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*Kathāmṛta*

Narasingha Prosad Sil

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## *Article*

# The Nectar of the Master's Speech: An Anatomy of Sri Ramakrishna's *Kathāmṛta*

NARASINGHA PROSAD SIL

Ramakrishna's life is full of talk.

Amalkumar Ray, *Vidyāsāgar O Paramahansa*, 64

## I

