of reality. That which is real in Maya is the Reality in and through Maya. Yet the Reality is never seen; and hence that which is seen is unreal, and it has no real independent existence of itself, but is dependent upon the Real for its existence. Maya then is a paradox — Real, yet not real; an illusion, yet not an illusion. He who knows the Real sees in Maya not illusion, but reality. He who knows not the Real sees in Maya the illusion and thinks it real (CW6, 1985 : 92).

Hence the Absolute is manifesting itself as many, through the veil of time, space and causation. Swami Vivekananda states (CW2, 1983 : 210-211): "We now see that all the various forms of cosmic energy, such as matter, thought, force, intelligence, and so forth, are simply the manifestations of that cosmic intelligence, or, the Supreme Lord. Everything that you see, feel, or hear, the whole universe, is His creation; or to be a little more accurate is His projection."

Swami Vivekananda's view of the relation between substance and quality, noumenon and phenomenon lends further evidence in support of the contention that for him the universe is a real manifestation of the Absolute in various forms. By substance is meant the unchanging ground and support of changing qualities. So also by noumenon is meant the immutable reality (ie. the Absolute), underlying the world of mutation and change (ie. the world of changing objects) which is called phenomenon. Swami Vivekananda is of the view that we cannot think of the substance as separate from the qualities; we cannot think of change and not-change at the same time; it would be impossible. But the very thing which is the substance is the quality; substance and quality are not two things. It is the unchangeable that is appearing as the changeable. The unchangeable substance of the universe, (the Absolute), is not something separate from it. The noumenon is not something different from the phenomenon, but it is the very noumenon (the Absolute) which has become the phenomena (the sensible universe) (CW2, 1983 : 344-345).

From the above it is evident that Swami Vivekananda gives a philosophical exposition of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that Brahman and Shakti are non-different, abheda. What Swami Vivekananda calls the unchangeable substance of the universe or the noumenon is the same as Brahman, and what he calls the qualities or the phenomena are just the contents of the universe as a play of energies, powers and forces, in a word, of Shakti. The Shakti is sometimes called Mahamaya as the

manifest universe of space, time and causation. Thus we may say that for Swami Vivekananda the universe as such is really a manifestation of Brahman. However, the fact remains that at times his thought switches off to the other pole from which he says that the universe is an apparent manifestation of Brahman. These seemingly conflicting statements are reconciled by Swami Vivekananda himself in his treatment of Advaita, Dvaita and other schools of thought (Chatterjee, 1963 : 271-272).

3.4 Advaita, Visistadvaita, Dvaita

Like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda is of the view that Advaita, Dvaita and Visistadvaita are all true and that descriptions of Brahman given by them relate to the same reality. In Advaita, Brahman is nirguna, that is, devoid of quality and form. It is indeterminate and impersonal. But for Dvaita and Visistadvaita, Brahman has all good qualities. He is saguna, that is, with qualities. He is a Personal Being and as the omnipotent and omniscient creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world.

So also there are different conceptions of the world and of the soul and its liberation in Advaita, Visistadvaita and Dvaita.

In Advaita, the world is the product of maya, an illusory creation of God's magical power. The individual self as a limited person is also unreal. But the real self of man, the Atman in him is ever pure, free, infinite and immortal; it is

the same sat-chit-ananda that Brahman is, and as such, it is Brahman itself. Its false association with the body through ignorance, avidya, is the root cause of bondage. Therefore moksha, liberation, is to be attained only through knowledge, jnana, of the self as identical to Brahman. The performance of religious works (karma), or devotion to and worship of God (bhakti) do not lead to liberation. Of course karma and bhakti are important in so far as they purify the mind and generate in us the desire to know Brahman. But after that, ignorance can be removed and liberation attained only through knowledge of the Self or of Brahman (CW2, 1983 : 346-348).

According to Dvaita and Visistadvaita, the world is a real creation of Brahman by his wonderful, but real creative power. The world is, therefore, as real as Brahman. The individual soul, according to Dvaita and Visistadvaita, is a limited, finite being, though it is essentially conscious and eternal. It is not identical with, but different from Brahman, and is completely dependent on Him. When through ignorance it identifies itself with the body and forgets God, it comes under bondage. Liberation from bondage cannot be attained through mere knowledge of God, self and the world. However, we must have true knowledge about them. But after we have the requisite knowledge, we must constantly remember God and love and worship Him. It is through such steadfast devotion to God, (karma and bhakti), that man receives God's grace; and it is God's grace that liberates man from bondage. Hence it is bhakti or devotion, combined with jnana and karma (knowledge and work), that leads to liberation.

Swami Vivekananda in his Neo-Vedanta philosophy has brought about a reconciliation of Advaita, Visistadvaita and Dvaita. According to him God is Personal and Impersonal at the same time (CW8, 1985 : 188). Even man may be said to be both personal and impersonal. We are personalised impersonal beings. If we use the word in the absolute sense, we are impersonal; but if we use it in a relative meaning, we are personal. The Impersonal according to Swami Vivekananda, is a living God, a principle. The difference between personal and impersonal is that the personal is only a man, and the impersonal idea is that He is the angel, the man, the animal, and yet something more, because Impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe and infinitely more besides (Chatterjee, 1963 : 274).

Swami Vivekananda's Advaita is friendly and not antagonistic to Dvaita and Visistadvaita. These are accepted by him not in a patronising way, but with the conviction that they are true manifestations of the same truth, and that they all lead to the same conclusions as the Advaita has reached. As he states (Vivekananda, 1981 : 219): "The dualists and the Advaitist need not fight each other. Each has a place, and a great place in the national life. The dualist must remain for he is as much part and parcel of the national religious life as the Advaitist. One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfilment of the other."

A reconciliation of Advaita, Dvaita and other schools of thought as made by Swami Vivekananda, rests on the recognition of different

standpoints of knowledge and levels of human experience. From the different standpoints and levels we may have different views of the same thing, for example, the water of the ocean appears as blue when viewed from a distance but has no colour when held in the palm of the hand. The numerous views we have of things from different standpoints should be synthesized if we are to get a full view of the thing. These different views may sometimes be contrary and even contradictory. But we cannot reject any of these as false, since they are all based on genuine human experience.

The Advaitin's view of Brahman seems to be based on nirvikalpa samadhi in which there is only pure consciousness, but no particular form of consciousness, related to any particular object. In nirvikalpa jnana there is a negation of all objects and even of the subjects of consciousness, and what remains is pure consciousness which simply is or exists and is, therefore, identical with pure existence. Hence on the basis of nirvikalpa jnana we are to say that Reality as Brahman is impersonal existence — consciousness which is also peace or bliss, and that there is no world of objects, no other reality.

The Visistadvaitins subscribe to the doctrine that Brahman is identity-in-difference. Brahman is the unity of the different selves and material objects of the phenomenal world. Brahman as the identity of these different constituents is the underlying substratum. Brahman, although different from the cosmos, controls and guards it. Brahman is thus the ruler and controller,

niyamaka, of the world. Reality is like a person: the various selves and material objects are its body, and Brahman its soul. The world of variety and multiplicity, in so far as it is related to Brahman, is real, although not independently real. Individual selves and material objects are related to Brahman as parts to a whole. Each part is separate and yet not different in substance from the whole. Just as qualities are real but cannot exist independently of substance, so also the selves and objects are real as parts of ultimate reality but cannot exist independently of it (Puligandla, 1975 : 230).

The Dvaitin's view of Reality, on the other hand, is based on savikalpa samadhi in which the meditative consciousness takes the form of a subject as different from, but related to, the object of meditation. In savikalpa jnana there is an affirmation of both the subject and the object as related to each other. So, on the basis of savikalpa jnana we are to say that Reality or Brahman is a subject related to a real world of objects, that it is a personal being, the real creator of a real world of finite things and beings.

For Swami Vivekananda all of these views of Brahman being based on genuine spiritual experience, should be accepted as true of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. However, there may be an alternation between these views in the life and teachings of some spiritual personages who sincerely believe in both. They may alternately pass from the one to the other and express themselves in the language of either, according to the needs

and capacities of those whom they teach. Hence, they may sometimes speak the language of Advaita and sometimes that of Visistadvaita or Dvaita resulting in apparent inconsistencies between their different statements. This is probably the explanation for the apparent contradictions that one may find in the statements of Swami Vivekananda at different times and in different places. But these may be reconciled in the light of what has been said above (Chatterjee, 1963 : 274-275).

Swami Vivekananda also reconciles the different paths of liberation in his Neo-Vedanta philosophy. The main principle of this reconciliation is given by him in his conception of Brahman. "The Vedantists", he says, "give no other attribute to God except these three — that He is Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss," and he regards these three as One. Existence without knowledge and love cannot be; knowledge without love and love without knowledge cannot be. What we want is the harmony of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Infinite. For that is our goal. We want harmony, not one-sided development. And it is possible to have the intellect of a Sankara with the heart of a Buddha (Vivekananda, 1980 : 128).

Swami Vivekananda emphasized that we should give due recognition to all the paths leading to the goal of liberation. Instead of mere knowledge, jnana, or mere love, bhakti or mere work, karma, Swami Vivekananda called for a combination of all in the ideal life and the ideal spiritual path. He stated that

we should not confine ourselves to any one of them and ignore the rest, for they all touch the fibres of our being and appeal to our nature as spiritual beings. We cannot do away with any one of them. Both the heart and the head must be satisfied.

In his Neo-Vedantism, Swami Vivekananda combines jnana, karma, bhakti and raja yoga. For him, the ideal man was one in whom all the elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion and action were equally present in full. To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions is his ideal of religion. And this ideal, according to Swami Vivekananda, is attained by Yoga or Union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and higher self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of love; and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by yoga and the man who seeks after this kind of union is called a yogin. Swami Vivekananda calls upon all to become yogins. He stated that it is imperative that all these various yogas should be carried out in practice; mere theories about them will not do any good. First we have to hear about them, then we have to think about them. We have to reason the thoughts out, impress them on our minds, and we have to meditate on them, realise them, until at last they become our whole life. No longer will religion remain a bundle of ideas or theories, an intellectual assent; it will enter into our very self (CW2, 1983 : 142-143).

While for Swami Vivekananda, an integrated cultivation of all these paths is the ideal of religion, he does however, admit that any one of the paths, if followed sincerely and entirely, will lead to the ultimate goal – moksha (Vivekananda, 1976 : 78–79). He states (Rolland, 1975 : 190): "Each one of our yogas – the yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of moksha."

3.5 Practical Vedanta

One of the greatest contributions of Swami Vivekananda is his emphasis on the practical nature of Vedanta. In his numerous lectures he clearly shows how Vedanta was a practical philosophy in the past and that many of the Vedantic thoughts emanated from persons who lived the busiest lives in the world, namely, the ruling monarchs of ancient India. He also points out that the Bhagavad Gita, which is the quintessence of Vedanta philosophy, was taught to Arjuna by Sri Krishna on the battle-field of Kuruksetra. Swami Vivekananda maintained that the Vedanta, as a religion must be intensely practical. "We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this, the fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish, for the Vedanta teaches oneness – one life throughout" (CW2, 1983 : 291).

The central ideal of Vedanta is oneness. There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but one life, one world, one existence. Everything is that One, the difference is in

degree and not in kind. It is the same life that pulsates through all beings, from Brahman to the amoeba, the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. We must not look down with contempt on others. All of us are going towards the same goal. We have no right to look down with contempt upon those who are not developed exactly in the same degree as we are. Condemn none, if you can stretch out a helping hand, do so. If you cannot, fold your hands, bless your brothers and let them go their own way (CW2, 1983 : 299).

Swami Vivekananda maintained that Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation. For, if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory for the chosen few. Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid (CW2, 1983 : 299–301). The principles of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function.

According to Swami Vivekananda Vedanta calls upon us to have faith in ourselves. All the difference between man and man is due to the existence or non-existence of faith in himself. Faith in ourselves will do everything. He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said that he

was an atheist who does not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all because you are all. Love for yourself means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better. As Swami Vivekananda says (CW2, 1983 : 300-301): "He is the highest man who can say with truth, I know all about myself."

3.6 The Self (Atman)

The Vedanta declares that it is through the Self that you know anything, therefore "know thy self". Swami Vivekananda maintains that this is not impossible and impracticable, but quite a feasible and practical proposition. Your real Self is the abiding and constant consciousness, the standing witness in you, which observes all changes in your body and mind, but is not involved in them, rather it stands above them. It is the pure immutable, unflickering light of consciousness in you which is also pure existence and is ever free and blissful. You are that sat-chit-ananda, not the small miserable being that you ignorantly think yourself to be. Your self is the universal self that is one with all things and beings, that shines in the sun, the moon and the stars and illumines them all (Chatterjee, 1963 : 279).

The Atman is first to be heard of "Hear day and night that you are the Soul. Repeat it to yourselves day and night till it enters

into your very veins, till it tingles in every drop of blood, till it is in your flesh and bone. Let the whole body be full with that one ideal, "I am the birthless, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent, ever-glorious soul" (CW2, 1983 : 302).

Swami Vivekananda calls on us to think of the Atman day and night, meditate on it constantly till the thought enters into our flesh and blood and we have a vision of the Atman as Brahman. Here we realise our real Self as none other than Brahman itself. With this realisation there comes a total transformation of our life and activities. We live the Vedantic ideal, it becomes a matter of our practical life.

The Vedanta asks us to find God in our Self and worship that God. Swami Vivekananda declares that there is nothing more practical than this. God is not a being far-off from us, hidden somewhere behind the clouds and seated on His exalted throne in a region far beyond. He is the Self in us. The Self is known to every one of us — man, woman, or child — and even to animals. Without knowing him we can neither live nor move, nor have our being; without knowing this Lord of all, we cannot breathe or live a second. The God of the Vedanta is the most known of all and is not the outcome of imagination. Swami Vivekananda declares "If this is not a practical God, how else could you teach a practical God? Where is there a more practical God than He whom I see before me — a God omnipresent, in every being, more real than our sense? (CW2, 1983 : 305).

For the Swami it is not the God in temples, in symbols and images that we are to worship; it is not the God in the high heaven whom we cannot see, that we are to worship. We are to worship the living God, whom we see before us and who is in everything we see. We are to worship God in all men and women, in the young and the old, in the sinner and the saint, in the Brahmin and the Pariah, especially the poor, the sick, the ignorant, the destitute, and the downtrodden, for the God in them wants our worship, our care and service. The Vedanta states that it is the greatest privilege in our lives that we are allowed to serve the Lord in all these shapes. "He who sees Siva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Siva, and if he sees Siva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Siva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed or race, or anything, with him Siva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples (Thus Spake Vivekananda, 1975 : 73-74).

The Neo-Vedanta visualises divinity in every walk of life. It reminds man that he is the spirit. Sri Ramakrishna's expression of "Jiva is Siva" is a practical realisation of the spirit in man. His utterance of "Jiva is Siva" was at once a revelation to Swami Vivekananda.

The real practical side of Neo-Vedanta is to see God in everything, and as everything. The earth and the heaven, fire and sun, the moon, the stars and the water are all forms of

Brahman. We are all children of the immortal ever pure and ever free. Recognising this truth is the most practical of all worship. It has nothing to do with theorising and speculation. No doubt, the Vedanta says that each one must have his own path, but the path is not the goal. The worship of a God in heaven and all these things are not bad, but they are only steps towards the Truth and not the Truth itself. They are good and beautiful and some wonderful ideas are there, but the Vedanta says at every point "My friend, Him whom you are worshipping as an unknown I worship as Thee. He whom you are worshipping as unknown and are seeking for, throughout the universe has been with you all the time. You are living through Him, and He is the Eternal Witness of the universe. He whom all the Vedas worship, He who is always present in the eternal 'I', He existing, the whole universe exists" (CW2, 1983 : 321).

The Vedanta teaches that we are not really the weak, sinful and miserable beings that we sometimes think ourselves to be, for the Vedanta recognises no sin, it only recognises error. And the greatest error, says the Vedanta, is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner. Whosoever thinks he is weak is wrong (CW2, 1983 : 295). In the Vedanta there is no attempt at reconciling the present life – the hypnotised life – with the ideal; but this false life must go, and the real life which is always existing must manifest itself, must shine out. No man becomes purer and purer, it is a matter of greater manifestation. The veil drops away and the native purity of

the soul begins to manifest itself. Everything is ours already — infinite purity, freedom, love and power.

The Vedanta also says that not only can this be realised in the depths of forests or caves, but by men in all possible conditions of life. Those who discovered these truths were neither living in caves nor forests, nor following the ordinary vocations of life, but men who we have every reason to believe, led the busiest of lives, men who had to command armies, to sit on thrones and to look to the welfare of millions (CW2, 1983 : 295–296).

According to the Swami the highest prayer that the Advaita teaches is this: "Rise thou effulgent one, rise thou who art always pure, rise thou birthless and deathless, rise almighty and manifest thy true nature. These little manifestations do not befit thee "CW2, 1983 : 357). This is the one prayer, to remember our true nature, the God who is always within us, thinking of it always as infinite, almighty, ever-good, ever-beneficent, selfless, bereft of all limitations.

3.7 Humanism

Another important practical side of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism is the call to us to be first Gods, and then help others to be Gods. We should look upon every man, woman and everyone as God. As a Vedantin Swami Vivekananda firmly believes that all life is one. The life and existence of an individual is not separate, distinct and independent from

that of others. As all individuals are sparks of the same Divine Force or Entity, all are free and equal and one. Swami Vivekananda showed that no man is inferior to the other, no class has got special qualification over the other. The Vedantic spirit of oneness makes the individual identify himself with the community and serve it with a service motive without any personal gain. "The individual's life is in the life of the whole, the individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole, apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable — this is an eternal truth and is the bed-rock on which the universe is built (CW4, 1985 : 463). Swami Vivekananda maintained that individual liberation is incomplete without the total liberation of mankind. He declared "I believe in God, and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe in going even to hell to save others. I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. However sublime be the theories, however well-spun may be the philosophy — I do not call it religion so long as it is confined to books and dogmas" (CW5, 1985 : 50-52).

Romain Rolland sums up Swami Vivekananda's humanism thus (1975 : 129): "It was wonderful that he (Vivekananda) kept in his feverish hands to the end the equal balance between the two poles : a burning love of the Absolute (The Advaita) and the irresistible appeal of suffering humanity. And what makes him so appealing to us is that at those times when



equilibrium was no longer possible and he had to make a choice, it was the latter that won the day." The oppressed, exploited and tyrannised were his Gods and the destitute and ignorant were his Siva.

Swami Vivekananda's humanism advocates that man who is an end in himself must also become a means to serve humanity. "The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples" (CW2, 1983 : 321). Man himself is the subject, the object, the end and the means. It is for this reason that some critics have called Neo-Vedanta also as Humanistic Advaitism, Manavadvaita (Mishra, 1971 : 20). Thus humanity is Swami Vivekananda's God and social service his religion.

For Swami Vivekananda the happiness and welfare of all is based on promoting freedom and equality of all. Thus his concept of equality fosters fellowship and unity among individuals and nations. Swami Vivekananda laid emphasis on social unity for social-economic uplift of the people. He was of the view that mere unity in society is fictitious unless it is accompanied by the desire to uplift the down-trodden. The desire to uplift others becomes well-established only when the lower self of the individual is erased and community consciousness promoted. Swami Vivekananda aimed to regain the strength and freedom of India by means of practical Vedanta. He was of the view that "Vedanta is the necessity of the age."

He hoped that Vedanta would percolate into every walk of national life. He stated "These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forests, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying" (CW3, 1979 : 245).

India's misery, poverty, ignorance and servitude allowed Swami Vivekananda no rest. Internally he worked tirelessly to free India from social evils like caste rigidity, untouchability and the mass illiteracy by spreading sacred and secular education. He warned that India must give up her exclusive outlook and must become an equal to other nations in the exchange of knowledge. Thus he interpreted the Vedanta in terms understandable both to the West and the India of his own times. By so doing he showed that India had within herself the intellectual means to her own emancipation.

3.8 Vedantic Universalism

An important practical aspect of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is acceptance, not mere tolerance of other forms of worship. According to it, other forms of worship, including the worship of God through ceremonials and forms, are not in error. It is the journey from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher Truth. Truth is nobody's property, no race, no individual can lay any exclusive claim to it. Truth is the nature of all souls (CW2, 1983 : 358). Swami Vivekananda,

like his Master Sri Ramakrishna, stated that we should see others with eyes of love, with sympathy, knowing that they are going along the same path that we have trod. The Neo-Vedanta not only tolerates but accepts and respects other religions of the world as but different paths that lead to the same goal — God. Swami Vivekananda says "all religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind" (CW1, 1984 : 366). He further states: "We Hindus do not merely tolerate, we unite ourselves with every religion, praying in the mosque of the Muslim, worshipping before the fire of the Zoroastrian, and kneeling to the cross of the Christian. We know that all religions alike, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, are but so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite. So we gather all these flowers, and, binding them together with the cord of love, make them into a wonderful bouquet of worship" (CW1, 1984 : X). To the heart of Swami Vivekananda, none was foreign or alien. For him, there existed only Humanity and Truth. Of the universalism preached and practised by Swami Vivekananda and his Master Ninian Smart (1968 : 71) states: "It is therefore important to recognise that the universalist message of Swami Vivekananda, and of his Master Ramakrishna, genuinely represents a new departure in world religions — the attempt to make the highest form of Hinduism a world faith. In doing so, the Vedanta would cease to be the highest form of Hinduism as such; but it would become the highest form of religion in general."

It is evident that Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is a living, practical Vedanta and not a dry and dead theory. Satischandra Chatterjee (1963 : 281) states of the Neo-Vedantism of Swami Vivekananda: "It is the Vedanta of the forests come back to our home, our city and our society; it is the Vedanta entering into our ordinary life and conduct, it is the Vedanta that may inspire our individual life, social life and national and international life." Indeed it was this Neo-Vedanta philosophy, inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, which Swami Vivekananda used so effectively during his short but brilliant life to rejuvenate faith and strength in the individual and society. It is also this Neo-Vedanta that is the life-pulse of the Ramakrishna Movement worldwide, including the South African Centre, in its vast and varied religio-spiritual and humanitarian activities.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION

4.1 Historical Development

The Ramakrishna Movement is today widely acknowledged as one of the most active Neo-Hindu movements in the world. Sri Ramakrishna, the inspiration behind this Movement, provided the spiritual basis of the organisation and it was his direct disciples under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda who gave formal shape and structure to the Movement.

Following the mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, there arose an intense desire in Swami Vivekananda to establish a permanent institution to propagate the universal teachings of his Master in an organised manner both nationally and internationally. Soon after his return to India from his second visit to the West the Swami signalled his intention to establish an organisation. This is most evident in the two lectures he delivered at Madras during his Indian tour of 1897, viz. "My Plan of Campaign" and "The Work Before Us". He states (CW3, 1979 : 222-223):

"The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures, in our Puranas, must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries ... and scattered broadcast all over the land ... My plan is to start institutions in India to train young men as preachers of the truth in India and outside India".

These quotations taken at random from the two lectures sufficiently indicate the ideological background against which the history of the Ramakrishna Order unfolded. Swami Vivekananda thought it absolutely necessary to start a permanent organisation that might establish real "man-making" institutions in India and abroad for producing individuals who would live up to the Neo-Vedantic ideals and dedicate their lives to the upliftment of humanity. He conceived that this organisation must be monastic in its basic structure, and that instead of being exclusive and individualistic in its spiritual aspirations like many of the traditional monastic orders, it must work in co-operation with the high-souled and interested public for the much needed service of mankind, without discriminating on the basis of creed or colour.

Swami Vivekananda, to whom the Master had entrusted the welfare of his disciples, persuaded his gurubhais to see through his eyes the import and significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings and induced them in this way to incorporate the ideal of serving suffering humanity as a manifestation of Divinity within the scheme of their monastic organisation. He made them conscious of the fact that they were required by the Master to evolve an altogether new order of monks combining all the spiritual paths of jnana, bhakti, karma and raja of which Sri Ramakrishna's life was a perfect and glorious epitome. Through meditation they were to realise God in the depth of their own existence, and through service they were to realise the self-same God, the Virat, in the entire universe. Individual

liberation and service of deified humanity were to be blended harmoniously to form the motto of the new order of monks, Atmano Mokshartham jagaddhitaya Cha — for one's own liberation and for the liberation of all.

4.1.1 Ramakrishna Mission Association

Swami Vivekananda gave a definite shape to the above ideal by calling a representative meeting of all the monks and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna at the home of Balaram Bose in Baghbazar, Calcutta on 1 May 1897. At this meeting, by a unanimous decision, a new organisation, the Ramakrishna Mission Association was inaugurated. In his address to the gathering the Swami stated (Eastern and Western Disciples, 1981 : 247):

"This Association will bear the name of him in whose name we have become Sannyasis; him taking whom as your ideal you are leading the householder life in the field of activity — this Samsara (this world) —; him whose holy name, and the influence of whose unique life and teachings, have within twelve years of his demise spread in such an unthought of way both in the East and the West. Let this Sangha (Organisation) therefore be named the Ramakrishna Mission. We are but the servants of the Master. May you all help in this work!"

4.1.2 Aims and Objectives

At a second meeting of the organisation on 5 May 1897 resolutions were passed laying down the main principles by which the Movement was to be guided, and its aims and objectives adopted. As originally drawn up these were as follows (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 95-96):

1. "This Association, Sangha, shall be known as the Ramakrishna Mission Association.
2. The aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna has, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.
3. The duty of the Mission is to conduct in the right spirit the activities of the Movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of the one undying Eternal Religion.
4. Its methods of action are:
 - a) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;
 - b) To promote and encourage arts and industries;
 - c) To introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.
5. Indian Work Department:
The activities of the Mission should be directed to the establishment of Maths and Ashramas in different parts of India for the training of sannyasis and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to educate others, and to the finding of the means by which they would be enabled to educate the people by going about from one province to another.
6. Foreign Work Department:
Its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to start centres there for the preaching of Vedanta in order to bring about a close relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

The aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics."

The meeting also agreed that anyone who believes in the mission of Sri Ramakrishna, or who sympathizes with, or is willing to co-operate with the abovementioned aims and objects of the Association, is eligible for membership.

After the resolutions had been passed, office bearers were appointed. The Swami himself became the General President, and Swami Brahmananda and Swami Yogananda were appointed President and Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta Centre (Eastern and Western Disciples, 1981 : 248).

With money contributed by his devoted English admirer, Mrs Henrietta F Muller, and by his American disciple Mrs Ole Bull, Swami Vivekananda purchased property at Belur on the bank of the Ganges in Calcutta. He built a monastery on the property and endowed it with a permanent fund, thereby providing his organisation with a home of its own. Thus in January 1899 the Belur Math was formally established and it was to serve as the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order of monks. It became the centre of monastic training and, in addition, initiated the establishment of Math and Mission branches in other parts of India and also in countries outside India. The Belur Math also became the de facto headquarters of all missionary and philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Mission Association.

In 1901 Swami Vivekananda imparted to his monastic organisation a legal status through a deed of trust, and appointed his gurubhai Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Trustees (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 721).

Soon after the establishment of the Mission Swami Vivekananda began sending his gurubhais to different parts of the country with the intention of establishing Mission branches. In 1897

Swami Ramakrishnananda was sent to Madras to start a centre.

In June of the same year another brother disciple Swami Sivananda was sent to preach the message of the Master in Sri Lanka.

Besides sending out monks for missionary work, the Swami stirred up the enthusiasm of his spiritual brothers and disciples for undertaking humanitarian work at various places in Bengal and Bihar.

With the Indian Mission firmly established under the able leadership of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Vivekananda once again journeyed to the West in June 1899 where he spent almost one and a half years. He induced one of his great brother-disciples, Swami Turiyananda, to accompany him, as he wanted to place before his American followers a living example of the well-disciplined life of a Vedantic monk in India. As was the case during his previous visit to the West many Americans became deeply interested in the Swami's teachings and several Vedanta centres were established, the most prominent among which was the Centre at San Francisco. Leaving this Centre and also the neighbouring ones under the care of Swami Turiyananda, and finding the New York Vedanta Society in the able hands of Swami Abhedananda, Swami Vivekananda left America in July 1900 to attend the Congress of the History of Religions in Paris (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 722).

4.1.3 Rules of Conduct

As the Ramakrishna Mission began growing both in size and membership, Swami Vivekananda realized that the organisation

required some rules of conduct. He formulated a set of rules for the guidance of the monks of the Mission, which later became known as the "Belur Math Rules", meant exclusively for the monks of the Order. In formulating the rules Swami Vivekananda was not dogmatic. He realized that rules were framed under certain conditions which might change, necessitating a fresh enunciation. Hence he concludes the Math Rules as follows (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 107): "These rules will admit of being added to and altered according to necessity". The Math organisation as subsequently distinguished from the Mission, took advantage of this flexibility to supplement these from time to time, though so far no one has even suggested modification of any of the original rules, they being considered sacrosanct. The Belur Math rules make provision for a disciplined life, spiritual practices, habits of cleanliness, obedience, reverence to seniors, silence and adherence to other observances for a healthy community life.

4.2 Seal of the Ramakrishna Movement

Swami Vivekananda considered it important to devise an emblem that would inform the public at a glance of the ideals of the Movement in addition to reminding the members of the Movement of the goal they were called upon to attain. The emblem, in short, was to depict Sri Ramakrishna's message in visual form.

It is difficult to assign any definite date to the conception of the emblem. The first written reference to it is in a letter dated 24 July 1900, from Swami Vivekananda to Miss

Josephine Macleod. The emblem which is today used by both the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission became the seal of the Mission after its registration in 1909. The components of the emblem are as follows (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 112):

"A lake ruffled by the wind; the sun rising, as it were, from its waters; a full blown lotus rearing its head above two floating leaves; a swan sailing gracefully on the troubled waters; and a serpent with outstretched tongue, upraised head and a sanskrit mantra in the central part of its body — "Tanno Hamsa Prachodayat" — May the Swan (the Supreme Self) send us that. It is the mind-lake."

In explanation of the emblem, Swami Vivekananda himself writes in the abovementioned letter (CW8, 1985 : 528):

"The sun = knowledge. The stormy water = Work. The lotus = love. The serpent = Yoga. The swan = the Self. The Motto = May the Swan (The Supreme Self) send us that. It is the mind-lake".

In another letter dated 5 July 1901, he writes to Mrs Hale (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 112):

"In the Mission seal, the snake represents mysticism; the sun knowledge; the worked-up waters, activity; the lotus love; the swan the soul in the midst of all".

4.3 The Post-Vivekananda Era

After spreading the message of his beloved Master in India, Europe and America, and consolidating his mission by organising the Ramakrishna Order of monks, inspiring it with his ideas

and ideals, and placing it on a permanent and secure basis, Swami Vivekananda attained mahasamadhi on 4 July 1902.

The passing away of a leader like Swami Vivekananda is nothing less than a stunning blow to any organisation still in its embryonic stages. But the Swami made plans well in advance for the sustenance and growth of this budding Movement in the person of Swami Brahmananda, a direct disciple of the Master. Hence the change in leadership was smooth and natural without any detriment to the spirit of efficiency of the organisation. Under the benign spiritual aegis of Sri Sarada Devi and the able steering of Swami Brahmananda assisted by his gurubhais Swami Saradananda and Swami Premananda, the Ramakrishna Movement continued to grow in stature.

4.4 The Ramakrishna Math and The Ramakrishna Mission

In the course of time, with the broadening of its scope of public work and the consequent increase of its responsibilities, the Movement had to split itself formally into two distinct bodies. For the purpose of efficient management, as well as the unavoidable exigency of imparting a legal status to the service aspect of the organisation, all philanthropic, educational, charitable and missionary activities were placed under a corporate body and registered formally in 1909 as the Ramakrishna Mission under Act XXI of 1860 of the Governor-General-in-Council of India. According to the rules of the Mission, the Trustees of the Belur Math formed the Governing Body of the Mission (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 723). Swami

Brahmananda who had continued to be the President of the Trustees of the Belur Math since 1901, became the first President of the formally registered Ramakrishna Mission with Swami Saradananda serving as first secretary.

The Trustees of the Belur Math, among other duties, monitor the spiritual training, growth and consolidation of the Ramakrishna Order of Monks and establish, guide and control branch monasteries as training grounds of the members of the Order at various suitable places. The Ramakrishna Math have a purely religious outlook with worship, preaching and spiritual self-culture as its main activities. The Ramakrishna Mission on the other hand involves itself mainly in humanitarian work, including temporary relief measures during floods, famines and other such occasional calamities. It also concentrates on regular and continuous charitable, missionary and educational activities through permanent institutions in the shape of hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, colleges, industrial and residential schools, for both boys and girls as well as arrangements for part-time cultural training and peripatetic teaching for the masses (Nirvedananda, 1969 : 724).

Although the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission with their respective branch centres are distinct sister institutions, there is a close association between them, since the Governing Body of the Mission is comprised of the Trustees of the Math, and the principal workers of the Mission are monks of the Math. Both have their headquarters at Belur Math;

but their funds and accounts are separate. Hence the distinction between the Math and Mission proper is a technical one. The two sister institutions are by no means water tight compartments. There are many branches which are combined Math and Mission centres, and again, there are purely Math centres conducting activities of the type undertaken by the Mission. For these reasons it is very difficult to review their activities separately (Eastern and Western Disciples, 1981 : 255).

4.5 Activities of The Ramakrishna Movement in Its Formative Years

During its early history the Ramakrishna Movement expanded and grew in strength notwithstanding, or perhaps with the help of reverses. There were temporary set-backs, however, the sincerity of purpose of the monks and devotees, their firmness of faith to the original impulse propelled the Movement forward. Hence the Math and Mission grew mainly as a result of personal effort and initiative. Almost all the branches in the initial stages grew out of wants felt and co-operation extended by the people of the locality, irrespective of whether it was a province, a district or even a village.

According to the General Report of the Math and Mission for 1936-1937 there were 50 Mission centres and 59 Math centres in India and abroad. A decade later the General Report for 1946-1947 indicates that there were 65 Mission centres and 67 Math centres. In terms of the social-welfare activities of the Math and Mission the 1937 Report reflects the following

(Gambhirananda, 1983 : 292):

"... in 1937 there were 9 Indoor Hospitals which accommodated 9 320 patients, 43 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 1 312 614 patients ..., 31 Ashramas accommodating 761 students, 3 Residential High Schools with 2 379 boys and 869 girls, 5 Industrial and Agricultural Schools with 492 boys, 5 Middle English Schools with 401 boys and 89 girls, 57 Upper and Lower Primary Schools with 3 049 boys and 1 352 girls, 18 Night Schools with 632 students"

The above statistics is indicative of the extensive humanitarian work of the Math and Mission during the early years of its development. As the Movement grew in size with the establishment of new Math and Mission centres not only did its monastic membership increase but also its scope of activities in the religion-cultural and humanitarian sphere. It was the deep involvement of the Movement in the religio-cultural and humanitarian arena which drew public attention to the Movement which thereby gained recognition as one of the leading Neo-Hindu Movements in India today.

In keeping with Swami Vivekananda's dictum of spreading Vedanta amongst the masses the Mission established contact with the general public by building many of its institutions in rural areas, some of which catered specifically for the villagers. There were also night-schools and educative tours with magic lanterns and gramophones. Permanent institutions were also established for the hill tribes. Regarding the various types of activities for the upliftment of the labouring and rural communities, the General Report of 1947-1948 indicates

that there were 150 different types of activities under this category in addition to the occasional preaching tours.

While great progress was being made in the educational and humanitarian work, the spiritual and cultural activities of the Movement also gained momentum. The General Report for 1947-1948 states (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 293):

The Math and Mission Centres, particularly the former, laid special emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideas and ideals of the Hindus, and through various types of activities tried to give practical expression to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna that all religions are true. The centres established real points of contact between people of different denominations through public celebrations, meetings, classes, publications, etc."

Over and above conducting libraries, reading-rooms and Sanskrit schools, some Math centres published books on religion and philosophy as well as magazines in different languages. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture has played an important role in this regard.

4.6 The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta was established in 1938 and has, within a period of five decades, grown into one of the leading cultural institutes in India. Since its inception the Institute of Culture has played an important role in trying to bring eminent men and women of India and other countries into cultural fellowship. The

Institute has a threefold aim, viz.:

1. A proper interpretation and appraisal of Indian culture;
2. The promotion of mutual knowledge and understanding between India and other countries; and
3. The promotion of the study of the cultural heritage of India and of mankind as a whole.

From its modest beginnings the Institute has grown into a centre of learning and research, recognised by the University of Calcutta and the Indian Council of Social Science Research. It has also drawn the interest of the general public as well as many leading scholars of India and other countries (General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, 1987 : 24).

4.7 Sri Sarada Math

One of the major developments in the history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in the recent past has been the establishment of a Math for women. This event was to have far-reaching consequences for the future of the Movement. The idea of establishing a Math for women was Swami Vivekananda's. As he states in a letter to Swami Sivananda written in 1894 (CW7, 1986 : 484):

"... it is her Math that I want first ... Without the grace of Shakti nothing is to be accomplished ... We must first build a Math for Mother".

Although Swami Vivekananda was unable to fulfil his desire to establish a Math for women during his short lifetime, his plan was finally put into effect following a decision taken at the Ramakrishna Order of Monks Conference in May 1952. On the recommendation of this conference, the Trustees of Belur Math sanctioned the inauguration of a Math for women. It was resolved that the Math meant for the welfare of women would ultimately be independent from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

On the occasion of the hundredth birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi observed on 27 December 1953, a group of seven women workers, who had already dedicated their lives to the cause of Sri Ramakrishna, took the vow of Brahmacharya at the Belur Math from Swami Sankarananda. These seven Brahmacharinis formed the nucleus of the Sarada Math.

Six years later on the occasion of the 106th birth anniversary celebration of Sri Sarada Devi, on 1 January 1959 the seven women renunciants were invested into the sacred and solemn life of Sannyasa by the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. This was the preliminary step taken to institute a separate and independent Math for the women members of the Order. Accordingly a home called Sri Sarada Math situated on six acres of land was provided for the sannyasinis at Dakshineswar, not far from the Kali Temple, by the Trustees of Belur Math. By a registered Deed of Trust negotiated on 26 August 1959 the said properties together with some funds

were transferred to the new body of the Trustees of Sri Sarada Math consisting of the seven sannyasinis. As the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Math thought that the time was ripe for transferring the three Mission institutions, founded by the Mission specifically for the upliftment of women, viz. Nivedita School, Matribhavan and the Women's Welfare Centre — all located in Calcutta — to their control and administration, the matter was placed before the Mission's 50th Annual General Meeting held on 13 December 1959, and approved by an overwhelming majority of votes. Soon after an Association called Ramakrishna Sarada Mission was registered under Act XXI of 1860, with a suitable constitution. The Trustees of Sri Sarada Math were elected as members of the Governing Body, who assumed the responsibility of the three institutions mentioned above.

The Ramakrishna Math's large educational institution for girls located at Puranattukara near Trichur in Kerala was subsequently handed over to the sannyasinis of Sri Sarada Math in 1968. As the work of the Math began gaining momentum the sannyasinis established new institutions on their own accord in places like Varanasi, New Delhi and Madras (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 315—318).

Today the Sarada Math has a number of branch centres scattered throughout India. With the approbation of many educated and ardent female renunciants, these branch centres are thriving conspicuously in fulfilment of the noble desire of their leader Swami Vivekananda.

Although the Sarada Math is today an independent organisation from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission there is still a close bond of friendship between the two organisations. As Swami Vandanananda explains (Interview):

"The sannyasinis of the Sarada Math often consult the senior monks of the Ramakrishna Math for advice and assistance whenever needed. Further, both institutions are working along parallel lines in spreading the message of Neo-Vedanta as illustrated in the lives of Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda."

4.8 Monks of The Ramakrishna Math

Since its inception the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has grown steadily as a result of the dedicated and selfless service of its monks who form the backbone of the Movement. The Ramakrishna Math is today one of the largest monastic organisations in India with a membership of over 1 200 monks. The monks of the Math undergo an extensive and disciplined period of training under the guidance and supervision of the senior monks of the Math.

In an interview with Swami Smaranananda the Principal of Saradapitha, the training centre for monks of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur, it was pointed out to the writer that "every healthy, educated young man under twenty-five, if he is an undergraduate, or under thirty, if he is a graduate, who is attracted by the path and way of life of the Ramakrishna Movement, is eligible for admission into the Order". The

Movement also stresses that anyone intending to join the Math should also have read something of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, associated himself with some of the Swamis and Maths, and had some acquaintance with the life of the Sangha. He must also be free from undischarged family duties that are likely to weigh on his conscience and act as a disturbing factor in his proposed monastic career. If he finally decides to join the Math, he can do so at any one of the recognised recruiting centres as a pre-probationer for one year, after which he may be recognised as a Brahmachari. However, his initiation into Brahmacharya in the formal sense can only take place four years after this recognition. On completing another four years as an initiated Brahmachari, he can be admitted into Sannyasa and full membership of the Order, provided the Board of Trustees of the Math are satisfied with his progress. Only the President of the Math is authorised to initiate a Brahmachari into the Order of Sannyasa.

The novice is given this long period of training both to prepare himself for his lifetime of monastic work as well as provide him with sufficient time to examine his own fitness for a monastic career. In the event of his discovering that he is not suited to a monastic way of life he is free to leave the Math without any obligation. The Ramakrishna Math is very careful in screening the candidates wishing to join the Order. Although the Movement suffers from a shortage of trained manpower, Swami Smaranananda maintains that the Movement is more concerned with the quality of monks joining the Order rather than numbers (Interview: Swami Smaranananda).

During the period as a probationer, and as a Brahmachari, the novice gets an opportunity to pursue his studies in the various facets of Hinduism while engaged in the devotional way of life. While for most part of this period he may be a working member of any of the branch centres, it is compulsory that he spends two years at the Headquarters at Belur in the special training centre, Saradapitha, attached to it. At the Saradapitha training centre the novice receives systematic instructions in the Hindu scriptures, both sruti and smriti, as well as philosophy. He is also required to study Sanskrit. The Brahmacharis are also introduced to the numerous "disciplines and traditions" associated with the monastic order. The training period of the Brahmachari is only an orientation course, which he will have to pursue throughout his life, both from the spiritual and intellectual points of view. Bhakti, jnana, raja and karma all form the recognised sadhanas of the Order which all monks are expected to pursue not only during but also after the period of training. Karma Yoga has special importance in the Movement primarily because of the rules laid down by Swami Vivekananda which stress that every member whatever his predilections must engage himself in some aspect of karma yoga in the service of the Master. Selfless service in the sangha, as conceived by Swami Vivekananda is regarded as service to God through the living social symbol of the Incarnate Deity. As such there is no division between the sacred and the secular in the life of a true sannyasi of the monastic order of Sri Ramakrishna. He is as much a full-time devotee of God as a sannyasi of any Vedantic Order and the work he does in

the sangha as conceived by Swami Vivekananda, must accompany ardent meditation and deep self-analysis, without which work, however vast it might be in extent and worldly value, ceases to have any spiritual significance (Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission [S.A.] : 17).

During the period of training as a Brahmachari as well as after becoming a sannyasi, a member of the Order will have to assume some responsible work as an assistant or head in a centre of the Math and Mission. The work in the sangha ranges from the running of small monastic centres to the management of large publishing houses, of colleges and other educational institutions, of workshops and engineering institutions, of large hospitals and invalids' homes, of huge operations in famine and flood stricken areas, etc. There is also considerable preaching work, involving the production of books and periodicals, lecturing to students as well as the community at large and organising and leading Vedanta centres in the West.

Although the monks do not receive a salary and have no source of personal income, all their legitimate needs in life are met by the institutions of the Movement in which they work. The monastic vow of "poverty" therefore does not mean penury and indigence. While personal ambition has no place in the life of a monk, scope for great achievements are open to persons of ability and courage. According to Swami Bhavaharananda, position and status of a much higher order than that which a successful worldly career could bring, are often the unsought

rewards that pursue a monk who combines in himself the devotional spirit with ability and learning. Through renunciation one gains much more than what one renounces. Only the return comes unsought and unplanned in the life of a true monk (Interview: Swami Bhavaharananda).

Upon initiation into sannyasa a monk is expected to dedicate his life to the service of the Master. Service implies the dedication of one's energies and capacities to the work of the Organisation conceiving it as a symbol of the Master. While giving a shape and habitation to the sangha, Swami Vivekananda also gave it a definite ideological background. He states this in his original Rules and Regulations as follows (Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission [S.A.] : 10):

"This Organisation is His very body, and in the Organisation itself He is ever present. What the united Organisation orders is verily the Lord's order. He who worships the Organisation worships the Lord, and he who disregards the Organisation disregards the Lord."

In view of this conception of the Swami the sangha becomes the earthly symbol of the Master and the medium for the working of his will. Its service thereby becomes the service of the Master and a potent form of sadhana. The ideology of the sangha with a programme of organised work under its auspices as the service of the Master, is the means Swami Vivekananda has offered for adapting the monastic ideal to the needs and conditions of the modern world.

4.9 Branches of The Ramakrishna Math and Mission

4.9.1 Branches in India

Any organisation capable of providing effective leadership and recruiting a team of committed and sincere workers is bound to expand. This is obvious in the case of the Ramakrishna Movement. Under the initial leadership of Swami Vivekananda and subsequently of a host of dedicated sannyasis, sadhakas and friends, the Movement opened new branches throughout India. The constitution of the Movement makes provision for the opening of new branches in India and abroad. The branch centres of the Mission, spread all over India as well as several foreign countries, are under the control of the Governing Body currently comprising sixteen sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Math (see Appendix 1). The individual branches are managed by local committees, most of whose members and office-bearers are residents of the area.

The activities of the branches are maintained by subscriptions and donations from the general public as well as grants from the State and Central governments and public bodies. Funds earmarked for a specific purpose are utilised for that particular purpose only. Funds of the branches are used exclusively for the welfare of the respective branch centres towards the promotion of their numerous activities. The branches as well as the Headquarters publish periodic reports of their activities along with their accounts which are audited by certified auditors appointed by the Governing Body (Swami Vireswarananda, 1986 : 493-494).

According to the General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for the period April 1985 – March 1986, there were 92 Math and Mission centres in India in addition to the Headquarters of the Movement (See Appendix 2 for distribution of Centres in India). Furthermore there were 27 sub-centres attached to some of the branches where monastic workers resided more or less permanently.

In addition to the branch centres of the Math and Mission the Ramakrishna Movement also provides "moral and physical" support to the large number of religio-cultural organisations in India which are working independently of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission but committed to similar ideals. According to Swami Smaranananda there are over 1 000 independent organisations in India dedicated to spreading the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Swami Smaranananda maintains that the Ramakrishna Math and Mission cannot actively support these private organisations because of the limited manpower and resources of the Movement. At a Private Centres Conference held in 1987 and attended by delegates of over one thousand organisations, three Swamis of the Ramakrishna Math were elected onto the committee of Private Centres to assist in co-ordinating their activities as well as providing moral support and guidance (Interview : Swami Smaranananda).

The branches of the Ramakrishna Movement spread throughout India have become the chief instruments for spreading the Neo-Vedanta teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

throughout the country, thereby creating a new mood for the renewal and revitalization of Hindu religion and culture.

4.9.2 Branches in The West

In accordance with Swami Vivekananda's directions, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has, from the very beginning, been regarding itself as an organisation both Indian and foreign. The spheres of its activity were quite clearly delineated by the Swami's regulation which states (Tkacheva, 1987 : 27-28):

"In India, the Mission considers it its duty to participate in the process of national integration and social transformation, to assist, though without directly interfering, in the political life, a definite line followed by government institutions, and in some cases to stimulate, by its own example, the adoption of official measures on various problems. Outside the country, the Mission functions in two main directions — as a religious-educational organisation of Hinduism, in principle neutral to the social-political conditions of the country which is the area of its activity, and as an international centre of studies in the field of humanities."

The activities of the branches of the Movement in the West are primarily centred around these two goals, with emphasis on educating the West on the spiritual truths of Vedanta. At every Western centre, regular lectures are scheduled on a variety of religious topics, and classes are held on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta philosophy. The lectures

and classes are conducted by the Swamis and their assistants and are open to the public.

In an interview with Swami Bhavyananda, President and Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in London, it was pointed out to the writer that the branches in the West are often frequented by teachers and lecturers who bring their students to the branch centres to expose them to Hindu religion and culture. Students visiting the centre range from university level to junior high school. The monks of the Movement also travel outside of their Centres to speak to various groups who invite them.

Further education is achieved by the existence of reading libraries, lending libraries and book-stalls in every centre. Another means of dissemination is achieved by donating books on Vedanta and the Movement to public libraries.

For the Westerner who has a desire to delve more deeply into Vedanta, and to practise what he has been taught, each Swami-in-charge is available for interviews and spiritual instruction. There are also set meditation times at every branch. Informal classes are often held, which provide devotees with an opportunity to participate in question and answer sessions with the resident Swami of the Centre.

Most of the branches conduct worship on a regular basis. Further the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami

Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi as well as all the major Hindu festivals are celebrated. In keeping with the universal teachings of the Movement, Christmas and Easter are also celebrated at the different branches. After the conclusion of the satsang, prasad is served to the congregation. Satsang includes ritual worship, chanting, the singing of kirtans and bhajans and meditation.

Another important facet of the Movement's work in the West is its attempts at uniting Eastern and Western religious traditions. Since most Westerners come from a Judaeo-Christian background, many of the centres are involved in inter-religious councils which meet regularly to discuss points of common interest. One of the primary reasons responsible for Westerners being drawn to the Ramakrishna Movement is its expansive universality, a philosophy unfettered by dogma or fanaticism, which readily accepts all religions as true. Devotees in the West are also greatly impressed by the fact that the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda does not conflict with modern science. At the inter-religious meetings, various subjects are discussed, such as "Mysticism versus Science", and the ensuing discussions serve to enhance the spirit of fellowship and broaden each religion's outlook.

According to Swami Hiranmayananda (Interview), General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the primary aim of the Ramakrishna Movement in the West is to spread the seeds of Indian culture as well as the Vedanta philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, by laying emphasis on the

universal teachings of the Vedanta which places emphasis on the divine nature of man and the oneness of the universe.

The Swami also stressed that the Movement does not attempt to convert people to the Hindu faith since this militates against the primary teachings of the Vedanta which preaches the unity of all religions. This fact was also emphasised by Swami Ranganathananda, who states (Interview):

"Vedanta seeks to strengthen every religion — it does not seek to abolish any religion, but assist in making it more tolerant and broad-minded."

The actualization of the humanist content of various cultures of civilization, and a flexible and liberal approach to participation in its activity, explain the sympathy which the Movement has enjoyed from such world-known scholars as, for example Aldous Huxley, Tennessee Williams, Christopher Isherwood and Somerset Maugham.

The Ramakrishna Movement currently has a total of twelve Centres (with several branch centres) in America. Two of these Centres, located in New York and San Francisco, trace their history directly to Swami Vivekananda as the founding father. However, most of the Western centres were founded by the following generation of Swamis — the disciples of the direct disciples of the Master. It is as a result of the dedicated and selfless service of the monks of the Order that branches of the Movement have successfully sprung-up in several Western countries as well as other parts of the world. It is through

the activities of these branches that the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda has become widely known in the West and in other countries where the Movement has established branches.

Outside of the United States the Ramakrishna Movement has four other major Western centres — three in Europe and one in South America. An intricate network of communication has been laid across the West by these Vedanta Centres, and this network is continually expanding its reach. Many of the established branches have private centres where the Swamis go to deliver lectures and conduct private classes on a regular basis. Some of these private groups include centres in Honolulu, Washington, D.C., St Petersburg, Kansas City and Atlanta in America, Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary in Canada, Fulda in West Germany and Sao Paulo in Brazil (Brahmacharini Bhavani, 1987 : 25–26).

4.9.3 Branches in Other Countries

In addition to the branches in the West, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has also established branches in several other countries where people have shown a deep interest in the teachings of the Movement. These countries include Bangla Desh, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Japan and Mauritius. Like the branches of the Movement in India and the West, branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in the above-mentioned countries are under the spiritual leadership of the monks of the Ramakrishna Math who have been sent to these countries by the Governing Body of the Mission, upon the invitation of the local students of Vedanta and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

The religio-cultural activities of these branches are similar to those of the branches in India. However, some of the branch centres in countries like Bangla Desh and Sri Lanka, are also involved in extensive humanitarian and educational work. As Swami Krishna-Rupananda, Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius, points out (Interview):

"In addition to the religious, cultural and spiritual activities of the Movement the scope of work of a specific branch is determined by the needs of the country in which it operates."

4.10 Departments of Service of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission

The activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are multifaceted. Most of the Math and Mission centres conduct various activities ministering to the physical, intellectual and spiritual needs of the public in general, irrespective of caste, creed, colour or nationality. While the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is primarily a religio-cultural organisation, all of its activities are directed to the spiritual liberation of humanity. It is not intended to enter into a detailed discussion of the various activities of the Math and Mission within the scope of this study. A brief overview of the numerous departments of service of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India is all that can be attempted within the confines of this chapter.

4.10.1 Religio-Cultural

Upon establishing the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Vivekananda placed before it the motto of the Movement which called upon its followers to work simultaneously for the liberation of humanity while striving for one's own liberation, thereby making self-realisation inseparable from the welfare of humanity. One of the greatest achievements of the Ramakrishna Movement lies in providing a programme of action integrating the spirit and body. Both the Ramakrishna Math and Mission branches place great emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideals of India, and through various types of activity seek to give practical shape to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. In catering for the spiritual needs of the devotees, the shrines of the Math and Mission are open to the public irrespective of caste, creed or sex. A regular and uniform programme of worship is conducted daily at all the shrines of the Movement. This includes the arati ceremony held twice daily in the morning and evening. The evening arati is usually accompanied by the singing of bhajans and kirtans. Discourses on Hindu scriptures as well as lectures on religio-philosophical topics are conducted daily at most of the ashrams by monks of the Math.

The major religious festivals as well as the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi are celebrated at all the Math and Mission Centres. Yoga camps and spiritual retreats are held periodically for

sadhakas intent on accelerating their spiritual growth. In keeping with Swami Vivekananda's call to take Vedanta to the masses, monks of the Math often embark on lecture tours to the rural areas delivering discourses on Vedanta as well as distributing religious literature.

In catering for the cultural expression of the populace many of the Mission branches conduct classes in music, singing and classical Indian dance (Interview : Swami Suparananda).

4.10.2 Educational Services

Education occupies an important place amongst the many service schemes of the Ramakrishna Movement. Since its inception the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have been committed to fostering the "right type" of education as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda. The Swami maintained that if India was to raise its status in the world league of nations it will have to do so by spreading education among the masses. As he states (The Ramakrishna Movement, 1982 : 181):

"The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education to develop their individuality. They are to be given ideas. Their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them and then they will work out their own salvation."

In keeping with Swami Vivekananda's call to raise the level of the masses through education the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has established a large number of educational institutes throughout India (See Appendix 3).

Education in the Ramakrishna Movement implies a combination of the secular and spiritual ideals of life. Hence most of the educational institutes of the Ramakrishna Mission are residential or partly so and religious instruction forms an integral part of the student's life. Sports and physical training are also encouraged. An attempt is made to help the students manifest the perfection already in them by making the environments suitable for building a healthy body, a healthy intellect, and a healthy mind (Vireswarananda, 1986 : 495).

While most of the educational institutes of the Ramakrishna Mission are headed by monks of the Math, many of whom are also involved in teaching, the staff of these institutes are paid workers.

4.10.3 Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature

An important place in the work of the Ramakrishna Movement is occupied by publishing and translating activity, aimed at the propagation of Hindiusm — its philosophical systems, its mythology and its traditions — in India and abroad. The numerous publishing houses of the Ramakrishna Movement interpret the ancient Vedantic texts into the various Indian languages as well as English, French, Spanish and several other foreign languages. They also similarly publish the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. These publications present to the reading public the very quintessence of the age-old and continuing spiritual culture of India. The religious literature presented by the Ramakrishna Movement to mankind, while being

strictly faithful to the Vedantic spirit, always keeps in mind the needs and aptitudes of modern man. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature not only aims to provide spiritual nourishment to mankind but also seeks to provide guidance for character-building and value orientation, leading to the possible regeneration of society.

Much of the literature published by the Ramakrishna Movement is written by senior monks of the Ramakrishna Math, many of whom are eminent scholars and recognised specialists in various disciplines of the humanities. The publication houses of the Movement also invite leading scholars of Indian culture and religion to contribute to its publications. The "Cultural Heritage of India", a publication of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, in six volumes, is today recognised as one of the leading reference-works on Indian culture and religion. Most of the larger branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission operate publication departments. However the major publication houses of the Ramakrishna Movement are:

1. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta;
2. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; and
3. Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

4.10.3.1 Religious, Philosophical and Cultural Journalism

In order to propagate the spiritual heritage of India as well as the message of his Master, Swami Vivekananda initiated ideas of a new type of religious, philosophical and cultural journalism

in the Ramakrishna Movement. The main idea of this journalism is to expose the principles of essential religion to the masses in simple unencumbered language. He writes (The Ramakrishna Movement, 1982 : 183):

"You must not forget my interests are international and not Indian alone ... You must always remember that you are addressing the whole world. The journal must not be flippant but steady, calm and high toned."

Swami Vivekananda himself showed the way of dynamic religious philosophical journalism through his own writings in Prabuddha Bharata and Udbodhan, two journals founded by him and still being published presently by the Movement.

Following the example of Swami Vivekananda, several branches of the Ramakrishna Movement began publishing journals on a regular basis in the Indian languages and in English and French. In addition many branches of the Movement annually or occasionally publish souvenir brochures for the propagation of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. At present the Ramakrishna Movement publishes twelve journals on a regular basis (See Appendix 4). These journals carry spiritual and cultural articles, news of the branches, programmes and progress reports, notices about meetings, functions and celebrations. The journals also serve as a bond between the headquarters and the branches as well as a communication medium between members of the Movement.

The religious literature published and distributed by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have become important instruments for diffusing the Neo-Vedanta teachings to the reading public.

4.10.4 Medical Services

The apostolic call of Swami Vivekananda to see God in man by serving the ailing Narayanas, (Daridra Narayanas), had a profound influence on the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Since its inception the Ramakrishna Movement has been deeply involved in providing medical relief especially to the poor and needy. In many areas the monks of the Math began their medical services with a humble homeopathy box in the villages adjacent to the Ashrams where doctors were not available. However, this department of service of the Movement soon gained momentum in volume and diversity. Today the medical services of the Ramakrishna Movement is an important facet of its diversified humanitarian activities. The following extract from the General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for 1985-1986, provides an indication of the extensive medical services being provided by the Math and Mission branches (1987 : 6):

"In 1985-1986 there were altogether 13 Hospitals with 1 811 beds which accommodated 53 094 patients, 83 Out-patient Dispensaries which treated 4 436 325 cases including the old ones and 19 Mobile Dispensaries which treated, mostly in rural and tribal areas, 543 750 cases ...

A Veterinary Dispensary for the treatment of animals is also run by the Movement. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission also promotes research in the different branches of medical science at its Institute of Medical Science in Calcutta which also offers post-graduate degree and diploma courses in medicine and nursing.

4.10.5 Humanitarian Work among the Rural and Tribal Communities

Since its inception the Ramakrishna Movement has placed special emphasis on working for the upliftment of the rural and tribal communities in India. The work of the Movement in this area is accomplished in three ways, viz:

- (a) Through branches located in rural and tribal areas, primarily established for this purpose;
- (b) Through branches located in urban centres which have undertaken development projects in rural and tribal areas;
- (c) Through the educational and medical institutions in urban areas where rural people form a significant percentage of the beneficiaries.

The activities conducted under this service scheme of the Math and Mission are broadly grouped under the following:

- I. General; II. Agriculture; III. Education and Self-Reliance; and IV. Medical.

I. General

Attempts are made to create an awareness amongst villagers regarding sanitation and cleanliness. Drinking water is provided to residents by bore-wells and tube-wells. The residents are also given assistance in the construction of low-cost housing and sanitation facilities. Religious and moral classes are conducted and cultural events are arranged to cater for the religio-cultural life of the residents.

II. Agriculture

The Movement assists in conducting free soil-tests and farmers are taught improved methods of cultivation and are also provided with agricultural inputs and financial help. Projects such as wasteland development and the planting of fruit and forest trees are undertaken.

III. Education and Self-Reliance

Free schools are operated by the Movement for children who are also provided free board and lodging and aids such as stationery and clothing. Adult and non-formal education centres as well as night-schools for labourers and working-children are also conducted. Training schemes are also conducted to teach residents arts and crafts to enable them to achieve self-reliance.

IV. Medical

Mobile dispensaries supply free medicines to a large number of patients and organise free diagnostic and eye-operation services and generally help to spread health education.

The extent of the humanitarian service provided by the Math and Mission in the rural and tribal areas is reflected in the General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission for 1985-1986 which states (1987 : 19):

"During the year, the organisations ran in rural and backward areas, 17 Secondary or High schools, 47 Senior Basic, Junior Basic, M.E. and U.P. Schools, 53 Primary Schools, 56 Night Schools, 6 Vocational Training Centres, a Rural Librarianship Training Centre, a Village-Level workers Training Centre, a college, 3 schools, a Chatuspathi and a Pathashala, all for Sanskrit study; an Institute of Agriculture, 247 Adult Education and Community Centres, 428 Non-Formal Education Centres, and an Institute for training village youths in farming, with a total of 62 777 students. The Organisations also conducted 3 Hospitals treating 1 392 cases, 40 Out-patient Dispensaries treating 1 031 447 patients and 19 Mobile Dispensaries serving 516 499 patients besides running 133 milk-distribution centres."

In addition to such varied activities, preaching and educational tours, the screening of films and slide shows are undertaken by monks and workers of the Math and Mission in their endeavour to improve the lifestyle and standard of living of the rural and tribal communities.

4.10.6 Pallimangal

Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission on the bedrock of renunciation and service. Pallimangal is one of the many streams of services organised by the Ramakrishna Movement. It connotes action plans for integrated rural development in response to the passionate utterances of Swami Vivekananda regarding the decadence and regeneration of the people of India. As the Swami states (The Ramakrishna Movement, 1982 : 188):

"No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for ... We have to follow the plan laid down by our ancestors, raise them slowly up, raise them to equality ... Instruct them in simple words about the necessities of life and in trade, commerce agriculture, etc ... Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. The well-being of the higher classes now lies in helping the lower to get their legitimate rights."

In keeping with this call of the Swami, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has from its very inception dedicated and directed its energies towards the upliftment of the masses. With a view to meeting the priority need of faster all-round rural development the Math and Mission especially initiated programmes under a new service-wing named "Pallimangal" in mid-1980.

Pallimangal is a call to the nation, to all individuals and groups of all ages and avocations to mobilise all resources —

manpower, natural, financial, educational, scientific, technical, medical, moral and cultural, towards the all-round development of the nation, particularly the masses. It is a call to the urban, the energetic, the enlightened and the resourceful to come forward with determination and dynamism to work for the eradication of poverty and ignorance, for the establishment of social justice, proper distribution of wealth, creating equal opportunities for all, for self-development and self-reliance for all without any privilege based on caste, colour and creed as well as creating moral and spiritual awareness amongst all through the Vedantic methods of love and sacrifice (Interview: Swami Hiranmayananda).

Pallimangal prescribes a path to human welfare away from competition and confrontation. As Swami Ranganathananda observes (Interview):

"Pallimangal does not give charity but provides support for the deprived and depressed to stand on their feet and identify their lost individuality. The Vedantic teachings of Swami Vivekananda is meant to help a man without destroying his dignity. Hence the Ramakrishna Movement does not believe in distributing economic hand-outs to the deprived and poor communities but seeks to assist them to help themselves so that they regard themselves as equals in society."

Pallimangal envisages a new order of society and culture, rooted in the great Upanishadic truth of the identity and absoluteness of the Self, redefined and redemonstrated by

the advent, spiritual practice and realisation of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Under the direct supervision of the Belur Math, pilot Pallimangal Field Actions were appropriately first started in the villages of Jayrambati and Kamarpukur, where Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna were born. The Pallimangal Field Action programme of integrated rural development has, since its inception, become an important stream of service of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and has subsequently spread to several parts of India. In this regard special mention must be made of the Lokashiksha Parishad of Narendrapur (West Bengal), Divyayan, a residential institute, and Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Ranchi and the Vivekanandapura Rural Institute and the Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Coimbatore which have attracted the admiration of the country for their selfless service and successful Pallimangal programmes of integrated rural development.

4.10.7 Relief and Rehabilitation Work

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission has undertaken relief and rehabilitation works whenever necessary and in whatever manner possible. From its very inception the Movement has served people in distress caused either by natural calamities like floods, famine, cyclones, earthquakes, etc. or by inhuman atrocities of man on his kind.

Since independence the State and Central Governments have appreciated the Mission's selfless service to suffering humanity without discrimination of caste, creed or colour and have invited the Mission to undertake relief works on many very difficult occasions and in extremely trying situations. The Government also extends financial and other assistance for the relief and rehabilitation programmes undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission. In recent times the relief activities of the Ramakrishna Movement have also been extended to the neighbouring countries, viz. Burma, Bangla Desh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The extensive aid being provided by the Ramakrishna Mission in the field of relief and rehabilitation work is reflected in an article which appeared in The Telegraph (14 Dec. 1987) which states:

"The Ramakrishna Mission spent Rs 1 985 810 for relief and rehabilitation projects and allotted substantial amounts for rural and tribal welfare during 1986-87."

4.11

Conclusion

From its humble beginnings the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has today become one of the most respected and admired Hindu movements in India and abroad. The selfless and dedicated work of the Movement in propagating the religio-cultural ideals of Hinduism in particular and Indian culture in general as well as the extensive humanitarian, educational, relief and rehabilitation work of the Movement in India has

won admiration from both the public sector as well as the Central Government. The important role being played by the Movement in promoting national integration in India was recently acknowledged by the Government of India when Swami Ranganathananda, Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Hyderabad and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, was awarded the first Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration, in 1985.

According to Tkacheva (1987 : 25) the Ramakrishna Mission, along with the organisations established on its model is undoubtedly one of the most accurately and systematically operating teams in the whole system of ideological establishments for the propagation and spread of the ideas of Hinduism in India and abroad. Prof LN Sharma, Head of the Department of Philosophy, Banaras Hindu University, also echoes the above view. He states (Interview):

"The Ramakrishna Movement is one of the most authentic and committed Hindu Movements working for the religious, spiritual, cultural, and socio-economic regeneration of India today."

While the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is growing steadily in India and abroad the Monks of the Order are fully aware of the major task that lies ahead of them in fulfilling Swami Vivekananda's ideal to revitalize the whole of Indian Society by taking Vedanta to the masses. India is a vast country and it is safe to assume that millions of Indians

have not yet heard the name of Sri Ramakrishna or the Movement bearing his name. The prognosis is good, however, for a gradual and continuing increase in public awareness of the Movements presence and probable permanence. As Swami Ranganathananda states (Interview):

"The Ramakrishna Movement is a long range Movement. Hence we do not expect any striking changes in society within a year or a decade. However, we are confident that the Movement has an important and positive contribution to make in re-shaping the human situation not only in India but internationally."

It is evident that the Neo-Vedantic teaching of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is very much alive and vibrant today as expressed in the multifarious activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and its numerous branches in India and abroad. One such organisation dedicated to the propagation of the Neo-Vedantic philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. Although independent from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the Ramakrishna Centre has modelled itself on the Indian Movement and resembles it in several ways.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RAMAKRISHNA CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA

5.1 Hinduism in South Africa : A Brief Overview

The history of the Hindu community of South Africa, since the arrival of Indians in this country in 1860, has been researched and documented by several writers.¹ Hinduism is now firmly established in South Africa as one of the nation's flourishing faiths, and, although in the past it has been somewhat neglected as an area for serious research, this situation has now changed. In recent times several scholars of religion have concentrated their research specifically on Hinduism in South Africa.² It is not the writer's intention to enter into a detailed study of Hinduism in South Africa within the confines of this chapter. However, it is important to examine briefly the religious practices that were prevalent in the Hindu community at the time of the establishment of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa.

The establishment of the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa was an important phenomenon in the history of religions in South Africa. The founding of a Hindu monastic institution as advocated in the Upanishads, marks the beginning of a new era in the history of local Hinduism.

Hinduism in South Africa has, since the mid-nineteen forties, mainly concerned itself with institutional expression. It is no longer a faith practised solely at the domestic or local mandir.

The religious practices of the early Hindus covered a wide emotional and intellectual spectrum. These took the form basically of traditional orthodox, ritualistic, ceremonially-orientated religion. Rituals ranged from those with a limited material significance performed at home for the family or friends, to those with a great cosmic significance performed at temples for the community as a whole. Hence from the very early period South African Hindus performed many rituals, privately, within the family, and publicly, usually at temples, with varying intensity, the exact form differing with the language group (Singh, 86 : 80-81).

Since the early period of Hinduism in South Africa the Hindu temple served a vital role as it became an important forum for religious expression. It also served to draw the community closer together and the celebration of popular festivals like Shivarathri, Krishnashthami and Navarathri became a regular feature of their religious life. However, a vital element that was lacking amongst the early Hindus was the presence of adequately qualified Hindu theologians. While the priests played an important role in conducting home and temple prayer and rituals their knowledge of Hindu religion and philosophy was largely restricted to the domains of ritualistic Hinduism, or the specific rituals with which they were familiar. Although in recent times several Hindu organisations have established institutions for the training of priests³ this element was not present during the early history of Hinduism in South Africa. The majority of priests in the country inherit their profession

through family lineage or by studying under a competent guru, in most cases a senior or elderly priest. The absence of competent teachers of Hindu religion led to both spiritual and religious stagnation in Hinduism almost from the time of their arrival in this country. Although the priesthood has been playing a vital role in the preservation and continuity of Hindu rituals and ceremonies their sphere of influence is limited. Leading members of the Hindu community, aware of the serious implications this deficiency had for the future of Hinduism in South Africa, made concerted efforts to bring Hindu preachers from India to South Africa. The first of such preachers was Prof Bhai Parmanand who arrived in South Africa in August 1905. His visit served to generate greater awareness and interest amongst the Hindus in their religious-cultural heritage. The visit of Prof Parmanand was followed by that of Swami Shankaranand, who was instrumental in establishing the Hindu Maha Sabha of South Africa in May 1912, and other eminent scholars of Hinduism. It was during this period that the first monk of the Ramakrishna Mission arrived in South Africa in 1934. He was Swami Adhyanand. His lectures generated great interest in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda amongst Hindus locally (Chotai, 1960 : 83-85).

These Hindu scholars and missionaries from India played an important role in the regeneration of Hinduism in South Africa. However, as a result of the fact that these scholars remained in the country for a limited period, at most a few months,

their influence was limited. The urgent need amongst Hindus in South Africa was the establishment of institutionalised religious movements, which could co-ordinate and regulate, at least to some extent, the religio-cultural activities of the community. Although family Hinduism is by far still the most important carrier for the transmission of the religious beliefs and practices, Hindus in South Africa are in a diaspora situation hence the need for institutional expression takes on an important significance. These institutional organisations, whether established around a temple, ashram or sabha, have become important centres and meeting places for an ethnic and religious minority.

One of the first institutionalised Hindu movements to take root in South Africa was the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj has been playing an important role in the propagation of Hindu religion and culture locally since its inception in South Africa in 1925. While the Arya Samaj heralded a new era in Hinduism in South Africa its institutional structures were not vastly different from those which were already existent in the country. The temple is the main institutional centre of the Arya Samaj in South Africa and spiritual authority is vested in the priest. Pandit Nardev Vedalankar, a Gujarati-speaking Hindu, was invited to South Africa in 1947 originally to teach Gujarati, and is today widely respected as the Spiritual Head of the Arya Samaj of South Africa. For the Arya Samaj in South Africa, the temple and priesthood are the most important "transmitters" of religio-cultural activities.

While the Arya Samaj exercises a certain degree of influence on the Hindu community in general, it has had the greatest impact specifically on the Hindi and Gujarati speaking community from which folds it draws its largest number of adherents (Naidoo, 1984 : 72). Swami Bhawani Dayal the first and best known Arya Samajist born in South Africa had a deep desire to reform Hindu society and more particularly the Hindi speaking people. As a preacher of the Vedic message, he toured many parts of Natal and the Transvaal with the intention of reforming Hindu society. However, to date the Arya Samaj has failed to elicit sizeable support from amongst the Tamil and Telugu-speaking Hindus of South Africa. Perhaps one of the primary reasons for this phenomenon is the fact that Swami Dayananda Saraswathi adopted the use of the Hindi language as the national language of the Samaj. Further, the Arya Samaj in South Africa enjoys a close working relationship with the Hindi Shiksha Sangh, who have been doing exemplary work in promoting the Hindi language locally.

While the Arya Samaj appealed in the main to the Hindi and Gujarati-speaking Hindus this was not to be the case with the Ramakrishna Centre, the second Neo-Hindu movement to take root in South Africa. Its appeal was to be broad-based, transcending linguistic, religious and racial barriers.

5.2 The Ramakrishna Movement : The Pre-1965 Era

Like the Ramakrishna Mission in India the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa had very humble beginnings. The establishment

of the Movement in South Africa is attributed to a group comprising of culturally orientated young men all attracted to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

In 1942 these young men formed a literary group with the object of studying Hindu religion, philosophy and culture. This group met in secrecy initially, since it was not the custom then, at least in the Hindu community, for young men to take to religion seriously (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 16). The oldest member of this small group was barely twenty-six years of age and the ages of the others ranged from fourteen to eighteen years. These seemingly insignificant events took place at Sea View, a suburb of Durban. No one realised that the seeds of a major religious movement were being sown, a movement which was not only to grow into one of the largest and most influential Hindu movements in South Africa, but was also to play a vital role in the regeneration of Hindu religion and culture in South Africa. As this group of enthusiastic young men were intent on forming a permanent institution they were forced by circumstances to come out into the open. On 27 March 1946 these eight young men met at Sea View and founded The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. These pioneers of the Movement were: DC Naidoo, (later to be known as Swami Nischalananda, the first President and Spiritual Head of the Movement), MK Chetty, MS Moodley, ST Govender, PS Moodley, JD Naidoo, BJ Naidoo and MR Chetty (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 17).

The Centre inaugurated its first Sunday Prayer Service in August 1947 at the Sea View Indian Primary School and later shifted the venue to the Sri Vishnu Temple, also in Sea View.

Although the founding of the Movement is attributed to the group as a whole it was Sri DC Naidoo, born on 22 July 1925 in Paradise, Newcastle and later domiciled at Sea View, who was the main inspiration and driving force behind the growth of the Movement.

After reading the biography of Swami Vivekananda, which he found spiritually elevating, Sri DC Naidoo was fired with the spirit of renunciation and service. Upon completion of his Matriculation examination at the Sastri College he worked for the Natal Naval Stores Department. During this period he was in correspondence with the then President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, India, Swami Virjananda. The spiritual advice received through letters from Swami Virjananda fanned his devotion and inspired the growth of the Ramakrishna Centre locally. The Centre subscribed to the "Vedanta Kesari", the monthly magazine of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras and the spiritually educative content of the magazine was helpful to the Movement. It also kept the Centre in touch with the activities and news of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India.

One of the greatest disadvantages which the Hindus of South Africa face, more so than any other Hindu community outside of

India, is their cultural isolation from India. India's leading role in opposing the apartheid regime of South Africa resulted in the break-down of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This made it increasingly difficult for meaningful cultural contact between the Hindus of South Africa and India to the detriment of the local Hindus. In this respect the close religious and cultural ties that have been fostered between the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and the Ramakrishna Mission in India since Swami Nischalananda's time has served to alleviate this situation.

The Ramakrishna Centre celebrated, for the first time in South Africa, the birthday of Sri Sarada Devi in December 1947. This celebration has since become an annual event in the calendar of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and is one of its most important celebrations.

While Sri DC Naidoo worked assiduously in the propagation of the activities of the Centre he had a deep desire to visit India to further his knowledge of Hinduism. In particular, he wanted to visit the Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission in India.

In January 1947 Swami Ghanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, India, arrived in Durban as the guest of the Hindu Vedic Dharma Sabha of Natal. Prior to his arrival in Durban the Swami was instrumental in founding the Mauritius Branch of the Ramakrishna Mission. Whilst in Durban the Swami's great erudition, his

oratorical skill and spirituality attracted many people to him. Sri DC Naidoo met Swami Ghanananda and received from him a letter of introduction to the authorities of Belur Math (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 17).

On 4 February 1948 Sri DC Naidoo set sail for India, his passage having been sponsored by the faithful devotees of the Centre. Sri Naidoo promised his co-workers, friends and well-wishers that after his spiritual training in India he would return to South Africa and identify himself with the cause as a servant of Sri Ramakrishna. In his absence the remaining members of the Centre continued with the religio-cultural activities of the Movement.

Sri DC Naidoo reached the world headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur, India in March 1948. He was initiated into spiritual life by Swami Virjananda and was henceforth known as Brahmachari Jairam. Swami Virjananda was a direct disciple of Sri Sarada Devi and he was also blessed in receiving much of his spiritual training at the feet of Swami Vivekananda.

After his initiation Brahmachari Jairam was transferred to the Ramakrishna Math in Khar, Bombay. He soon discovered, however, that he could not fulfil a vital condition laid down by the Mission, which required him to sever his links with South Africa and remain completely under the care of the Mission. This caused a conflict within him as he had promised the people of South Africa that he would return to the country and be of service to

them. He reluctantly left the Mission and proceeded to Rishikesh in the Himalayas where he came into contact with Swami Sivananda, the founder and then Spiritual Head of the Divine Life Society. He remained at the Ashram for a brief period assisting in the social work of the Society. Thereafter, he proceeded fourteen miles further into the Himalayas until he reached Vasishta Guha, an ancient cave. According to tradition, Vasishta Muni, the Guru of Lord Rama performed severe austerities at this Guha. The cave was now occupied by an aged Sannyasi, Swami Purushottamananda who was initially ordained as a Brahmachari by Swami Brahmananda of the Ramakrishna Mission and later took the vows of Sannyasa from Swami Shivananda also of the Ramakrishna Mission. After many years of dedicated service at the Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala, Swami Purushottamananda journeyed to the Himalayas and spent his time in God-absorption at the Vasishta Guha. It was this aged monk whom Brahmachari Jairam accepted as his life-long spiritual guide.

On the auspicious day of Krishnasthami on 17 August 1949, Swami Purushottamananda initiated Brahmachari Jairam into the ancient Vedic Order of Sannyasa and gave him the name "Swami Nischalananda" which connotes "the unshakeable".

During his study at Vasishta Guha, Swami Nischalananda visited Mount Kailas. He also journeyed on a pilgrimage to the ancient shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Jumnotri and as far north as Amarnath in Kashmir. After returning to Vasishta Guha

and under the directions of his guru he undertook an extensive pilgrimage of India quite similar to that undertaken by Swami Vivekananda. During his pilgrimage he met many of the great spiritual teachers of Modern India such as Ramana Maharishi and Acharya Vinoba Bhave. He also met many spiritual heads of the Ramakrishna Mission branches in India. During this trip he also paid homage at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. The pilgrimage gave him first-hand knowledge of the Indian civilization, both ancient and modern as well as the impetus that India was now experiencing at the advent of Sir Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

During his six-year stay in India Swami Nischalananda also engaged himself in various other activities. He was one of the organisers of the mammoth Sadhus Conference of All India held in 1951. His special portfolio at this conference was that of Press and Public Relations Officer. In this capacity he met and had interviews with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr Rajendra Prasad, the then Prime Minister and President of India respectively. In May 1951 he organised a food collection drive in New Delhi for the Bihar famine relief. At Vasishta Guha itself he helped organise a primary school for the rural children. He also conducted First Aid and Health classes for the local inhabitants (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 18).

With his spiritual growth matured by six years of intense sadhana in India, Swami Nischalananda after obtaining the blessings and permission of his guru returned to South Africa on 30 September

1953. At a welcome reception held in his honour on 4 October 1953 Swami Nischalananda delivered a stirring lecture on Practical Vedanta and called upon devotees of the Movement to make this philosophy, as preached and practised by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the hall-mark of the Centre's activities henceforth.

Swami Nischalananda's return to South Africa placed the Ramakrishna Centre on a firm footing and the Movement now began to grow in stature gaining greater recognition and acceptability amongst all sections of the Hindu community. On his arrival from India Swami Nischalananda lived at the Stree Vaithianatha Easparar Alayam. This huge temple complex, commonly referred to as the Umgeni Road temple, became a hub of inspiration and service. Under the able and composed leadership of Swami Nischalananda the Ramakrishna Centre began expanding its scope of activities in several directions. One of the primary aims of the Movement is to work towards the religio-cultural regeneration of Hinduism locally, however, the Centre has been deeply involved in social and humanitarian activities from its very inception. This activity of the Movement is in keeping with Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta philosophy which lays great emphasis on both spiritual and secular life.

In order to consolidate the activities of the Movement, Swami Nischalananda purchased a 14-acre plot of land together with a building at Avoca, Durban, in 1959. Henceforth the Avoca Ashram became the headquarters of the Movement in South Africa.

As a result of the multifarious activities of the Movement coupled with the numerous lecture tours undertaken by Swami Nischalananda the seeds of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings began to be scattered throughout the country. This inspired the establishment of numerous Ramakrishna Centre branches in Natal and Transvaal.

Swami Nischalananda's patient training of spiritual aspirants, his deep concern for the underprivileged and children inspired him to work tirelessly for their upliftment and betterment in life. In his twelve years as Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Centre he firmly established the Movement as a permanent institution of Hinduism in South Africa. His premature death⁴ on 11 February 1965, aged 39 years, was deeply mourned not only by devotees of the Centre but the Hindu community at large, whose respect and admiration he had won.

5.3 The Ramakrishna Movement : The Post 1965 Era

The demise of a founder of a religious movement typically creates serious problems for the movement he founded, both "politically" and spiritually : succession struggles, schisms, crises of faith, and even the demise of a movement as a cohesive organizational entity. Specifically religious organizations evolve out of the specific religious experiences of particular founders and their disciples. From such experiences a form of religious association emerges, which eventuates in a permanent institutionalized religious organization (O'Dea, 1983 : 39).

The religious experience which emerges from such an organization marks a breakthrough from the ordinary; it is a charismatic experience. The evolution of stable forms out of this "charismatic moment" is an important example of what Max Weber (1947 : 363-364) calls "the routinization of charisma". With the disappearance or death of the charismatic figure himself, a crisis of continuity is created. Weber has shown that if charisma is not "to remain a purely transitory phenomenon, but to take on the character of a permanent relationship forming a stable community of disciples or band of followers", its character must become radically changed (Weber, 1947 : 364). Weber suggests that the motivations for this change are found in the interests, both ideal and material, of the followers, and particularly the leaders among them, to continue the community the founder has created. This means their desire to continue so far as possible under new conditions the original religious experience. This crisis of continuity is also a crisis of succession — who shall constitute the authority in the group to replace the charismatic founder? Weber (1947 : 364) suggests that the way this crisis is met is of crucial importance for the character of the subsequent religio-social relationships.

Although Swami Nischalananda's departure was certainly a blow to his disciples, and his physical absence required a period of institutional and spiritual adjustment, the Movement has survived the "crisis of succession" and, on the whole, is prospering, its leadership, institutional solidarity and integrity well intact.

The continued vitality of the Movement can be ascribed to several factors. First, the basic organizational and administrative structure of the Movement was well established several years prior to Swami Nischalananda's mahasamadhi.⁵ A Board of Governors was initiated by Swami Nischalananda to oversee the practical and administrative affairs of the Movement. Each member of the Board was assigned a particular task thereby facilitating the smooth co-ordination of the Centre's work. The Board met on a monthly basis and, under Swami Nischalananda's supervision, established and enforced policy concerning all aspects of the Centre's affairs: spiritual, missionary, administrative, financial, etc. Although Swami Nischalananda acted as final arbiter in all matters and would review the Board's actions, by the time of his passing the Board learned how to function as a semi-autonomous democratic body, as it still does today (Interview : Swami Shivapadananda). Thus Swami Nischalananda's absence did not necessitate any substantial change in the Board's modus operandi.

Another reason Swami Nischalananda's demise did not create an insurmountable crisis for the Movement was that by 1965, because the Movement was a sizeable organization with numerous branches throughout the country, the overwhelming majority of its members were accustomed to functioning without the guru's constant personal supervision. They did, however, follow the strict guidelines he had established for all branches. Thus, for the daily life of most of the devotees, the guru's departure created no functional change.

Further, Swami Nischalananda had not created a self-centred personality cult. Although reverence to the guru, as contained in the Hindu scriptures was certainly observed within the Movement, Swami Nischalananda had clearly established the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda as the centre of the Movement's spirituality. He tolerated no suggestion that he himself was any sort of divine being or avatar. Swami Nischalananda had introduced the devotees to the full depth and richness of Neo-Vedantism, and the roots they planted in that tradition exceeded superficial attachment to a charismatic personality whose physical departure might cause disintegration of the body of followers. Swami Saradananda, a sannyasi of the Movement, points out that the emphasis of the Movement is not on "guru-worship" but the ideology which the guru represents, viz. Neo-Vedantism.

There is another less tangible but equally significant factor in the continued strength of the Movement. A fundamental tenet of Vedantic spirituality asserts that the relationship between guru and disciple transcends the physical death of the master. That relationship is, by definition, transcendental, mystical. Of the two kinds of manifestations of guru, his presence in the form of his teachings or "words", vani, is more substantial than his physical manifestation or form, vapuh. Vapuh is relative and temporal whereas vani is eternal and universal. Vani implies more than a metaphorical or sentimentalized presence of the guru. For the mature devotee, the guru's presence is spiritually tangible. As Swami Shivapadananda, the

only disciple initiated into the Order of Sannyasa by Swami

Nischalananda, states (Interview):

"In the beginning we see the Guru but we know it is God who ultimately operates through his body. Although I now do not have the physical presence of my guru, Swami Nischalananda, I feel my guru is never dead and that he was never born. He appeared as that form we call Swami Nischalananda; after giving me his grace he dissolved in the Formless and is still present today."

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons perhaps the most significant factor in the solidarity and continued growth of the Movement is that prior to his mahasamadhi Swami Nischalananda had already chosen and initiated his successor, viz. Swami Shivapadananda Maharaj, the present President and Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. In assuming the role of Guru and Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Centre Swami Shivapadananda was perpetuating one of the ancient Vedic institutions, viz. the institution of Guru-shishya-parampara, guru-disciple lineage. It is this concept that is to a large extent responsible for the safe and unbroken perpetuation of some of the most precious aspects of India's spiritual heritage (Singh, 1986 : 104).

The Ramakrishna Centre has experienced its greatest growth over the last two decades under the inspired leadership of Swami Shivapadananda. However, Swami Shivapadananda refuses to take any personal credit for the steady growth and expansion of the Movement under his leadership. He firmly maintains that the

growth and appeal of the Movement is due to the "source—inspiration" of Sri Ramakrishna which was imparted locally by Swami Nischalananda. It is the inspiration which Swami Nischalananda awakened in the devotees which is bearing fruit today. As Swami Shivapadananda states (Interview):

"I have added nothing new to the Movement, I have only just looked—after the Centre. There were already active branches in the areas where new Centres have been built in recent times such as Ladysmith, Newcastle and Pietermaritzburg. Although the Centres in these areas have been built under my supervision it must be remembered that I am also an extension of Swami Nischalananda's inspiration."

Swami Shivapadananda also maintains that one of the reasons why additional centres were not built by Swami Nischalananda was that he concentrated firstly on the social upliftment of the poor and needy. Funds accrued were not used to build a monument but rather for the feeding and clothing of the poor. This spirit of selfless service, nishkama-karma, which permeates all the activities of the Movement is in keeping with Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism. Swami Nischalananda did not think of saving the money collected by the Centre and "making the organization rich", instead "he invested the funds in humanism, in the same manner as Swami Vivekananda did.

In April 1898 Calcutta was struck by a serious outbreak of plague. Swami Vivekananda and his gurubhais of the Ramakrishna Mission rendered extensive aid to those afflicted by the plague. When some members of the Mission asked Swami Vivekananda where the

funds for their activities will come from he immediately replied, "Why, we shall sell the newly purchased Math (Belur) grounds, if necessary" (Gambhirananda, 1983 : 101). It is this spirit of selflessness which has inspired the Ramakrishna Mission to become a world-wide organisation today. It is also this self-same spirit embodied in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda which is the inspirational source of Swami Shivapadananda and the Ramakrishna Centre locally.

Swami Shivapadananda was born on 7 March 1938 in Mayville, an Indian suburb of Durban. Sri Inder Lutchman (Rambaran), the pre-monastic name of Swami Shivapadananda, hailed from a very humble and simple background. He was introduced to spiritual life in childhood by his parents who were deeply religious and whom he describes as "Sanathana Hindus". In order to support his family he had to discontinue his schooling after completing his standard nine examination at the Clairwood Secondary School. It was during 1957 that he first came in contact with the Ramakrishna Centre when he began attending the weekly satsangs, initially of the Candella Road branch of the Centre and later the Wiggins Road branch. He saw Swami Nischalananda on several occasions whenever the Spiritual Head visited the Mayville branch of the Centre. However, it was only in 1960 that he met his guru personally. It was during this meeting that Swami Nischalananda invited him to become an official of the Wiggins Road branch of the Centre and he accepted.

After becoming an official of the Wiggins Road branch Sri Inder began visiting the Avoca Ashram on a regular basis which

brought him in close contact with Swami Nischalananda. Although Sri Inder had a deep desire to join the Ashram as a resident devotee his guru discouraged him from doing this, stating that he should first take care of his family responsibilities. However, from 1961 Swami Shivapadananda became deeply involved in the activities of the Centre assisting in several areas of its work and he became one of the closest disciples of Swami Nischalananda.

Three months prior to the mahasamadhi of Swami Nischalananda Sri Inder was initiated into the holy Order of Sannyasa by his guru in November 1964. He was given the name Swami Shivapadananda, meaning "one who derives bliss at the feet of Lord Shiva". Earlier as a scholar he was initiated into the Brahmacharya ashrama by his family priest Pundit Bedasi Maharaj.

It was known only to a chosen few of Swami Nischalananda's intimate disciples that Swami Shivapadananda was chosen to succeed him. According to the instructions left by Swami Nischalananda this fact was to be made public only when Swami Shivapadananda officially assumed the role of Spiritual Head of the Centre which he did only in 1966. Swami Nischalananda requested Swami Shivapadananda to, firstly, settle his family responsibilities and, secondly, to undergo a surgical operation to correct a leg ailment. The instructions pertaining to the above were left in writing by Swami Nischalananda in the care of Mrs Jackie Pillay, a senior devotee of the Centre (Interview: Swami Shivapadananda).

Swami Shivapadananda was able to complete these responsibilities and his Sannyasa was formalised by the performance of the Vraja homa on Krishnasthami, 7 September 1966, when he officially assumed the position as Guru of the Centre.

Swami Shivapadananda's first contact with the "life" of Sri Ramakrishna came in the form of a photograph of Mother Kali which also included the images of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. He purchased the photograph which fascinated him, from a shop in Central Durban, not knowing the identities of the "old man and old lady" depicted in the photograph. He placed the photograph in the family shrine of his home. It was only when he began attending the satsangs of the Centre that he discovered the identities of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. On joining the Movement he began studying the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. This intense study was to have a lasting effect on his life.

There is no doubt that the charismatic and selfless personality of Swami Shivapadananda as well as the inspiration he is able to generate in the devotees of the Centre are key elements in the steady growth of the Movement locally. It is also the strong and disciplined leadership of Swami Shivapadananda as well as his firm commitment to spread the seeds of Neo-Vedanta locally that is enabling the Movement to give meaningful expression to its aims and ideals.

5.4 Aims and Ideals of the Movement

The aims and ideals of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa do not differ much from those of the Mission in India. In fact they incorporate most of the aims and ideals of the Mission in India. However, certain additions and adjustments had to be made to adapt the scope of its activities to the South African context.

The aims and ideals of the Centre as enshrined in its constitution are (Constitution of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, 1984 : 1-2):⁶

"The aims and ideals of the Centre shall be purely Spiritual, Cultural and Humanitarian, and shall be universal and non-political. The objects for which the Centre is established are:

1. To impart and promote the study of religion in accordance with the principles of Vedanta as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and of comparative theology in its widest form.
2. To impart and promote the study of the arts, science and industry.
3. To train teachers in all branches of knowledge above-mentioned and enable them to teach the masses.
4. To carry on educational work among the masses.
5. To work for the establishment of Fellowship amongst the religious workers of all religions, realising one eternal and universal truth.
6. To establish, maintain, carry on and assist schools, colleges, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid and the afflicted, relief work, and other educational and charitable works and institutions of a like nature.

7. To open branches, establish temples and shrines of the Centre for the dissemination of spiritual, philosophical and cultural knowledge.
8. To co-operate with or become affiliated to any other religious body having objects similar to those of the Centre, or accept the affiliation of any such organisation, provided the aims and ideals of such organisations are not contradictory to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.
9. To invite preachers and teachers to assist in furthering the objects of the Centre.
10. To print and publish and to sell or distribute gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books or leaflets that the Centre may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.
11. To establish a printing press and to publish, print and distribute literature for the purpose of furthering the aims and ideals of the Centre.
12. To raise money by any honourable means for the objects of the Centre.
13. To carry on any enterprise or venture which in the opinion of the Board of Governors would be a source of revenue for the purpose of the Centre's aims and ideals.
14. To insure with any company/ies against losses, damage, risks or liabilities of all kinds which may affect the Centre.
15. To do or cause to be done, anything that may be advisable, incidental or conducive to the carrying out or attaining of any of the objects of the Centre.
16. At least 75% of the net income of the Centre shall be expended in giving effect to the Centre's Aims and Ideals within a period of twelve months from the closing of the financial year/years during which it accrued."

The Ramakrishna Centre has been successful in implementing and giving practical expression to most of the aims and ideals as set down in its constitution. However, since it is a young

organisation there are still some of the aims and ideals yet to be given practical expression. The leadership and devotees of the Centre are confident that the Movement will eventually be able to meaningfully implement all of its aims and ideals.

5.5 The Organisational Structure of the Movement

A well organised administrative structure is one of the key elements necessary for the steady and successful growth of an institutionalised movement. The religious movement satisfies complex needs of its adherents, however such needs are focused upon religious values as these are proclaimed and embodied by the Spiritual leader. With institutionalization, however, an important innovation is introduced. Institutionalization involves a stable set of statuses and roles, defined in terms of functions, upon which are incumbent rights and obligations. There arises a structure of offices which involves a stratified set of rewards in terms of prestige, life opportunities and religio-spiritual compensations.

This process is clearly to be observed in the emergence of specifically religious organizations. The stable structure which thus develops becomes capable of eliciting a wide range of individual natures and of focusing diverse motivations behind the goals of the organization as specified in prescribed role behaviour (O'Dea, 1983 : 57-58).

The well organised and highly disciplined administrative structure of the Ramakrishna Centre is an important factor for

the progressive growth of the Movement since its inception. Being a monastic organization based on the Upanishadic concept of an ashram institution, spirituality is placed on the highest rung of the organisational ladder. The Spiritual Head of the Centre Swami Shivapadananda represents traditional authority and is revered and respected as leader of the Movement. However, Swami Shivapadananda maintains that although he is the Spiritual Head of the Movement, the Centre is a democratic organisation. There is de-personalization of power in terms of the secular affairs of the Centre. As Swami Shivapadananda states (Interview):

"I don't like to administer this institution in the manner of a dictator. I feel the Centre belongs to the Community and they should have a say in its affairs. However, the public should not lose sight of the fact that the Centre has to operate with some degree of authority from spiritual sources".

The organizational structure of the Movement is constituted as follows (Constitution, 1984 : 2-3):

Three Trustees
 A President/Spiritual Head
 5 Vice-Presidents
 2 Joint Honorary Secretaries
 2 Joint Honorary Treasurers
 Chairman
 2 Liaison Officers, and
 11 Committee Members.

The constitution stipulates that the position of President of the Centre shall at all times be held by the Spiritual Head of the Centre. It also lays down that there shall at all times

be a Spiritual Head of the Centre who shall be a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. In the event of the position of Spiritual Head becoming vacant by death or any other reasons, his successor shall be appointed by him. To provide for circumstances such as untimely death, provision shall be made during the Spiritual Head's life-time to have his successor named, in writing, failing which, his successor shall be appointed by the Executive Committee of the Centre.

The Spiritual Head has the sole and unfettered power to frame rules and regulations for the conduct of all inmates especially, and members generally, and this is known as the "Codes of Discipline". The constitution lays down that the Spiritual Head in exercising his powers shall consult with the Executive from time to time as far as is practicable.

Although the constitution makes provision for five Vice-Presidents at present the Centre has four Vice-Presidents viz. Swami Premananda, Swami Saradananda, Pravrajika Atmaprana and Brahmacharini Gargi. The Vice-Presidents are appointed by the Spiritual Head.

The three Trustees of the Centre are elected by the Board of Governors at an Annual General Meeting and they hold office for a period of three years. The present Trustees of the Centre are: Mr NM Naidoo, Mr RK Mistri and Mr SH Singh. The primary functions of the Trustees as stipulated in the Constitution of the Centre are:

1. All property/ies, movable or immovable of any description whatsoever, of the Centre, its Branches and its subsidiaries, acquired or to be acquired shall be registered in the name of the Trustees of the Centre to be held in trust under the constitution of the Centre.
2. In the event of a deadlock in the Centre, the Trustees shall have the power to manage and maintain the Centre until the deadlock is resolved.

The constitution of the Centre also makes provision for Honorary Life Vice-Presidents. This position is designed to give recognition to those devotees who have served the Centre meritoriously in the spirit of selflessness for a long period of time. Thus far the Centre has one Honorary Life Vice-President, Mr DP Soni, who has been an active member of the Centre for over thirty years.

Although the Board of Governors is comprised of twenty seven members, this number is flexible. Provision is made for the co-option of additional members as the need arises. The committee members of the Board of Governors are elected at the Annual General Meeting from amongst the branch representatives. The term of office of the members is one year. The primary functions of the Board of Governors as laid down in the constitution of the Centre are:

1. The control, administration and management of all the affairs of the Centre shall be vested in and conducted

by the Board of Governors subject at all times to the approval of the Spiritual Head; and

2. The Board shall have power to frame rules and standing orders for the efficient administration of the affairs of the Centre.

The Board of Governors meet on a monthly basis to see to the efficient administration of the Centre's activities. The members of the Governing Board are expected to abide by the rules and regulations of the Centre. According to Swami Shivapadananda the primary criteria necessary for a devotee to become a member of the Board of Governors is that "one must have the spirit of selfless service". The members are also called upon to refrain from consuming alcoholic drinks, partaking of drugs, gambling and if possible "they should try to be vegetarians".

The Board of Governors also has an executive committee consisting of the President, Chairman, Joint Honorary Secretaries, Joint Honorary Treasurers and one committee member of the Board. The executive committee which meets at least twice a week "act in all matters of routine and all matters of urgency and in all other matters that may from time to time be referred to it by the Board of Governors" (Constitution, 1984 : 5).

The numerous sub-committees appointed by the Board of Governors

are directly responsible for implementing the numerous undertakings that the Centre is involved in. Each sub-committee has a chairman and, if necessary, a secretary. The chairman of a sub-committee provides a detailed report of his sub-committee's activities at the monthly meeting of the Board of Governors. The various sub-committees are involved in specific activities such as building, mobile clinic, school-feeding, press, literature-compilation, fund-raising, children's branches, rally committee, Deepavali hamper distribution, functions committee, etc. While most of the sub-committees are of a permanent nature there are those that come into being for a specific purpose, and after having completed its scope of work are dissolved.

Despite the widespread nature of the Centre's activities both spiritual and secular, Swami Shivapadananda takes an active interest in all of the Movement's undertakings. In the traditional Hindu spirit of reverence and respect for the Guru the devotees, prior to commencing any undertaking seek the blessings and advice of Swami Shivapadananda. It is believed that once a task receives the ashirvad, blessings, of the Guru there is a greater likelihood of it succeeding. As Swami Vivekananda maintained (CW5, 1985 : III): "Perfect purity, disinterestedness, and obedience to the Guru are the secret of all success."

Although Swami Shivapadananda agrees that in principle the Guru's word is final he points out that he does not allow this

in practice. He states (Interview):

"I never give directions that devotees must do things my way. I make suggestions to them so that they themselves learn to use reason and ultimately arrive at an answer satisfying to them."

One of the key concepts of Jnana Yoga is manana, that is, cogitation. One has to reason out what has been heard from the guru and the shastras (Nirvedananda, 1979 : 79). Swami Vivekananda also laid great emphasis on reasoning, as he states (CW2, 1983 : 336):

"We should, therefore, follow reason and also sympathise with those who do not come to any sort of belief, following reason. For it is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred millions of gods on the authority of anybody."

The democratic nature of the organizational structure of the Ramakrishna Centre allows all devotees to express their views freely. However, if there is disagreement amongst devotees, be it on a personal level or committee level, the Guru ultimately decides on a solution. It is this abiding respect and reverence for the Guru that is a vital uniting factor of the Movement.

It is clearly evident that the well organised and regulated administrative structure of the Movement is largely responsible for the efficient functioning of the Centre in its multifarious activities.

5.6 Sources of Income

The Ramakrishna Centre has numerous sources of financial support. However, it is primarily dependent on public donations to support its manifold activities. Swami Shivapadananda is of the view that an important reason for the growth of the Movement is the tremendous support it has received from the community at large since its inception. The Board of Governors appoints several fund-raising groups whose specific task it is to raise funds for the Centre. Until recently funds were raised mainly from the Durban area. However, since 1986 the Centre has expanded its fund-raising drive to include Transvaal and Cape Province.

Although funds are derived mainly from the Hindu community the Centre also receives generous donations from members of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. This is not a strange phenomenon since the universal teachings of the Movement as advocated and practised by Sri Ramakrishna accord respect and reverence to all religions. Hence it is not surprising to find Muslims, Christians and Jews present at the satsangs of the Centre.

One of the reasons why the Movement is financially sound today is the progress made in its work, spiritual as well as secular. As Swami Shivapadananda states (Interview):

"The public will definitely respond if you show progress in your work. The primary reason why the public continues

to support the Centre generously is because of the progress made by the Centre in the various areas of its activities which is visible to the public eye."

Another major and stable source of income for the Centre is the regular donations received from a core group of sincere devotees. These devotees who are mainly businessmen donate substantial sums of money to the Centre on a regular basis.

In addition to funds from public support another important source of income is the sales of "religious stickers", music cassettes, calendars, diaries, etc.

The Jyoti bookshop, run by the Centre is also a steady source of income. Books on Hindu religion and philosophy are imported from India and sold to the public. However, the profit from this venture is minimal since the main aim is to make available to the public, literature, especially on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, at a reasonable price.

Periodically the Centre also publishes books and the sales of these books is also a valuable source of income. During 1986 the Centre released three books which it published viz. "Sri Ramacharitamansa of Goswami Tulsidas", "Sadhana of Service" by Eknath Ranade and the "Chicago Addresses" of Swami Vivekananda.

The Centre also has "shares" in the Ramakrishna Clinic in Chatsworth. These shares were acquired as a result of the generosity of a devotee who purchased "shares" in the name of the Centre and ceded them to the Centre.

Thus far the Centre has not received any financial assistance from the state despite its widespread social-work activities. The numerous social-work activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in India are subsidised by the Indian Government.

The Centre is constantly involved in a number of projects which are undertaken simultaneously, such as hamper distribution, school-feeding, medical relief, etc, thus donors have a choice to contribute to which-ever project they prefer. The funds received by the Centre are strictly administered by the Joint-Treasurers under the supervision of the Board of Governors.

Although the branches of the Centre are allowed to raise funds for their specific activities this can only be done after they have obtained permission, in writing, from the Board of Governors. Each branch is expected to furnish full details of the nature of their planned activity, the amount of money required and the period during which the funds would be raised. The request is reviewed by the Board of Governors who then issue the branch with a letter of authority to raise funds in the name of the Centre, if it approves. The Board also stipulates that any excess funds collected by a branch would become the property of the Centre. This money is either held in trust by the Board

to be utilised for future activities of the branch or it could be used by the Centre at the discretion of the Board of Governors. Each branch is expected to raise funds for its activities from the community in the area where the branch is situated. Thus each branch is independent in terms of financial need and not a "burden" to the headquarters of the Centre. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that the strict rules governing the finances of the Centre have been so designed in order to regulate effectively the funds and prevent its misuse.

All expenses of the Centre have to be sanctioned by the Board of Governors. However, in matters of urgency the Executive of the Board of Governors have the power to sanction payments. The treasurers present a statement of the Centre's income and expenses to the Board of Governors at their monthly meeting. A detailed financial statement, audited by the Centre's auditors, is presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Governors.

The disciplined and regulated manner in which the Centre administers its finances is definitely a contributory factor in the expansion of its activities and branches over the years.

Like Swami Vivekananda the Centre realises the value and importance of sound organisational structure for the stability and growth of the Movement. Swami Vivekananda constantly urged his country-men to take note of the value and power of sound organisation. He states (CW3, 1979 : 149):

"We have, perhaps, to gain a little in material knowledge, in the power of organisation, in the ability to handle powers, organising powers, in bringing the best result of the smallest of courses."

It is this great emphasis that the Centre places on sound organisation that has made it one of the most influential and financially sound Hindu movements in the country.

5.7 Branches of the Centre

Prior to the mahasamadhi of Swami Nischalananda in 1965, the Ramakrishna Centre had only one ashram building in South Africa, viz. the Headquarters of the Centre in Avoca near Durban.

The Centre had a large number of affiliated branches throughout the country, which operated mainly from community halls, school buildings, temples and the homes of devotees. Swami Nischalananda had already set in motion plans to build Centres in various parts of the country, having already purchased properties for this purpose. However, his premature demise prevented him from carrying out his plans. From its humble beginnings under the effective and inspired leadership of its founder the Ramakrishna Centre has today, grown into one of the largest and most influential Hindu Movements in South Africa with six Centres and over twenty branches throughout the country. The numerous Centres and branches of the Movement are actively engaged in spreading the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna throughout the country and giving practical expression to Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta philosophy.

5.7.1 Avoca Ashram (Headquarters)

In several ways the Avoca Ashram which is the oldest Hindu ashram institution in South Africa, is reminiscent of a traditional Hindu retreat centre as described in Upanishadic literature. Although it is situated in the heart of an industrial area the nine acre⁷ site bordered by huge oak trees and dense vegetation has an atmosphere of serenity and peace, conducive to prayer and meditation.

The Avoca Ashram was officially opened on 22 November 1959 by Swami Nischalananda. To the existing building on the property were added several other buildings. This included a shrine, living quarters for ashramites, kitchen and dining hall, the Jyoti Press and a pre-fabricated building which is utilised as a multi-purpose room.

The main building which comprises two floors also houses the shrine and serves as the living quarters of the resident sannyasi of the Centre. The Jyoti bookshop is also situated in this building as are the board-room and offices of the Centre. Also part of this building is a well equipped library housing a comprehensive collection of books, journals and magazines on Hindu religion and philosophy. The extensive collection of books also includes literature on the world religions, western philosophy, science, medicine, music, art and architecture. The library is open to the public who are free to use the facilities after obtaining permission from the authorities.

The shrine of the Avoca Ashram can accommodate approximately three hundred people. The focus of the shrine is the altar situated at the front of the hall. As is the traditional practice, the devotees are seated in lotus posture on the carpeted floor, facing the altar. The male devotees are seated on the left and the female devotees to the right when facing the altar. The altar is dominated by a life-size white marble image of Sri Ramakrishna seated in samadhi pose on a lotus base. To the right of the murti is a framed photograph of Swami Vivekananda and to its left that of Sri Sarada Devi. All three images are always garlanded with fresh flowers. Below the raised platform in front of the Master's image, is an illuminated Aum (ॐ) sign which is symbolic of the omnipresence of the Absolute. In front of the Aum sign is a lamp, jyothi swarupa, which remains constantly burning. Next to it is an incense, dhoop, holder, a bell and various other items used in the daily rituals performed in the shrine. The altar which is the most sacred space, the sanctum sanctorum, of the shrine is separated from the rest of the shrine by a decorative panelling embossed with the Aum sign.

According to Mircea Eliade (1959 : 25-26) every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different. Thus within the sacred precincts of the ashram shrine the profane world is transcended, heré, in the sacred enclosure, communication with the Absolute is made possible.

The walls on either side of the shrine have numerous niches in which are placed images of deities of the Hindu pantheon, such as Ganesha, Sarasvathi, Radha and Krishna and Dattatreya. The images of Jesus Christ, the Buddha, and Zoroaster are also included amongst these. The inclusion of the images of founders of other world religions in the shrine is in keeping with the teachings of universalism preached and practised by Sri Ramakrishna and which the Centre also seeks to embody.

The shrine remains open throughout the day and is open to all irrespective of race, gender, religion or creed. During the day the shrine is mainly used on an individual basis when devotees or visitors to the ashram indulge in private prayer or meditation. Congregational worship takes place every Saturday at 4.00 pm when the weekly Satsang is held. Daily arati is held at 5.00 am. and 5.00 pm., and is also open to the public.

The spacious grounds of the ashram are well utilised throughout the year. The Yoga Camp held twice yearly, the annual Children's Rally of the Northern Durban areas, and numerous "special gatherings" are all held at the Avoca Ashram. Being the Headquarters of the Centre in South Africa the Ashram is always a hive of activity.

In addition to the daily arati and weekly satsang the other regular activities at the ashram, all of which are in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Centre, include:

1. Sanskrit classes, held every weekday from 9.00 am – 10.00 am., for the ashramites conducted by Swami Premananda, a sannyasi of the Centre.
2. Upanishad Classes, held every Tuesday from 6.30 pm. – 7.30 pm., conducted by Swami Shivapadananda. The Upanishad classes are open to the public.
3. Celebration of all major Hindu festivals as well as the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.
4. House satsangs, held at the homes of devotees, whenever requested.

(Interview : Swami Shivapadananda, Swami Saradananda).

5.7.2 Sri Sarada Devi Ashram

The Sri Sarada Devi Ashram is unique in South Africa in that it is the first and only Hindu monastic institution catering specifically for the religio-cultural needs of women devotees. According to Swami Shivapadananda the ashram was established mainly to provide greater opportunity and scope for the religio-cultural expression and development of women as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda. Throughout his busy life, Swami Vivekananda worked untiringly for the upliftment of women in India. He stated (Selections from Swami Vivekananda, 1981 : 443-444):

"If you do not raise the women, who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise" "That country and that nation which do not respect the women have never become great, nor will ever be in future."

Swami Vivekananda also pointed out on several occasions, that discrimination on the basis of sex is not in keeping with the Vedantic teaching of the equality of all life. He stated (Selections from Swami Vivekananda, 1981 : 447-448):

"In the highest reality of the Parabrahman, there is no distinction of sex. We notice this only in the relative plane. Ultimately, when the mind is wholly merged in the homogeneous and undifferentiated Brahman, such ideas as this is a man or that a woman do not remain at all."

It was the desire of Swami Vivekananda to establish a Math exclusively for women so that Brahmacharinis and Sadhvis could be trained to help individuals to work out their own liberation and also to train them to serve the world along the lines laid down by Sri Ramakrishna (Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1977 : 2). In fulfilment of Swami Vivekananda's dream the Ramakrishna Mission established the Sri Sarada Math in 1954 and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in 1960 (See Chapter 4).

Likewise the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa has also given concrete shape to Swami Vivekananda's dream with the establishment of the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram in Durban.

The land on which the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram is located in Abelia Road, Asherville, Durban, was purchased by Swami Nischalananda in 1959. The site lay vacant until Swami Shivapadananda formed a building committee in 1975 and began planning the development of the site. The Ashram which was

completed in 1980, was built entirely as a result of the generous donations of devotees. The Ashram was officially opened in March 1984 by Swami Nisreyasananda of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Zimbabwe.

The building houses a large shrine which accommodates over six hundred devotees. Additional features of the building are: lounge, diningroom, kitchen, office, type-setting room, four living rooms and a dormitory. The living facilities are exclusively for female devotees, male devotees are not allowed to reside at the ashram. The building also houses a branch of the Jyoti bookshop and the Swami Nischalananda library.

The outer-facade of the building is dominated by a vast dome in the shape of a Siva-linga on top of which is mounted an illuminated Aum sign. The shrine is built in the manner of an auditorium with terraced seating. The focus of the shrine is the altar which is dominated by the life-size murti of Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi pose. The layout of the altar⁸ is similar to that of the Avoca Ashram.

The white marble murti of Sri Ramakrishna was sculptured in India by the reputed Calcutta sculptors G Paul and Sons. The founder of this studio, G Paul, was responsible for the manufacture of the murti of Sri Ramakrishna which adorns the altar of the Belur Math, headquarters of the Mission in India (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 32).

The foyer of the building is dominated by a life-size standing

image of Sri Ramakrishna, while the lounge is dominated by imposing oil paintings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. The lounge also houses a "rockery-fountain" in the centre of which is a large Siva-linga hooded by the naga.

The Sri Sarada Devi Ashram is administered and run by Pravrajika Atmaprana and Brahmacharini Gargi who are assisted by members of the branch committee. In keeping with Swami Vivekananda's call to treat all of humanity equally it is not surprising that the Ashram is headed by a sannyasini. Pravrajika Atmaprana who has been a resident devotee of the Centre for the past sixteen years was initiated into the Order of Sannyasa in 1984, becoming the first Hindu sannyasini in South Africa. As Pravrajika Atmaprana states (Interview):

"There is no such thing as inferiority or superiority in the Centre. There are equal opportunities for women in the Movement."

The Sri Sarada Devi Ashram is one of the most active branches of the Centre. Its numerous activities include (Interview: Pravrajika Atmaprana and Brahmacharini Gargi):

1. Daily morning and evening arati.
2. Sri Ramakrishna Pooja, daily from 7.30 am. — 8.30 am.
3. Siva arati, held daily.
4. Hatha Yoga classes held every Monday from 7.00 pm. — 8.00 pm. Three separate classes for men, women and children are conducted simultaneously.

5. Music classes are held every Wednesday, from 6.00 pm – 7.30 pm. Two separate classes are held simultaneously one for Tabla and another for Harmonium.
6. Sanskrit classes are held every Wednesday from 7.00 pm. – 8.00 pm.
7. The Centre's Homeopathic Clinic operates on Thursdays from 9.00 am. – 11.00 am.
8. Hindi classes are held every Thursday from 6.00 pm. – 7.00 pm. Again several classes are conducted simultaneously for the different age-groups.
9. Ramayana classes are held on Thursdays from 6.00 pm. – 7.00 pm.
10. A children's service is held every Sunday from 9.00 am. – 10.00 am. Several services are conducted simultaneously for the different age groups.
11. The Centre's weekly satsang is held every Sunday from 4.00 pm. – 6.00 pm.
12. The Swami Vivekananda study circle meet every Sunday from 7.30 pm. – 8.30 pm.

In addition to the above activities the Centre also observes and celebrates all the major Hindu festivals as well as the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi.

Under the disciplined and loving guidance of Pravrajika Atmaprana the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram is playing an important role in spreading the spiritually inspiring message of Sri

Ramakrishna, as well as that of Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

5.7.3 Chatsworth

The Chatsworth Ashram is the most recent Centre built by the Ramakrishna Movement. The Movement draws a large number of devotees from Chatsworth. Numerous branches from Chatsworth were affiliated to the Centre, however, since there was no permanent institution of the Centre in Chatsworth to house these devotees, it was noticed that several of the branches began to close.

To cater for the growing number of devotees in the area the Movement decided to build a permanent Centre in Chatsworth. In 1984 property for the construction of an ashram was purchased in Unit 9 from the Durban City Council for a token price of R2,00. The construction of the Centre began in 1985 and is now nearing completion and is due to be officially opened in the near future.

The ashram building comprises a spacious shrine which can accommodate 400 devotees, living quarters for a resident sannyasi, an office and an "out-building". Future plans for the Centre include the construction of a building to house the press and a hall for staging cultural programmes.

Although the Centre is not complete it is already functioning. Satsangs are held every Sunday at 4.00 pm and Ramayana classes are conducted every Friday at 7.00 pm.

It is envisaged that once the Centre is completed it will play an important role in disseminating the seeds of Neo-Vedanta in the Chatsworth and surrounding areas (Interview : Swami Shivapadananda).

5.7.4 Pietermaritzburg

The need to cater for the growing number of devotees in Pietermaritzburg saw the building of an ashram in Northdale. The Pietermaritzburg branch of the Centre was inaugurated in 1957 when Swami Nischalananda opened the children's services which were then held at the historic Siva Soobramoniar and Mariammen Temple complex in Longmarket Street. When Northdale was declared an Indian residential area, the Centre decided to establish an ashram there. Hitherto, the branch conducted regular satsangs in the homes of devotees.

As part of the branch's expansion it was decided that a plot of land be purchased at Sarojini Road and an ashram and library be erected on the site. The foundation stone of the building was laid on 3 December 1973 by Swami Nisreyasananda of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Zimbabwe. However, work on the project took much longer than anticipated since most of the labour was provided on a voluntary basis by devotees during weekends. It was also the desire of the members to build "as and when" funds become available rather than incur huge debts (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 34).

With the completion of the building in 1985 the branch has now expanded its scope of work in the Pietermaritzburg area.

The ashram building comprises a large two-storey building which incorporates a shrine which can accommodate 300 devotees. The layout of the shrine is similar to that of the other ashrams of the Centre, with the murti of Sri Ramakrishna dominating the altar. Additional features on the ground floor of the building include a large lounge, an office, a guest-room, a sannyasi's room, kitchen and dining room and a dispensary and waiting-room. The upper floor comprises a hall which can accommodate 300 people and two rooms which are to be used as a library.

The activities of the branch are wide and varied. Weekly satsangs are held every Tuesday evening from 7.00 – 8.00 pm. A children's satsang is held every Sunday morning from 10.00 am – 11.00 am. The branch satsang group also conducts house – satsangs whenever requested. The arati is held daily at 5.30 am. and 6.00 pm. Every Sunday devotees of the Centre conduct satsang at the Fort Napier hospital from 9.30 am. – 10.30 am. The Centre also celebrates the major Hindu festivals as well as the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

In addition to catering to the religio-cultural needs of the devotees the Centre is rendering valuable service in providing free medical aid to the needy of the area. The branch conducts a medical clinic every Sunday morning from 9.00 am. Medical attention and medicines are provided free to all irrespective of race, gender, religion or creed. The clinic treats an

average of one hundred patients a month. The branch has a pool of sixteen doctors who provide their services free, on a rotation basis (Interview : Brahmachari Hriday).

The members of the Centre are also involved in field work which includes the sale as well as free distribution of literature of the Movement, and visiting residents of the area spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna. The Centre also distributes food hampers to the poor and needy during the Deepavali festive season.

The Pietermaritzburg ashram of the Ramakrishna Movement is playing an important role in spreading the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna both in theory and in practice.

5.7.5 Ladysmith

The Ladysmith branch of the Ramakrishna Centre was officially opened in 1958 by Swami Nischalananda. Devotees from Ladysmith decided to open a branch of the Centre in the area after listening to the inspiring talks delivered by Swami Nischalananda whenever he visited Ladysmith. Since its inception the branch has been actively engaged in religious, cultural and social work in the area. As a result of the multifaceted activities of the branch and the large number of devotees in the area it became necessary to build a Centre in Ladysmith.

In 1975 construction work began on the shrine after the foundation-laying ceremony was performed by Swami Shivapadananda. The

building was completed in 1986 thus providing a much needed permanent residence for the branch. The shrine of the Centre accommodates 400 devotees. The building also houses a branch of the Jyothi Bookshop.

Regular activities of the branch include the weekly satsang held every Sunday from 6.30 – 7.30 pm., Sunday school for children, held every week on Sundays from 9.30 – 10.30 am, and the Swami Vivekananda Study Circle held on Tuesdays at 6.30 pm. In addition to catering to the spiritual and cultural needs of the devotees the branch is actively engaged in humanitarian work in the area. At different times it has assisted in providing food hampers for the needy, blankets for the poor as well as conducting prayer services, at the local hospital, for the patients. At present the branch provides lunch, once a month, for the residents of the Ladysmith old age home for Blacks. It also provides meals once a month for the Black patients of the Ladysmith General Hospital.

The Ladysmith branch also serves as the Northern Natal liaison office of the Movement. The branch is also actively engaged in assisting the smaller neighbouring branches of the Movement in areas like Bergville, Colenso, Durnacol, Wasbank and Glencoe (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 37).

5.7.6 Newcastle

The Ramakrishna Movement draws a large number of devotees from the Newcastle area. One of the reasons forwarded for this

phenomenon is the fact that Swami Nischalananda was born in Newcastle. The Newcastle branch of the Movement is one of the oldest affiliates of the Centre. The pioneers of the branch were eight children who met daily in a home in Lennoxton for satsang in February 1956. These children, all attracted to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, inspired the growth of the branch in Newcastle. They were: Indira Singh, Rantha Singh, Ithra Singh, Jayanthie Singh, Sheila Singh, Vijay Singh, Hashmukh Parbhoo and Leela Singh.

Within weeks of the inauguration of the satsang the attendance increased, and the service was moved to the large garden lawn of the house. During this period Swami Nischalananda visited Newcastle and addressed the children of the Lennoxton Government Aided Indian School. The impact of his talk gave a fresh impetus to the children and attendance at the satsangs increased sharply. As a result of the large turn out at the satsangs it became necessary to move the satsangs to the garden lawn of the Lennoxton Government Aided Indian School, in the absence of suitable premises to accommodate the large group. Soon a classroom was allocated for the use of the group by the Hindi Pracharni Sabha. By this time the number of children attending the satsang had risen to over one hundred.

As it was inconvenient for children from central Newcastle to attend the satsang held in Lennoxton, it became necessary to conduct another satsang in central Newcastle, which was held at the NTA Hall. A third satsang was conducted at Fairleigh

for devotees of that area (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 35-36).

During this period, the Newcastle branch was also instrumental in initiating and assisting in the establishment of branches at Ballengeich, Natal Coal Exploration, Kilbarchen Colliery, Wesselsnek, Dannhauser, Dundee and Glencoe, of which the latter three branches are still functioning.

Through the initiative of the Newcastle branch, the first Northern Natal Children's Rally was organised at Hattingspruit, at an open air function on 7 June 1959. The Northern Natal Children's Rally has since become an annual event of the Centre and is one of the important functions in the Movement's calendar.

As a result of the rapid growth of the branch and the expansion of its scope of activities the members soon realised that a permanent building was a necessity. In 1967 the branch received a donation of an acre of land in Lennoxton. The building of the Centre began in earnest after the "turning of the sod" ceremony was performed by Swami Shivapadananda on 13 October 1968. The foundation stone of the building was laid by Dr KM Naidoo, a senior devotee of the Centre. The building was completed in 1981 when a life-size murti of Sri Ramakrishna was installed in the altar of the shrine by Swami Shivapadananda on 22 August 1981. The murti was made locally by an ardent devotee of the Centre, Andrew Walford, a renowned South African potter. The shrine of the building seats 400 devotees. The

main building also comprises a multi-purpose room, which is presently used as a classroom, and the homeopathic clinic. At the rear of the main building is a three bedroom house which is meant to be used as a sannyasi's quarters.

The Newcastle branch of the Movement is the centre of numerous spiritual and Cultural activities as reflected below (Annual Reports, 1986 : 9-10):

1. Daily arati every evening at 5.30 pm.
2. Weekly satsangs held on Tuesdays from 7.00 – 8.00 pm. for adults.
3. Weekly Sunday School for children are held on Sundays from 9.30 – 10.30 am.
4. Regular house satsangs are held every Sunday afternoon.
5. Swami Vivekananda Study Circle for Youths are held every Sunday from 10.30 – 11.30 am.
6. Observance and celebration of all major Hindu festivals, including the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

5.7.7 Richmond

In December 1984 a senior devotee of the Movement donated a twenty-five acre property in Richmond to the Centre. Subsequently, a four-roomed cottage was built on the site.

The Movement intends developing the Richmond Centre into a Hindu Retreat Centre. However, since the property is situated

in a farming area the Movement cannot initiate its plans until the law prohibiting the construction of elaborate buildings in the area is rescinded.

In addition to the numerous Centres discussed above the Movement owns properties in La Mercy, Stanger and Dannhauser which it intends developing in the near future.

5.7.8 Additional Branches

In addition to the six ashrams the Ramakrishna Centre has numerous branches in several parts of the country. These branches which conduct their activities in school buildings, homes of devotees or temples are actively engaged in spreading the teachings of the Movement in their respective areas. Each branch has at least three officials, viz. Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. The branch members are expected to abide by the Constitution of the Centre. The main activity of these branches are the weekly satsang as well as the active dissemination of the Movement's literature in their respective areas. All the branches also observe and celebrate the major Hindu festivals as well as the birth anniversaries of the "Holy Trinity" as Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda are fondly referred to by the Ramakrishna Movement throughout the world.

The Spiritual Head as well as the sannyasis of the Centre regularly visit the branches and deliver discourses as well as guide their activities.

While the Centre is constantly seeking to expand its sphere of influence, Swami Shivapadananda maintains that the Centre will "not interfere in an area where a sister organisation is already doing good work." However, if there is a strong group of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees in a particular area who are keen to begin a branch in that area the Centre actively encourages and supports the move.

The majority of the Movement's branches are in Natal. However, this is understandable since over 80% of the country's Hindu population is resident in the province of Natal. Although the Movement has active branches in the Transvaal and Cape Province it is keen to develop a permanent Centre in Lenasia in Transvaal.

In addition to the six ashrams the affiliated branches of the Centre are (The Jyoti, Vol. 9, July – September, 1984 : 33; Vol. II, April – June 1986 : 16–17):

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Durban Central | 2. Sydenham |
| 3. Phoenix | 4. Verulam |
| 5. Redhill | 6. Tongaat |
| 7. Redfern | 8. Stanger |
| 9. Longcroft | 10. Etete |
| 11. Estcourt | 12. Dundee |
| 13. Glencoe | 14. Dannhauser |
| 15. Colenso | 16. Lenasia |
| 17. Springs | 18. Laudium |

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 19. East London | 20. Nanoti |
| 21. Umhlali | 22. Umkomaas |
| 23. Amatikulu | 24. Port Elizabeth. |

All the branches of the Ramakrishna Movement are actively engaged in spreading the dynamic message of their founder Sri Ramakrishna and giving practical expression to Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta philosophy. Within a short period of forty-five years the Movement has grown into one of the largest Hindu organisations in South Africa exercising a marked influence on Hinduism in South Africa as a whole. The Centre having now attained organisational maturity and financial stability will continue to grow and perhaps exercise an even greater influence on the development of Hinduism in South Africa, through its multifarious religio-cultural and socio-humanitarian activities.

The close working relationship that the Centre enjoys with the Ramakrishna Mission also augurs well for the future growth of the Movement locally. Although the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa has no administrative ties with the Mission in India the Centre continuously receives advice and moral support from the senior monks of the Mission. The Ramakrishna Centre considers the Ramakrishna Math and Mission as its mother institute. The Centre has sought affiliation with the headquarters of the Mission. However, the Mission has indicated that at present it does not have the necessary monastic manpower to send to South Africa to head the Movement locally (Interview : Swami Vandanananda). It is the policy of the Ramakrishna Mission

to send their monks to head the branches of the Mission, wherever they are established. Swami Shivapadananda has indicated that he would be pleased to hand over the leadership of the Movement in South Africa to a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission. Over the years the Ramakrishna Centre has established a close relationship not only with the headquarters of the Mission in Calcutta but also with several branches of the Mission in India and other parts of the world. Since 1947 several senior monks of the Ramakrishna Mission have visited South Africa at the invitation of the Ramakrishna Centre. In recent times Swami Balaramananda and Swami Bhavyananda, senior monks of the Ramakrishna Mission visited South Africa. In 1984 the late Swami Balaramananda, the past President of the Ramakrishna Mission's Mauritius branch spent two weeks in South Africa as a guest of the Centre. In 1986 Swami Bhavyananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in London also spent two weeks in South Africa as a guest of the Centre. Swami Nisreyasananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, who is presently the President of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Zimbabwe also visits the Ramakrishna Centre regularly. The headquarters and branches of the Mission also hosted Swami Shivapadananda during his three visits to India in 1969, 1974 and 1980.

Hence, although the Centre does not come under the control of the Ramakrishna Mission it is nevertheless closely associated with the Mission. The sannyasis of the Centre constantly seek the advice and guidance of the Mission in their numerous

religio—spiritual and humanitarian activities. The Centre has also received the blessings of the present President of the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Gambhirananda, to continue in their endeavours to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna locally.

Notes:

1. See The Hindu Heritage in South Africa, Durban, South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1960; The Indian Annual, published annually by the Indian Academy of South Africa, Durban; Kuper, H. Indian People in Natal, Chapters X and XI, pp. 186-216, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1974; Meer, F. Portrait of Indian South Africans, pp. 134-178, Durban, Avon House, 1969.
2. See, Naidoo, T., The Influence of the Arya Samaj on Hinduism in South Africa, D. Phil. thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1984.
Singh, N., A Study of the Divine Life Society with Special Reference to its Socio-Religious Implications in South Africa, M.A. Dissertation, University of Durban-Westville, 1986.
Sooklal, A. A Socio-Religious Study of the Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa, Durban, NERMIC, 1986.
3. The Vedic Purohit Mandal and the Sanathan Dharma Sabha Purohit Mandal have facilities for the formal training of priests.
4. The exact cause of Swami Nischalananda's death is still unknown. On the morning of 11 February 1965 Swami Nischalananda went to his meditation cave on the banks of the Umgeni River, Durban, to meditate and was later found dead by some of his disciples. The death certificate issued at the time of his death states that the cause of death is uncertain. The inquest into his death is still open.
5. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the death of Swami Nischalananda, the devotees of the Centre refer to his death as his mahasamadhi. According to Swami Shivapadananda when a sannyasi dies, his death is referred to as mahasamadhi, irrespective of the cause of his death.
6. Henceforth referred to as Constitution.

7. The property was originally 14 acres in extent, however the Durban City Council expropriated 5 acres of the property for roadworks.
8. The layout of the altar of all the Ashrams are standardised.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RELIGIO-PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the role of the Guru and Ashram as the focus of the religio-philosophical framework of the Ramakrishna Movement. Two of the most important ashram rituals, viz., the satsang and arati will also be described and analysed.

6.1 The Guru in Hinduism

The traditional concept of the Guru is unique in the cultural treasury of Hinduism. It is this concept that is largely responsible for the preservation and perpetuation of many of the most precious aspects of India's spiritual heritage.

A striking perception for a student of religions is the universal insistence that instruction by an adept teacher is necessary for spiritual development. This insistence is especially notable with regard to the guru in Hinduism. Given the variety implicit in Hindu social and religious life, and the lack of a unified hierarchical organization, the individual guru as religious teacher, plays an important role in the transmission and development of the Hindu religious tradition, from the passing on of religious knowledge to being himself a focus for worship. In Hinduism, religion is manifested or embodied in the continuing, successive presence of the guru. It is the guru who reveals the meaning of life; he is the immediate, incarnate exemplar in life, and as such the guru is an inspirational source for the student. The basic strengths of the guru's role are such

that guruhood is the oldest form of religious education still extant in Hinduism (Mlecko, 1982 : 33).

An understanding of the concept of guru is of paramount importance in any consideration of the Ramakrishna Movement which itself is based on the guru-shishya-parampara tradition of Hinduism.

The precise meaning of the Sanskrit word guru is uncertain since the term has a cluster of meanings with significance beyond that of the English translation "teacher". "Gu" means ignorance and "ru" dispeller. The guru is a dispeller of ignorance; thus within the Hindu world-view there are gurus not only for specifically spiritual development, but also for mundane preoccupations such as dancing, music, wrestling, etc.

The term guru also means "heavy" or "weighty" and might well illustrate the belief that accomplished or holy persons are characterised by the uncommon weight. However it does not imply the physical sense. Jan Gonda (1965 : 237) states that "it must primarily have described the man who on account of his special knowledge and function was held to be a bearer of power conspicuous by his prestige, 'weight', and influence." Weight refers to the power and potential of the spiritual office.

It is also maintained, though not commonly, that "guru" is derived from the Sanskrit root "giri", meaning "one who calls."

Kirpal Singh (1967 : 8) writes: "... he who always hears this (divine) call within himself, and is devotedly attached to the call and can make it manifest in others is described as guru."

It may be noted that disagreements about the etymology of the term guru tend to be resolved when the functions of the guru are discussed. Since the Vedic age the gurus have been spiritual preceptors. The idea of a spiritual preceptor who guides one's study of religion and philosophy has been a constant influence on the religion of India since the most ancient times. Already in the Rig Veda we see him referred to as the rishi, "seer", or muni, a sage or "silent one"; as such he is the possessor of deep spiritual insights and is considered to be the "author" of sacred hymns. In later times we also find him referred to as acharya, brahmana and swami (Eliade, 1987 : 29).

The guru, according to Joel Mlecko (1982 : 34) is an entity which in Western culture has no exact counterpart. Gurus are men and often women, who have become spiritually enlightened and who believe that they have some responsibility to guide others, so helping them to attain moksha (Cole, 1982 : 2).

The guru is a teacher, counsellor, father-image, mature ideal, hero, source of strength, even divinity integrated into one personality. Primarily, however, the guru is the personal teacher of spirituality, that is, of the basic, ultimate values perceived within the Hindu tradition. Further, the guru

possesses experiential knowledge, in addition to intellectual knowledge, of these values. The guru is thus indispensable for spiritual development. In early Hinduism he was a vital factor in imparting Vedic knowledge; in later development the guru became the visible embodiment of truth and in some cases he was worshipped as an incarnate deity (Mlecko, 1982 : 34).

6.1.1 The Guru in the Vedic Age

In his earliest role the guru was a teacher of the Vedas and the various skills needed for their study such as grammar, metrics and etymology. By means of the dialectical method, the guru led the shishya or student-seeker-devotee into philosophical and spiritual inquiry. In this process the use of books was rare. Knowledge was transmitted orally. The interpersonal dimension was highly regarded. Further, great importance was attached to the proper accentuation and pronunciation in the Vedic recitation. These could be correctly learned only from a properly qualified teacher. Thus the guru was indispensable since he was the repository of ultimate knowledge and right action as recorded in the Vedas.

The gurus postulated that the authority of their message lay in the sacred authority of the words of the Vedas, divinely revealed, apaurusheya, the shabda or word; the expansion of the sacred and primal syllable Aum, which is Brahman. They also trace their authority to Brahma, as Adi Guru, the first guru (Cole, 1982 : 3). In the Mundaka Upanishad this idea is

conveyed by means of genealogy which traces the teachings of Angiras to the first deity of the trimurti aspect of the Absolute, ie. Brahma (Gambhirananda, 1982 : 81-83):

"Brahma, the creator of the universe and the Protector of the world, was the first among the gods to manifest Himself. To His eldest son Atharva He imparted that knowledge of Brahman that is the basis of all knowledge" (Mundaka Upanishad I, I, I).

"The knowledge of Brahman that Brahma imparted to Atharva, Atharva transmitted to Angir in days of yore. Angir passed it on to Satyavaha of the line of Bharadvaja. He of the line of Bharadvaja handed down to Angiras this knowledge that had been received in succession from the higher by the lower ones" (Mundaka Upanishad I, I, 2).

In ancient India the students ideally lived within the gurukula or the extended family of the guru since great importance was placed on association and imitation in the learning process. This close personal contact enabled the guru to influence and mould the shishya's life intimately and radically.

There are scattered references to the religious teacher in the Vedas. In the Rig Veda (IV, 5,6), the guru is described as the source and inspirer of the knowledge of the Self, or the essence of reality, for the seeker. In the Yajur Veda (VII, 27), the guru is described as the one who blesses and enhances the seeker's spiritual life. He does this not only through the knowledge he imparts as a teacher but also through the ritual he performs as a priest.

Vedic man conceived the world as a realm of powers that affected and controlled their lives. Nature was clearly a main preoccupation as most of the Vedic deities were forces of nature such as Surya (sun), Agni (fire), Vayu (wind) and Indra (rain). The Vedic priest-teachers could thus bring blessings from this world through their knowledge and performance of the Vedic prayers and rituals (Mlecko, 1982 : 35).

It is the Upanishads, however, that explicitly insist on the necessity of a guru. It is strikingly clear that education was not an end in itself but a means to the attainment of sacred knowledge or knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. Even the "gods and demons" must be taught by the guru concerning that Ultimate Reality. In the Chandogya Upanishad (VII-XII), Indra from the gods and Virochana from the demons approach the renowned teacher Prajapati in order to learn the essence of Reality. Only by knowledge received direct from the guru does one attain this most beneficent Truth.¹ This fact is also illustrated in the Katha Upanishad where the guru is represented as indispensable to the acquisition of knowledge (Gambhirananda, 1957 : 132):

"The Self is not certainly adequately known when spoken of by an inferior person; for It is thought of variously when taught by one who has become identified with It, there is no further cogitation with regard to It. For It is beyond argumentation, being subtler even than the atomic quantity (I, 2, 8).

The Upanishads repeatedly disapproved of study by oneself, considering it futile. Even self-study of scriptural works cannot give the supreme knowledge. In this context, the term "Upanishad" itself provides an important clue for it literally means "sitting near devotedly", (upa, near; ni, devotedly; shad, sitting) (Prabhavananda, 1974 : 43).

The Svetasvatara Upanishad (VI, 22) states (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 749):

"This highest mystery in the Vedanta which has been declared in a former age should not be given to one whose passions are not subdued nor again to one who is not ... a pupil."

The Upanishadic dialogues with the gurus are clearly didactic, such as the dialogue between the shishya Nachiketas and the guru Yama in the Katha Upanishad. They reveal little about the character of the gurus. However, the gurus' methods are clear and varied and they all have a soteriological goal.

It is also in the Upanishads that divinity and the guru are subtly related. Major extant evidence of the most early Vedantic activity are the Katha, Isa, Svetasvatara and Mundaka Upanishads. The first three are significant because of their theistic theology. They conceived Brahman as a Personal God, Saguna Brahman, using words such as Deva, Bhagavan, and Isa. In his devotion, bhakti, to Brahman it was not uncommon for the shishya to feel bhakti for the guru who himself was

considered to have reached emancipation² and who therefore was identified with Brahman. This is seen in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (VI, 23) (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 750):

"These subjects which have been declared, shine forth to the high-souled one who has the highest devotion for God and for his spiritual teacher as for God ..."

Thus, it is the wise shishya who has the same bhakti for his guru as for God. The relationship between a guru and his shishya was one of spiritual reciprocity. The guru provided guidance and knowledge on the spiritual path and the shishya reciprocated with obedience and devotion. In Hinduism the spiritual bond, vidyasambandha, that exists between the spiritual preceptor and his disciple is no less real than a blood relationship (Eliade, 1987 : 29).

It is apparent that long before the medieval bhakti period (c. 1000 – 1750 AD), respect for the guru was evolving into a devotional form similar to that relating to worship of God. The guru was to be approached as one approached God. To be near the guru, to humbly and reverently serve and obey him, is to find, to know, and to experience the Truth. Thus a function of the guru is to explain, both intellectually and verbally, the letter and spirit of the scripture. He also teaches by his life, daily acts, casual words, silence, overseeing the shishya's health, sleep, diet, the company he keeps and the places he visits (Brent, 1972 : 28).

The formal method of teaching included a dialectical approach whereby the student asked questions and the teacher discoursed upon them. There was, however, more to the method than simply asking and listening. There was the insistence, as the shishya advanced, on contemplating the truth and realizing or activating it in one's life. The responsibility of spiritual growth, therefore, ultimately devolved on the shishya and not on the guru. Mookerji notes (1951 : 114):

"The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad clearly states that education in the highest knowledge depends upon three processes following one another ... Sravana is listening to what is taught by the teacher ... Manana is defined as constant contemplation of the One Reality in accordance with the ways of reasoning aiding in its apprehension. Nididhyasana is concentrated contemplation of the truth so as to realize it."

All three steps are activities of the shishya and all necessitate a great deal of self-discipline.

6.1.2 The Guru in the Post-Vedic Age

The important and reverential position which the guru occupied since the Vedic age has not waned. The guru has been an influential figure throughout Hindu history and he continues to occupy a key position even in contemporary Hindu society. While it is not possible to enter into a detailed discussion on the role of the guru in the post-Vedic age within the confines of this chapter, it is important to note that nearly all the smriti literature devote much attention to the guru.

The continuing historical development of the guru—shishya relationship saw an important development during the age of the bhakti schools. The bhakti school of devotion brought in a new type of teacher in place of the older Vedic teacher. The guru was revered not because of academic knowledge or birth but because of his individual, inspirational qualities, rooted in his own personal devotion to and realization of the Absolute. It is important to note that the ascendancy of both bhakti and the guru occurred during the Hindu renaissance of the 7th century AD, after the period of Buddhist domination. The importance and prominence given to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita during this period, also brought into sharp focus the necessity and value of the guru. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna, the avatar, is eventually seen to be the Supreme Brahman, beyond all categories and qualities, Nirguna. Sri Krishna is both Lord and guru.³ He is Arjuna's guru, advising him, commanding him on matters of dharma, and also revealing Brahman to him and teaching him the highest way to liberation. Here the guru is Brahman in manifest form. Even as divine guru Sri Krishna points to human teachers (Sastry, 1979 : 148):

"Know this : by long prostration, by enquiry, by service, those men of wisdom who have realised the truth will teach thee wisdom" (IV, 34).

It was reaction to the radical idealism of Sankara which gave definitive momentum to the bhakti movement. Sankara also placed emphasis on the importance of the guru as is evident

in verse 34 of his classic work, Vivekachudamani (Madhavananda, 1982 : 12):

"Worshipping that Guru with devotion,
and approaching him, when he is pleased
with prostration, humility and service,
(he) should ask him what he has got to
know."

However, the context of jnana and Advaita Vedanta in which he situated the guru was highly intellectual and did not evoke widespread response in the popular mind. In reaction to the intellectual thrust of Sankara, other philosophers of the medieval age, both Vaishnavite and Saivite, stressed bhakti. Thus, it was the bhakti schools which gave a decisive impetus to the divinity concept and consequent worship of the guru. The great poet and mystic Kabir (1440–1518), taught that the guru should be recognised as the Lord himself, a view also echoed by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), and his followers. Sidney Spencer notes (1971 : 50):

"Being himself one with God, the guru
was worshipped as God and such worship
was regarded as a means of union.
Images of the chief gurus were created
in the great temples. Devotion to the
guru was placed on an equal footing with
devotion to God."

Thus devotion to and worship of the guru was akin to that of a deity worshipped in a temple. As explained by Srisa Chandra Vidyarnava (1979 : 4–5):

"In the morning let him (the disciple) remember his guru, utter his name and think of him ... Next to the Great God in his threefold aspect, and His Emanations, the Planetary Spirits or Logoi, there is no higher object of veneration and homage to man, than his Gurudeva, the Man-God living in the eternal and for ever."

6.1.3 The Guru in the Ramakrishna Movement

In modern times the guru continues to play an important and influential role in Hindu society. However, it was Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples who brought much positive attention to the guru not only in India but also in the West.

Hindu monastic orders are organised around the concept of a teaching tradition, sampradaya, related to a famous teacher, guru, who first enunciated the religio-philosophical system of the Order. Although Hindu monastic orders are found as early as the Upanishadic times, the best known Orders were begun by Sankara (c. 788–820), Ramanuja (1017–1137), Nimbarka (c. 1300 AD),⁴ Madhva (1199–1278) and Vallabha (1473–1531). The almost limitless flexibility of the Hindu understanding of sampradaya, as a concept and as a religious institution, allows for a claim to tradition, while at the same time ever adapting to new situations and times (Miller, 1981 : 82). A monastic who becomes recognised as a famous guru begins, as it were, a new sampradaya.

Sri Ramakrishna is recognised as the founder of a new

sampradaya, viz. the Ramakrishna Order of monks which was "officially" established by his ardent disciple Swami Vivekananda in 1897. According to Swami Shivapadananda it would be difficult to restrict Sri Ramakrishna as belonging to any one of the traditional sampradayas since "he followed the path of all schools of Hinduism, he therefore belongs to all the sampradayas. However, he also went beyond the pale of Hinduism in practising the sadhanas of Islam and Christianity. In this sense he must be seen as the founder of a new sampradaya."

Sri Ramakrishna, having developed a high level of spirituality became a guru to the many people who came to consult him. According to Swami Nirvedananda (1969 : 685-686) his relationship with his shishyas was unique:

"He did not rule them like the traditional gurus with the rod of iron, nor did he believe in thrusting doctrines or dogmas into their young minds. He was all love and compassion ... He led each one of them by the hand along the path best suited to his taste, temperament and capacity."

Sri Ramakrishna's method of instruction was to insist on experiencing, not merely accumulating knowledge. Concerning the role of the guru he stated (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, 1949 : 214):

"He (the guru) brings man and God together, even as a matchmaker brings together the lover and the beloved."

On the relationship between the guru and shishya Sri Ramakrishna states (Chidbhavananda, 1984 : 314):

"The disciple ought not to hold the master as a man. Before getting the vision of the Deity, the novice sees the form of the guru as a preliminary. This form metamorphoses into the Deity. The disciple thereby understands that God and guru are one and the same. The master awakens the spiritual consciousness in him. More than that, he leads the initiated into Brahman Itself."

At the close of the last century a dramatic development in Hinduism and guruhood came about particularly through the endeavours of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda, one of the outstanding shishyas of Sri Ramakrishna, learnt from his Master the value and importance of the guru in one's quest for Truth and he in turn reiterated this message in his numerous talks delivered in India and the West. It was largely the efforts of Swami Vivekananda which made it possible for seekers outside the Hindu community to receive spiritual guidance more readily from its gurus without the necessity of integrating themselves into the Hindu social community. Swami Vivekananda was most instrumental in aiding this development with the Vedanta Societies he founded in the West.

Swami Vivekananda maintained that a guru is necessary for "quickenning the impulses of the soul." He is of the view that while we may study books all our lives, and we may become very intellectual, in the end we find that we have not developed at all spiritually. As he states (CW4, 1985 : 288):

"In India, for everything, we want a guru. Books, we Hindus are persuaded, are only outlines. The living secrets must be handed down from Guru to disciple, in every art, every science, much more so in religion."

According to the Swami in order to "quicken the spirit", the impulse must come from another soul. The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the guru — the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the shishya — the student. To convey such an impulse to any soul, in the first place, the soul from which it proceeds must possess the power of transmitting it, as it were, to another; and in the second place the soul to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it (CW 3, 1979 :45).

Swami Vivekananda maintained that when a teacher of humanity comes to help us, the soul will instinctively know that truth has already begun to shine upon it. Truth stands on its own evidence, it does not require any other testimony. The conditions necessary for the taught are purity, a real thirst after knowledge and perseverance.

With regard to the guru the Swami maintains that we must first see that he knows the spirit of the scriptures. According to Swami Vivekananda the teacher who deals too much in words and allows the mind to be carried away by the force of words, loses the spirit. It is the knowledge of the spirit of the scriptures alone that constitutes the true religious teacher.

The second condition necessary in the teacher is sinlessness. The sine qua non of acquiring spiritual truth for one's self or for imparting it to others is the purity of the heart and soul. A vision of God or a glimpse of the Absolute never comes until the soul is pure. Hence with the teacher of religion we must first see what he is, and then what he says. He must be perfectly pure and then alone comes the value of his words, because he is only then the true "transmitter". For Swami Vivekananda the function of the guru is indeed an affair of the transference of something, and not one of mere stimulation of the existing intellectual or other faculties in the disciple. Something real and appreciable as an influence comes from the teacher and goes to the student. Therefore the teacher must be pure.

The third condition concerns the motive. The guru must not teach with any ulterior, selfish motive — for money, name or fame; his work must be simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted, is love. God is love, and only he who has known God as love can be a teacher of Godliness and God to man (CW3, 1979 : 50—51).

Swami Vivekananda pointed out that only when the foregoing conditions are fulfilled by your guru are you safe. If they are not, it is unsafe to allow yourself to be taught by him, for, there is the great danger that, if he cannot convey goodness to your heart, he may convey wickedness. This danger

must by all means be guarded against. Only "He who is learned in the scriptures, sinless, unpolluted by lust, and is the greatest knower of the Brahman" is the real teacher (CW3, 1979 : 51). The guru must be without touch of taint; and he must be akamahata, unhurt by any desire; he should have no other motive except that of purely doing good to others. He should be an ocean of mercy, working selflessly for humanity at large. And most of all he must be an intense knower of Brahman. When spiritual union is established with such a guru, then comes realisation of God — then God-vision becomes easy to attain (CW3, 1979 : 452-453).

The relationship between the guru and shishya, according to Swami Vivekananda is the same as that between an ancestor and his descendants. Without faith, humility, submission, and veneration in our heart towards our guru there cannot be any growth or religion in us. The devotee must seek and accept the guru or spiritual preceptor as his counsellor, philosopher, friend and guide. The disciple should serve the guru with childlike confidence and simplicity, freely open his heart to the guru's influence, and see in him God manifested. Those who come to seek Truth with such a spirit of love and veneration, to those the Lord of Truth reveals the most wonderful things regarding truth, goodness and beauty (CW3, 1979 : 452).

Swami Vivekananda points out that it is important for devotees to come in direct contact with a sad-guru, one on whom the

spiritual power has descended by guru-parampara, and mould their lives in accordance with those of the great-souled ones who have reached the Goal (CW5, 1985 : 322). As he states (CW4, 1985 : 431):

"There is no way to the attainment of knowledge unless it is transmitted through an apostolic succession from disciple to disciple, unless it comes through the mercy of the Guru and direct from his mouth."

The intense relationship between guru and shishya as witnessed in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda still permeates the Ramakrishna Movement throughout the world even today. This is also clearly evident in the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa where the guru is the focus of the ashram community.

Swami Shivapadananda is revered and respected by devotees of the Centre as guru. However, he maintains that he prefers to be seen as "a guide than a guru". He is of the view that in the Ramakrishna Movement there is no guru whatsoever, except Sri Ramakrishna. "He is the ideal, he is the Guru, he is the Mother and the Father." According to Swami Shivapadananda, the spiritual leaders who are at the head of affairs at the various ashrams of the Movement, are called gurus in the sense that they represent the ideal — Sri Ramakrishna. He believes that it is incumbent upon the guru to first practise and follow the teachings of the Master and thus become the embodiment of his teachings. It is also the guru's task to

see to it that the devotees apply the teachings of the Master to their daily lives, as far as is possible.

Swami Shivapadananda, being a guru in the guru-shishya-parampara lineage of the Ramakrishna Order, states that he was inspired by his guru, Swami Nischalananda, and he tries to emulate the ideal as embodied in the life of the Master and as taught by his guru. He is also of the view that it is important to have a guru for "spiritual advancement." He states that while theoretical knowledge is important it is far better to learn via the personal experience, ie. sitting at the feet of the guru and experiencing first-hand, the truth.

The role of Swami Shivapadananda as guru of the Ramakrishna Centre is multi-faceted and not only confined to that of spiritual guide. Although this is his primary function as Spiritual Head of the Centre, devotees approach him for advice and assistance with even the most "mundane problems." However, in the true spirit of sannyasa dharma, Swami Shivapadananda regards all actions as spiritual, even that which is considered mundane or secular by the devotee is to him worship. As he states (Interview):

"I do not draw a line of demarcation between the secular and spiritual. Every action is a spiritual sadhana. Whether I am worshipping in the shrine or cleaning the ashram yard — both are actions of service and devotion to God."

According to Swami Shivapadananda the primary pre-requisite for one to be a teacher is to be pure and selfless. A person in any station of life is naturally fit to be an example and lead people if he is pure at heart and lives the ideal as contained in the scriptures and witnessed in the life of the Master.

For Swami Shivapadananda the word disciple is synonymous with discipline. He is of the view that the disciple must be willing to take on discipline and realise that it is for his own good. The disciple goes to the guru not to argue but to understand. Further, the disciple must have an intense yearning for spiritual life and intense faith both in the scriptures and in the guru.

Swami Shivapadananda maintains that one does not take a guru overnight, a point also stressed by Swami Vivekananda. He states that the disciple should give himself time so that "he understands the guru and the guru understands him." The disciple has to make sure that the guru is pure and the guru in turn needs to study the disciple and establish his sincerity to become an earnest sadhaka. Through this period of "testing" the disciple ultimately develops respect and reverence for the guru once he has established the bona fides of the guru and is convinced that he can lead him to the goal ie. moksha. Likewise the guru establishes the intent and sincerity of the shishya before initiating him as a bona fide disciple.

Upon initiation the disciple is given a mantra by the guru as well as a disciplined programme of sadhana suited to the temperament of the disciple. The disciple meditates on the ishta of the mantra and follows the programme of sadhana which is meant to promote his spiritual growth. The disciple accepts mantra initiation not only to strive for his own liberation but also for the liberation of his fellow man in keeping with the motto of the Ramakrishna Order, viz. Atmano mokshartham Jagaddhitaya Cha, for one's own liberation and for the liberation of all.

That the pupil is often tested by the guru and admitted only some time after a noviciate or probation, is attested to in several of the Upanishads.⁵ The Prasna Upanishad (I, 2) states (Gambhirananda, 1982 : 409):

"To them (shishyas) the seer said, live (here) again for a year in a fitting manner, with control over the senses and with brahmacarya and faith. Then put questions as you please. If we know, we shall explain all your questions."

Swami Shivapadananda as guru of the Ramakrishna Movement of South Africa is greatly respected and revered by devotees of the Centre. His charismatic personality, deep spirituality and penetrating knowledge of Hindu religion and philosophy has drawn a large number of devotees to his "feet" over the years from all parts of the country. The father-figure he portrays combined with his loving, benevolent and charitable nature have all contributed to the great respect the Ramakrishna Centre

enjoys in the Hindu community of South Africa. It is evident that there is a very close relationship between the Guru and shishyas in the Centre.

A regular stream of devotees congregates at the ashram waiting to receive the Guru's ashirvad. Despite his rigorous work schedule Swami Shivapadananda always makes himself available to the devotees. As he states (Interview):

"Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the hearts of all. I am a devotee and they (disciples) are gods. I am worshipping Sri Ramakrishna through them."

The compassionate and selfless nature of Swami Shivapadananda is seen in his deep concern for the spiritual growth of all the devotees. He maintains that if he does his sadhana intensely and with sincerity, all the devotees of the Centre naturally benefit from it. As he explains (Interview):

"I cannot reach out personally to wherever the devotees are. But the grace of Sri Ramakrishna is uniting all devotees. The guru's sadhana is a collective sadhana. The devotees do not have to be present before the guru to receive the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. Through the guru's sadhana the grace of the Master is transmitted to the devotees as well."

Swami Shivapadananda characterises the true spirit of a world-teacher. He is a living embodiment of a true sannyasi as expounded in the Bhagavad Gita (5.25) viz. "Sarvabhutahite ratah" – "He who rejoices in the welfare of all beings."

His life is an embodiment of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to which he has given practical expression in the form of the multi-faceted activities of the Centre.

It is not uncommon to find devotees showering their guru with gifts, usually flowers or sweets, as a sign of their affection and love for their guru. One of the most visible acts of devotion and reverence to the guru is that of the devotees prostrating at the feet of the guru, who in turn blesses them. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that a disciple should not prostrate at the feet of the guru if he does not have the right attitude. He should not indulge in this act merely out of duty or for the sake of exhibitionism. The act of the shishya prostrating at the feet of the guru is a sacred action dating back to the earliest period of Hindu history. It is often misunderstood especially by Westerners, many of whom have ridiculed this action largely on account of their ignorance of the full import of this symbolic and sacred action. As Swami Shivapadananda explains (Interview):

"It must be understood that the devotee is not prostrating to the person (guru) but to the deity incarnate in the guru. In the temple you are not prostrating to the murti but to that Absolute Brahman who is made concrete through the murti. Likewise the guru's body is like the murti — representative of the Absolute."

Swami Shivapadananda constantly urges the devotees of the Centre to mould their lives on the ideal — Sri Ramakrishna. While he is revered and respected as guru he impresses upon

the devotees that he is only a guide to them and that Sri Ramakrishna is the only guru of the Centre. He thus maintains that there is no danger of a "guru-cult" developing. He believes that if such a development does occur, then it will certainly be against the "Ramakrishna way of spirituality." As he explains (Interview):

"The guru like the disciple is also constantly developing, moving towards God-realization. Once the guru becomes one with the Absolute he dissolves in It and someone else takes over the responsibilities on the relative plane."

In the several interviews the writer conducted with devotees of the Centre it became apparent that devotees of the Centre have a deep feeling of respect, reverence and veneration for their guru. They not only see him as a "father, friend, mother and guide" but also an "embodiment of the divine." As one devotee explains (Interview):

"I never associate Swamiji with any human relationship. Brahman has assumed a form and is speaking to me and guiding me through that form as the guru. The guru is God and he will lead me to moksha."

It is quite evident that the guru is a central figure in the Ramakrishna Movement. However, while the guru is revered and venerated by devotees of the Centre it is Sri Ramakrishna who is the focus of their worship. Swami Shivapadananda is seen as an embodiment of the Master. Thus personal devotion is centred on Sri Ramakrishna, the "Avatara-varishtaya" of the Ramakrishna Movement.

6.2 The Ashram

6.2.1 Monasticism

The Ashram of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, like that of the Ramakrishna Mission, is based on the ancient Vedic concept of a monastic institution. Monasticism has played a long and distinguished role in the religious and cultural history of India. Its institutional types in India, dating back to various ages in their origin, are presented by viharas, ashrams, mathas, gurudvaras, akhadas, etc. They belong to different creeds, sects and religions, and differ widely in function and organisation, as well as in size and status. But they all have the common characteristic of collective living for the pursuit of a higher spiritual life.

In the religious history of man, efforts for spiritual attainment have taken innumerable forms. One form, however, seems peculiar to Indian civilization, viz. sannyasa, the monastic life, dedicated to the practice of complete renunciation of self and the attainment of knowledge of the Supreme Reality. As early as the 6th century BC. there was a flourishing monastic community in India. These renunciates were generally known as parivrajakas, "wanderers", while special designations were also given to members of the community, qualifying some aspect or other of a parivrajaka's condition of life, viz. sannyasi (one who has "cast off" home and worldly life), bhikshu (a mendicant "living on alms"), sramana ("a toiler" for spiritual life), etc. No credal or other distinctions in the community were originally implied by these denominations.

In later developments of Indian religion, when differences of creeds and systems became more clearly defined the parivrajakas of each religion had their own body of practices, rules and regulations, disciplinary and organizational. The various names denoting the condition of the religious "homelessness" were appropriated by different religious systems: bhikkhu and samana by the Buddhist, yati by the Jains and sannyasi by the followers of Hinduism. The institution of sannyasa in Hinduism was first fully elaborated in the Upanishads which advocated the theory of life in four stages, ashramas (Datta, 1969 : 582-583).

6.2.2 Ashramadharma

In order to understand and appreciate the function of the ashram in Hinduism it is necessary to understand how the four stages of life, ashramas, operates in Hindu society.

Ashramadharma concerns itself with the moral and spiritual growth of the individual. Accordingly, a person is given various guidelines at different stages and his life and actions should conform to those. The four stages of life are ethically oriented preparing the way for the knowledge and realization of the atman.

Radhakrishnan (1977 : 220) is of the view that the word ashrama derives from a root with the meaning of "toil". The four ashramas, therefore, imply "toil and suffering" and they represent the different steps by which man gradually purifies

himself from all earthly taint and becomes fit for his spiritual home. The ashrama system attempts to fill the whole of life with the power of spirit. They help man reach his only goal in life – the goal of reaching unity with the Supreme. The lower stages prepare man to reach the higher ones which in turn directly lead him onto the final goal in life.

6.2.2.1 Brahmacharya

The first stage in life is that of the brahmachari, the student. It is a period of training and education which is oriented ultimately towards the knowledge of Brahman, as the very word brahmachari indicates. In the first stage the novice in spiritual life undergoes "the sacramental symbol of initiation." His body and mind are controlled and trained in order to build up the proper psycho-physical constitution in him. He is taught to be clean in body and mind, godly and chaste. The students are subject to the direction of the guru who diligently guides them and supervises their education. They learn the sacred without overlooking the secular. Both boys as well as girls went through this period of brahmacharya (Radhakrishnan, 1936 : 38–39).

6.2.2.2 Grahastha

The second stage of the ashrama system is the grahastha, the householder. As soon as a person marries and sets up as a householder, he enters a life of sacrifices. The householder is the economic support of the entire social structure composed of the four ashramas. He is the bread-winner of the whole

social family. He is expected to share whatever he earns with the other three ashramas; and he must earn it by honourable means, by following irreproachable occupations. The life of the householder is co-extensive with dharma (Chakladar, 1969 : 571-572). As an ashrama this was a period of restraint and moral growth. The householder must spend his life for others and for the whole world passing beyond distinctions of caste, creed or sex. By working for others he overcomes his narrow egoism and selfishness and also fulfils his duties in society. As Swami Vivekananda states (CW4, 1985 : 9):

"The householder's house should be open to everybody that is poor and suffering; then he is a real householder. If he builds a house only for himself and his wife to enjoy, he will never be a lover of God."

Being in the world means that men are pledged to one another, the individual for the family, the family for the community, the community for the nation, and the nation for the world. In the fulfilment of his duties, the householder is motivated by the "law of his being" and thus establishes himself in the supreme Reality and dedicates all his actions in his married and social life to God. That is why the Upanishads⁶ advise the student about to embark on the second stage not merely to continue studying the Vedas and to bring forth virtuous children, but to concentrate all his senses in the self and to practise non-hatred towards all creatures.

Men and women enter marriage to preserve the human family and

to grow gradually into mature personhood. Marriage is enjoined on all because of the conviction of the Hindus that the path to the higher life is normally through the world (Radhakrishnan, 1939 : 380). Sri Ramakrishna in his advice to householders, advocates that they follow the middle-path. He maintains that they should renounce mentally and not outwardly. As he states (Gupta, 1952 : 67):

"There is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind toward God; otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands."

6.2.2.3 Vanaprastha

The stage of vanaprastha and of the sannyasi are very closely related. The former is a lower and preparatory stage in which tapas or the "forced control of passions", is undertaken, whereas in the stage of the mendicant or sannyasi, there is no forced constraint, but rather an easy spontaneous self-control. According to the Laws of Manu (VI, 2), the householder, when he sees signs of old age coming upon him — when his hair is growing grey, and his sons or daughters have children of their own — should be ready to renounce the comforts of a settled life at home, to retire from the world, to give up all "desire for children, desire for possessions and desire for the world" as the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad (III, 5, 1) puts it. However, vanaprastha does not mean the cessation of action. On the contrary, the vanaprasthi settled himself in the neighbourhood of the very people he had lived with throughout his life.

Instead of serving the family as he had done hitherto, he now served the community as a whole (Siddhantalankar, 1969 : 138-139).

6.2.2.4 Sannyasa

The final stage in the journey of life is sannyasa. The spirit underlying the other three stages only found its fulfilment in the fourth. The sannyasi who has found his bliss in Brahman is concerned about the welfare of the world and works for all men. The sannyasi is no longer bound by social laws, he devotes himself to the cultivation of God-consciousness through a life of selfless-service. He remains clad in saffron as a symbol of a life of total renunciation. He is also a constant reminder to society of the only true reality viz. Brahman.

6.2.3 Swami Vivekananda on Sannyasa

According to Swami Vivekananda the real sannyasi is a teacher of householders. It is with the light and teaching obtained from them that householders of old triumphed many a times in the battles of life. The householders see lofty ideals carried into practice in the lives of the sadhus and accept from them such noble ideas; and it is this, which has enabled them to fight their battle of life from the sphere of karma (CW6, 1985 : 510).

In an address to a group of disciples who were to be initiated into sannyasa, Swami Vivekananda spoke of the glory of renunciation.

His discourse is too long to be quoted here in full, but his concluding words were (Eastern and Western Disciples, Vol. II, 1981 : 243):

"Remember, for the salvation of his own soul, and for the good and happiness of the many, the sannyasi is born in the world. To sacrifice his life for others, to alleviate the misery of millions rending the air with their cries, to wipe away the tears from the eyes of the widow, to console the heart of the bereaved mother, to provide the ignorant and depressed masses with the ways and means for the struggle for existence, and enable them to stand on their own feet, to preach broadcast the teachings of the Shastras to one and all without distinction for their material and spiritual welfare, to rouse the sleeping lion of Brahman in the hearts of all beings by the diffusion of the light of knowledge — for this the sannyasi is born in the world!"

It is these potent words, a call to action, which inspire the sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Movement to lead a life of dedicated service.

One of Swami Vivekananda's greatest triumphs was the conversion of his gurubhais from the individualistic to the national ideal of religious life, in which public spirit and service to fellowmen occupied a prominent place. Swami Vivekananda maintained that the Indian monk had to come out of his narrow groove and combine the ideal of service and the ideal of renunciation and cease to think of his individual liberation.

6.2.4 The Ashram Institution

The numerous ashrams of the Ramakrishna Movement, throughout the world seek to combine the ideals of spiritualism and humanism as advocated in the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. While the term ashrama originally meant a stage of life it has since undergone a development in meaning. An ashram in its current modern sense refers to a monastery where Hindu monks live together in a more or less organised and corporate society. According to Sukumar Datta (1969 : 592-593) the revitalization of the ashram institution in modern India is mainly the achievement of the Ramakrishna Mission. He maintains that the Mission has given the ancient monasticism of India a new orientation — a turn towards a new purpose, a new outlook, and in its humanitarian emphasis, a new relation to the welfare of humanity at large. The novelty of the Ramakrishna Movement is that it preaches not only God-realization, but also service to humanity as is evident in the widespread humanitarian work of the Movement in India (see Chapter 4), as well as other parts of the world. "Be God and make others also God" — this is the message advocated by the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda.

Through the ashram institution the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa is dedicated to giving practical expression to the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that while God-realization is the first concern of the ashram, selfless-service, karma yoga, is a means to that end. "Service to man is Worship of God", is the "motto" of the Centre and it is also the hermeneutical key employed by the Centre in

giving practical expression to the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. Hence the ashram is not merely a spiritual retreat but also the nucleus of a widespread programme of humanitarian and cultural activities (These activities of the Centre will be discussed in Chapter 7 of the study).

The Ramakrishna Centre has the largest number of Hindu sannyasis in South Africa. The four sannyasis of the Centre are greatly respected not only by devotees of the Centre but by the community as a whole. While Swami Shivapadananda was the only disciple to be initiated into sannyasa by Swami Nischalananda, he in turn has initiated three disciples into sannyasa over the past ten years.

6.2.5 Sannyasis of the Centre

Angath Bhanjan (the pre-monastic name of Swami Premananda), was initiated into sannyasa in 1977. He has been associated with the Centre since childhood. He met Swami Nischalananda when he was seven years old and was instinctively drawn to him "like a child to a mother". When he was twelve years of age he became a resident devotee of the ashram, "with the blessings of his parents". In 1968 he was initiated into brahmacharya and given the name Prabhu Chaitanya. In 1969 he was sent to India by Swami Shivapadananda to further his spiritual education. He spent eight years in India living at the Kailash Ashram in Rishikesh and studying under the Spiritual Head of the ashram Swami Hariharteerthiji Maharaj. He was initiated into sannyasa by Swami Hariharteerthiji, on behalf of Swami Shivapadananda.

Swami Premananda is well versed in Sanskrit and Vedanta philosophy. He is also a talented musician and bhajanist. He has been described by devotees of the Centre as "an embodiment of bhakti".

Swami Saradananda, formerly, Balan Reddy, is the youngest Hindu monk in South Africa. Balan Reddy became a resident devotee of the Centre in 1974. As a student at the Clairwood Secondary school he became deeply interested in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He undertook an intense study of their writings and this led to his joining the Centre. He was initiated into sannyasa by Swami Shivapadananda in December 1983 and given the name Swami Saradananda by Swami Nisreyasananda of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Zimbabwe, who was also present at his initiation ceremony. Swami Saradananda is widely respected in the Hindu community for his deep and profound knowledge of Hindu religion and philosophy. He has participated in several academic conferences on religion and philosophy and has presented papers on Hinduism at conferences held at the Universities of Natal, Durban—Westville and South Africa.

In December 1984 Brahmacharini Shree was initiated into sannyasa, and became the first Hindu sannyasini in South Africa. Rosemary Oosthuizen, (the pre-monastic name of Brahmacharini Shree), hails from an Anglican Christian background. She completed her matriculation examination at the Durban Girls' College and thereafter worked as a radiographer. She later obtained a BA

degree from the University of South Africa, majoring in Philosophy and Science of Religion. She first visited the Ramakrishna Centre Ashram in 1972 on the invitation of a friend. It was during this visit that she met Swami Shivapadananda and was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. After this initial visit she became a regular visitor to the Ashram. In 1973 she joined the Centre as a resident devotee and was initiated into brahmacharya and given the name Brahmacharini Shree. She initially faced opposition from her parents who were "not too happy with her becoming a Hindu nun". However, after her family met her guru they were "happy with her decision to join the Centre". As she states (Interview): "My family's contact with the Centre probably made them more ardent Christians". Brahmacharini Shree was initiated into sannyasa by Swami Shivapadananda and given the name Pravrajika⁷ Atmaprana. Since the beginning of 1985 Pravrajika Atmaprana has been in charge of administering the Sri Sarada Devi ashram in Asherville.

The sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Centre are a living embodiment of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They combine in their life the ideals of renunciation and service. Although they are mainly involved in assisting in the spiritual growth of the devotees, the sannyasis of the Centre are actively engaged in the secular affairs of the Movement. This involves overseeing the administration of the Centre as well as planning and co-ordinating the numerous cultural, humanitarian and educational activities of the Centre.

In addition all rituals and ceremonies observed by the Centre are conducted by the sannyasis. They also visit the branches of the Centre delivering lectures and discourses as well as guiding them in their activities. The sannyasis also undertake lecture-tours visiting other parts of the country, including the Transvaal and Cape Province, disseminating the seeds of Neo-Vedanta. The sannyasis also provide counselling and advice to the numerous devotees who call at the ashrams of the Centre daily. Despite the rigorous work-schedule the sannyasis also follow a strict programme of personal sadhana. This involves daily meditation, japa, yoga and scriptural and Sanskrit studies. In leading a life dedicated to spirituality and selfless-service the sannyasis seek to emulate the ideal life as preached and practised by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi. In so doing they serve to inspire the devotees of the Centre to lead a life dedicated to total human development – a life which seeks to combine "immense idealism with immense practicality" as advocated by Swami Vivekananda (CW3, 1979 : 447). As Swami Shivapadananda states (Interview):

"The sannyasis and the ashram are very much part of society. Society needs people who will set an example of the highest ideal, and who else but those who have renounced all attachments can best do this".

The sannyasis of the Centre are ably assisted in their numerous tasks by the two brahmacharis of the Centre.

6.2.6 The Brahmacharis of the Centre

Vanitha Soni has been associated with the Ramakrishna Centre since childhood. Her parents are ardent devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1975 Vanitha was part of a group of devotees of the Ramakrishna Centre who accompanied Swami Shivapadananda on a pilgrimage to India. It was during this trip that she became very close to her guru Swami Shivapadananda. Henceforth, she visited the Ramakrishna Centre on a regular basis. In January 1985 she became a resident devotee of the Centre and was initiated into brahmacharya by Swami Shivapadananda and given the name Brahmacharini Gargi. Presently Brahmacharini Gargi, a BA graduate of the University of Durban—Westville, is resident at the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram where she assists Pravrajika Atmaprana in the administration and maintenance of the Ashram.

Nameshwar Sookdeo was initiated into brahmacharya in 1983 and given the name Brahmachari Hriday by Swami Shivapadananda. Brahmachari Hriday has been closely associated with the Ramakrishna Centre since 1973. In 1977 he became a resident devotee of the Centre. While living at the Avoca Ashram he still retained his job as a technician at the Edgewood College of Education in Pinetown, Natal. In 1981, upon the advice of Swami Shivapadananda, he resigned from his position henceforth devoting all his attention to the work of the Centre.

Like the sannyasis the brahmacharis are committed to a life of renunciation and service and are intrinsically involved in all facets of the Centre's work.

6.2.7 The Grahasthas

However, it is the grahastha devotees who form the core membership of the Ashram and actively assist in its numerous undertakings, under the disciplined guidance of the sannyasis. They are the "manpower" of the Centre. As spiritual aspirants, sadhakas, they are committed to God-realization while serving society. It is the Ashram that is their "spiritual home" catering for their religio-spiritual growth.

6.2.8 The Ashram as a Centre of Spirituality and Learning

Throughout history the ashram has exercised an enormous influence on the religio-social life of the Hindus. Although the ashram is primarily a spiritual retreat, it is very much part of society. It serves as a constant reminder to society of the inherent spirituality of man. It is, according to Swami Premananda, the "spiritual conscience" of society. Although the Ashrams of the Ramakrishna Centre are primarily concerned with the spiritual development of the devotees they are also committed to a wide-spread programme of cultural, humanitarian and educational activities. In the South African context the ashram has become an increasingly important centre of Hindu learning. This has been due to several factors, the foremost being the breakdown of the joint-family system as well as the Group Areas Act which served to undermine the solidarity of the family unit.⁸ Traditionally the joint-family played an important role in inculcating and continuing religious and social values and customs. With the breakdown of the joint-family system and the preference amongst the younger

generation Hindus for the nuclear family system, a vacuum has been created in their religious education. Hence the role of the ashram as a centre of religious education has grown steadily over the years (Sooklal, 1986 : 46-49). Apart from being a centre of Hindu learning the Ashram serves as a great cementing factor in the community. Its weekly satsangs and numerous religio-cultural programmes serve to draw the devotees together in fellowship and instil in them a sense of community and belonging.

As a centre of learning the Ashram is not only concerned with the dissemination of spiritual knowledge but the propagation of Hindu religion and culture in its widest sense. Hence the numerous educational classes conducted at the Ashrams in Indian languages, Classical Indian dance and music, Hatha yoga and drama are all designed to promote the development of the "whole-person" as advocated in the Neo-Vedanta. According to Swami Shivapadananda the Ashram "is a centre of learning from which wise people could go out to enlighten society at large".

The Ashram as a religious institution is still a relatively new concept in the life of South African Hindus. However, within a short period of less than thirty years the influence and popularity of the ashram has grown rapidly. This is not only attested to by the increasing number of Ashrams that have been established by the Ramakrishna Centre since 1959 but also by the growing number of monastic institutions⁹ that have taken root in South Africa in recent times and have established ashrams in several parts of the country.

The sound religio-philosophical framework of the Ramakrishna Movement is one of the primary factors for its stability and growth. As an institutionalised organisation centred around the guru and ashram, the Centre seeks to give practical expression to the Neo-Vedantic ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Through its religio-cultural activities the Movement seeks to influence society by impressing upon devotees the need to live the Vedanta in their daily life. By emphasizing the ideals of renunciation and selfless-service, the Ashram aspires towards total human development. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that in spiritualising the life of the individual, society in turn will be spiritualised. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. Hence the Movement is committed towards the spiritual metamorphosis of society as a whole.

6.3 Worship at the Ashram

The Ramakrishna Movement is first and foremost a religious organisation. Spirituality is its main concern. As an ashram institution it seeks to provide a forum for the religio-cultural expression of its many devotees. Its numerous religio-cultural activities aim specifically to improve the life of man and endow it with greater meaning and fulfilment.

Of the numerous religious practices observed at the Ramakrishna Ashrams, the arati and satsang are held most frequently. The arati is held twice daily, in the morning and evening and the

satsang is held at least once a week. The satsang and arati are important aspects of the Movement's ritual framework which is broadly divided into three areas, viz. daily pooja, cyclical festivals and ceremonies performed on special occasions, such as initiation ceremonies. The basic daily ceremony is the arati. However, every Saturday afternoon a satsang is held at the Avoca Ashram and it is usually very well attended.

All Hindu rituals have a historical development which can be traced through primary and secondary sources, a liturgical and ritual content and a series of meanings. According to the Hindu view the ultimate object of ritualistic worship is the realization of God. Both the satsang and arati ceremonies are meant to lead devotees to this end – moksha. It is essential to an understanding of Hindu religious practice in general that these two ceremonies, arati and satsang, be described and explained. Arati, a short service of worship performed twice daily, is an important feature of religious practice as well as a practice in its own right. The satsang, an important mode of worship since the Vedic age, gained popularity during the age of the bhakti schools and is today perhaps the most widely employed means of popular worship amongst Hindus.

Both arati and satsang are of value in an account of Hindu religious practice because they represent two important forms of worship, viz. the ritualistic and devotional. Ravi Varma (1969 : 46) wrote:

"The most important thing to understand in Hinduism is that everything taught there is not intended for everybody; there is a definite question of suitability or adhikari-bhava. The greatness of Hinduism lies in this fact that it supplies forms, methods and measures to suit all possible types of men."

This view is reiterated by the Ramakrishna Movement who see it as an explanation for the performance of both forms of worship in the same ritual space.

The Ramakrishna Centre concentrates on two aspects of worship, viz. individual sadhana as directed by the guru and in keeping with the teachings of Neo-Vedanta, and secondly, congregational worship through the satsang. The satsang of the Centre is bhakti orientated. Bhakti as a yoga system is a comprehensive religio-philosophical system which in its widest sense has several variations. The type of bhakti which Sri Ramakrishna preached was that of Narada¹⁰ as presented in the Narada Bhakti Sutra. Narada's bhakti yoga expounds a combination of bhakti and jnana which emphasizes devotion through understanding and emotions disciplined by knowledge.

Sri Ramakrishna prescribed Narada's Bhakti Yoga as the desired means of liberation for this age, Kali Yuga. As he states (Gupta, 1978 : 175):

"Thus on account of the difficulty of work without attachment in this age, communion by prayer, devotion and love — by the practice of Narada's Bhakti Yoga — has been enjoined as better adapted to this age than the communion by work or

communion by the path of knowledge
or philosophy.

Communion by love (of God) will enable
us to see God with much less difficulty
than by any other kind of communion."

The Neo-Vedantism of Swami Vivekananda also stresses the
importance of bhakti yoga. As Swami Vivekananda states (CW3,
1979 : 32):

"The one great advantage of Bhakti is that
it is the easiest and most natural way to
reach the great divine end in view."

According to Varma (1969 : 463) men may be grouped into three
classes: those in whom the faculty of intellect and reasoning
is dominant; those in whom emotions play the highest role;
and those who are controlled by their impulses and instincts.
The bulk of humanity belong to the second group. In them
emotion predominates. They are capable of abstract thinking,
but to a limited extent, and most of them would also require
material and mechanical measures to stimulate their emotions
to the desired strength. Bhakti-marga, or the emotional way
of realizing God is for them, and Agama ritualism is designed
to satisfy the needs of this group.

The Ramakrishna Centre is cognisant of this fact and the
satsang is designed so as to cater for the spiritual needs of
the laity. The satsang is one of the most important mediums
through which the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami
Vivekananda are transmitted to the public. It is a ceremony

comprising many religio-philosophical elements. The format of the satsang of the Centre is modelled on that of the Ramakrishna Mission in India.¹¹ The "content" of the satsang is based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as well as modes of worship developed by Sri Ramakrishna and his direct disciples, in particular Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863–1911).

6.3.1 The Satsang

The satsang of the Centre comprises the following:

1. Prayers and Chants
2. Bhajans and Kirtans
3. Ritual worship
4. Discourses
5. Reading from the scriptures and writings of Saints
6. Meditation.

The term satsang comprises two Sanskrit words, viz. sat (truth) and sanga (association). In its widest etymological sense the term means "association with Truth through the various methods enunciated in the shastras, and the end of which is the attainment of the Supreme Truth, Brahman" (Interview: Swami Saradananda).

During the period of the bhakti schools, satsang in the form of congregational worship became a very popular medium of religious expression. However, satsang is not only restricted to congregational worship. As Swami Premananda explains (Interview):

"Satsang is very broad in its outlook. It does not only refer to a congregational gathering where there is rendering of kirtans and bhajans in devotion to God, but to any type of religious discussion about the Truth. It does not matter who is talking about it or where it is held, whether in the confines of the shrine, cave, house or under a tree."

The weekly satsang of the Centre is congregational in nature. On Saturday afternoons devotees congregate at the Avoca Ashram in large numbers. After removing their shoes, devotees enter the shrine and prostrate before the image of Sri Ramakrishna. The devotees then take a seat on the carpeted floor, facing the altar. Devotees are encouraged to sit in the padmasana, lotus posture. The act of sitting at the feet of the guru has been in practice since the Vedic age. The Absolute is considered to be the Ultimate Guru. Hence in worship devotees are symbolically seated at the "lotus Feet of God" while contemplating on Him. Furthermore, asana is one of the important physical disciplines necessary for regulating the body. There is a general recognition among religious traditions that the body's tendency to please its own senses tend to distract the spirit from its more ethereal tasks. Therefore, most spiritual disciplines involve the seeker's control and restraint of his or her physical body (Eliade, 1987 : 25). In Hatha Yoga the lotus posture is considered the most conducive to meditation. As Swami Vivekananda states (CW5, 1985 : 324):

"When one acquires a perfect steadiness in posture asana, then and then alone one begins to struggle with the mind".

The satsang commences with the chanting of Aum three times by the entire congregation. The repetition of Aum is intended to concentrate the mind inwards and invoke the presence of the Absolute.

The syllable Aum, with which every recital of the Vedic chants begins, is represented as the symbol of the Supreme and therefore the means of the meditation on the Supreme. Before we attain to the Supreme Vision of God, ie. the contemplative realization, we have to resort to prayer and meditation. In meditation, the soul is furnished with a symbol on which it can fix itself, or on which we concentrate all our imagination and reasoning. We start with prayer, we pass on to meditation. When the discursive acts cease, we have contemplation. The Upanishads open with this instruction to concentrate on the syllable Aum, to draw our thoughts away from all other subjects, to develop ekagrata or one-pointedness (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 337). In the Mundaka Upanishad (II, 2, 6), it is stated: "Meditate on the Self thus with the help of Aum". The ascertainment of the meaning of Aum becomes an aid to the realization of the reality of the Self. The Katha Upanishad (I, 2, 16) speaks of Aum as Brahman¹² (Gambhirananda, 1957 : 141):

"This letter (Aum), indeed, is the (Inferior) Brahman (Hiranyagarbha); and this letter is indeed, the supreme Brahman, Anybody, who (while) meditating on this letter, wants any of the two, to him comes that."

The Mandukya Upanishad (I, 1, 1) states (Gambhirananda, 1982 : 179):

"The letter Aum is all this ... All that is past, present, or future is verily Aum. And whatever is beyond the three periods of time is also verily Aum."

The Chandogya Upanishad (I, 4, 1) states (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 345):

"One should meditate on the udgitha as this syllable, for one sings the loud chant, beginning with Aum."

According to Swami Vivekananda, Aum stands for the name of the whole universe or God. The manifesting word of God is Aum. It is the matrix of all the various sounds. Aum denotes the whole range and possibility of all the words that can be made.

In the universe Brahma or Hiranyagarbha or the Cosmic Mahat manifests Himself as name and then as form, ie. as this universe. All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible Sphota,¹³ the manifester as Word. This eternal Sphota, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names; is the power through which the Lord creates the universe. The Lord first becomes conditioned as the Sphota, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This Sphota has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is the ॐ (Aum). This Aum and the eternal Sphota are inseparable. Therefore, it is out of this holiest of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms, the eternal Aum, that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created.

Therefore this Sphota is called the Nada-Brahma, the "Sound Brahman" (CW3, 1979 : 57).

Swami Vivekananda maintains that constant repetition of the syllable Aum and self-surrender to the Lord will strengthen the mind and bring fresh energy. As he states (CW4, 1985 : 50):

"Simply by repetition of that word (Aum), will come even the highest state of bhakti."

At the satsang the full import and significance of Aum is often explained to the congregation. It is also stressed that the word must be pronounced in the proper manner with intense love and devotion while meditating on the Ishta-devata, or chosen ideal.

The repetition of Aum is followed by Pranaam mantras, opening prayers saluting the Personal Absolute and the Holy Trinity (Morning and Evening Hymns to The Holy Trinity, 1984 : 2-3):

1.

Gurur brahmā gurur vishnur
gurur devo maheshvarah
Gurureva param brahma
tasmai sri gurave namah.¹⁴

The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is the Lord Shiva, the Guru is verily the Supreme Brahman. Salutations to that Guru.

2.

Om sthapakāya cha dharmasya
sarva dharma svaroopine
Avatāra — varishtāya
rāmakrishnāya te namah.¹⁵

O Ramakrishna, the establisher of religion universal, and the embodiment of all religions. To thee, the noblest of Divine Incarnations, I offer my salutation.

3.

Jananeem shāradām deveem
Rāmakrishnam jagad-gurum
Pāda—padme tayoh shrityā
pranamāmi muhur—muhuh.¹⁶

Taking shelter at the feet of Sharada, the universal Mother, and Ramakrishna the Teacher of the world, I salute them again and again.

4.

Namah sri yatirājāya
Vivekānanda sooraye
Sachchit sukha svaroopāya
Svāmine tāpahārine.¹⁷

Salutation to that king of renouncers and controller of passions, the sage Vivekananda, who is Satchidananda (Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute) Itself, the Spiritual preceptor, the remover of distress.

After the Pranaam mantras are rendered the Gayatri mantra¹⁸ is repeated three times by the congregation (Shivapadananda, 1984 : 22):

Om bhur bhuvah svah
 Tat savitur varenyam
 Bhargo devasya dhimahi
 Dhiyo yo nah prachodayat (Rig Veda III, 62, 10).

We meditate on that Ishwara's glory,
 Who has created the universe,
 Who is the embodiment of knowledge and light,
 Who is the remover of all sins and ignorance.
 May He enlighten our intellect.

According to Sankara the Gayatri mantra reveals the Supreme Self, who is all power, all-revealer, and who is the Self of all. The Gayatri denotes the unity of Brahman and Pratyagatman, the Inner Witness of all. He recommends that this Gayatri should be meditated upon in Pranayama (Vidyarnava, 1979 : 29).

Following the Gayatri mantra are two invocatory kirtans, one to Sri Ramakrishna and another to Sri Sarada Devi. Each line of the kirtan is first sung by the lead-singer and thereafter the entire congregation repeats it:

Om Namo Bhagavate Ramakrishnaye Om (repeated several times)
 Our salutations to Sri Ramakrishna

Om Namo Bhagavati Sarada Devi Yea Om (repeated several times)
 Our salutations to Sri Sarada Devi.

The invocatory kirtans as well as the Pranaam mantras are accompanied by music, viz. harmonium, tabla and cymbals. Music is seen as an "embellishment" to worship. It aids concentration

and meditation. According to Swami Shivapadananda devotional music is conducive to directing the mind within and shutting off the external disturbances. Devotional music was also favoured by Sri Ramakrishna as a means of worship. As Swami Chidbhavananda states (1977 : 104):

"Music invariably carried him (Sri Ramakrishna) into the Beyond. Music made him forget the world with all its weal and woe."

Swami Vivekananda maintains that music has tremendous power over the human mind and brings it to concentration in a moment. As he states (CW5, 1985 : 125):

"Music is the highest art and, to those who understand, is the highest worship."

According to Narada's bhakti yoga, devotional music is looked upon as one of the means of knowing God. It is Nada-Yoga, ie. Yoga as sound.

After the invocation to Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi the Maha-mantra is sung:

Hare Rama, hare Rama, Rama Rama hare hare
Hare Krishna, hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna hare hare

The Maha-mantra is a combination of the various names of God. It is one of the most well known Hindu mantras. The Maha-mantra was popularised by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu,¹⁹ the 16th century saint widely revered as an incarnation of Sri Krishna. Chaitanya advocated the singing of the Maha-mantra as the desired means of liberation in this age of Kali. He cites a passage from the Brhan-naradiya Purana (38, 126) in support of this view (Prabhupada, 1974 : 202):

"Harer nama harer nama harer namaiva kevalam
Kalau nasty eva nasty eva nasty eva gatir anyatha."

"In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy, the only means of deliverance is the chanting of the holy name of the Lord. There is no other way. There is no other way. There is no other way."

Swami Vivekananda maintains that by the repetition of the mantra comes the realization of the intended deity. Constant repetition of the word helps to fix the ideal firmly in the mind (CW7, 1986 : 63). He is of the view that the mantra is an equally effective means to attain God-realisation. It is divine power manifesting in a sound body. The mantra itself is the Deity. The aspirant should try his best to realise his unity with the mantra of the Divinity, and to the extent that he does so, the Mantra-power or the Mantra-Shakti supplements his worship-power, Sadhana-Shakti.

After the Maha-mantra is rendered several kirtans and bhajans are sung. The kirtans and bhajans are usually sung by devotees drawn from the congregation. However, on special occasions the Centre invites prominent musicians from the community to render devotional songs and music.

The singing of kirtans and bhajans are an important aspect of devotional worship in Hinduism. It is also regarded as yoga, viz. Sangeeta Yoga or Yoga as singing. The singing of kirtans and bhajans in praise of the Personal Absolute was a prominent feature of worship in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna²⁰ makes several references to the numerous devotional songs sung by the Master. Sri Ramakrishna employed singing not only as a means of worship but also as a medium of teaching. It was often through songs that he conveyed some of the important teachings of Hindu religion and philosophy to his numerous disciples. Swami Vivekananda also attaches great

importance to devotional singing as a means of worship. In a lecture he delivered on bhakti yoga he cites an episode in the life of the sage Narada to demonstrate the importance of devotional singing (CW4, 1985 : 9):

"The Lord says to Narada the great teacher of Bhakti — 'I do not live in heaven, nor do I live in the heart of the Yogi, but where My devotees sing My praise, there am I'".

According to Swami Vivekananda (CW5, 1985 : 347) kirtan means singing the glories of God, in whatever way that suits us. Swami Shivapadananda states that kirtans and bhajans awaken our spiritual consciousness and increase the intensity of our spirituality. They also inculcate in us love for God and increase our devotion to God.

Following the rendering of devotional songs there is a talk on some aspect of Hindu religion and philosophy. The talk which lasts for about twenty minutes is normally delivered by one of the ashramites or a devotee of the Centre. However, the Centre often invites prominent members of the Hindu community to deliver lectures at the satsang. The talk serves an educative purpose. It is intended to inform devotees on the various aspects of Hindu religion and philosophy. The combination of jnana and bhakti in the satsang of the Centre is in keeping with Swami Vivekananda's call that we should "worship God with bhakti tempered with jnana" (CW5, 1985 : 347).

After the lecture the Spiritual Head delivers a short talk,

usually elaborating on the contents of the lecture delivered. Thereafter about ten minutes are devoted to reading from the scriptures. The passages read at the satsang, by one of the ashramites, are chosen in advance. The reading exercise is meant to be informative and also to help stimulate an interest in the devotees to read the scriptures. It also provides educative norms through which the devotees could mould their daily life by emulating these teachings and experiences.

Usually kirtans and bhajans are sung after the reading and then there is a short period of meditation. While the devotees meditate the Spiritual Head advises them to think of their Ishta-devata and feel the presence of the chosen-ideal within.

Meditation or dhyana is the seventh of the eight limbs of raja yoga. Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras defines dhyana as "an unbroken flow of thought toward the object of concentration" (Prabhavananda, 1982 : 112). According to Swami Vivekananda the greatest help to spiritual life is meditation, dhyana. In meditation we divest ourselves of all material conditions and feel our divine nature (CW2, 1983 : 37). He states that every meditation is direct superconsciousness. In perfect concentration the soul becomes actually free from the bonds of the gross body and knows itself as it is (CW4, 1985 : 226). Patanjali states (III, 3), (Prabhavananda, 1982 : 112):

"When, in meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, not distorted by the mind of the perceiver, that is absorption, (samadhi)".

Sri Ramakrishna also impressed upon his disciples the value and importance of meditation. He states (Gupta, 1952 : 837):

"So long as 'I-consciousness' exists, a man cannot go beyond the Relative. Through meditation he can negate the phenomena, following the process of 'Neti, neti', and reach the Absolute."

After the period of meditation a final kirtan or bhajan is sung while one of the ashramites prepares to offer the arati.

6.3.2 The Arati

The Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook (Usha, 1971 : 14) defines the term arati as "a ceremonial waving of lights before a deity or holy person." The arati is a ritual ceremony performed every morning and evening at the ashram. It also forms the concluding part of the satsang. Ritual pooja in the Ramakrishna Movement is a combination of Vedic and Tantric methods of worship, as well as poojas devised by Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna stated (Gupta, 1952 : 296):

"It is extremely difficult to perform the rites enjoined in the Vedas. In the Kaliyuga the discipline of Tantra is very efficacious."

The philosophy of the Tantric school is based on the Upanishads. It is non-dualistic, upholding the identity of the individual soul with Siva-Sakti – that is, the identity of the individual Self with Brahman, or the Universal Self. The Tantras refer to the creative power of the universe as Sakti or the Divine

Mother and regard the universe as Her play when She has become mind and matter.

This Sakti or Divine Mother is not distinct from Siva, or Brahman the Absolute of the Upanishads, but is the power of the Absolute. In the transcendental plane, which is static, where there is but one undivided, absolute existence, and where there is no universe, the truth is known as Siva or the Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss; but in the active, immanent plane, that is, the plane in which the universe is known, there is experienced by the seer the play of Sakti, of God the Mother (Prabhavananda, 1981 : 144-145).

Tantra claims that its disciplines have a universal application, It admits the validity of the rituals of the Vedas, the discrimination and renunciation of the Upanishads, the purifying disciplines of raja yoga, and the passionate love for the Deity in the Puranas. Tantra promises its devotees not only enjoyment of worldly happiness but also liberation, moksha, and acknowledges that the power of the kundalini, mystic energy, can be aroused by the sincere pursuit of the spiritual disciplines recommended by all the great religions of the world (Nikhilananda, 1968 : 158-159).

Sri Ramakrishna, in modern times, followed the disciplines of Tantra and demonstrated them to be a valid means of God-realization.

6.3.2.1 Pre-Arati Rituals

Prior to offering the arati certain rituals are performed by the devotee who is to conduct the ceremony. The devotee performing the arati ritual represents the entire congregation. His actions are enjoined upon all. The devotee is seated on a special seat directly in front of the altar. Before entering into the worship of God, the whole body with its various organs must first be purified and then dedicated to God, who should be considered as dwelling in every part of it. As a temple is consecrated before it becomes a sacred place of worship, so before God is invoked, the body, (the true temple of God) should be dedicated to him. This dedication or assignment of the body called nyasa is preceded by the purificatory ritual (Vidyarnava, 1979 : 12).

Purification of the body is performed symbolically. This involves the sprinkling of water on the various limbs of the body as well as touching the various parts of the body viz. head, eyes, nose, ears, mouth, hands, knees and feet, with different hand gestures, mudras.²¹ This is done while the devotee repeats specific mantras mentally, dedicating the body to the Absolute, who is regarded as the sovereign ruler of the body. This fact is illustrated in the Katha Upanishad (II, 2, 1) (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 636):

"There is a city of eleven gates²²
(belonging to) the unborn, uncrooked (sic!)
intelligence. By ruling it one does not
grieve and being freed is freed indeed.
This, verily is that."

After completing nyasa the devotee then performs dhyana while mentally chanting the following hymn on Sri Ramakrishna:

"Hridaya — kamala — madhye rajitam nirvikalpam
Sadasadakhila — bhedatitamakasvarupam
Prakriti — vikriti — shunyam nityamananda —murtim
Vimala — paramahamsam ramakrishnam bhajamah.

Nirupamam — atisukshmam nishprapancham niriham
Gagana — sadrisham — sesham sarva bhutadhivasam
Triguna — rahita — satchit — brahmarupam varenyam
Vimala — paramahamsam ramakrishnam bhajamah.

Vitaritum — avatirnam jnana — bhakti prashantih
Pranaya — galita — chittam jiva — dukkhasahishnum
Dhrita sahaja samadhim chinmayam komalagam
Vimala — paramahamsam ramakrishnam bhajamah."

"Shining in the lotus of the heart, assuredly, Beyond all
changes real and unreal;
One and compact, untouched by prakriti or her evolutes;
the eternal image of Bliss,
The spotless Swan Supreme, Ramakrishna we adore.

Beyond compare, extremely subtle, outside the cosmic flux
impulseless, vast as the sky, the Supreme Lord, whose home
is all beings, the very Brahman, Above the realm of the
triple gunas, the best refuge,
The Spotless Swan Supreme, Ramakrishna we adore.

Born to spread knowledge, devotion, peace,
Whose heart love — melted, who would never bear to see
the world suffer; who spontaneously stays in Samadhi, of
tender build and filled with God's spirit,
The Spotless Swan Supreme, Ramakrishna we adore."

Having thus meditated on the deity, the devotee now offers him pooja with naivedyam, ie. food offering. The naivedyam is first symbolically purified by sprinkling water over it and reciting the following sloka from the Bhagavad Gita (IV, 24) (Sastry, 1979 : 140):

"Brahmarpanam brahma havir
Brahmaagnau brahmanaa hutam
Brahmai'va tena gantavyam
Brahma Karma samaadhinaa."

"Brahman is the offering, Brahman the oblation, by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman; Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action."

The offering of the food to the deity for the purpose of consecration, is indicated symbolically by means of the grasa mudra. The left hand is held in grasa mudra while the right hand in five different finger gestures symbolically offers the food to the deity while the devotee recites the following mantra:

Om praanaaya swaha
Om apaanaaya swaha
Om vyaanaaya swaha
Om samaanaaya swaha
Om udaanaaya swaha."

This mantra refers to the five modifications of prana which are concerned with such bodily functions as respiration, digestion, excretion, thinking etc. Prana is a manifestation of Brahman

responsible for all bodily actions. The Prasana Upanishad (III, 4-5)²³ states (Gambhirananda, 1982 : 439-440):

"As it is the king alone who employs the officers saying: 'Rule over these villages, and those ones', (sic!) just so Prana engages the other organs separately. He places Apana in the two lower apertures, Prana Himself, issuing out of the mouth and nostrils, resides in the eyes and ears. In the middle, however, is Samana, for this one distributes equally all this food that is eaten ..."

After the naivedyam has been offered to the deity it is regarded as prasad, ie. sanctified food.

6.3.2.2 The Evening Arati

Upon completion of the above ritual the arati commences with the entire congregation singing the Sri Ramakrishna arati²⁴ to the accompaniment of music (See Appendix 5). The devotee offering the arati stands in front of the altar and performs several symbolic acts while the congregation sings the arati hymn. He (or she) first rings a bell held in the left hand, which signals the commencement of the ceremony and is also a "welcome" greeting to the deity. The sound of the bell also helps to create an atmosphere conducive to prayer and meditation. While ringing the bell the devotee waves a lamp, held in his right hand, containing five flaming wicks, in front of the murti. Light is symbolic of the Absolute. The Mundaka Upanishad (II, 2, 10), states (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 685):

"In the highest golden sheath is Brahman without stain, without parts; Pure is it, the light of lights. That is what the knowers of self know."

and the Katha Upanishad (II, 3, 15),²⁵ states (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 641):

" ... Everything shines only after that shining light. His shining illumines all this world."

After the lamp has been waved in front of the deity a lit camphor is also waved. Thereafter a conch containing water is waved in front of the deity. The water is then poured over a small Siva-lingam, at the base of the altar. Following this a piece of cotton fabric held in a specific mudra, is waved in front of the deity. Thereafter a flower also held in a particular mudra is waved before the deity. Finally, the deity is fanned with a yak-tail whisk.²⁶ The entire arati ceremony is based on the royal-reception of the deity, in the same manner as one king receiving another sovereign visiting his state. Pooja conducted in this manner dates from the era of Vikramaditya (c. 57 BC), a celebrated Hindu king who reigned at Ujjayini (Dowson, 1961 : 356).

The various items waved in front of the deity all have a symbolic function. The lit camphor like the lamp is also symbolic of the Absolute as light. The water contained in the conch is meant to "refresh the deity." The fabric is symbolic of a towel meant for use by the deity. The flower

symbolises the garlanding of the deity. The deity is fanned to provide relief from the heat.

After the Sri Ramakrishna arati is sung, the Sri Ramakrishna Stotram is rendered (See Appendix 6). Finally a hymn "In Praise of the Divine Mother"²⁷ is sung (See Appendix 7).

Following this is a short period of meditation, during which time a prayer is offered for the peace and happiness of the universe. Thereafter there is a concluding prayer:

"Om poornamadah poornamidam
Poornaat poornamudachyate
Poornasya poornamaadaaya
Poornamevaavasishyate
Om shantih! shantih! shantih!

"Aum That (Universal Soul) is perfect.

This (Individual Soul) is perfect.

From the perfect is the perfect born

Taking the perfect from the perfect, verily the perfect remains.

Om peace! peace! peace!

The arati (and satsang) ends with salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Sarada Devi and all the rishis of the past.

The devotees prostrate before the deity and then leave the shrine. On leaving the shrine the devotees partake of arati. A devotee stands at the exit of the shrine, holding a tray

containing vibhuti and the arati lamp. Devotees offer money, and wave their hands across the flame and over their foreheads. They then mark their forehead with the vibhuti and perform namaste to the lamp. The lamp is symbolic of the Absolute and the above action is meant to receive the blessings, ashirvad, of the Absolute. The devotees then partake of prasad.

6.3.2.3 The Morning Arati

The morning arati, a ceremony which lasts approximately fifteen minutes, does not differ much from the evening arati. The main difference is in the hymns rendered. The arati commences with the repetition of Aum three times. This is followed by Pranaam mantras. Thereafter the Gayatri mantra is repeated. Following this the pre-arati rituals are performed. This is the same as for the evening arati. The arati commences with the singing of the Sri Ramakrishna Suprabhatam (See Appendix 8). While this hymn is sung, the devotee offering the arati conducts the symbolic worship in the same manner as described above for the evening arati. The morning arati is also based on the royal – reception of the deity. The term "Suprabhatam" means "auspicious or holy-morning", hence the arati ceremony is literally meant to "awaken" the deity and greet the deity an "auspicious morning". However, the symbolic significance of the ceremony is to awaken the deity seated in the heart of all devotees. It is intended to awaken the consciousness of the devotees to the Ishta-devata within. The text of the hymns sung extol the virtues of Sri

Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi.

After the "Sri Ramakrishna Suprabhatam" is sung, the "Sri Sarada Suprabhatam" is rendered (see Appendix 9). This is followed by a hymn to Swami Vivekananda (see Appendix 10). Thereafter there is a short period of meditation followed by readings from the scriptures. Devotees partake of arati and prasad at the end of the ceremony.

It is evident that the poojas of the Ramakrishna Movement have a strong element of devotionism, bhakti. Through prayer man is constantly reminded of his essential divinity. According to Eliade (1987 : 489) prayer is understood as the human communication with divine and spiritual entities. In Hinduism prayer is referred to as sandhya. It is a compound term, made up of two words, "Sam" and "Dhya". Sam means "perfect" or "complete"; Dhya means "meditation" or "concentration". Therefore, prayer principally consists of meditation on the attributes of God and of His creation – the world and man. It is more meditative than petitionary in its characteristics (Vidyarnava, 1979 : 32).

The arati and satsang described above are examples of Hindu poojas which aim primarily to bring about an awakening in the devotee of his innate divinity. These ceremonies are not only meant to bring about communication with the spiritual or divine, but also direct attention to the comprehension and

appreciation of the power and effectiveness of communication acts that are human-divine communications. The many dimensions of the pooja, its symbolism, chanting, rituals, meditation, etc, induce the presence of the spiritual in the minds of the devotees. It sets the tone and attitude of worship and transforms the mood of the devotee from the mundane to the spiritual.

In the numerous interviews conducted by the writer it was evident that the satsang and the numerous religious ceremonies and festivals observed at the Centre were of great importance in the spiritual life of the devotees. As one devotee explains (Interview):

"Satsang is very essential. The world current is flowing in such a manner that it is not possible to dedicate all our time to thinking of God. Satsang creates an inspiration in us to become conscious of God at all times."

According to Swami Premananda satsang, and prayer at the Ashram in general, is beneficial to all those that attend. He maintains that satsang yields adrishtaphal, unseen results. As he explains (Interview):

"By attending satsang there is a silent spiritual upliftment in the devotee. The results may not be visible immediately although it is taking place. The fruits that accrue will benefit the devotee in time to come. The adrishtaphal is taking place within."

While the numerous poojas and festivals observed by the Centre cater for the spiritual growth of the devotees, they are also meant to influence the daily life of the devotees, by instilling in them an attitude of love, respect and service to their fellow-man. Swami Vivekananda called for a "marriage" of worship and service. As he states (CW8, 1985 : 275):

"And never forget Humanity!
The idea of a humanitarian man-
worship exists in nucleus in India."

6.3.3 Festivals and Sacred Days

The essential unity underlying diversity in Hinduism is best gleaned from the festivals and "sacred days" celebrated throughout the year by Hindus world-wide. The Ramakrishna Movement celebrates most of the popular Hindu festivals and also holds special satsangs on days of special significance to the Movement, such as the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi. It would not be possible to discuss all the festivals and sacred days observed by the Movement, within the confines of this chapter. However, the writer will cite some of the major festivals observed by the Movement and discuss the reasons for the celebration of festivals by the Movement. Appendix 11 provides a complete listing of all the festivals and sacred days observed by the Movement during the course of the year.

The sanctity of certain moments and periods of time by association with memorable events, holy persons, and notable

psychic experiences is the basic idea underlying the observance of sacred days and festivals. They are instruments of enrichment of the inner life of man. The numerous festivals, whether religious, social or seasonal, have played an important part in the life of the Hindus since the turn of history. Religious festivals in honour of various deities have been mentioned in ancient Hindu literature and epigraphs. The Rig Veda²⁸ as well as the epics make references to festivals and sacred days. In the Ramayana and Mahabharata and other works of later periods, the word samaja has been used for festivals. The numerous festivals were celebrated by observing fast, worship and a programme of devotions and pious exercises, as is still the case today (Sharma, 1978 : 3-4).

According to Williams (1951 : 350) there is not an object in heaven and earth which a Hindu is not prepared to worship – sun, moon and stars; rocks, trees, shrubs, seas and rivers, the animals he finds useful, men remarkable for extraordinary qualities as well as the spirits of departed ancestors – each and all come in for a share of divine honour or a tribute of greater or lesser adoration.

This worshipful attitude is due to the cardinal Hindu tenet that one divine Intelligence pervades all, and that links and affiliations join all forms of life, past and present. This is clearly seen in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (VI, II) (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 746):

"The one God hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the inner self of all beings, the ordainer of all deeds, who dwells in all beings, the witness, the knower, the only one, devoid of qualities."

This essential unity between God, man and the universe is also attested to, in the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda. It is this idea which underlies the worshipful attitude of the Hindu to all creation and the appreciation of this fact manifests itself in the numerous festivals observed by him. All Hindu festivals, whether magical or traceable to nature or vegetation — myths in their origin, are predominantly religious in character and significance, and have a deep spiritual import (Bhattacharya, 1969 : 479-480).

According to Eliade (1959 : 68-69) religious festivals represent the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning". Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time reactualized by the festival itself. The "time of origin" of a reality — that is, the time inaugurated by the first appearance of the reality — has a paradigmatic value and function; that is why man seeks to reactualize it periodically by means of appropriate ritual. The observance and celebration of religious festivals such as Krishnasthami and Ram Naumi seek to reactualize the "original event". Hence it is not uncommon to find plays and dramas being staged enacting the leelas of the avatars, during these periods. Man feels the

need of indefinitely reproducing the same paradigmatic acts and gestures, because he desires and attempts "to live close to his gods". To reintegrate the sacred time of origin of the festival is equivalent to becoming contemporaneous with the gods, hence, to living in their presence — even if their presence is mysterious in the sense that it is not always visible (Eliade, 1959 : 91).

The numerous religious festivals observed by the Ramakrishna Centre are an exercise of piety and devotion — in fasting, in vigils, in worship, in ablution, in offerings to the deities and in the practice of austerities as benefiting the spirit within. According to Swami Saradananda, (Interview), the observance of the numerous religious festivals and sacred days are meant to bring about spiritual awareness individually as well as collectively.

Maha Shivaratri is one of the major annual religious festivals celebrated by all the branches of the Centre. The festival focuses on the aspect of the Absolute as Siva, the "redeemer" of the Hindu trinity. Devotees observe a strict fast on this day and attend the satsang at the ashram in the evening. The ceremony takes the form of a night long vigil by the devotees, during which time Lord Siva is worshipped through the performance of Siva pooja, the rendering of kirtans and bhajans in praise of Lord Siva, the chanting of hymns from the Rudra Ashtakam of the Rig Veda and the offering of prasad. A guest speaker also delivers a talk on the significance of the festival.

The Ram Naumi festival celebrated in the Hindu month of Chaitra (March – April) is preceded by "Ramayan-Week". Satsang is held daily at which discourses on the leelas of Lord Rama are delivered and the Ramayan of Valmiki and Tulsidas are recited.

The Krishnasthami celebrations held in the month of Bhadrapada (August – September) is preceded by "Gita – Week". The week long programme focuses on the life and teachings of Sri Krishna. The Bhagavad Gita and the Srimad Bhagavatam are read daily, and discourses on the leelas of Sri Krishna are delivered daily at the satsang.

The Navaratri celebrations focus on the worship of the Absolute as the Divine Mother. The term Navaratri literally means "nine-nights". Hence the ceremony is observed over nine nights during which time daily satsang is held and the Devimahatmyam is read and studied.

All the festivals described above as well as the numerous others celebrated by the Centre serve to focus on the multifold nature of the One Absolute in Hinduism. It also brings the devotees in contact with the various Hindu shastras and inspires them to read these texts.

In keeping with the principles of universalism advocated by Sri Ramakrishna, the Centre also celebrates the birthdays of Prophet Muhammad and Lord Buddha. It also observes a special

satsang on Christmas eve. The birthday of Prophet Muhammad is celebrated annually, by holding a special satsang in honour of the Prophet. During this time the Centre invites a prominent member of the Muslim community to deliver a lecture on the life and teachings of the Prophet.

Likewise a leading member of the Buddhist community is invited to deliver a talk on Lord Buddha, during the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations at the Ashram.

For the Christmas Eve satsang an image of Jesus Christ is placed in front of the altar and candles are lit in the shrine. A Christian minister is generally invited to deliver a talk on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Hymns in praise of Jesus Christ are sung by devotees of the Centre. Often a Christian choir group is invited to render carols and hymns at the service.

In addition to the numerous festivals celebrated by the Centre there are several "sacred days" in the Religious Calendar of the Centre. The foremost of these are the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi. On their respective birthdays a special satsang is held in their honour. These celebrations are meant to bring about greater awareness of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi, not only amongst the devotees of the Centre but also the community in general. The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna is celebrated in "several stages". In addition

to the birthday-satsang a series of religio-cultural programmes are held by the numerous branches of the Centre focusing on the life and teachings of the Master. The annual "Quest" symposium is also staged as part of the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna (The Quest symposium will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this study).

The numerous ceremonies, festivals and sacred days observed at the Ashram give the devotees an opportunity to "practice their religion". It is also a constant reminder to them of the true aim of life, ie. moksha.

Notes

1. See also Chandogya Upanishad IV, 4, 3; IV, 9, 3 and VI, 4, 1.
2. See Katha Upanishad I, 2, 7-8 and I, 2, 20-21.
3. See Bhagavad Gita XVIII, 75.
4. The date of Nimbarka is uncertain. However, most scholars agree that he lived after Ramanuja, probably in the 13th century.
5. See Chandogya Upanishad VIII, 7, 3.
6. See Chandogya Upanishad VIII, 15, 1.
7. This is the title of sannyasins affiliated with the Ramakrishna Order, or with the Sarada Math. It corresponds to the title of Swami for sannyasis. The generic meaning of the word is "woman ascetic".
8. See Oosthuizen and Hofmeyr, A Socio-Religious Study of Chatsworth, ISER, Durban, 1979 (pp. 10-14).
9. These include the Divine Life Society, the Hare Krishna Movement, Chinmaya Mission and the Adi Sankara Mission.
10. The Puranas refer to more than seven prominent births of Narada. He was first born as the son of Brahma. He is also known as a perfect bhakta of Vishnu and a unique master of music.
11. The poojas, chants and ritual worship of the satsang are standardised at all the Mission branches. There may be variations in the kirtans and bhajans rendered, scriptural readings and discourses.
12. See also Katha Upanishad I, 2, 15; I, 2, 17; Prasna Upanishad V, 2; Maitri Upanishad VI, 3; Taittiriya Upanishad I, 8, 1; Chandogya Upanishad II, 23, 3.
13. The word Sphota etymologically means "from which meaning bursts forth" or "which is revealed by sounds" (Joshi, 1980 : 235).
14. This verse is an extract from the Guru-Gita, which forms part of the Skanda Purana.
15. This mantra was composed by Swami Vivekananda on 6 February 1898.
16. This composition is attributed to Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.
17. This prayer was composed by Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911), also a direct disciple of the Master.

18. The Gayatri Mantra, which is a mantra from the Rig Veda (III, 62, 10) is one of the most ancient and well-known of all Hindu mantras. It is regarded as the universal mantra of all Hindus. This mantra is also found in the Yajur Veda (III.35) as well as in the Sama Veda (III.6.10).
19. Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Sri Chaitanya whom he described as "Divine Love Incarnate". He also accepted Sri Chaitanya as an avatar of Sri Krishna.
20. See the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, New York, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1952.
21. The mudras in the Hindu ritual worship, designed to connect external actions with spiritual ideas, serve as aids in concentrating the mind on God.
22. The Bhagavad Gita (V, 13), mentions nine gates which are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus and generating organ. Here two others are mentioned to make up eleven and they are the navel and the sagittal suture, the opening at the top of the skull, through which the liberated soul is said to depart at death.
23. See also Prasana Upanishad III, 6-12.
24. The Sri Ramakrishna arati was composed by Swami Vivekananda.
25. See also Bhagavad Gita XV, 6.
26. The Yak-tail whisk is traditionally used in India to fan the deity, however the peacock feather whisk is also widely used.
27. This hymn is an extract from the Devimahatmyam XI, 9-11.
28. See Rig Veda IV, 24, 10. According to some scholars this passage makes reference to an "Indian festival". There are also other scholars who even find allusion to a procession of images in the Rig Veda (I, 10, 1; III, 53, 5-6).

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RAMAKRISHNA CENTRE : ITS DEPARTMENTS OF SERVICE

The Ramakrishna Movement is an institution dedicated to the realisation of the Divine will in the world. While the dissemination of spiritual knowledge is of primary concern to the Movement it seeks to work for the regeneration of society as a whole. As a religious institution the Movement is rendering spiritual, cultural, educational and humanitarian service, with a view to spreading the salient features of Neo-Vedanta which proclaims that man is essentially divine and the aim of human life is to realize this great Truth. The numerous departments of service of the Ramakrishna Movement are all directed to the realization of this Vedantic ideal.

7.1 Training of Spiritual Aspirants

The Ramakrishna Centre provides spiritual sustenance to both the monastic and lay devotees. The Centre is seen as a joint venture of the monastics and the laity. Both are expected to play their respective roles in unison in fulfilling the aspirations of the Movement. The Ramakrishna Movement holds the view that man is not simply an economic or a political being; he is Atman, the Universal Spirit. In order that all men may realize fully their spiritual nature, the Centre seeks to instil in them love and longing for God. Along with this religious fervour, it tries to provide devotees with a broad understanding and sympathetic appreciation of the infinite facets of spiritual life, in order to usher in a new order of society. This society as visualized by Swami Vivekananda would be one of equal rights for all and the absence

of special privileges; and would be based on the recognition of the spiritual nature of every being. According to the Swami our chief mission is to see that everyone is helped to attain the right to dharma, artha, kama and moksha (Vivekananda CW5 1985 : 454). As an institutionalized organization the Ramakrishna Centre seeks to work towards this ideal by providing a forum for the earnest training of all spiritual aspirants. The spiritual aspirants of the Centre are classified into two groups, viz., the lay devotees and those committed to the monastic life.

7.1.1 The Lay Devotees

The lay devotees of the Ramakrishna Centre are mainly grahasthas, youth and children and are drawn from all sectors of the Hindu community as well as all race groups. Although the majority of the devotees of the Centre are members of the Indian Hindu community, a small number of devotees are also drawn from the White, Coloured and Black communities. The universal teachings of the Movement is one of the primary reasons for this phenomenon. The formal training of the lay devotees of the Centre begins immediately after their initiation. In order to become an initiated devotee of the Centre a devotee who is keen to further his spiritual training must convey his intentions to the Spiritual Head. After a period of probation, when the Spiritual Head is satisfied that the devotee is genuinely interested in pursuing the path of spirituality, he then initiates¹ the devotee. Initiation implies mantra-initiation. This involves a simple ritual ceremony during which the guru gives the devotee a specific mantra as well as a programme of sadhana suited to the devotee's

temperament. Thereafter the devotee is expected to practise japa on the mantra daily as well as follow the spiritual disciplines that have been prescribed for him. The spiritual disciplines usually comprise of scriptural studies, karma yoga, worship, meditation and seva. At the time of initiation devotees take a vow that while they strive for their own liberation they would also work simultaneously for the liberation of mankind as a whole, thus giving practical expression to the motto of the Movement, "Atmano Mokshartham Jagaddhitaya Cha - for one's own liberation and for the liberation of all". On becoming an initiated devotee of the Centre, devotees are expected to participate in and assist in the various facets of the Centre's activities, both religio-cultural as well as humanitarian. This is also viewed as part of their training which is directed towards total human development as taught by Swami Vivekananda. The devotees are also expected to join the Vivekananda Study Circle of the Centre where an intense study of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and the general principles of Hindu religion and philosophy is undertaken. Devotees are also encouraged to study one of the Indian languages and elementary Sanskrit, all of which are taught at the Ashrams of the Centre.

The devotees are expected to consult the monastic devotees and senior members of the Centre, on a regular basis informing them of their progress and if they encounter difficulties they are provided with assistance.

According to Swami Shivapadananda the training of spiritual aspirants is one of the most important facets of the Centre's work. It serves a two-fold purpose. Firstly, the training programme is designed to benefit the individual by increasing his spiritual awareness and instilling his life with greater meaning. Secondly, it aims at the regeneration of society as a whole. In creating a better individual the Centre is committed to creating a better society. Neo-Vedantism maintains that there is a deep, primordial and spiritual relationship between individual and society. Society is viewed as an organism in which individuals are organs that find the fulfilment of their ends not in themselves but in the collective life of the organism (Malhotra, 1970 : 59). Hence while the Ramakrishna Centre's programme of training spiritual aspirants concentrates on the individual it is society which ultimately benefits from this endeavour. As a religious movement the ministration of the Ramakrishna Centre aims at the progressive development of mankind, and the lay-devotees of the Centre are playing an important role in assisting the Movement to achieve this objective. The lay devotees of the Centre are expected to impart the teachings of Neo-Vedanta to all those they come in contact with, as well as give practical expression to the teachings in their daily life. The lay-devotees are thus one of the most important instruments through which the teachings of the Centre are spread.

7.1.2 The Monastic Devotees

Upon the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 Swami Vivekananda stressed that the Mission will incorporate

both monastic as well as lay devotees and through the joint efforts of both, the Movement must work towards the upliftment of society. The Ramakrishna Centre is committed to this ideal preached by Swami Vivekananda. As a monastic institution it caters for the training of individuals in society who seek to dedicate their entire life exclusively to the service of God. If a devotee has a desire to join the monastic order he must first communicate his intentions in writing to the Spiritual Head of the Centre. The Spiritual Head considers the application of the devotee and he also interviews the devotee. If he is convinced that the devotee is serious in his intentions he invites the devotee to become a resident ashramite. The devotee lives at the Avoca Ashram for a probation period of at least one year. During this period he is expected to practise his personal sadhana as well as assist in and participate in all facets of the Centre's work. The period of probation also helps the Spiritual Head to establish whether the devotee is serious about joining the monastic order. The devotee also has the opportunity to explore the full scope of monastic life and obtain immediate knowledge of what it entails. After the period of probation at least eight years are set aside for the monastic training of the devotee. At the beginning of his eight-year training period the devotee is initiated into brahmacharya, when he or she takes the vow of "voluntary joyous abstention and celibacy" (Interview: Swami Saradananda).

Henceforth the brahmachari begins an intense study of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada

Devi. He also continues to participate in and assist in all the activities of the Centre as well as practise his individual sadhana daily. The training of the brahmacharis takes place at the Avoca Ashram under the strict supervision and guidance of the spiritual head. In addition to studying the teachings of the Centre the brahmacharis also undertake an intense study of the primary Hindu scriptures. They are also delegated administrative responsibilities which comprises part of their training in learning how to administer the Ashram. Under the guidance of the Spiritual Head the brahmacharis are taught how to conduct the numerous ritual poojas performed at the Ashram. The eight year training period is meant to equip the brahmachari with an in-depth knowledge of both the theoretical and practical aspects of Hindu religion and philosophy. The training period also gives the brahmachari an opportunity to decide whether he wants to commit himself to a monastic life. If he is unsure and decides against becoming a sannyasi he is free to remain at the Ashram as a brahmachari or he may leave the Ashram and associate with the Centre as a lay or householder devotee.

Initiation into sannyasa takes place at the discretion of the Spiritual Head alone. After the eight year period of training a brahmachari does not automatically qualify to become a sannyasi. Only when the Spiritual Head is satisfied that a brahmachari is ready to join the Order of Sannyasa will he or she be initiated into sannyasa. Hence the eight years of training is the minimum requirement before a brahmachari is considered for initiation into sannyasa. It could take a longer period if the Spiritual Head so decides.²

The intense training which the monastic devotees of the Ramakrishna Centre undergo is one of the reasons for the stable and steady growth of the Movement. In possessing a sound knowledge not only of Neo-Vedanta, but also of the fundamentals of Hindu religion and philosophy, these monastic devotees whose life and character have been carefully moulded by the Spiritual Head, are soundly equipped to direct the activities of the Centre and steer the Movement into the future.

According to Swami Shivapadananda the "gigantic task" of the Centre can only be carried out efficiently when both the lay devotees and monastics are bound together by the love and respect for the Master and thus sustain each other in performing guru-seva according to their individual ability. They are inter-dependent and mutually indispensable each to the other. Jointly, they are indispensable to the furtherance of the Master's mission as a whole. The monks who teach, preach, guide, perform ministerial duties and help in spiritual matters are encouraged and assisted in their work by the laity. Pravrajika Atmaprana maintains that the monks, devotees and friends of the Centre must work unitedly and efficiently with unselfish motive in fostering the ideals of the Movement. The monks should set the model, inspire, and guide the devotees and friends, and call upon them to offer their services unflinchingly in carrying out the twin purposes of the Centre of achieving spiritual progress and rendering humanitarian service. As Swami Shivapadananda explains (Interview):

"The monks, lay devotees and friends of the Ramakrishna Centre are members of one large family of Sri Ramakrishna, and our common ideal is to foster a bond of love and unity amongst all."

7.2 The Sadhana Camp

In catering for the religio-cultural needs of its devotees the Ramakrishna Centre offers a variety of spiritual disciplines aimed at the acceleration of their spiritual growth. One of the most important spiritual programmes of the Centre is the Sadhana or Yoga Camp. The Sadhana Camp was inaugurated by Swami Nischalananda in 1954 and has since become an important forum of religio-cultural expression. Several one-day camps are held during the course of the year. These camps are directed specifically at either the children, youth or adult devotees of the Centre. However, the Centre also has a major Sadhana Camp twice annually during the Easter and Christmas holidays. These camps are of four-days' duration and are open to all devotees of the Centre. The Easter and Christmas period are chosen for the Camps for convenience, since most devotees are on holiday during this period and are in a position to attend the Camp held at the Avoca Ashram. All participants in the Camp are expected to reside at the Ashram for the duration of the Sadhana Camp since the emphasis at the Camp is on solitude. The Sadhana Camp seeks to draw devotees away from their home environment for a period of time so that they may retreat to an atmosphere of solitude which is conducive to prayer and meditation. The concept of the Sadhana Camp was inspired by Sri Ramakrishna's advice to householders to

practise spiritual disciplines in solitude from time to time.

As Sri Ramakrishna states (Gupta, 1952 : 5):

"The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God."

Sri Ramakrishna states further (Gupta 1952 : 270):

"It is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline and at the same time lead a householder's life. There are many handicaps.... But still there is a way out. One should pray to God, going now and then into solitude, and make efforts to realize Him."

It is in keeping with this advice of the Master that the Centre organises the Sadhana Camp for the benefit of its devotees. While one-day Camps attract a large number of participants the four-day Camp appeals to a select group of devotees because of the intense and serious tone of the Camp. Only those devotees who are deeply interested in intense sadhana and scriptural studies and are earnest about enhancing their spiritual life attend the Camp. According to Swami Premananda the emphasis at the Sadhana Camp is on practical Hinduism. Devotees are taught how to apply the precepts of Hinduism in their daily life.

7.2.1 The December Sadhana Camp³

The writer attended and participated in the Sadhana Camp held over the Christmas week-end in December 1986. The Camp which was conducted over a four-day period from 25-28 December, was attended

by over one hundred devotees comprising men, women and children. While the majority of the participants were of the Indian race group there were also a small number of White, Coloured and Black participants in the Camp. The Camp commenced on the morning of 25 December 1986. All participants arrived at the Ashram by 7 am. Upon arrival the participants confirmed⁴ their registration and paid a fee of R10,00. There is a concession for those devotees who are unable to afford the registration fee. The payment of the fee is voluntary and is seen as an expression of sadhana in that aspirants are given a chance to exercise charity. The registration fee is utilized to cover the expenses of the Camp. Accommodation and meals are provided for all participants in the Camp for the four days.

7.2.1.1 The Sadhana Camp Programme

The programme for the Sadhana Camp is drawn-up in advance by the Sadhana Camp Committee who are responsible for organising and administering the Camp. While the programme for each day varies, there are certain sadhanas which form part of the daily programme of the Camp (see Appendix 12 for the full Sadhana Camp programme). The daily sadhanas are:

Individual meditation

Group meditation

Arati (morning and evening)

Hatha yoga

Karma yoga

Recitals from the scriptures

Readings from the scriptures

Japa (Mouna and Likit)

Discourses and Discussions

Question and answer sessions

Cultural items.

The Sadhana Camp commenced on the morning of the first day with an inaugural satsang presided over by the Spiritual Head. During the inaugural satsang Swami Shivapadananda delivered a short talk on the aim and purpose of the Camp. He stated:

"Man needs to charge his spiritual batteries and remember his real nature which he seems to forget when caught up in mundane activities. This can be done by willingly removing oneself from the daily routines of life and retiring to the Ashram and intensely occupying the mind with spiritual thoughts and exercises."

Devotees are urged to participate fully in all aspects of the Camp. On the first day the Camp commenced at 7.30 am., however, for the remaining three days the programme began at 4.00 am. and terminated at 10.00 pm. when the participants retired for the night. After performing their morning ablutions the participants are expected to practise their individual sadhanas and also spend a short period in meditation. At 5.00 am. all the participants assembled in the shrine for group meditation which is led by the Spiritual Head or one of the sannyasis of the Centre. The group meditation aims at assisting the sadhakas who experience difficulty in meditating alone. In group-meditation all the sadhakas aspire to concentrate on their Ishta Devata and "feel the living presence of the deity in their hearts". According to Swami Saradananda by commencing

the day with meditation the mind is filled with God-consciousness and thereafter all the activities of the day are conducted in an attitude of peace filled with the presence of the Divine within.

The group meditation is followed by the morning arati. The format of the morning and evening arati performed during the Sadhana Camp is the same as that conducted at the Ashram daily (See Chapter 6). Several kirtans and bhajans are rendered after the morning arati. Thereafter all the sadhakas partake of arati and leave the shrine to participate in hatha yoga.

7.2.1.2 Hatha Yoga

All the sadhakas are expected to participate in the hatha yoga class. Only those who are ill are exempted from this sadhana. The hatha yoga sadhanas are conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr R Seebran, an experienced hatha yoga teacher, who conducts weekly hatha yoga classes at the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram of the Centre. Before commencing with the asanas Dr Seebran delivers a short talk on hatha yoga explaining the philosophy underlying the practice of hatha yoga. As he explains:

"The principal object of hatha yoga is physical health. It is concerned with postures of the body and pranayama. In Hinduism we regard the body as the temple housing the Divine. It is essential that we take special care in keeping the body fit and healthy so that we may concentrate on the Ishta within."

Since most of the sadhakas participating in the hatha yoga sadhana are novices they are taught only the most basic asanas. The hatha

yoga sadhana aims to inculcate an interest amongst the sadhakas in hatha yoga as well as impress upon them the value and importance of this physical discipline. Each asana is first demonstrated to the participants by Dr Seebran and thereafter they are given an opportunity to practise the asana aided by devotees well versed in hatha yoga asanas.

In Hinduism all yoga systems have as their goal the union with the Supreme. Hatha yoga is also directed to this end and its whole principle of action is founded on an intimate connection between the body and the Self. To the hatha yogin the body is not a mere mass of living matter, but a mystic bridge between the spiritual and physical being. The two main disciplines of hatha yoga are asana, the habituating of the body to certain attitudes of immobility, and pranayama, the regulated direction and arrestation, by exercises, of breathing, of the vital currents of energy in the body. The hatha yogic⁵ system of asana has as its basis two profound ideas which bring with them many effective implications. The first is that of control by physical immobility, the second is that of power by immobility. The power of physical immobility is as important in hatha yoga as the power of mental immobility in the yoga of knowledge. The body becomes purified from many of its disorders and irregularities, partly by asana, and completely by combined asana and pranayama. It is freed from its ready susceptibility to fatigue and acquires an immense power of well-being. But the principal gain is that by this purification of the body, the vital energy can be directed anywhere, to any part of the body and in any way or with any

rhythm of its movement. All this, however, is still a mere foundation, the outward and inward physical conditions of the two instruments used by hatha yoga. There still remains the more important matter of the physical and spiritual effects to which they can be turned. This depends on the connection between the body and the mind and spirit and between the gross and the subtle body on which the system of hatha yoga takes its stand. Here it comes into line with raja yoga, and a point is reached at which a transition from the one to the other can be made (Aurobindo, 1971 : 506-513).

7.2.1.3 Discourses, Discussions, Japa ...

After the hatha yoga sadhana the sadhakas have a short break during which breakfast is served. The programme after tea includes readings from the scriptures or the writings of Hindu saints, discourses, discussions, Japa, kirtans and bhajans and karma yoga (selfless service). As is the case with the weekly satsang the readings from the scriptures and the discourses are meant to serve an educational purpose. The talks are delivered by the monastic devotees of the Centre. After the talk there is a period of discussion either on the contents of the talk delivered or on specific aspects of Hinduism. Great attention is devoted to contemporary issues. During the December Camp topics discussed included "The Hindu attitude to Divorce and re-marriage", "Traditional and Modern ways of life" and "The effects of Westernization and secularization on Hinduism in South Africa". The discussion period is a lively session with both the monastic and lay devotees participating in it. The Spiritual Head draws

the sadhakas into discussion by eliciting their views on the topic under discussion. Swami Shivapadananda constantly encourages the sadhakas to forward questions, adopting the view that no question is "too trivial". He maintains that only through the process of questioning and discussion as reflected in the dialectical method of the Hindu scriptures, can one learn and acquire deeper knowledge.

Mouna and likit japa is another important spiritual discipline in which the sadhakas participate. This involves the observance of silence and writing the mantra Aum, one hundred and eight times.⁶ Each sadhaka is expected to have a book in which he records all his thoughts during the Camp. This book is also used for likit japa. Mouna and likit japa are disciplines aimed at "calming the mind and concentrating it on the Ishta through the aid of silence and the writing of the mantra. It has the same benefit as repeating the mantra audibly. When writing the mantra the sadhaka repeats it mentally while meditating on his Ishta Devata (Interview: Swami Saradananda). Referring to japa Sri Ramakrishna states (Gupta, 1952 : 867):

"Japa means silently repeating God's name in solitude. When you chant His name with single-minded devotion you can see God's form and realize Him."

7.2.1.4 Karma Yoga

At the Sadhana Camp karma yoga focuses on practical yoga performed in a spirit of selflessness. The sadhakas are divided into small groups and each group is assigned a specific task. Karma yoga at

the camp involves working in the Jyothi Press, cleaning the Ashram yard, preparation of meals, assisting in the book-shop, etc. These activities are seen as sadhana. While the sadhakas execute their respective duties they observe silence and chant the name of the Divine and concentrate on the Ishta within. According to Swami Vivekananda work must be performed through yoga (concentration). In such concentration in action (karma yoga) there is no consciousness of the lower ego present. The Swami maintains that all work must be viewed as sacred, irrespective of how menial it may seem. As he states (CW5, 1985 : 240):

"Every duty is holy, and devotion to duty is the highest form of worship of God; It is certainly a source of great help in enlightening and emancipating the deluded and ignorance-encumbered souls of the bound ones."

Swami Vivekananda is of the view that duty of any kind is not to be despised. A man who does the humbler type of work is not for that reason, a lower man than he who does the so-called higher work; a man should not be judged by the nature of his duties, but by the manner in which he does them. His manner of doing them and his power to do them are indeed the test of a man (CW5, 1985 : 240-241).

According to Brahmachari Hriday the karma yoga sadhana is also meant to be an exercise in humility as well as to instil an appreciation in the sadhakas for all forms of work and to get them to view all acts of service with an "equal-eye".

The writer was assigned to a group whose sadhana involved sweeping and cleaning the Ashram yard. The group consisted of ten sadhakas including professional and businessmen. For many in the group this humble task was a new experience. As one sadhaka states (Interview):

"I cannot recall when last I picked up a broom and swept my own yard or house since I have a servant to do this. However, being involved in this duty at the Camp makes me more appreciative of my servant and I realize that his job is just as important as any other in society."

According to Swami Premananda the Sadhana Camp is designed to give expression to all aspects of yoga: karma, jnana, bhakti, hatha and raja yoga. The camp seeks to show that all paths of yoga are equally viable means of liberation as taught by the Neo-Vedanta philosophy.

7.2.1.5 Reflections of the Sadhakas

Most of the sadhakas interviewed by the writer, indicated that they benefited greatly by attending the Camp. Many were of the view that the Camp gave them an opportunity to reflect seriously on their spiritual progress as well as focus on their spiritual practices in greater earnestness not only during but also after the Camp. As one sadhaka explains (Interview):

"The Camp is charged with an atmosphere of tranquility and peace which makes it easy for me to concentrate on my inner self and reflect on the deeper meaning of life. After attending the Camp I find it easier to cope with the daily issues of life. My mind is clearer and my perceptions of life deeper."

While most sadhakas were satisfied with the Sadhana Camp programme some complained that four days of intense sadhana was too demanding on the body and mind and that the programme should be curtailed to two or perhaps at most three days. Many sadhakas also felt that a separate programme should be organised for children. As a sadhaka explains (Interview):

"Children need separate attention and should not be expected to sit in the shrine silently, since they get restless easily. A separate programme designed to suit their level of thinking should be conducted simultaneously for them at the Ashram."

7.2.1.6 The Value of Sadhana

The Sadhana Camp serves to expose the sadhakas to the vast scope of Practical Vedanta and thus encourage them to give practical expression to the Neo-Vedanta philosophy in their daily life. According to Swami Shivapadananda whatever is learnt at the Camp is never lost. That wisdom or help that has been gained at the Camp will manifest itself in the life of the sadhaka in due course. Exposure to the Sadhana Camp is exposure to the higher life, to the inner Self. The principal object of sadhana is to remove our externalism, which is due to our forgetfulness of God, the only source of bliss we hanker after. Identifying ourselves with the body, we give all our attention to things external. To retard the outgoing urge and to give it an inward direction requires sadhana. It is through sadhana that we can get rid of our forgetfulness and remember God always (Nath, 1969 : 194).

The Sadhana Camp terminates on the afternoon of the fourth day with a concluding satsang and the presentation of certificates. All the Camp participants are presented with a certificate bearing their name and signed by the Spiritual Head. The certificate is meant to act as a reminder to the sadhaka of the spirit of the Camp as well as the lessons learnt which must be manifested in their daily life.

7.3 The Religio-Cultural Education of Children

7.3.1 Sunday Classes

In catering for the spiritual needs of its devotees the Ramakrishna Centre pays special attention to children. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that childhood is the most impressionable period in one's life. The Centre has devised specific religio-cultural programmes aimed at the spiritual education of children. One such activity is the Children's rally which focuses specifically on the religio-cultural education of children. According to Swami Saradananda the Ramakrishna Centre is aware of the fact that children have "tremendous potential to grow into decent, morally and spiritually inclined citizens" if their religious education begins at an early age. In her advice to children Sri Sarada Devi advocated that children should live a life of God-consciousness from their childhood. As she states (Tapasyananda, 1969 : 265):

"Listen, my child. Many may take the name of God after their minds have been hardened by the contaminating influence of the world. But he alone is blessed who can devote himself to God from very childhood."

All the branches of the Ramakrishna Centre have special classes, which are held on Sunday morning, for the religio-cultural education of children. These classes provide children with basic lessons on Hindu religion and philosophy as well as song, music, dance, and moral lessons based on scriptural themes. The education programme seeks to infuse the life of the child with spiritual values. Children of the Centre are urged to practise the ten precepts laid down by Swami Nischalananda for children. The ten precepts are (The Joythi Vol. 11, April-June 1986 : 3):

1. Speak the Truth
2. Be neat and clean
3. Be courteous and good
4. Speak softly
5. Be simple and kind
6. Be gentle to all creatures
7. Respect both big and small
8. Give freely, take from none.
9. Be loving in thought and action
10. Pray regularly

7.3.2 The Children's Rally

In order to give expression to all that they have learnt during the course of the year at the children's classes, the children are brought together annually in a spirit of friendly competition in the form of the Children's Rally. The Children's Rally was conceived by Swami Nischalananda. The first rally was held in 1954 and it has since become an annual event. Two rallies are

held annually, one for the Northern Natal branches of the Centre and another for the Southern Natal branches. The rally of the Southern Natal branches is held in June at the Avoca Ashram while the Northern Natal Rally is held in September and hosted by different branches of the Centre each year. The programmes of both rallies are similar. The programme comprises of banner competition, speeches, sketches, kirtans and bhajans. The format of the Children's Rally is designed to combine items of worship, cultural expression and religious education. In his opening message delivered at the Children's Rally held in June 1987 at the Avoca Ashram, Swami Shivapadananda stated the following:

"In the Rally all your arts, music, bhajans, kirtans and acting, are your offerings to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. The competitions are meant to make you see where you are strong or weak - a kind of measurement to improve yourself. The weaker points should be strengthened and the strong made stronger."

The Rally begins at 8.30 am. with a sankirtan which is held in one of the Indian residential areas. A large number of devotees as well as residents of the area join the sankirtan which is intended to create a greater awareness of religion in the area. As Swami Saradananda explains (Interview):

"If we find that an area needs an awareness of religion to be boosted, a march, together with the distribution of literature in that area, is organised to coincide with the Rally. The presence of a large number of devotees singing the praises of God assists in increasing an awareness of religion in that area."

After the sankirtan the devotees return to the Avoca Ashram where the Rally is held under a large marquee. The Rally commences with prayer and the hoisting of the Aum-flag. Thereafter there is a welcome address by the Chairman of the Centre.

The various items of competition are then rendered by the branches partaking in the Rally. Each group is given a specific time in which to complete its item. The items are judged by a panel of adjudicators comprising senior devotees of the Centre as well as prominent members of the Hindu community. According to Swami Premananda the competitive element was introduced in the Rally to generate the necessary enthusiasm in the children as well as reward them for their efforts. He maintains that the Rally serves as an ideal forum for the children to express their various skills in a noble way. Although the Children's Rally is largely a forum of religio-cultural expression it helps in the understanding of Vedanta. The Centre maintains that Neo-Vedantism has to be taught and assimilated at the children's level of understanding. The kirtans and bhajans rendered by the children, while demonstrating their singing and musical skills also instil in them the spirit of bhakti yoga, thereby strengthening their love and devotion of God. The sketches enacted by the children are excerpts from the Hindu scriptures, mainly the Itihasas as well as the lives of Hindu saints. In the enactment of these religious episodes the children as well as their audience imbibe the moral and religious lessons portrayed in the sketches. Likewise the

speech contest requires the children to research their selected topics before presentation and this serves as an important exercise in religious education for both the children and the audience at the Rally. Hence the children are taught through cultural means to give expression to their religious impulses. In Hinduism there is no sharp demarcation between religion and culture. Hinduism legitimately filters into every dimension of life. Cultural expression is an integral part of the Vedantic world-view (Interview: Swami Saradananda).

The atmosphere at the Ashram during the Children's Rally is one of joy and festivity. It is one of the busiest days of the year at the Ashram when over three thousand devotees and friends of the Centre congregate to partake in the day's events. The Rally serves to draw together the children, their parents, relatives and friends, and instil in them a sense of community as well as pride in their religio-cultural heritage. The highlight of the day's events, which is eagerly awaited by all, is the announcement of the winners of the various items as well as the overall branch winner. Prizes in the form of trophies, books and cash vouchers are presented to the winners by the Spiritual Head of the Centre.

The Rally ends with a talk by the Spiritual Head, followed by concluding prayers.

7.4 The Ramakrishna Movement and Youth

Since the dawn of history the Vedic sages impressed upon man the need to cultivate intense reverence for life. They vividly saw Brahman pulsating in everything, animate and inanimate. The glorious purpose of human life was taught with such certainty of conviction, that every stage of it, from the moment of birth, assumed an ever-increasing significance for the fulfilment of the true aim of life, i.e., union with the Supreme. The Yajur Veda IV,6.6 states:

"Obeisance to the eldest and the youngest,
the elder and the younger, the middle and
the juvenile."

The Vedic texts emphasise that birth and the nurturing of the child must be taken care of with utmost dedication so that the youth could be competent not only to receive and contain the invaluable spiritual and cultural heritage but also augment it by the power of their body, mind and soul, for their own fulfilment and the good of the world. The Upanishads also devote special attention to youth. The Taïttiriya Upanishad II,8.1 states (Radhakrishnan, 1974 : 550):

"...Let there be a youth, a good youth,
well read, prompt in action, steady in
mind and strong in body. Let this whole
earth be full of wealth for him. This
is one human bliss."

Sri Ramakrishna was fully aware of the potential of the youth and much of his teachings were directed specifically to the younger

generation. He states (Gupta, 1952 : 795):

"I know these youngsters to be Narayana Himself.... The youngsters' minds are not yet coloured by worldliness. That is why they are so pure in heart. Besides, many of them are eternally perfect; they have been drawn to God from their very birth."

The youth have played an important role in the Ramakrishna Movement since the time of Sri Ramakrishna. The Ramakrishna Mission was founded by a group of young men, led by Swami Vivekananda, all of whom were below the age of twenty-five years. Sri Ramakrishna was able to infuse the lives of these dedicated band of disciples with the spirit of renunciation and service which today is still one of the hallmarks of the Ramakrishna Movement throughout the world. Like his guru, Swami Vivekananda was also full of hope and expectation from the youth of his day. He made a special plea to the younger generation to assist him in his campaign to revitalize all facets of Indian life. He states (The Ramakrishna Movement 1982 : 11):

"My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formulated the idea and have given my life to it.... And again, I am born to organise these young men and I want to send them rallying like irresistible waves over India, bringing comfort, morality, religion, education to the doors of the meanest and the most down-trodden. And this I will do or die."

In keeping with this spirit of Swami Vivekananda the Ramakrishna Mission places great emphasis on the role of the youth in the organisation. In September 1982 the Ramakrishna Mission organized a Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Youth Convention in New Delhi. The Convention was attended by over ten thousand delegates from throughout the country. The convention entitled "Youth and Human Destiny" focused on the role the youth can play in shaping the future destiny of mankind. In his message to the Convention the late Swami Vireswarananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission stated that the youth must make special efforts to fulfil the hope of Swami Vivekananda in the younger generation, "by spreading the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda for the good of the country and for their own good". (The Ramakrishna Movement, 1982 : 11). Swami Ranganathananda, Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, stressed the need to harness the "youth-energy" and utilise it creatively for the benefit of mankind. He maintains that the world's destiny is assured if young people develop the capacity to process experience, and purify the energy that is within and translate it in human terms with a humanistic impulse coming out of it. The science and technique of human development must take into account the tremendous energy in youth and give this energy a constructive, creative, humanistic direction. There is need for character energy to transform all this physical energy in terms of human welfare and human development. Swami Ranganathananda is of the view that young people developing a human impulse for serving people, for making their life brighter, because of the energy they have with them, are a dynamic investment in human

development. That is how the youth, idealism and energy combined together, can achieve the human purpose on a global scale (Ranganathananda, 1982 : 64-66).

It was Swami Vivekananda who first stressed the need of transforming youth energy into strong humanistic impulses. In recognition of the important role played by Swami Vivekananda in the regeneration of modern India, as well as the inspiration he still is to the Indian nation today, in 1985 the Government of India declared 12 January, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda, National Youth Day. The day is observed as a public holiday in India, and the week of 12-19 January is observed annually as National Youth Week.

7.4.1 The Youth League of the Ramakrishna Centre

The return of Swami Nischalananda to South Africa in 1953 inspired many youths who were attracted by the Neo-Vedanta philosophy expounded by the Swami. In order to organise the youth of the Centre into a corporate body the Ramakrishna Youth League was formed in 1953 with P.I. Devan as Chairman and R. Bugwandeem as Honorary Secretary. The other members of the committee were: R.S. Moodley, B. Naidoo, R. Dasarath, R. Naidoo, A.R. Chinniah (now Swami Brahmarupananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, India), A. Murugan, D. Steenkamp and M.C. Pillay. Since its inception the Youth League has been actively involved in fostering the aims and ideals of the Centre. In 1956 the Youth League led by Swami Nischalananda

embarked upon a spiritual campaign in the country. Under the guidance of the Swami, Symposia and Youth Camps were held regularly in several parts of the country thereby catering for the religious education of the youth.

The Ramakrishna Youth League is guided by the following principles laid down by Swami Nischalananda (Souvenir Brochure, 1984 : 25):

1. There must be effective leadership. The leadership sets the pace and leads the direction by personal action rather than by instruction.
2. One must recognise that youth are essentially hero worshippers and idealistic. An effective ideal has to be projected and this ideal must be a towering personality worthy of emulation and immensely active at the same time. Swami Vivekananda is the best example.
3. The boundless energy of youth has to be selectively channelled according to their differing temperaments into different activities. As such, a successful movement must have protean arms for different types of activities to suit its members.
4. The members must feel and know that he is a valued member. Once this feeling of belonging is developed, then the activities of the Movement would become part of the normal daily activities of the youth. In this way total involvement should ensue.
5. The Movement must resolve the confusion faced by the youth in particular, caused by the division of life into secular and sacred compartments. The harmonization of life as projected by the ancient Indian teachers has to be propagated.
6. The Movement must make contact with the youth to attract them. The home, educational institutions and literature are the best avenues.

The activities of the League devolve upon the youth themselves and they are guided by a member of the Board of Governors. The youth drawn to the Ramakrishna Centre come from a cross-section of society ranging from those engaged in professional vocations to artisans, students and housewives. The Centre seeks to harness the potential of these devotees and direct it towards the good of humanity.

The Ramakrishna Youth League is involved in all facets of the Centre's religio-cultural and humanitarian work. Their numerous activities include visiting hospitals and praying for the sick, providing assistance in the sale and distribution of the Centre's literature, in the Jyothi Press and in the medical-relief work of the Centre. The Youth League also has Youth Camps and Youth Conferences on a regular basis. In 1985, the International Year of the Youth, several youth-conferences were held by the branches of the Centre. A major convention, "The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Youth Convention", was held in July 1985 in Durban. A brochure entitled "Swami Vivekananda and the Modern Youth" was published and distributed by the Centre.

The Ramakrishna Youth League is an important forum which caters for the religio-cultural expression of the youth of the Centre. Many who serve in the Youth League later become leading members of the Centre. Hence the Youth League serves as an important "training centre" of the future leaders not only of the Centre but also the community. The Youth League in shaping the lives

of the youth seeks to instil in them a sense of responsibility, selflessness and dedication in their services to humanity.

Swami Premananda maintains that a good man of character and education can shoulder the responsibility of looking after his own welfare, and understand that it is inseparable from the welfare of all.. By virtue of his developed social consciousness he spontaneously becomes an enlightened citizen, who is keenly aware of what he owes to society, and acts accordingly.

7.5 Education

7.5.1 Swami Vivekananda on Education

Swami Vivekananda in studying the problems of India of his time fully realized that one of the greatest handicaps facing Indian society was the lack of proper education for its peoples. He states (CW4, 1985 : 483):

"Education, education, education alone!
Travelling through many cities of Europe
and observing in them the comforts and
education of even the poor people, there
was brought to my mind the state of our
own poor people, and I used to shed tears.
What made the difference? Education was
the answer I got."

Swami Vivekananda was certain that the only way of raising the condition of the masses of India was to provide them with a sound education. He was conscious of the defects in the prevailing system of education in India. In this regard he states (CW5, 1985 : 332):

"We have had a negative education all along from our boyhood. We have only learnt that we are nobodies. Seldom are we given to understand that great men were even born in our own country. Nothing positive has been taught to us. We do not even know how to use our hands and feet."

He comments further on the defects of the education system (CW7, 1986 : 147):

"Well, you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures. The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion - is it worth the name?"

According to Swami Vivekananda the object of the ideal system of education, should not merely be the advancement of theoretical knowledge but also the advancement of life, development of the highest powers and capacities, and the unfoldment of the noblest potentialities of the student. The pupil must be enabled at the same time to apply intelligently to his own life all the ideas that he has learnt and gathered and thus promote his growth - physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. True education means an all-round culture-physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual (Yatiswarananda, 1963 : 463). A complete system of education, implies a balance and harmony between the properly developed body, mind and soul. Swami Vivekananda maintains that physical culture is comparatively simple and easy, while the culture of the mind is a more difficult affair as it has

the sub-conscious and the conscious and the intuitive and intelligence processes with regard to the working of different faculties. The most difficult of all is the culture of the soul, which implies the awakening of the intuitive faculty or the soul's appreciation of itself and direct experience of the true Self, without passing through the complex, tortuous and insufficient mental process. In attempting to formulate the right type of education, the Neo-Vedanta philosophy calls upon us to regard life as an indivisible whole, and as such we have to include in our system of education both intellectual knowledge and spiritual realisation.

When Swami Vivekananda perceived that religion should be the firm foundation on which the great edifice of education was to be built, he did not have in mind a particular religion, but a universal religion. As he states (CW5, 1985 : 231):

"I look upon religion as the innermost core of education. Mind, I do not mean my own or anybody else's opinion about religion. The true eternal principles have to be held before people."

In order to formulate any true system of education, we must first of all consider the nature of those whom we want to educate. Neo-Vedanta emphasises that the human being is not a mass of cells. He is the Self. "Each soul", Swami Vivekananda declares, "is potentially divine, and the goal is to manifest this divine within" (CW1, 1984 : 124). He defines religion as

"the manifestation of the divinity already in man" (CW4, 1985 : 358). This self-realisation is only possible through education which is "the manifestation of perfection already in man" (CW4, 1985 : 358). The attainment of perfection brings out the divine nature. The goal of human existence is to manifest the perfection and divinity of the Self by removing the accretions and encrustations which have grown around what is taken to be the personality. (CW4, 1985 : 464).

Swami Vivekananda did not over-emphasise the spiritual basis of education to the utter neglect of the need of scientific and technological training. Speaking on the importance of scientific and technical education the Swami states (CW5, 1985 : 368):

"What we need, you know, is to study independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge that is our own, and with it the English language and Western science; we need technical education and all else that may develop industries so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for themselves and save something against a rainy day."

For Swami Vivekananda secular education and spiritual education are not antagonistic to each other. He is of the view that secular education must have a strong religious basis. He stresses that religion helps a man in gaining confidence in his own self. Without self-confidence and awareness of the dignity of the human spirit no secular education can be fruitful. (Majumdar, 1963 : 485). It was with this under-

standing that Swami Vivekananda worked tirelessly for the upliftment of the Indian masses by instituting a constructive, practical and comprehensive programme of education. Among the numerous service schemes of the Ramakrishna Movement education is of fundamental importance. The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa like the Ramakrishna Mission in India, (see Chapter 4), is committed to the propagation of education encompassing the Neo-Vedantic ideals preached by Swami Vivekananda.

7.5.2 Education and the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa

The education programme of the Ramakrishna Centre is vast and varied. This includes classes in religious education, Indian languages, classical Indian dance and music, hatha yoga as well as conferences and symposia held periodically. The education programme of the Centre is conducted in the spirit of Swami Vivekananda's definition of education, viz., "education is the manifestation of perfection already in man" (CW4, 1985 : 358).

7.5.2.1 The Vivekananda Study Circle

The Vivekananda Study Circle is a forum catering for the religious education of the devotees of the Centre. It provides devotees with a programme of formal education in Hinduism. The classes are meant for adults who are keen on a serious study of Hinduism. Each branch of the Centre has a Vivekananda Study Circle. Classes are held once a week in the evening for a duration of two hours. All the branches follow a uniform syllabus drawn-up by the monks and senior devotees of the Centre. The syllabus

was compiled after examining the syllabus used by the Ramakrishna Mission for similar programmes in India. The course which lasts for eighteen months incorporates the study of the following aspects of Hindu religion and philosophy (Interview: Swami Saradananda):

Scriptural studies (Sruti and Smriti)
 Hindu metaphysics
 The Concept of Yoga
 The Concept of God
 Hindu Temples - their function and role in society
 Renascent Hinduism
 The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement
 Hindu Missiology

The teachers of the Vivekananda Study Circle are drawn from senior devotees of the Centre. The teachers prepare their lessons in advance and also provide students with notes. The teaching staff is supervised by the monks of the Centre. After each section is taught the students are set assignments on the relevant topic for which they are allocated a mark after it is assessed by the teacher. The students also write tests periodically. The class which usually comprises of about fifteen students are also divided into groups for group-projects. This involves the preparation of a mini-thesis on a chosen topic. Upon completion of the thesis a seminar is held when the thesis is presented, discussed and evaluated. At the end of the eighteen-month period students write an examination. The successful candidates are presented with a certificate for having completed the course.

7.5.2.2 Lay-Preachers

Most of the students who graduate from the Vivekananda Study Circle play an important role, as lay-preachers, in propagating the Centre's teachings. As lay-preachers these devotees are expected to disseminate the teachings of the Movement in their residential areas. This is achieved by the distribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature as well as preaching to those members of the public who are interested in the Centre's work. The preaching activities of these devotees are confined mainly to the Hindu community. The Centre seeks to educate the Hindu community on the fundamental teachings of Hinduism. Swami Shivapadananda points out that as missionaries it is not the role of the lay-preachers to disturb the faith of another. It is not their duty to entice members of other faiths to convert to Hinduism since this will be contrary to the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings of the harmony of religions. Swami Vivekananda did not encourage conversion from one religion to another. He maintained that each religion must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its own law of growth. He was critical of the role played by Christian missionaries in converting Hindus to Christianity in India. In a lecture delivered at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 20 September 1893 he stated (CW1, 1984 : 20):

"You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen - why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation?.... You erect

churches all through India, but the crying evil in the East is not religion - they have religion enough - but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats."

In keeping with the Neo-Vedantic spirit of the harmony of religions the lay-preachers of the Centre are taught not merely to tolerate other religions but to accept them as equally valid paths to the Divine. They are called upon to embody the spirit of Swami Vivekananda who did not confine his ideas to the usual expression "toleration" in relation to all religious views of the world. He went a step further and said that we have to accept all religions as true. This serves as a basis of a universal religion. As the Swami declares (CW8, 1985 : 229):

"Do not disturb the faith of any....
Confucius, Moses and Pythagoras, Buddha
Christ, Mohammed; Luther, Calvin and
the Sikhs; Theosophy, Spiritualism and
the like; all these mean only the preaching
of the Divine-in-man."

7.5.2.3 Conferences on Hinduism

In its efforts to spread the teachings of Neo-Vedanta in particular, and Hinduism in general the Ramakrishna Centre often convenes conferences on Hinduism. The purpose of these conferences is purely educational. According to Swami Saradananda the conferences are not necessarily held "to meet and pass resolutions". They are intended to serve an educational purpose. At most of the conferences held by the Centre

the emphasis is on discussing contemporary issues affecting religion. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that it is the responsibility of Hindu organizations in the country to discuss contemporary issues affecting Hinduism and to formulate responses to such issues on the basis of scriptural authority as a guide to the community. During 1986 the Centre held two conferences at the University of Durban-Westville in conjunction with the Department of Hindu Studies. At both these conferences various contemporary issues affecting Hinduism in the social, political, educational and medical fields were discussed.

The Mobile Clinic Committee of the Centre also organises medical conferences once every two years. These conferences focuses on subjects relating to Hinduism, science and medicine. Topics usually discussed include India's contribution to Science, Yoga therapy and Hinduism and medical ethics. The medical conferences seek to address contemporary issues affecting the practice of medicine. By discussing such issues as euthanasia, aids and surrogate motherhood, the Centre seeks to formulate guidelines to assist Hindus in the medical profession.

7.5.2.4 The Dhanwantari and Aryabhatta awards

In order to honour members of the community who have distinguished themselves in their respective fields of education, the Ramakrishna Centre inaugurated the Dhanwantari⁷ and Aryabhatta⁸ awards in 1986 to coincide with the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna. The Dhanwantari awards were presented at a medical

conference entitled "Medicine and the Hindu" held at the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram on 9 August 1986. The awards were presented by Swami Bhavyananda, President of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Centre, London, to Professor S. Kalichuran and Mr C.N. Pillay. Professor Kalichuran, Head of the Department of Pathology at the University of Natal was presented the award for "her dedicated services in the field of Pathology and in the teaching of medicine." Mr C.N. Pillay, Principal Surgeon at the R.K. Khan Hospital in Chatsworth, Durban, received the award for "his selfless service and teaching in surgery".

At a conference on "Indian Sciences through the Ages held on 25 October 1986 at the University of Durban-Westville, the Centre inaugurated the Aryabhatta award. The recipient was Vedprakash Sewjathan, lecturer in the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics at the University of Durban-Westville. He was honoured for his "outstanding contribution in the field of Theoretical Physics".⁹

7.5.2.5 The Quest Symposium

The Ramakrishna Centre is one of the few religious organisations in South Africa that convenes inter-religious symposia on a regular basis. Despite the diversity of religions in South Africa, inter-faith dialogue is still a relatively new phenomenon in South Africa. The apartheid policy of the South African government is the foremost factor that has inhibited the meaningful exchange of ideas between adherents of different

faiths in the country. In keeping with Sri Ramakrishna's teachings of the harmony of religions and in fulfilling one of the tenets of its constitution of promoting inter-faith harmony and dialogue, the Ramakrishna Centre convenes an inter-faith symposium annually. In recent years these symposia known as "Quest" have been convened in conjunction with Departments involved in teaching religion at the local universities. The Quest symposium is held annually by the Centre as part of the Birth Anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna. The inaugural Quest symposium was held in 1983 in conjunction with the Department of Science of Religion at the University of Durban-Westville. Since then Quest symposia have been held in conjunction with the Departments of Religious Studies at the Universities of Natal, Witwatersrand and South Africa. The symposium takes the form of a panel discussion involving representatives of the five major religions of the world, viz., Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. The panellists are given three Discussion points to which they are expected to formulate a reply in terms of the teachings of their respective religions (See Appendix 13 for Quest '87 Discussion Points). After each panellist has presented the views of his religion, provision is made for questions and discussion in which the guests participate. The Quest symposium is an attempt to understand and appreciate the similar as well as differing viewpoints of all religions. It also seeks to inculcate a feeling in all to accept the different religions as "equally valid paths to the Truth" as taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda both of whom were staunch

advocates of the harmony of religions. Swami Vivekananda constantly pointed out that though different in name and externals most of the religions have certain tenets and beliefs common to all. In this regard he mentions the following (CW6, 1985 : 46):

"Religion is of the soul and finds expression through various nations, languages, and customs. Hence it follows that the difference between the religions of the world is one of expression and not of substance; and their points of similarity and unity are of the soul, are intrinsic, as the language of the soul is one, in whatever peoples and under whatever circumstances it manifests itself."

At the inaugural Quest symposium Professor G.C. Oosthuizen, the then Head of the Department of Science of Religion at the University of Durban-Westville, praised the efforts of the Ramakrishna Centre in promoting inter-faith dialogue and understanding in South Africa. As he states (Quest '83, 1983 : 7):

"...Here we rub shoulders with each other daily whether we are Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Parsees or from various other religious groupings.... And yet, very few know something substantial about any of the religions to which they do not belong."

It is for this reason that the Ramakrishna Centre should be congratulated on yet another Symposium where representatives from the various religions may put their basic beliefs to those present."

7.5.2.6 Languages and the Arts

For Swami Vivekananda "true education" meant an all-round culture: physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. He maintained that a complete system of education cannot disregard any of these different aspects. In keeping with the teachings of the Swami, the Ramakrishna Centre places great emphasis on education in the Indian languages and the fine arts. Regular classes are held at the headquarters and branches of the Centre where the Indian languages, i.e., Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, and classical Indian dance, music and singing lessons are conducted. According to Swami Shivapadananda the arts, including the sciences and all other branches of knowledge are all means of manifesting the perfection already in us. Devotional music and dance are equally valid means of realizing the Absolute.

Swami Vivekananda emphasised that the ideal system of education must incorporate cultural values. An integral and complete education must work towards the development of the aesthetic, the volitional and the intellectual faculties of man. He states (CW3, 1979 : 291):

"It is culture that withstands shocks not a simple mass of knowledge. You can put a mass of knowledge into the world, but that will not do it much good. There must come culture into the blood."

The Indian language and fine art classes conducted by the Centre seek to embody this ideal of culture as enunciated by the Swami.

7.6 Literature and Journalism

7.6.1 Swami Vivekananda on Literature

Swami Vivekananda was fully aware of the power of the printed word as a means of communicating with the masses. During his lifetime he established two journals, the Prabuddha Bharat, an English monthly and Udbodhan, a Bengali monthly, for the purpose of disseminating the Neo-Vedantic teachings of the Ramakrishna Mission nationally and internationally. The Swami regularly contributed articles to these journals which together with many others, (see Chapter 4), have become an important medium for propagating the aims and ideals of the Ramakrishna Movement worldwide. In launching the Udbodhan in 1897, Swami Vivekananda gave directions to his gurubhais about the conduct of the magazine. He maintained that nothing but positive ideas for the physical, mental and spiritual improvement of the race should have a place in it. Instead of criticizing and finding fault with the thoughts and aspirations of mankind as embodied in its literature, philosophy, poetry, arts, etc; ancient and modern, it should point out how they can be made more conducive to progress. It should never attack or seek to destroy anyone's faith. The highest doctrines of the Vedas and Vedanta should be presented to the people in the simplest way, so that by diffusing true culture and knowledge, it might in time be able to raise the Chandala to Brahmana status. The literature published by the Mission should stand for universal harmony as preached by Sri Ramakrishna, and it should scatter abroad his ideals of love, purity and renunciation (Eastern and Western Disciples, Vol. II, 1981 : 407-408).

7.6.2 The Ramakrishna Centre and Cultural Journalism

Like the Ramakrishna Mission the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa places great emphasis on religious, philosophical and cultural journalism. Swami Shivapadananda is of the view that it is essential to have the teachings of the Centre in printed form for the effective propagation of the Centre's ideals to all sectors of the community. He maintains that preaching and the audio-visual presentation of the Centre's teachings are not sufficient in themselves. They need to be supplemented by the distribution of literature on a large scale.

Since its inception the Ramakrishna Centre has printed and distributed a large quantity of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in the form of books, journals, pamphlets and tracts. In 1954 the Centre launched its first regular journal "The Jyothi", with Swami Nischalananda as its editor. The Jyothi is still the official journal of the Centre and is published quarterly. The editorial board of the journal consists of Swami Shivapadananda who is the editorial advisor, and Pravrajika Atmaprana and Dr H.B. Parbhoo serve as editors of the journal.

The Centre also prints and distributes pamphlets on Hindu religion and philosophy on a regular basis. On the occasion of Hindu festivals, literature expounding the significance of the relevant festival, is printed and distributed by the Centre through its branches. The Ramakrishna Centre is one of the few Hindu organisations that publishes books on Hinduism on a regular basis.

7.6.3 The Jyothi Press

The Jyothi Press was established by Swami Nischalananda in 1959 to cater for the printing needs of the Centre. The strained trade relations between India and South Africa makes it extremely difficult for the Centre to import large quantities of literature from India. In order to overcome this handicap the Centre publishes and prints its own literature in its well equipped Jyothi Press situated at the Avoca Ashram. All the work in the Jyothi Press is undertaken by the monks of the Centre. They are assisted by the lay-devotees who offer their services on a voluntary basis. While the printing of literature is conducted at the Jyothi Press, the typesetting as well as the initial preparation of the material to be published, is undertaken at the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram under the supervision of Pravrajika Atmaprana. After the literature has been printed it is despatched to the branches of the Centre either for free distribution or sale. The publication cost of the literature produced by the Press is covered by the sale of the literature as well as donations received from well-wishers.

Since its inception the Jyothi Press has played an important role in the production of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature as well as literature pertaining to Hindu religion and philosophy in general. The vast quantity of literature printed at the Press ultimately filters into the community and thereby the seeds of Neo-Vedantism are disseminated to all who come in contact with the Centre's literature.

7.7 Humanitarian Work

7.7.1 Swami Vivekananda and Humanitarianism

Swami Vivekananda was of the view that unless the Indian masses are fed, educated and their poverty eradicated, India will never be able to attain liberation. As a means to overcome the ills of Indian society he propounded the doctrine of service to our fellow beings while realizing our divinity. This kind of service, he maintained, is as efficacious as any other kind of introspective discipline. The Swami's "domestic policy" related to the application of Neo-Vedanta in India for the amelioration of the economic and social condition of the masses. He envisaged three levels or stages of application of the Vedanta, which he designated as annadana (food or physical help), vidyadana (intellectual help), and jnanadana (spiritual help). In Swami Vivekananda's scheme of Practical Vedanta, annadana or physical help occupies the first place. This is in keeping with Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that there can be no religion on an empty stomach. When man's basic physical needs like food, clothing and shelter are met then comes the time for vidyadana or intellectual help to enable him to face the problems of life and solve them. When a person acquires sufficient intellectual knowledge based on the scriptures, a thirst for spiritual knowledge grows spontaneously in his heart. This is the time for jnanadana. This refers to paravidya comprising knowledge of the Spirit and the method of manifesting It (Ananyananda, 1980 : 118-119).

It is with this understanding that Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission placing before it the twin ideals of renunciation and service. The Ramakrishna Movement places great emphasis on the ideal of realizing Truth through service to humanity without distinction of race, nationality or religion. Swami Vivekananda advocates a "happy blending" of the ancient monastic ideals of contemplation and spiritualized service. Proclaiming this ideal that service to man is service to God, he says (CW6, 1985 : 288):

"You have read - 'matridevo bhava, pitridevo bhava - look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God' - but I say 'daridradevo bhava, murkhadevo bhava - The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted - let these be your God.' Know that service to these alone is the highest religion."

Swami Vivekananda maintains that true spiritual experience awakens love for God and also for man. The first law of life is love. Our service must be based on this vital principle. Swami Vivekananda's assumption of human purity elevates the place of man in society and the universe. He is of the opinion that there is nothing above and beyond man. Man and God are one to him. There is no difference between his ideal of humanity and divinity. "Man is the highest being that exists and this is the greatest world. We can have no conception of God higher than man, so our God is man and man is God." (CW7, 1986 : 30). Man must not only be loved and served but also worshipped.

Swami Vivekananda believed that individual liberation is incomplete without the total liberation of mankind. His humanitarianism advocates that man who is an end in himself must also become a means to serve humanity. "The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body" (CW2, 1983 : 321). As an end man shines in his own divine light and as a means he serves others to find divinity in them and also to make them conscious of their divinity. "First let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. Be and Make. Let this be our motto." (CW4, 1985 : 351). As a finite being man serves society and as an infinite being seeks to embrace humanity. Thus humanity is Swami Vivekananda's God and humanitarian service his religion (Reddy, 1984 : 89).

Swami Vivekananda maintains that service towards all must be performed as worship and not as philanthropy. A spirit of service must inspire us all the time. Man grows spiritually beyond his organic limitation by converting all work into service - service of man, service of all beings. Through such service the ego becomes transformed and when this transformation begins, we shall find a new man emerging spiritually. Swami Vivekananda's humanitarian ideals aim at elevating man, to instil in him a sense of his own dignity, a sense of responsibility for his own destiny, and the destiny of all people, to make him strive for the ideals of good, truth, justice, and to foster in man an abhorrence for any suffering (Chelysev, 1963 : 508).

In his desire to elevate man, Swami Vivekananda put forward the idea that the highest divine substance - Brahman - is personified

in millions of ordinary living beings and therefore the service to man is tantamount to the worship of God. He called for the all-round development of the human personality and the assertion of man's right to happiness in this world and the fostering in the ordinary man of a sense of his own dignity. The ultimate harmonious interrelation of all individuals with one another is the aim of his humanitarianism.

7.7.2 The Humanitarian Work of the Ramakrishna Centre

Since its inception the Ramakrishna Centre has been engaged in an extensive programme of humanitarian work. The humanitarian activities of the Centre seek to give practical expression to the Neo-Vedantic ideals preached by Swami Vivekananda. Swami Shivapadananda stresses that the humanitarian work of the Centre must not be viewed as social work but as sadhana. It is a compulsory sadhana for all devotees of the Centre and is as valid a path to God-realization as any other spiritual discipline. He maintains that the humanitarian work of the Centre is an expression of Practical Vedanta as advocated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Swami Gambhirananda (1980 : 151) points out that the monks of the Ramakrishna Order and devotees of the Movement involved in humanitarian work are following the path of "monism, monism in practice - Practical Vedanta". As he states (1980 : 152):

"We worship God in human beings. Worshipping God in human beings and all consequent service to human beings is worship. It is a new kind of relationship, a new outlook. It is Practical Vedanta."

It is this spirit of service as worship which governs all the humanitarian work of the Ramakrishna Centre. The humanitarian aid rendered by the Centre involves medical relief, providing meals for underprivileged children at schools and the distribution of food hampers and clothing to the poor and needy.

7.7.2.1 The "School-Feeding" Programme

Since the beginning of 1986 the Ramakrishna Centre has been engaged in an extensive "feeding-programme" in several schools in Phoenix, Durban. A number of devotees of the Centre who teach at schools in Phoenix were perturbed by the large number of pupils who were unable to afford a meal while at school. Swami Shivapadananda was deeply moved when he heard of the plight of children fainting with hunger at schools. He instructed the Board of Governors to appoint a sub-committee to investigate how the Centre could assist in alleviating the situation. The sub-committee wrote letters to the Principals of all the schools in Phoenix and Mt. Edgecombe offering the Centre's assistance in providing meals for those in need. This resulted in three schools approaching the Centre for assistance, while several other schools indicated that they were already in receipt of assistance from other organisations.

The feeding-programme of the Centre was initiated in February 1986, providing meals daily for over one hundred students. By the middle of 1987 the Centre's feeding programme expanded as a result of appeals from other schools in Phoenix. Presently the Centre is

providing meals daily for over one thousand students at eleven schools in Phoenix and Mt. Edgecombe. While the feeding-scheme has expanded rapidly the Centre cannot cope with the numerous requests it receives for assistance from schools in other parts of Durban. Swami Shivapadananda points out that the Centre can only provide such assistance as its resources allow (Interview: Swami Shivapadananda).

The feeding scheme of the Centre is administered by a sub-committee comprising three members. The sub-committee liaises with the Principal of each school who administers the feeding-programme at school. The Centre provides the schools with the necessary groceries and the meals are then prepared at the schools by the members of staff. The meals are prepared in the kitchens of the schools daily so that pupils are provided with freshly cooked hot meals. In providing meals for the pupils the Centre places great emphasis on the nutritional value of the meals.

Funds for the feeding scheme are generated through donations from devotees and friends of the Centre. The groceries are purchased and distributed to the schools once every six weeks. Members of staff of the schools call at the Avoca Ashram on a pre-arranged date and collect the groceries for their school. The Centre emphasizes that all the pupils who wish to have a meal should be fed irrespective of whether they are indigent or not since it is difficult to establish variables that distinguish a "well-off" child from the poor (Interview: Singh).

7.7.2.2 Food Hampers

The Ramakrishna Centre distributes a large number of food-hampers to the poor and needy on a regular basis. The distribution of food-hampers to the poor was initiated by Swami Nischalananda soon after his return from India in 1953. At present the Centre distributes a small number of food-hampers on a weekly basis to the poor who are referred to the Avoca Ashram by welfare organisations. However, the Centre has a major food-hamper distribution the week before Deepavali every year. According to Swami Saradananda, Deepavali "is an auspicious time to share whatever we have with those in need - it is a time of giving" (Interview: Swami Saradananda). Over one thousand food-hampers are distributed annually by the Centre during Deepavali. In 1987 the Centre distributed two thousand food-hampers valued at R60 000,00. The hampers are distributed with the assistance of the Chatsworth and Phoenix Child Welfare Societies to ensure that those most in need receive assistance.

In addition to the food-hampers donated by the headquarters of the Centre, each branch of the Centre is expected to donate at least twenty five food-hampers to the poor and needy in their respective areas. Devotees of the Centre are also urged to "intensify their practice of charity" during the auspicious period of Deepavali. Swami Vivekananda maintained that there is no higher virtue than selfless charity, dana. He states (CW4, 1985 : 10-11):

"The lowest man is he whose hand draws in, in receiving; and he is the highest man whose hand goes out giving. The hand was made to give. Give the last bit of bread you have even if you are starving. You will be free in a moment if you starve yourself to death by giving to another. Immediately you will be perfect, you will become God."

In its efforts to assist the poor, needy and deprived through its food and hamper distribution programmes, the Ramakrishna Centre seeks to remove the handicap of poverty which hinders individual growth and perfection. Swami Vivekananda is of the view that economic poverty stands in the way of human development. As a humanist he "declared war" on poverty. He regarded poverty as immoral and unsocial. He advocated freedom from want. His motto was first bread, then religion. "Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven!" (CW4, 1985 : 368).

7.7.2.3 Medical Relief

In keeping with the Upanishadic maxim "the body is the temple of God", the Ramakrishna Centre in its programme of seva also provides medical relief to those in need. The Centre provides two types of medical aid, viz., allopathic and homeopathic.

7.7.2.3.1 Allopathic

In 1959 Swami Nischalananda established a free dispensary at the Avoca Ashram to cater for the medical needs of the poor and needy. However, this service was discontinued in the mid 1960's after Avoca was declared an industrial area and most of the residents

were resettled in other Indian townships. In 1971 the Centre began operating a mobile clinic in Inanda providing free medical aid to the Black community of the area. The mobile clinic operated from the Ketalani Creche once a week on Sunday mornings. However, in 1985 the Centre was forced to discontinue this service because of frequent unrest and the tense political situation in the township. At present the Centre operates a mobile clinic in Greenbury in Phoenix. The acute shortage of medical facilities in the area prompted the Centre to provide assistance in the area. The clinic operates once a week on Sundays from 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon. It provides basic medical treatment for the needy and treats an average of two hundred patients a month. The clinic treats patients mainly suffering from colds, flu, skin diseases and children's paediatric problems. In cases where a serious illness is diagnosed the patients are referred to the local hospital for specialised treatment. Medical advice as well as medicines are provided free of charge. Medicines for the clinic are obtained through donations from private medical doctors in the community. The doctors who serve in the Mobile Clinic of the Centre offer their services on a voluntary basis. All the doctors are devotees of the Centre and regard this seva as sadhana.

The Mobile Clinic of the Centre operates from a fully equipped caravan. The caravan is divided into two sections. One serves as the "consulting room" and the other as the dispensary. The consulting room consists of two beds and basic medical equipment.

The Centre is presently working towards the establishment of a permanent clinic in Greenbury in Phoenix. It has approached the Durban City Council for land in the area to construct premises for a clinic.

The Ramakrishna Centre also operates a clinic at its Ashram in Pietermaritzburg. Free medical aid is provided to the poor and needy of the area. The clinic operates once a week every Sunday morning and is administered by medical doctors from Pietermaritzburg who offer their services free (Interview : Seebran).

7.7.2.3.2 Homeopathic

In addition to the allopathic clinic the Ramakrishna Centre also operates a homeopathic clinic at the Sri Sarada Devi Ashram in Asherville. This clinic provides treatment for those in the community who prefer homeopathic therapy. The homeopathic treatment is based on the ayurvedic system of medicine as practised in India since the Vedic age. Ayurveda embraces a knowledge of both philosophical and biological principles of life and incorporates both preventive and curative medicine. The clinic operates once a week on Thursday morning and treats an average of one hundred patients every month. Treatment as well as medicines are provided free of charge. However, patients are welcome to make a voluntary donation to the clinic to assist with maintenance expenses.

The homeopathic clinic has a staff of three, all of whom are devotees of the Centre. Mrs. Whitfield, a qualified homeopath is assisted by a reflexologist, Mrs D. Stott and a general assistant.

In addition to treating patients the Clinic periodically issues literature published by the Centre on health, diet and natural healing remedies. The Centre recently published a book on reflexology, "At Your Feet", written by Mrs. Stott.

7.7.2.4 Toys and Clothing

The Ramakrishna Centre also collect toys and clothing periodically, from devotees and the public. These items are then distributed to children's homes and welfare organisations to assist those in need. In 1986 the Centre made a large donation of toys to the Vivekananda Kendra in India. Professor Luxmi Kumari, President of the Vivekananda Kendra as well as the then treasurer of the organisation P.K. Awasti, spent two months in South Africa in 1986 as guests of the Centre. Professor Luxmi Kumari informed the Centre of the numerous education projects of the Vivekananda Kendra in India and appealed to the Centre for assistance. The Centre contributed educational toys valued at two thousand rands as well as a large number of books on the education of the mentally and physically handicapped child, to the Vivekananda Kendra.

7.7.3 Total Human Development

The comprehensive programme of humanitarian work of the Ramakrishna Centre is directed towards total human development as advocated in

the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda. The ethics of Neo-Vedanta demands that the seeker of Truth must identify himself with the good of others. In this way he overcomes his isolation and fragmentariness by working for the whole. Neo-Vedanta attributes a spiritual purpose to social living. Society is seen as a partnership not in power or wealth but in the production of spiritual perfection. Material advancement is not the sole end of social life since the true nature of man cannot be fully revealed by physical happiness. His true happiness or his progress, does not lie in the satisfaction of his physical desires but in the growth of his whole being, in a victory throughout the total range of his existence. It entails the mastery of the inner as well as and more important, than the outer, the true essential Self (Malhotra, 1970 : 62). Service to man is an article of faith in the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda. It is equated with devotion to God. Swami Vivekananda maintains that the best image for worshipping God is the human body since God resides in every human heart (CW2, 1983 : 313). It is with this understanding of the nature of man that the Ramakrishna Centre works selflessly for the religio-social upliftment of all in society irrespective of race, creed or sex, through its various departments of service.

7.8 Politics

7.8.1 Swami Vivekananda and Politics

Swami Vivekananda was first and foremost a philosopher and religious exponent. His thought is with spiritual concerns. The Swami's metaphysical reflections are closely intertwined with his religious

concerns. In some degree, therefore it is unrealistic to separate his philosophy from his spiritual teachings. Swami Vivekananda is of the view that our knowledge of the physical world would be incomplete without the knowledge of the spirit or perception of Truth. Therefore he is of the opinion that the eternal spirit explains the ephemeral world and not vice versa. Accordingly, he explains secular affairs in terms of the spiritual. While Swami Vivekananda was deeply concerned about the socio-political conditions in India, he firmly maintained that spirituality should form the core of Indian national life. He maintains that politics, social reform and education would be successful in India, only if these pointed to a higher spiritual life. He was firm in his belief that religion represented the heart of Indian national life and that politics, economics, industries, trade and commerce were only subsidiary to it (Sarma, 1967 : 153-155).

For Swami Vivekananda spiritual truths are absolute. They are to be reinterpreted to make society dynamic. He pointed out that if religion in India was perfect, everything would be perfect. For that purpose he advocated a positive religion, which he called Practical Vedanta which could pervade and guide all walks of life, both individual and national. He explained its utility in terms of individual, social and political life. Thus his political ideals are inseparable from religion. To Swami Vivekananda religion was not a creed but a realisation, and politics was seen as a necessity to help man discover truth and become perfect. However, it was not to

become an end in itself. For Swami Vivekananda it was merely an aid towards perfection. His fundamental concern was mukti or freedom. He wanted mukti to be attained by the individual and society and prescribed Truth as the ideal for its attainment. He made his concept of truth clear in the following words (CW5, 1985 : 96):

"God and Truth are the only politics in the world, everything else is trash."

Political thought was never an independent branch of study in Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism. It was subordinate to and dependent on religion. The Swami maintained that "if you want to speak of politics in India, you must speak through the language of religion" (CW8, 1985 : 77). Thus the political philosophy of Swami Vivekananda bears the deep impression of religion. As he states (CW3, 1979 : 314):

"...the Hindu can understand even politics when it is given through religion; sociology must come through religion, everything must come through religion. For that is the theme, the rest are the variations in the national life-music."

While Swami Vivekananda did not become personally involved in politics his contribution to the Indian freedom struggle was immense. Many of his inspired talks related to India's socio-political problems. His socio-political philosophy is not a product of a merely emotional upsurge of human compassion. It is based on the philosophy of man and his infinite possibilities -

the philosophy of Vedanta, which proclaims the divinity and solidarity of all human beings. He thus connects the modern political and social democratic demand for freedom and equality with India's ancient Vedantic spirituality. The Upanishadic concept of purity of human nature made Swami Vivekananda realise that all life is one and that human growth is based on freedom and equality and social relations are interdependent. He identified the individual interests with society. The organic view of life made it clear to him that society is organic and the individual and social growth are interrelated. He believed that growth depended on freedom. He regarded freedom as eternal, infinite, absolute and indivisible. Swami Vivekananda maintains that the relative freedom of the individual was as sacrosanct as absolute freedom. He viewed growth - individual, social, political or spiritual - in terms of freedom. His espousal of freedom made him to champion human equality on the basis of Neo-Vedanta. The Vedantic concept of equality of individuals made him work towards removing the existing human inequalities and establish faith in class unity in society. He believed that there could be no physical freedom without physical equality nor mental freedom without mental equality (Reddy, 1984 : 165-166). As he states (CW5, 1985 : 216):

"The word freedom which is the watchword of our religion really means freedom physically, mentally and spiritually."

The Vedantic doctrine of the indwelling of the perfect spirit in man implies that the perfect state of society is the true end of

all human endeavours since his inner self continuously presses upon him to make his external conditions consistent with the perfection inherent in him. While working tirelessly for the socio-economic and political emancipation of his countrymen, Swami Vivekananda continuously pointed out that the aim of all human endeavours is realization of the Self. It is for this reason that upon forming the Ramakrishna Mission he was careful to emphasize that the aim of the Mission will be purely spiritual and humanitarian and as such it will have no connection with politics. The Ramakrishna Mission is today guided by this principle laid down by the Swami and refrains from politics. It is the view of the Mission that if spirituality permeates all facets of life, issues pertaining to politics, economics or social life will be meaningfully resolved. Swami Ranganathananda (1971 : 674-675) maintains that political and other greatness, bereft of the touch of ethics and humanism, is a greatness which tends to humiliate all else around. Politics, he states, will have to be raised to a level where it will not exploit humanity for itself but will exploit itself for humanity. Politics guided by this principle can help in the evolution of man by striving to establish a social order which will be just and egalitarian. If the modern states can evolve social, political and economic structures based on the recognition of the dignity of man and leading to the full development of his personality, they will be responding to the demands of the age. A democratic state derives its strength and stability from its citizens. Citizens inspired by spiritual and ethical ideals, who find joy in giving off their best for the strength and sustenance of society and the state,

and who enjoy the delights which a free and egalitarian society offers, are the fruits and flowers of a healthy, stable society. It is "religion and religion alone" that can provide society with a stable foundation (Ranganathananda, 1971 : 676).

7.8.2 The Ramakrishna Centre and Politics

The constitution of the Ramakrishna Centre states that the aims and ideals of the Centre shall be purely spiritual, cultural and humanitarian and shall be universal and non-political. Since its inception the Ramakrishna Centre has adhered strictly to this policy of non-involvement in politics. The leadership of the Movement maintains that the Centre has a role to play in the religio-humanitarian field and can make its most meaningful contribution to South African society in this sphere of life. As a religious organisation the Centre prefers to remain non-political. Although the Centre does not involve itself in politics it is deeply concerned about the troubled political situation of the country. However, it will not take an active role in politics. Swami Shivapadananda maintains that the Centre cannot afford to align itself with any political movement in the country since this will affect the image of the Movement as a "purely religious organisation". While the Centre does not subscribe to a particular school of political thought its members are free to join political organisations and participate in politics. However, it is stressed that they should do so in their individual capacity and not as members of the Centre.

When questioned on the Centre's attitude towards the current political situation in South Africa Swami Shivapadananda states that it is not the Centre's view that is of importance but the view of Hinduism that must be taken into account. As he states (Interview):

"The Centre does not have a political policy of its own. When we have to make pronouncements pertaining to politics we do so on the basis of scriptural authority."

Swami Shivapadananda maintains accordingly, that the South African government's policy of apartheid is totally unacceptable to the Ramakrishna Centre since it is contrary to the Vedantic unity of all life. Further, he is of the opinion that apartheid is antithetical to the most basic principles of Neo-Vedanta and as such apartheid and all forms of discriminatory practices associated with it must be rejected. However, while the Centre does not agree with the Government's policy of apartheid it maintains that it is not the duty of the Centre to "advise the government on how to administer the country". Swami Saradananda maintains that the Centre is not in a position to make pronouncements on aspects of South African politics since the Centre "does not possess all the facts relating to the politics of the country". He states that the Centre firmly supports "Truth and Justice" and would like to see positive changes in the prevalent political system. However, such changes must take place within the framework of non-violence. The Centre would only support a peaceful settlement to the South African political condition. It rejects violence as a means of effecting changes.

When questioned on the Centre's views towards the so-called liberation movements such as the African National Congress, the United Democratic Front and the Natal Indian Congress, Swami Shivapadananda indicated that the Centre does not subscribe to a set policy towards political movements. However, he maintains that all political movements should be free to voice their views and conduct their activities unhindered provided that they do not interfere with the rights of the individual and the peace and stability of the country.

It is evident that the Ramakrishna Centre prefers to remain neutral to politics, preferring to confine its activities to the religio-cultural and humanitarian sphere. Dr AR Seebran, Chairman of the Ramakrishna Centre, maintains that the Centre is "most qualified" to serve society in this area of life. While most of the devotees interviewed were in favour of the Centre remaining non-political, a sizeable number of devotees, especially the youth, felt that the Centre should devote more attention to the politics of the country. This attitude which reflects the view of a sizeable number of devotees is succinctly echoed in the following statement expressed by a devotee (Interview):

"The approach of the Centre to politics is very much a soft pedalling approach. I would like to see more effective action on the part of the Centre in addressing the imbalances and inequalities that plague our South African society."

The Ramakrishna Centre is committed to working towards the creation of an egalitarian and democratic South African society as envisaged in the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda. It hopes to achieve the above-mentioned ideal by confining its activities to the religio-humanitarian sphere of life. It prefers not to become involved in politics. However, functioning in a country where politics is an important facet of life, the Centre will have to devote greater attention to politics if it is to continue playing a meaningful role in working towards the creation of a harmonious South African society. There is increasing pressure from the younger generation Hindu for religious organisations in the community to adopt a more active role in the country's politics. There is evidence of dissatisfaction amongst many younger generation devotees of the Ramakrishna Centre with the Movement's neutral political stand. The Centre will have to address this issue soon as it could alienate the support of this group of devotees who feel that there should be a closer alliance between religion and politics.

While Swami Vivekananda did not become personally involved in Indian politics he was extremely out-spoken against the injustices perpetrated against the Indian people by the British during their rule of India. As he states (CW3, 1979 : 474):

"We see England the most prosperous Christian nation in the world, with her foot on the neck of 250,000,000 Asiatics."

"There has been a reign of terror in India for some years. English soldiers are killing our men and outraging our women - only to be sent home with passage and pension at our expense" (CW8, 1985 : 476).

"If man cannot believe in the vengeance of God, he certainly cannot deny the vengeance of history. And it will come upon the English; they have their heels on our necks, they have sucked the last drop of our blood for their own pleasures; they have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved by villages and provinces" (CW7, 186 : 280).

While the Ramakrishna Centre is deeply committed to spreading the seeds of Neo-Vedantism it needs to give greater expression to Swami Vivekananda's response to Indian politics in formulating a more definitive attitude to the South African political situation.

Notes

1. Swami Shivapadananda as President and Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa is the sole initiating guru of the Movement locally. He alone is empowered to initiate disciples into the Order of Brahmacharya or Sannyasa. This policy is in keeping with that of the Ramakrishna Mission where the President and Spiritual Head of the Mission is the sole initiating guru.
2. Pravrajika Atmaprana was initiated into sannyasa eleven years after initiation into brahmacharya.
3. Since both the December and Easter Sadhana Camp are similar in nature only the December Camp will be described and explained in this study.
4. All sadhakas who intend participating in the Sadhana Camp must forward their names to the organising committee at least two weeks before the date of the Camp.
5. For further reading on Hatha Yoga see Swami Nischalananda's "Ten Easy Lessons In Yoga For the Layman", Durban, Yoga Institute, (S.A.)
6. The number 9 is considered to have a mystical value in Hinduism. Hence Japa is repeated either 9 times or in multiples of 9. It is normally repeated 108 times since the repetition of the mantra over a sufficiently long period helps to still the mind and leave a positive impression of God-consciousness in the mind of the devotee. (Interview: Swami Saradananda).
7. Dhanwantari (C. 3 century B.C.), the Father of the Ayurvedic System of Medicine is also regarded as the patron of the healing art.
8. Aryabhatta (C. 5 century A.D.), was an outstanding Mathematician-Astronomer. In India the title of "Aryabhatta" is conferred upon distinguished scholars in the field of Physical Sciences.
9. Sewjathan has developed a new theory of special relativity which corrects Einstein's theory. It has been published in the International Journal of Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences. Vol. 7, No. 3, 1984, Florida, pp. 565-589.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

1. A principally new stage in the history of Hinduism, as also in the history of India on the whole, begins in the nineteenth century. The arrival of the European powers on Indian soil was to have marked implications for Indian society. Initially the impact of Westernization led to an uncritical admiration of all things Western, coupled with a contempt for things of Indian origin. However, this was a temporary phase. The spread of English education in India helped to destroy the intellectual isolation of the Indian mind and brought it into contact with Western science, literature and history. The results produced by English education in India were revolutionary in the highest degree. It led to a great mental expansion which manifested itself in an afflorescence in the religious, cultural, economic, social and political life of the Indian populace.

The British during their occupation of India (c. 1757-1947), not only deprived the Indians of their political rights and freedom but also undermined their ancient religio-cultural heritage. The general attitude of contempt held by the British for anyone with a brown skin, was compounded by the zeal of the Christian missionaries to convert the people of India to Christianity. To the overwhelming majority of Westerners, Hinduism was simply "heathen", and a conversion to Christianity was the first, and most necessary, step to becoming a true member of the Empire.

There were converts to Christianity during this period, however, a surprisingly large number of educated Hindus - surprising to the British anyway - were not willing to abandon their own religion for that of their conquerors. They could perceive many imperfections with the Hinduism of their day, but they wanted to "purify" their ancient faith, not jettison it. The result was a virtual Hindu renaissance, which witnessed the birth of many religious movements and organizations which have subsequently been classified as the "Neo-Hindu" movements heralding a new era in the history of Hinduism (Leneman, 1980:22).

2. The Neo-Hindu movement was in essence a movement aiming at the resurgence of the whole of Hindu society and as such its primary concern was its spiritual awakening. This they sought to achieve by purifying their own religion by means of ideas derived from itself. The Neo-Hindu spirit was a pervasive one. It was potent enough to outstrip the bounds of religion properly so called and to irradiate at once the fields of contemporary literature, the Fine Arts, Music, History, Education and Politics. The movement itself had a large scope - it was in fact the embodiment of a vision of the New India as it could be made (Nath 1982:7).

The founding of the Brahmo Samaj and later the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj were the first dramatic indications of the beginning of a new era in Hindu history. Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj is acknowledged as the pioneer of the Hindu renaissance. His activities were many sided. However, it is in the field of politics, public administration and education

rather than in that of social reform and religion that he made his greatest contribution to the India of his time. The history of the Brahmo Samaj under the subsequent leadership of Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chander Sen was in many ways a stormy one. The many schisms which the Samaj underwent after the demise of its founder as well as the exclusion of some of the most fundamental doctrines of Hinduism from the theology of the Samaj led to its decline in popularity. Although the Brahmo Samaj was the instigator of many social reforms, such as the abolition of sati and child-marriages, its influence was mainly confined to the intellectual and social elite of Bengal. It failed to exercise much influence on the great mass of people.

Unlike the limited appeal of the Brahmo Samaj the next major religious movement to emerge during this period, the Arya Samaj was to exercise greater influence on the Hindu populace largely due to its dynamic leader Swami Dayananda Saraswathi. A great scholar of Sanskrit and the Vedas, Dayananda presented a striking contrast to the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. Having made Hindi the medium of his lectures and discourses, he was able to come into closer contact with the public at large, especially the middle-class. Swami Dayananda was fired with an intense zeal for the purification of Hinduism. His acceptance of the Vedas as sacred scriptures and his approval of the doctrines of Karma and rebirth linked his teachings to the great Hindu tradition. In his zeal to purify Hinduism by a return "back to the Vedas", Dayananda denounced not only the 'evil' customs that plagued Hindu society of his time but also the doctrine of avatars and

murti-worship. He further rejected the whole corpus of Puranic literature that supported the above doctrines. He also refused to recognise the Upanishads as sruti; nor did he acknowledge the authoritativeness of the Bhagavad Gita. Although the Arya Samaj continues to exercise much influence on contemporary Hindu thought its appeal has been limited by the rejection of the above mentioned doctrines and scriptures.

Although for Dayananda no rapprochement with the West was possible, this was not the case with the Theosophical Society, an organization founded in the West but which was to play an important role in the Hindu renaissance of this period. The impact of the Theosophical Society on India was incalculable, not because any great number of Indians took-up Theosophy but because for the first time Westerners drew their inspiration from Hinduism. Under the leadership of Annie Besant the Theosophical Society played an important role in the growing religious, cultural, and political self-consciousness of the Indian people. By their dissemination of Hindu religious writings The Theosophists created a new interest in Eastern religion throughout much of the Western world, while their unqualified admiration of Hinduism created a feeling of confidence and worth which helped to revitalise religious life in India.

3. However, the greatest source of the revitalisation and regeneration which Hindu religion and culture experienced at this time was entirely indigenous, in the person of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Although Sri Ramakrishna hardly ever ventured out of his home

province of Bengal and remained practically "illiterate" all his life, his influence both on the mass of Indian people and on the intellectuals (including Keshub Chander Sen and other members of the Brahmo Samaj) was far-reaching.

4. Sri Ramakrishna's entire life was a marvellous web of spirituality. His intense desire to see and experience God resulted in his having a vision of the Divine Mother Kali. Although God became a living reality for Sri Ramakrishna, his spiritual life continued to expand. He travelled the paths of devotion, yoga and knowledge and realized the Truth taught in Tantrism, Vaishnavism and Vedanta. As an untiring experimenter in religion he also followed the sadhanas of Islam and Christianity resulting in visions of Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ. The cumulative effect of all these experiences convinced him of the Oneness of God manifesting in different names and forms, and that all religions are paths that lead to the same goal and are equally valid.

Sri Ramakrishna's life demonstrates that he was a man of the highest realisation, both by the test of miracles and by the test of purity and innocence of his external conduct. He showed that not only were other religions viable paths to spiritual realization but that within Hinduism itself the various paths - jnana, karma, bhakti and raja yoga - all lead to the same goal. This emphasis upon universalism within Hinduism itself and the rejection of personal barriers to spiritual or religious attainment was to give the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the work of his followers the dynamism and broad appeal they still possess today.

Sri Ramakrishna successfully synthesized the many divergent elements of Hinduism into a cohesive whole. Perhaps most important of all was that his teachings are based on actual experience. He was living what he taught so that even the most sceptical and wary "visitor" usually fell under his charismatic appeal when they came face to face with him, including his most beloved disciple Swami Vivekananda.

5. Swami Vivekananda is without doubt one of the most striking and influential personalities in the modern history of Hinduism. His influence on contemporary Hinduism is so pervasive that it is a difficult if not impossible task to identify separately and extricate the elements which he contributed to the understanding of Hinduism in the modern era. While Sri Ramakrishna had succeeded in producing a great impression on many intellectuals in Bengal and in attracting a number of disciples the movement associated with his name became successful and known all over the world mainly through the selfless work of Swami Vivekananda. However, Swami Vivekananda only gave verbal expression to what he thought had been demonstrated by the life and experiences of his great Master. The message of his Master assumed the form of a dynamic conviction and a programme of ardent and revolutionary action in the life and activities of Swami Vivekananda who was a great orator and a champion of reason and rationalism.

As a preacher of universal religion as expounded by his Master, Swami Vivekananda is well known both in the East and the West. It was largely due to his untiring efforts that Hinduism as a

world religion gained its rightful credibility and acceptance in the Western world. After his visit to the West and his participation in the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, Swami Vivekananda became confident of his spiritual mission and determined to reorganise Indian society on the basis of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy preached by his Master. The social reformers of the day called Vivekananda a revolutionary for his resuscitation of spiritual values into the body-politic of India. Swami Vivekananda in his spiritual itinerary came to know the strength of the Indian Spirit and the weaknesses of the Indian society. The problems he confronted in India were many-sided and he bestowed his thought and activity in overcoming them by devising the ends and means of national reconstruction on a spiritual basis. In this regard he followed Sri Ramakrishna's Neo-Vedanta which is also termed Practical Vedanta, to rejuvenate faith and strength in the individual and society.

6. Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta philosophy maintains that Brahman as Infinite Existence, Knowledge and Bliss, is the highest and only true reality. To reach back to that One Absolute Spirit - Brahman - is the goal of human life. The Neo-Vedanta philosophy does not differentiate the sacred life from secular affairs but attaches equal importance to both. As the world is a manifestation of Brahman, worldly activity is also sacred, and all selfless activity is worship. Hence selfless service is not merely social work but a spiritual sadhana. The central ideal of the Neo-Vedanta is oneness,

the unity of all life. Everything is that One, the difference is in degree and not in kind. It is the same life that pulsates through all beings from Brahman to the Amoeba; the difference is only in the manifestation.

The human being holds an exalted position in the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. The doctrine of the indwelling of God in man implies that he is essentially divine. The Neo-Vedanta visualises divinity in every walk of life. It reminds man that he is Spirit. The real practical side of Neo-Vedanta is to see God in everything, and as everything. Recognising this truth of the unity of all life is the most practical of all worship.

The Neo-Vedanta according to Swami Vivekananda, can be manifested in all walks of life. It is not a philosophy confined to books and to be practised in the depths of forests or caves. He advocated Practical Vedanta which can express itself in our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life and the home life of every nation. For the Swami it is not God in the temples, in symbols and images that we are to worship. On the contrary he insists that we are to worship the living God, whom we see before us and who is in everything we see. We are to worship God in all of humanity, the young and old, the weak and poor, the sick and ignorant, and the saint and sinner alike.

The Vedantic spirit of oneness makes the individual identify himself with society at large and serve it with a service motive

devoid of personal gain. The Neo-Vedanta maintains that individual liberation is incomplete without the total liberation of humanity. Hence Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta maintains that man who is an end in himself must also become a means to serve humanity. It is this humanistic vision of the divinity of man which inspired the Swami to work tirelessly for the upliftment of the downtrodden and underprivileged masses. The Neo-Vedanta maintains that the happiness and welfare of the individual is based on working selflessly for the happiness and welfare of all.

7. Perhaps one of Swami Vivekananda's greatest contributions to the building of a new India was the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. From its humble beginnings with a core group of young sannyasis committed to the Neo-Vedantic ideals preached by their Master and under the benign leadership of Swami Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has today grown into one of the largest and most influential contemporary Hindu movements. Several factors have contributed to the steady growth of the Movement in its short history. The future success of the Movement was already cemented by Sri Ramakrishna himself with the founding of the Ramakrishna Order of Monks just prior to his mahasamadhi in 1886. It is the dedicated and selfless service of the monks of the Ramakrishna Math that is largely responsible for the steady growth of the Movement internationally. The monks are the inspiration and 'guiding light' of the multifaceted activities of the Mission. The deep involvement of the Monks in all facets of the Mission's

work is a direct result of Swami Vivekananda's transformation of the role of the sannyasi in society. Unlike certain orthodox schools of Hindu thought which maintained that the sannyasi should not involve himself in secular life, Swami Vivekananda firmly maintained that the Vedanta makes it incumbent for a true renunciate to take an active role in working selflessly for the welfare of humanity while at the same time striving for his own liberation. The most radical innovation, therefore, introduced by Swami Vivekananda in organizing the life of the sannyasi was the removal of the sharp constraints between the duties and aims of the sannyasis and of the laity. Swami Vivekananda's main thesis justifying the secular work of the sannyasis, was that all people, particularly the poor, sick and downtrodden are the manifestation of the divine source, and selfless service to them is accordingly a form of divine service. In keeping with this ideal of Neo-Vedanta the Ramakrishna Math and Mission concentrates its activities in two main directions, viz., the active spread and propagation of Hindu religion, philosophy and culture amongst the various strata and categories of the population, and organising educational and philanthropic establishments and working in them. In recent years the Mission has devoted special attention to the upliftment of the masses through its various educational, rural-development and humanitarian activities.

8. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission has also made an impact in the West as a result of its numerous branches in the Western world some of which were initiated by Swami Vivekananda himself.

These Vedanta Centres are playing an important role in disseminating the Neo-Vedantic ideals in Europe and the U.S.A. The Ramakrishna Mission as a result of the initial endeavours of Swami Vivekananda must be largely credited for the widespread interest now being shown by Westerners in Vedantic thought.

The names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as well as their Neo-Vedantic teachings are today widely known throughout India and in countries outside of India wherever the Mission has established branches. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission in its short existence has exercised much influence on the development of contemporary Hindu thought and is one of the leading exponents of Indian culture in India and abroad. The fact that Swami Vivekananda's birthday is observed annually as National Youth Day by the Indian nation demonstrates the continuing influence the Swami exerts on modern India. Although it would be safe to state that the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has not as yet fulfilled all the ideals set out by Swami Vivekananda for the Movement, there is no doubt that the Movement is committed to fulfilling the Swami's dream of transforming India into one of the leading nations of the world, while at the same time scattering the seeds of the Vedanta to every continent.

9. Like the Indian Movement the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, founded in 1942 by Swami Nischalananda, is playing an important role in the regeneration and active propagation of Hinduism. Although the Centre is independent from the Ramakrishna Math

and Mission it has modelled itself on the Indian Movement and derives much of its inspiration and guidance from senior monks of the Belur Math.

The establishment of the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa heralded a new era in the history of Hinduism in South Africa. The Ramakrishna Centre was the first Hindu monastic organisation, centred around a guru and ashram as advocated in the Upanishads, to establish itself locally. Prior to the emergence of the ashram-based organisations, the temple was the main forum for religious expression. While the temple continues to be an important centre for institutional expression in the religious life of the Hindu community locally, its role in uniting the community is limited to occasions of the major Hindu festivals. Traditionally the temple was a centre of learning and religio-cultural expression. However, the lack of adequately qualified Hindu theologians has limited the scope of activities of the temple in South Africa.

10. The Ashrams of the Ramakrishna Centre serve not only as mandirs, but also as forums for cultural expression and religious education. The Ramakrishna Centre in its endeavours to educate the Hindu community, seeks to redirect the Hindu mind from the formal to the fundamental aspects of Hindu religion and philosophy.
11. The sound organisational structure of the South African Movement is one of the primary factors that has sustained it over the years, even during times of difficulties such as the demise of its

founder in 1965. While Swami Nischalananda laid the foundation of the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa, it was Swami Shivapadananda together with the monks and dedicated devotees of the Centre who have successfully steered the Movement to become one of the major influencing forces in shaping Hinduism in South Africa. At the time of the Mahasamadhi of Swami Nischalananda in 1965, the Movement had only one ashram centre in South Africa, viz., its headquarters in Avoca, Durban. Today the Movement has six centres and over twenty branches spread throughout South Africa. The ashrams and branches of the Movement are guided and regulated by the Spiritual Head and the Board of Governors. All the branches are involved in an extensive programme of activities catering for the religio-cultural expression of its numerous devotees. The ashrams and branches of the Centre are sustained and directed by the philosophy and ideology of the Neo-Vedanta, with the focus of service and worship centred on the Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

12. As a monastic organisation the guru occupies an exalted position in the Ramakrishna Centre. His presence in many ways "makes the Ashram". The fact that Hinduism lacks a unified hierarchical organisation accentuates the importance of the role of the guru. The guru is not only a religious teacher but also plays an important role in the transmission and development of the Hindu religious tradition from the passing on of religious knowledge to being himself a focus for worship. The institution called the Guru-shishya parampara, has been to a large extent responsible for the preservation and perpetuation of the Hindu religion and

philosophy from the Vedic age to the present day. In modern times the guru continues to play an important role as well as exercise much influence in Hindu society. However, it was Sri Ramakrishna as the founder of a new sampradaya, as well as his disciples, particularly Swami Vivekananda, who brought much positive attention to the guru not only in India but also in the West. The intense relationship between guru and shishya as witnessed in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda still permeates the Ramakrishna Movement today. This unique relationship between the Spiritual-preceptor and the student is clearly evident in the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa where the guru is the focus of the ashram community.

Swami Shivapadananda, belonging to the Guru-shishya-parampara lineage of the Ramakrishna Order of monks is greatly respected and revered by devotees of the Centre. As Spiritual preceptor of the Centre Swami Shivapadananda's role is multi-faceted and not merely confined to that of spiritual guide. In the true Neo-Vedantic spirit of sannyasa, Swami Shivapadananda is equally immersed in all facets of ashram life both spiritual as well as secular. The Neo-Vedanta philosophy insists that there is no difference between the sacred and secular work, and that all work is worship. As a Neo-Vedantic Movement the Ramakrishna Centre does not alienate itself from society. On the contrary, under the leadership of Swami Shivapadananda the Movement is deeply involved in working selflessly in the social sphere. It is as a result of the sterling leadership as well as the

selfless and dedicated services of Swami Shivapadananda that the Ramakrishna Centre has developed into one of the largest, and most influential Hindu organisations in South Africa. The spirit of universalism and love of humanity expressed in a lifetime of selfless service which is so vivid in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is today epitomised in the life of Swami Shivapadananda, one of their most ardent followers. While the guru is revered and venerated by devotees of the Centre it is Sri Ramakrishna who is the focus of their worship. Swami Shivapadananda is careful to point out that he is nothing but an embodiment of the Master. Hence personal devotion is centred on Sri Ramakrishna, the Avatara-varishtaya of the Movement.

13. As an ashram institution the Ramakrishna Centre seeks to spread the ideals of spiritualism and humanism as advocated in the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. The Ashram of the Centre is not merely a spiritual retreat but the nucleus of a widespread programme of religio-cultural and humanitarian activities. Through the ashram institution the Centre is dedicated to giving practical expression to the Neo-Vedanta philosophy. While spiritual liberation is the primary concern of the Ashram, selfless service also occupies an equally important place in the life of the devotees. "Service to man is worship of God" is the motto of the Centre and it is also the hermeneutical key employed in giving practical expression to the Neo-Vedanta. In this regard the monks of the Centre play a vital role in guiding the numerous activities of the Ashram. The Ramakrishna

Centre has the largest number (four) of sannyasis in South Africa. This is a factor that augurs well for the future growth of the Movement. Furthermore the issue of future leadership does not pose a problem.

14. As a centre of learning the Ashram is not only concerned with the dissemination of spiritual knowledge but the propagation of Hindu religion and culture in its widest sense. In the South African context the ashram has taken on an increasingly important role as a centre of Hindu learning. This has been due to several factors, the foremost being the breakdown of the joint-family system as well as the effects of the Group Areas Act which served to undermine the stability and solidarity of the Hindu family unit. Traditionally the joint-family played an important role in the Hindu community in inculcating and continuing religious and social values and customs. However, with the erosion of the joint-family system and preference by the younger generation Hindu for the nuclear family unit a vacuum has been created in their religious education. The Ashram as a centre of learning under the guidance of the guru is playing an important role in catering for the religious education and expression of the community.
15. Through its numerous religio-cultural activities held at its Ashrams and branches the Ramakrishna Centre seeks to influence society by impressing upon its devotees the need to live the Vedanta in their daily life. By emphasising the Neo-Vedantic ideals of selfless service and renunciation the Ashram aspires

towards total human development. Of the numerous religious practices observed at the Centre's Ashrams, the arati and satsang are held most frequently. The satsang attracts a large number of devotees to the Ashram on a regular basis. The weekly satsang is one of the most important mediums through which the Neo-Vedanta teachings are transmitted to the public. The satsang which comprises several spiritual disciplines in addition to ritual worship is designed to cater for the differing spiritual temperaments of the human person. Unlike some Hindu movements which do not encourage murti-worship and ritual ceremonies the Ramakrishna Movement attaches importance to both the ritual as well as the philosophical expression of Hinduism. As is the situation in India the majority of Hindus in South Africa are adherents of traditional Hinduism, i.e., worship centred around an Ishta-devata by means of ritual ceremonies. Sri Ramakrishna as well as the Movement inspired by him were cognisant of this fact. As Sri Ramakrishna profoundly observes (Sarma, 1966 : 170); "Rites and ceremonies are the husks of religion, but without the husk the seed will not germinate and grow...." One of the primary reasons for the steady growth of the Ramakrishna Movement in India and South Africa is that it caters for the differing spiritual needs of the human person. Swami Vivekananda's familiarity with the religious needs of the Western world as a result of his travels in countries of North America and Western Europe led him to realize the need for differentiating between the religious practices of the Ramakrishna Mission depending upon the composition of the members of the particular branch.

Thus, in the foreign branches of the Mission, the ritual aspect of worship is curtailed in favour of lectures of a religio-philosophical nature and discourses between the guru and members of the society. In India, on the other hand, because of the more traditional character of the consciousness of the masses, ritual worship continues to have a very great significance in the functioning of the various branches of the Mission. A similar situation persists in South Africa although the Centre is gradually trying to infuse the life of the devotees with a more philosophical understanding of ritual worship.

The Ramakrishna Centre also observes all the major Hindu festivals in addition to celebrating the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi. In keeping with the teachings of universalism advocated by Sri Ramakrishna, the Centre also celebrates the birthdays of Prophet Muhammad, Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ.

The numerous poojas, ceremonies and festivals observed at the Ashram serve to draw devotees together in worship and imbue them with a sense of belonging and community consciousness. It also provides them with an opportunity to practise their religion as well as act as a constant reminder of the true aim of life, i.e., Moksha or God-realization.

16. As a Neo-Vedantic movement the Ramakrishna Centre seeks to work for the regeneration of the whole person, his body, mind and spirit. In keeping with this aim the Centre is deeply involved

in a multi-faceted programme of cultural, educational and humanitarian work. An important facet of the Centre's work involves the training of spiritual aspirants. The Centre caters for the training of both lay and monastic devotees. The Centre draws its adherents from a wide cross-section of society, including house-holders, students and children. A small but sizeable number of devotees are also drawn from the Black, Coloured and White communities. The spiritual training of devotees is designed not only to benefit the individual by increasing his spiritual awareness but it is also aimed at the regeneration of society as a whole. By creating a better individual the Movement is committed to creating a better society. The successful expansion of the Movement locally is also due to joint efforts of the lay and monastic devotees. The lay devotees form the "strength" of the organisation and are largely responsible for executing the numerous activities of the Centre under the inspired guidance of the monks.

17. In catering for the religio-cultural expression of its devotees the Centre offers a variety of spiritual disciplines aimed at enhancing the spiritual growth of its devotees. The Sadhana or Yoga Camp held twice annually is one of the most important spiritual programmes of the Centre. The four-day spiritual retreat provides a forum for intense sadhana for those devotees desirous of accelerating their spiritual evolution. The Camp is designed to give expression to all facets of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy, viz., prayer and worship, meditation, selfless service, lectures,

scriptural discourses and cultural items. In the main the Sadhana Camp serves to bring devotees in direct contact with the vast scope of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy and encourages them to give practical expression to it in their daily life.

18. Since its inception the Ramakrishna Centre has placed great emphasis on the religious education of children. The Sunday Schools held weekly by all branches of the Centre seek to cater for the religious education of children while the annual Children's Rally provides a forum for cultural expression. The Centre is aware that childhood is the most impressionable period in a person's life, hence it works assiduously to inculcate the proper moral and spiritual values in the life of the child so that the child may develop into a responsible citizen and a credit to society. The Centre also has a special forum catering for the religio-cultural expression of the youth, viz., The Ramakrishna Youth League. In working for the regeneration of the Indian society Swami Vivekananda placed much faith in the youth of India. He was a staunch believer in "youth-power" and maintained that if the youthful energy is properly harnessed and utilised creatively, it can transform society for the better. The Ramakrishna Centre is inspired by this same ideal and the Youth League while catering for the religio-cultural expression of the younger generation is also an important reservoir from which the Centre draws its future leaders.

Education occupies a prominent place in the numerous activities of the Centre. The education programmes of the Centre are conducted in the spirit of Swami Vivekananda's definition of education, viz., "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man." The Vivekananda Study Circle is a forum catering for the religious education of those devotees interested in undertaking a serious study of Hinduism. It provides devotees with a programme of formal education in Hindu religion and philosophy. The Ramakrishna Centre is one of the few institutionalised Hindu movements in the country to have an effective and organised programme catering for the religious education of the community.

19. The Ramakrishna Centre in keeping with the universal teachings of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy is actively committed to promoting inter-faith dialogue and harmony. In a country where racial segregation by law has not only isolated the different race groups but also the different religio-cultural communities, inter-faith understanding and co-operation is of paramount importance. The annual Quest symposium, held by the Centre seeks to bring adherents of different faiths together to discuss as well as understand and appreciate the similar or differing viewpoints of all religions. Through arranging these inter-faith symposiums, as well as regularly inviting leading religious personalities of other faiths to address its congregation the Ramakrishna Centre is committed to promoting harmony and understanding amongst the diverse communities of South African society.

20. One of the primary means through which the Ramakrishna Centre seeks to infuse the lives of the Hindu community with the Neo-Vedantic teachings is the widespread dissemination of Vedantic literature. The Centre is fully aware of the power of the printed word as a means of communicating with the public. As a result of the difficulties faced by the Hindu community in obtaining religious literature from India due to the lack of diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries, the Centre publishes much of its own literature at its modern and well equipped Jyothi Press. The numerous publications of the Centre which are widely distributed in the Hindu community seek to enlighten the Hindus on the fundamental tenets of Hindu religion and philosophy.

21. The Neo-Vedanta philosophy is also referred to as Practical Vedanta because of its great emphasis on selfless service to humanity. In the true Neo-Vedantic spirit of working for the regeneration of society at all levels, the Ramakrishna Centre is deeply involved in a multifaceted programme of humanitarian services. Its motto of "service to man is worship of God" is physically evident in its humanitarian activities which are viewed as a sadhana or service. It is this spirit of service as worship which governs the humanitarian work of the Centre including providing medical-relief, meals for the underprivileged children at schools and the distribution of food hampers and clothing to the poor and needy. The humanitarian work of the Centre is directed towards total human development. Humanitarian aid is not viewed as social work or charity. It is equated with

devotion to God. Selfless service to humanity is an article of faith in the Neo-Vedanta, and this attitude is reflected in all facets of the Centre's humanitarian work.

22. As a religious organisation the Ramakrishna Centre is committed to the regeneration of society primarily through the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. The Centre is neutral to politics. Since its inception it has not become involved in the political affairs of South African society. The Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda does not divorce politics from the totality of man's life. Swami Vivekananda maintained that Moksha, liberation, does not only mean the spiritual freedom of a person but also his physical and mental freedom. One of the greatest challenges facing the Ramakrishna Centre today is its readiness not only to respond to the political situation in the country but also its ability to actively assimilate the political philosophy of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta into its teachings and applying it to the South African context. There is no doubt that politics affects almost all facets of life in South Africa and the Centre cannot divorce itself from the political arena. Most Hindu religious organisations have thus far remained either neutral or uncommitted to the complex political situation persisting in South Africa today. This attitude has been sharply criticized by a growing number of Hindus who feel that religion should not be divorced from politics. The Neo-Vedanta lays emphasis on all facets of life, the spiritual, cultural, social, economic and political. As a Neo-Vedantic movement the Ramakrishna Centre is in dire need to give greater expression to the Neo-Vedantic

attitude to politics in relating to South African society. In its quest to play a greater role in shaping the life of the Hindu community, the Centre cannot afford to adhere to its present non-committal attitude in matters affecting the political freedom of the individual as an inherently divine whole.

23. The Ramakrishna Centre is one of the largest and most influential Hindu Movements in South Africa. The society has assisted in imbuing the Hindu mind with a new self-esteem and confidence. Its highly organised and well structured programme of religio-cultural and humanitarian activities has taken the message of Hinduism to a large sector of the community. It may be factual to proclaim that not every Hindu in South Africa has heard the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekanand and of their Neo-Vedantic teachings. However, the prognosis is good for the gradual and continuing increase in public awareness of the Movement's presence and teachings. The Centre within a short timespan of four decades has become a permanent feature of South African Hinduism and is playing a vital role in shaping the evolution of Hinduism in South Africa at the present time. At the time of the completion of his study of the Movement Le Roux (1965 : 249-250) had predicted that the Movement is unlikely to develop into an established sect or denomination in its present stage of religious development. The rapid growth of the Movement in South africa, not only since its inception, but also after the demise of its founder, as well as the ready acceptance of its Neo-Vedantic teachings by a sizeable sector

of the Hindu community, has disproved Le Roux's prediction. Le Roux (1965 : 252) also wrongly type-casts the Movement "as between a sect and a cult with much the heavier accent on the cult aspects." Such a categorisation of the Movement clearly indicates a lack of appreciation and understanding of Renascent Hinduism. Klostermaier (1981 : 94) points out that the word "cult" in reference to religious movements "is ill-defined and emotion laden." It could be applied to almost any group activity which one happens to dislike or misunderstand. There is a tendency amongst some Western scholars of Eastern religions to type-cast new Hindu movements as cults. Movements such as the Ramakrishna Mission, Hare Krishna and Arya Samaj are some of the many Hindu movements that have been wrongly categorised as cults. This definitely shows a lack of understanding and appreciation of the Hindu world-view by those responsible for such a categorisation. It must also be noted that many leading contemporary scholars of religion from the West such as Ninian Smart, Ursula King, Diana Eck and Huston Smith amongst others who have undertaken a serious study of Hinduism have refrained from branding Hindu movements as cults but appreciate them for what they are - new expressions of traditional Hinduism. Klostermaier (1981 : 94) correctly points out that the numerous Christian Protestant Churches in the West as well as the many Religious Orders of the Roman Catholic Church which arose since the sixteenth century qualify as genuine "religion" and their adherents are seen as members of a "Church" and not as a cult. Likewise the numerous Renascent Hindu movements that arose in India since the nineteenth century must be viewed as a branch of the ancient Hindu tradition and have equal right to the more respectable title "religion".

24. The Ramakrishna Centre is a product of Renascent Hinduism and as a revitalization movement it is aimed at the resurgence of the whole society by imbuing the life of the individual with the universal teachings of the Neo-Vedanta which proclaims that man is inherently divine and the aim of life is to manifest this divinity.

The living presence of the Master, Sri Ramakrishna, has sustained the Ramakrishna Movement since its inception. The strong faith placed by its devotees in the Master as well as the Neo-Vedantic teachings of Swami Vivekananda will continue to sustain the Movement world-wide and at the same time be its main source of inspiration and continued expansion internationally. In this regard it is apt to conclude with the words of Smart (1968 : 71):

"It is therefore important to recognise that the universalist message of Swami Vivekananda and of his Master Sri Ramakrishna, genuinely represents a new departure in world religions - the attempt to make the highest form of Hinduism a world faith. In doing so, the Vedanta will cease to be the highest form of Hinduism as such; but it would become the highest form of religion in general."

SUMMARY

The following is a brief summary of the study:

Chapter One entails a discussion of the subject of study viz., The Ramakrishna Movement, as well as the aims of the study. The writer also discusses the methodological framework employed in this study.

Chapter Two examines the historical, political and socio-religious conditions prevalent in India during the 19th century. Factors responsible for the emergence of Renascent Hinduism are outlined. Particular attention is focussed on the more prominent Neo-Hindu movements and leaders who played a meaningful role in shaping the evolution of ideas that constituted the Hindu Renaissance. The Chapter however, focuses in the main on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the influence he had on the life of his most ardent disciple Swami Vivekananda.

Chapter Three entails a detailed discussion of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. The Neo-Vedanta philosophy of the Swami is discussed in relation to the Advaita, Visistadvaita and Dvaita schools of Vedanta. The concepts of Brahman, Atman and the Universe as well as the means to moksha as viewed by the Neo-Vedanta philosophy are explained. The chapter also focuses on the Practical Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and its relationship to Vedantic Humanism and Universalism.

Chapter Four entails a study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The history of the Math and Mission in India since its inception to the

present is elaborately detailed. Attention is also focussed on the training of monks of the Order and their role in the functioning of the Movement. The branches of the Movement in India and the West as well as their activities are discussed. Attention is also given to the various Departments of Service of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, viz. Religio-Cultural, Educational, Medical and Humanitarian.

Chapter Five provides a historical account of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa since its inception in 1942 to the present. A brief survey of Hinduism in South Africa prior to the emergence of the Ramakrishna Movement is provided. The Aims and Ideals, the Organisational Structure as well as the sources of income of the Movement are also discussed. The branches of the Centre as well as their activities are also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Six focuses on the Religio-Philosophical Framework of the Ramakrishna Movement. Two of the most important ashram rituals viz. the satsang and the arati are described and explained. The role of the Guru in Hindu society since the Vedic age to the present is discussed with particular emphasis on the concept of Guru in the Ramakrishna Movement. The ancient Upanishadic institution, the ashram, upon which the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa is based is examined. Festival and sacred days observed by the Movement are also discussed within this chapter.

Chapter Seven focusses on the various Departments of Service of the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa. These include:

- 1) the training of spiritual aspirants, both lay devotees and monastics;
- 2) the Sadhana Camp, including a detailed discussion of the annual December Sadhana Camp;
- 3) the religio-cultural education of children, which also entails a discussion of the Children's Rally;
- 4) The Ramakrishna Movement and Youth, including a discussion of The Youth League of the Centre;
- 5) The Education Programmes of the Centre are also discussed, including an explanation of Swami Vivekananda's view of education;
- 6) The Ramakrishna Centre and Cultural Journalism; and
- 7) The humanitarian work of the Centre.

Finally, the chapter also focusses on the Ramakrishna Centre and politics in the light of Swami Vivekananda's view of politics.

Chapter Eight reflects the conclusions arrived at from this study.

APPENDIX 1THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

[As on 15 May 1987]

Swami Gambhirananda	President
Swami Bhuteshananda	Vice-President
Swami Tapasyananda	Vice-President
Swami Hiranmayananda	General Secretary
Swami Gahanananda	Assistant Secretary
Swami Atmasthananda	Assistant Secretary
Swami Gitananda	Assistant Secretary
Swami Prabhananda	Assistant Secretary
Swami Satyaghanananda	Treasurer
Swami Abhayananda	
Swami Mumukshananda	
Swami Prameyananda	
Swami Ranganathananda	
Swami Smaranananda	
Swami Tattwabodhananda	
Swami Vandanananda	

APPENDIX 2DISTRIBUTION OF RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION CENTRES IN INDIA

[As on 15 May 1987]

Andhra Pradesh: Hyderabad, Rajahmundry and Visakhapatnam.

Arunachal Pradesh: Along, Itanagar and Narottam Nagar.

Assam: Gauhati, Karimgang and Silchar.

Bihar: Deoghar, Jamshedpur, Jāmtara, Katihar, Patna and Ranchi
(2 centres).

Delhi: New Delhi

Gujarat: Rajkot

Haryana and Punjab: Chandigarh

Karnataka: Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore and Ponampet.

Kerala: Kalady, Calicut (Kozhikode), Quilandy, Tiruvalla, Trichur
and Trivandrum.

Madhya Pradesh: Raipur.

Maharashtra: Bombay, Nagpur and Pune.

Meghalaya: Cherrapunji and Shillong.

Orissa: Bhubaneswar and Puri (2 centres).

Rajasthan: Khetri

Tamil Nadu: Chengalpattu, Coimbatore, Kanchipuram, Madras (5 centres),
Nattarampalli, Ootacamund and Salem.

Tripura: Agartala.

Uttar Pradesh: Allahabad, Almora, Lucknow, Kankhal, Kanpur, Kishanpur,
Mayavati, Shyamala Tal, Varanasi (2 centres) and Vrindaban.

West Bengal: Antpur, Asansol, Bankura, Barasat, Belgharia, Belur
(Saradapitha), Calcutta (8 centres), Chandipur, Contai,

Garbeta, Jalpaiguri, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Malda,
Manasadwip, Midnapore, Narendrapur, Purulia, Rahara,
Ramharipur, Sargachhi, Sarisha, Taki and Tamluk.

APPENDIX 3EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES OF THE RAMAKRISHNAMATH AND MISSION IN INDIA

Type	Number
Degree Colleges	5
B Ed and PGBT Colleges	4
College for Physical Education	1
Polytechnics	4
Higher Secondary schools	5
Secondary/High Schools	37
Senior Basic/Junior High Schools	3
Junior Technical/Industrial Section	8
Junior Basic Training Institutes	5
Vocational/Pre-Vocational Training Centres	7
Middle English Schools	23
Junior Basic Schools	33
Upper Primary/Primary Schools	64
Pre-Basic/Pre-Primary/Lower Primary Schools	21
Institute of Commerce	2
School of Agriculture	1
Rural Librarianship Training Centre	1
Blind Boys' Academy	1
Village-Level-Workers Training Centre	1
Krishi-Vijnan-Kendra	1
School of Automobile Engineering	1
Institute of Culture	1

Type	Number
Work Education Training Centre	1
Adult Education Centres	191
Non-Formal Schools	114
Hostels/Homes/Orphanages	95
Institute of Medical Sciences	3
Library and Reading Rooms	132
Audio-Visual Units	15
Recreational Centres	3

(The Ramakrishna Movement, 1982 : 181-182).

APPENDIX 4

JOURNALS PUBLISHED BY THE RAMAKRISHNA
MATH AND MISSION

1. Prabuddha Bharata (started in 1896), English Monthly.
2. Udbodhan (started in 1897), Bengali Monthly.
3. The Vedanta Kesari (started in 1914), English Monthly.
4. Prabuddha Keralam (started in 1914), Malayalam Monthly.
5. Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam (started in 1921), Tamil Monthly.
6. Sri Ramakrishna Prabha (started in 1944), Telegu Monthly.
7. Bulletin of The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture
(started in 1948), English Monthly.
8. Vedanta For East and West (started in 1951), English Bi-Monthly.
9. Samaja Shiksha (started in 1955), Bengali Quarterly.
10. Jivan Vikas (started in 1955), Marathi Monthly.
11. Vivek Jyoti (started in 1961), Hindi Quarterly.
12. Vedanta, French Quarterly.

(The Ramakrishna Movement, 1982 : 183-184).

APPENDIX 5SRI RAMAKRISHNA ARATI

Khandana bhava bandhana

jagavandana vandi tomay

Neeranjana nararoopadhara, nirguna guna may

Mochana aghadooshana

jagabhooshana chidghanakay

Jnananjana vimala nayana, veekshane moha jay

Bhasvara bhava sagara

chira unmada prema pathar

Bhaktarjana yugala charana, tarana bhava par

Jrimbhita yuga easvara

jagadheasvara yoga sahay

Neerodhana samahita mana, nirakhi tava kripay

Bhanjana dukha ganjana

karoonaaghana karma kathar

Pranarpana jagata tarana, krintana kalidor

Vanchana kama kanchana

ati nindita indriya rag

Tyageasvara he naravara, deha pade anurag

Nirbhaya gata samshaya

dridha nischaya manasavan

Nishkarana bhakata sharana, tyaji joti kula man

Sampada tava shreepada

bhava goshpada vari yathay

Premarpana sama darashana, jaga jana dukkha jay

Namo namo prabhoo vakya manateeta

Namo namo prabhoo vakya manateeta

Mano vacanaikadhar (prabhoo)

Mano vacanaikadhar

Jyotira jyoti ujala hridi kandara

Jyotira jyoti ujala hridi kandara

Tumi tamo bhanjana har (prabhoo)

Tumi tamo bhanjana har

Dhe dhe dhe langa ranga bhanga

bhaje anga sanga mridanga

Gayiche chanda bhakata vrinda arati tomar

Jaya jaya arati tomar!

Hara hara arati tomar!

Shiva Shiva arati tomar!

Khandana bhava bandhana

jagavandana vandi tomay

Jai sri guru maharajji ki jai!

We adore Thee, O snapper of worldly bondages! O honoured of all mankind!

Thou art at once the transcendent attributeless Being and the Divine

Person with attributes, O sinless one embodied as man!

O redeemer of all sins! O adornment for all the worlds!

O pure consciousness condensed! Thy eyes, sanctified with the
collyrium of Jnana, shatter the delusion of ignorance by their very
look.

Thou art verily an ocean of luminous and lofty spiritual sentiments,
ever lashed into waves of inebriating love. Thy holy feet, devotion's

reward, form a veritable boat for crossing the ocean of Samsara.

Thou art the Lord of the universe, manifested as the Incarnation for the modern age, for helping mankind in its spiritual endeavour. By Thy grace I clearly see this, O Thou whose mind is ever established in transcendent Samadhi!

O shatterer of the mass of mankind's sorrows! O mercy condensed!
O worker tremendous! Thy life is an offering of love for the redemption of mankind, and a power that shatters the bondage of the dark age of Kali.

Thou art the conqueror of lust and greed, and the spurner of all enticements of sensuous attractions. Bestow on us unflinching love for Thy blessed feet, O Lord of all renouncers and the noblest of mankind!

Thy mind is above all fears, devoid of all doubts, and firm in its resolves. Innocent of pride of birth and race. Thy universal love offers shelter to all devotees who seek it.

O offering of love! O paragon of same-sightedness! To those who treasure Thy holy feet in their hearts, the ocean of Samsara is but a puddle formed by the hoof-mark of a calf. Their sorrows take to wings!

Repeated salutations to Thee, O Lord who art beyond the reach of speech and mind, but yet the common basis of them both.

Light of all lights, ever resplendent in the cavity of the heart!
Destroy the darkness of ignorance therein, O Lord! Destroy the
darkness!

To the accompaniment of Mridanga with its sweet sounds of 'Dhe, Dhe,
Dhe, Langa, Ranga, Bhanga', Thy devotees are singing songs at Arati
Thine.

Jaya jaya arati Thine! Hare hara arati Thine! Shiva shiva arati
Thine.

We adore Thee, O snapper of worldly bondages! O honoured of mankind!

Victory to the Great Guru!

APPENDIX 6SRI RAMAKRISHNA STOTRAM

Om hreem ritam tvamachalo gunajit gunedyah
 naktam divam sakarunam tava pada – padmam
 Mohan – kasham bahu – kritam na bhaje yato'ham
 tasmāt tvameva sharanam mama deena – bandho.

Thou art the Supreme Being indicated by the mystic sounds Om and hrim.
 Thou art the Truth immutable who is beyond the sway of Gunas (Nature's
 modes), yet Thy glory do the Gunas proclaim. Day and night I have
 failed to worship Thy delusion – destroying feet with a longing
 heart and firm determination. Therefore Thou art my sole refuge, O
 Friend of the lowly and the lost.

Bhaktir bhagascha bhajanam bhava – bheda – kari
 gacchantyālam suripulam gamanaya tattvam
 Vakrod – dhritopi hridaye na cha bhati kinchit
 tasmāt tvameva sharanam mama deena – bandho.

Devotion, aspiration and worship – breakers of worldly bondage – are
 indeed sufficient to take one to the Supreme Truth. While I talk much
 of these, my heart fails to reflect them even in the least. Therefore,
 Thou art my sole refuge, O Friend of the lowly and the lost!

Tejas – taranti tarasa tvayi tripta – trishnah
 rage krite rita – pathe tvayi ramakrishne
 Martya – mritam tava padam maranarmi nasham
 tasmāt tvameva sharanam mama deena – bandho.

Those who have found the fulfilment of all their desires in Thee and developed loving attachment to Thee, O Ramakrishna, the apostle of truth and righteousness, they do overcome very soon the heat of the passions of the heart. Thy name is in sooth an immortal drink to Thy devotees, a veritable dispeller of the waves of death. Therefore, Thou art my sole refuge, O Friend of the lowly and the lost!

Krityam karoti kalusham kuhakantakari
 shnantam shivam suvimalam tava nama natha
 Yasmad — aham tvasharano jagad — eka — gamya
 tasmad tvameva sharanam mama deena — bandho.

Lord, holy and sanctifying is Thy name ending with 'shna', destroying delusion in all and transforming sinners into saints. I am verily without any other shelter, O Thou, the goal of all the worlds. Therefore Thou art my sole refuge, O Friend of the lowly and the lost!

Sthapakaya cha dharmasya
 sarva — dharma — svaroopine
 Avatara — varishthaya
 ramakrishnaya te namah.

O Ramakrishna, the establiher of religion universal, and the embodiment of all religions. To Thee, the noblest of Divine Incarnations, I offer my salutation.

Om namah sri bhagavate
 Ramakrishnaya namo namah (3).

APPENDIX 7IN PRAISE OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

Sarva — mangala — mangalye shive sarvarthasadhike
 Sharanye tryambake gauri narayani namostu te

O the most auspicious among those that are auspicious. O the one that grants the fulfilment of all prayers. O the one refuge of all. To Thee, consort of Shiva, known also as Tryambaka and Gauri, to Thee, O Narayani, our salutations.

Sristi — sthiti — vinashanam shakti — bhoote sanatani
 Gunashraye gunamaye narayani namostu te.

O Eternal one. Thou art the Power that creates, sustains and destroys the worlds. On Thee material nature rests, and of Thy being is it constituted. To Thee, O Narayani, our salutations.

Sharanagata deenarta paritrana parayane
 Sarvasyarti — hare devi narayani namostu te

O Mother Divine, noted for thy zeal in affording protection to the weak and the afflicted. O Thou, the dispeller of the miseries of all. To Thee, O Narayani, our salutations.

Jaya Narayani namostu te
 Jaya Narayani namostu te
 Jaya Narayani namostu te.

Jay sri guru maharajiki jay!

Jay sri maha maiki jay!

Jay sri swamiji maharajiki jay!

APPENDIX 8SRI RAMAKRISHNA SUPRABHATAM

Dharmasya hanimabhitah paridrishya sheeghram

Kamarapushkara iti prathite samriddhe

Grame suviprasadane hyabhijata deva

Sri—Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

Seeing the decline in the dharma, you hastened to be born in the prosperous village of Kamarpukur, in the house of a pious Brahmin. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Balye samadhyanubhavah sita — pakshi — panktim

Sandrishya meghapatale samavapi yena

Eeshaikya — vedana — sukham shivaratri — kale

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

In childhood you experienced bhava — samadhi on seeing a row of white cranes flying against the background of dark clouds, and (in your boyhood) you had the bliss of communion with Shiva on the Shivaratri night (while playing the role of Shiva) O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Nana — vidhanayi sanatana — dharma — margam

Christadi — chitra — niyamam paradesha — dharman

Asthaya chaikyamanayo — ramubhootavan — stvam

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

You practised spiritual disciplines according to various sects of the Sanatana Hindu Dharma; and you have also practised disciplines according to the religions of other countries, like Christianity and thereby shown the underlying unity of all religions. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

He Kalika — pada — saroruha — Krishna — bhringa

Matuh — samasta — jagatamapi saradayah

Aikyam hyadarshi tarasa paramam tvayaiva

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

The bee of your mind always sipped honey from the black lotus—feet of the Divine Mother Kali, and you have shown the oneness between Sri Sarada Devi and (the Divine Mother Kali) the Mother of the universe. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Rakhala — taraka — harishcha narendranatham

Anyanavishudhdha — manasah shashi — bhooshanadin

Sarvajna atmavayunam tvamihanushassi

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

You trained your apostles Rakhal, Tarak, Hari, Narendranath, Shashibhooshan and others who were pure souls aspiring for spiritual realization. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Niyam samadhija — sukham nijabodha — roopam

Asvadayan tava pade sharanagatashcha

Anandayan prashamayan — nupatishthase tvam

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

You were always experiencing the bliss of union with the Self in samadhi and you gave the glimpse of that bliss to those who surrendered at your feet and thus pacified their spiritual thirst. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Sweekritya papa — makhilam sharanagatairyad

Ajeevanam bahu kritam dadaya svadehe

Tajjata — kheda — nivaham sahase sma natha

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

You took on yourself the sins of those who surrendered at your feet, out of compassion, — the sins which they committed throughout their lives, and as a result you endured the sufferings that were caused due to those sins. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Pratah pranama — karanam tava pada — padme

Samsara — duhkha — haranam sulabham karati

Matveti bhakti — bharitah pratipalayanti

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

Saluting your lotus feet in the morning easily removes the miseries of the world. Knowing this the devotees devotionally take refuge at your feet. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Gatum stutistave jana amritayamanah

Samprapya darshanamidam tave padayoshcha

Dhanya naresha bhavitum militassameepam

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

People become filled with nectar-like bliss when they sing your hymns and get the darshan of your lotus feet. They thus become blessed by getting together near you. O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Sandaya darshana — sukham sharanagatebhyo

Mohandhakara — makhilam tvamapakurushva

Jnanarka bhakti — jaladhe sakalarti — hantah

Sri — Ramakrishna — bhagavan tava suprabhatam

You give the bliss of your vision to those who surrender to you, and you remove totally the darkness of ignorance in them. O Sun of knowledge, O Ocean of devotion, O Remover of everyone's sufferings, O Lord Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Ahaitukiti karuna kila te svabhavo

Dushtah kathora — hridaya api te bhajante

Tvameva sarva — jagatam janani prapatri

Sri Sharadesvari rame tava suprabhatam.

O Mother, unselfish compassion is in the very nature of yours. Even wicked and hard-hearted persons are seen to worship you. You alone are fit to be the mother of the whole universe. O Sharadesvari, O Rame, I adore you this holy morning.

Suptanstu bharata — janan svavachah praharai

Rudbodhayan vavashayan nija — dharma — marge

Protsahayan paramatam prakati — karoshi

Veeresha — dutta — mahiman tava suprabhatam

Vivekananda! You have awakened the Indians who were slumbering deep, due to lethargy and idleness by giving them blows through your powerful speeches, and you made them conscious about their duty towards the nation and towards their own selves. You have inspired them to follow the supreme spirit of religion. O Veeresha, who has brought glory to the Dutta family, I adore you this holy morning.

Prarutthaya yo devam

Ramakrishnam smaran smaran

Stotrametat — pathet — bhaktya

So'mritatvaya kalpate

One who chants this stotra (hymn) with devotion after getting up in the morning and remembering Sri Ramakrishna becomes immortal.

APPENDIX 9SRI SARADA SUPRABHATAM

Matah samasta — jagatam paramasya pumsah

Shakti — svaroopini shive karunarda — chitte

Lokasya shoka — shamanaya kritavatara

Shri — sharade'stu shivade tava suprabhatam

O Mother Sarada, the doer of the good, and mother of the whole universe,
O Pure One, who art of the nature of Primordial Power, you have
incarnated in the form of Sri Saradadevi out of compassion, in order
to redeem humanity from sufferings. I adore you this holy morning.

Balye bhavasya tamasah pariharayitre

Leela — mamishya — vapushetha gadadharaya

Datte tadarpitadiya'pta — samasta — vidye

Shri — saradestu shubhade tava suprabhatam

By your power you remove the darkness of ignorance of the world. You
are the spiritual consort of Gadadhara (Sri Ramakrishna) who has taken
the human form in leela. You surrendered yourself completely to him
and got the fruit of all the knowledge which he attained by sadhana.
O Sarada! the giver of auspicious things, I adore you this holy morning.

Balyat pare vayasi bhartari sampravritta

munmatta ityanuchitamavadhooya vartam

Taddarshana — kramita — durgama — doora — marge

Sri — Ramakrishna — dayite tava suprabhatam

O Mother, after attaining maturity in age you walked the long and difficult path (from Jairambati to Dakshineswar) in order to meet your husband (Sri Ramakrishna) on hearing about his spiritual madness. O consort of Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Sanyasitam patimaveksha cha nodvijane

Sevarpitatrikarane parishuddhachitte

Tatsadhana charamaseemni samarpitanghre

Sri — Ramakrishna — parameswari suprabhatam

On seeing your husband as a monk you did not become upset, on the other hand, you served him with devotion and with a pure heart and helped him in his mission, and he too in turn offered at your feet the fruit of all his spiritual practices. O Parameswari, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Yameva chatmajananim bhavatarinim cha

Sevaparam tu bubudhe gururastabhedah

Tasyas — samasta — jagato'sya sharanya — moorte

Sri — Ramakrishna — dayite tava suprabhatam.

Sri Ramakrishna regarded you, as his own mother, and the Divine Mother Kali as the same, although you regarded him as your guru and served him devotedly who had surrendered himself completely to the Divine Mother. O Mother, consort of Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Avrinvati paramikam prakritim svakeeyam

Samsarineeva bahuduhkajale bhavabdhau

Sarva — sahe shrita — janoddharanaika — deekshe

Sri — Ramakrishna — dayite tave suprabhatam

You very skilfully covered your divine power and appeared like an ordinary woman of the world drowned in the sea of misery. You endured all sufferings in order to bless humanity as was your mission. O Mother, consort of Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Gehasya marjanavidhou mama karma — shanti

Nayatyasankhya — bhuja — nishkriyamanamevam

Akasmikokti — vivritakhila — shaktiroope

Sri Ramakrishna — dayite tava suprabhatam

I don't get peace by attending to the cleaning and other household works, but when I remember your powerful sayings, and do the same, great power, as if, manifests in me and I do not feel the burden at all. O Mother, consort of Sri Ramakrishna, I adore you this holy morning.

Sri — Ramakrishna — dayite tadadheena — sattve

Tadbhakta — vrinda — paripalini muktidatri

Tadbhavarakta — hridaye tadabhinna — tattve

Matah samasta — jagatam tava suprabhatam

O spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, O Mother who surrendered at his feet and is one with him in principle, O Sarada whose heart always

vibrates with love for him, you are the giver of liberation and the protector of all the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. O Mother of the universe, I adore you this holy morning by chanting a hymn on you.

APPENDIX 10HYMN TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Moorta — maheshvara — mujjvala — bhaskara — m shta

mamara — naravandyam

Vande veda — tanu — mujjhita — garhita — kanchana —

kamini — gandham

I bow to Vivekananda, my spiritual guide, my object of worship, who is Lord Shiva incarnate, resplendent like the bright sun, adored alike by men and gods, the embodiment of the Vedas, who has completely overcome the bondage of the much-censured lust and gold.

Koti — bhanukara — deepta — simhamaho katitata — koupinavantam

Abhirabhi — hunkara — nadita — ding — mukha — prachanda —

tandava — nrityam

(I bow to Vivekananda) the lion (amongst men) brilliant with the rays of a million suns, who has nothing but the (Sannyasins) loin-cloth on, who is dancing the violent dance (of Shiva) reverberating the quarters with the impassioned cry of 'fear not'.

Bhukti — mukti — kripa — kataksha — prekshana — maghadala —

vidalana — daksham

Balachandra — dhara — mindu — vandyamiha noumi guru — vivekanandam

I bow to my guru Vivekananda, whose mere glance is enough to impart

both enjoyment and liberation, who tramples with ease the myriad Lords of vice, who is the veritable Shiva with the crescent moon on the forehead, and who is worshipped by Indu. (A pseudonym used by the composer, Sarat Chandra Chakravarty, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda).

APPENDIX 11

RELIGIOUS CALENDAR OBSERVED BY THE RAMAKRISHNA
CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA (1987)

Swami Vivekananda's Birthday	12 January
Makar Sankranthi	14 January
Thai and Surya Pongal	14 January
Thai Poosam	15 January
Vasanth Panchmi	3 February
Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday	18 February
Maha Shivaratri	26 February
Holika Dahan	15 March
Hindi New Year	30 March
Telegu New Year	30 March
Ramayan Week	30 March – 7 April
Sri Ram Naumi	7 April
Sri Hanuman Jayanthi	14 April
Tamil New Year	14 April
Guru Purnima	10 July
Swami Nischalananda's Birthday	22 July
Naag Panchmi	31 July
Raksha Bandhan	9 August
Gita Week	10 August – 16 August
Sri Krishnasthami	16 August
Sri Ganesh Chauth	28 August
Pithar Paksh	8 September – 22 September
Puratassi	17 September – 16 October
Navaratri	23 September – 7 October

Sri Saraswathi Pooja	30 September
Sri Doorga Naumi	1 October
Vijay Dasmi	2 October
Deepavali	22 October
Gujerati New Year	23 October
Inder Goberdhan Pooja	23 October
Kartik Purnima	5 November
Swami Purushottamananda's Birthday	23 November
Gita Jayanthi	1 December
Sri Sarada Devi's Birthday	22 December
Christmas	25 December

N.B. These dates are based on the Hindu almanac and will vary annually according to the Western calendar.

APPENDIX 12December Yoga Camp ProgrammeTHURSDAY: 25 December 1986

7.00 -	7.30	Registration
7.30 -	8.00	Inaugural Satsang conducted by Swamiji.
8.00 -	8.30	Hymns to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.
8.30 -	9.00	Tea
9.00 -	10.30	Karma Yoga
10.30 -	11.00	Mouna and Likit Japa
11.00 -	12.00	Talk: "Sri Ramakrishna" by Swami Premananda.
12.00 -	12.30	Recital of Karma Yoga verses from the Gita.
12.30 -	1.00	Lunch
1.00 -	2.00	Rest
2.00 -	3.00	Cultural Items by Sri Haribhai Popat (Of India)
3.00 -	3.30	Tea
3.30 -	4.30	Talk: "Swami Vivekananda" by Swami Saradananda.
4.30 -	5.00	Readings from Holy Mother - Sri Sarada Devi
5.00 -	5.15	Japa of Sri Ramakrishna's Mantra (Om Aim Sarve Deva Devi Swaroopaya Sri Ramakrishnaya Namah).
5.15 -	6.00	Arati/Evening Hymns
6.00 -	6.30	Discussion - Traditional and Modern Ways of Life.
6.30 -	7.00	Karma Yoga
7.30 -	8.00	Supper
8.00 -	9.00	Christmas Service including Talk: "Lord Jesus Christ" by Br. Francis
9.00 -	9.30	Hymns/Shanti Paat.
9.30 -	10.30	Coffee - Washing of dishes, cups, etc.
10.30		Bed. All lights out. Silence.

"Chant the name of God morning and evening, clapping your hands all the while; all your sins and afflictions will then leave you."

Sri Ramakrishna

A U MFRIDAY: 26 December 1986

4.00	-	5.00 a.m.	Ablutions, Cleaning of Rooms, Personal Meditation/Sadhana.
5.00	-	5.30	Group Meditation conducted by Swamiji.
5.30	-	6.15	Mangal Arati -/Suprabhatams
6.15	-	6.45	Bhajans/Kirtans
6.45	-	8.00	Hatha Yoga
8.00	-	8.45	Breakfast
8.45	-	9.45	Readings from Swami Vivekananda
9.45	-	10.00	Bhajans/Kirtans
10.00	-	11.30	Karma Yoga
11.30	-	12.30	Talk: "Glimpses of the Upanishads" by Swamiji.
12.30	-	1.00	Lunch
1.00	-	2.00	Rest
2.00	-	2.45	Talk: "Bhakti Yoga" by Pravrajika Atmaprana.
2.45	-	3.00	Bhajans/Kirtans
3.00	-	3.30	Tea
3.30	-	4.30	Recital of Bhagavad Gita Verses/Reading of Gita with commentary of Dr S Radhakrishnan.
4.30	-	5.00	Questions/Answers (Please prepare your questions).
5.00	-	5.15	Japa of Sri Ramakrishna's Mantra (Om Aim Sarve Deva Devi Swaroopaya Sri Ramakrishnaya Namah.)
5.15	-	6.00	Arati/Evening Hymns.
6.00	-	6.30	Discussion on Meditation and Japa.
6.30	-	7.00	Karma Yoga
7.00	-	8.00	Supper
8.00	-	8.30	Cultural Items
8.30	-	9.00	Brahmananda Bhajans with exposition by Swami Premananda.
9.00	-	9.30	Hymns/Reading from Gitanjali/Shanti Paat.
9.30	-	10.30	Coffee/Washing up, etc.
10.30			Bed/Lights out/Silence.

"What we need today is to know
that there is a God, and that we
can see and feel Him here and now."

Swami Vivekananda

A U MSATURDAY: 27 December 1986

4.00	-	5.00	Ablutions/Cleaning of Rooms/Personal Meditation - Sadhana.
5.00	-	5.30	Meditation conducted by Swamiji
5.30	-	6.15	Mangal Arati/Suprabhatams
6.15	-	6.45	Bhajans/Kirtans
6.45	-	8.00	Hatha Yoga
8.00	-	8.45	Breakfast
8.45	-	9.45	Readings from "The Visions of Sri Ramakrishna"
9.45	-	10.00	Mouna/Likit Japa
10.00	-	11.15	Karma Yoga
11.15	-	11.55	Talk: "Sri Sarada Devi" by Swamiji
11.55	-	12.30	Silent Meditation
12.30	-	1.00	Lunch
1.00	-	2.00	Rest
2.00	-	2.45	Talk: "Glimpses of Some Bhaktas" by Brahmacharini Gargi.
2.45	-	3.00	Discussion on Manasik (Mental) Worship.
3.00	-	3.30	Tea
3.30	-	4.15	Ramayana Recital with exposition by Swamiji
4.15	-	4.30	Break
4.30	-	5.00	Questions/Answers (Please prepare your questions).
5.00	-	5.15	Recitation of Master's Mantra (Om Aim Sarve Deva Devi Swaroopaya Sri Ramakrishnaya Namah).
5.15	-	6.00	Arati/Evening Hymns
6.00	-	7.00	Recital/Explanation of 15th Chapter of Bhagavad Gita
7.00	-	8.00	Supper
8.00	-	9.00	Readings from Swami Adbhutananda
9.00	-	9.30	Bhajans/Kirtans/Shanti Paat
9.30	-	10.30	Coffee/Cleaning up.
10.30			Bed/Lights out/Silence

"Remember one thing. If you want peace of mind then give up fault finding. If you would search for fault at all, find out your own faults and shortcomings."

Sri Sarada Devi

A U MSUNDAY: 28 December 1986

4.00	-	5.00 a.m.	Ablutions, cleaning of rooms, personal meditation/sadhana.
5.00	-	5.30	Group meditation conducted by Swamiji
5.30	-	6.15	Mangal Arati/Suprabhatams
6.15	-	6.45	Bhajans/Kirtans
6.45	-	8.00	Hatha Yoga
8.00	-	8.45	Breakfast
8.45	-	9.45	Readings from Mahatma Gandhi
9.45	-	10.00	Recitation of Sri Ramakrishna's Mantra (Om Aim Sarve Deva Devi Swaroopaya Sri Ramakrishnaya Namah).
10.00	-	11.15	Karma Yoga
11.15	-	12.15	Talk: "Swami Vivekananda" by Swami Saradananda.
12.15	-	12.30	Silent Meditation
12.30	-	1.00	Lunch
1.00	-	2.00	Rest
2.00	-	2.30	Talk: "Lord Buddha" by Swamiji.
2.30	-	3.00	Tea/Clear up Kitchen, etc.
3.00	-	3.30	Concluding Satsang

"If you desire to be pure, have faith, and slowly go on with your devotional practices, without wasting your energy in useless discussions and arguments."

Sri Ramakrishna

APPENDIX 13

Quest '87 : Discussion Points

1. It has been said that sin is nothing more than a little imperfection in the individual. Would your religion agree with this? If not, what is your religion's definition of sin, and does the individual have control over it?
2. What is your religion's view of pre-marital sex? Or of people simply living together? If there is no specific view, please discuss it in the context of your religion's view on morality.
3. How did this world and the universe come about? Was it created in a specific time by God? Literally? Or does your religion have other views about it's origin?

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- C. Journals,
- D. Reports, Booklets and Brochures,
- E. Newspaper, and
- F. Interviews.

The titles of Monographs are underlined. In instances where the writer has consulted articles in monographs, the title of the monograph containing the article is underlined. The same procedure is followed for Journal and Newspaper articles.

The names of those interviewed as well as the location of the interview is reflected under "Interviews". The exact dates of interviews are not reflected since the writer often conducted several interviews with the same person over a period of time. As indicated in the section on Methodology in Chapter 1, interviews with monks and devotees of the Ramakrishna Centre were conducted since May 1986 while interviews in India occurred during December 1987 and January 1988.

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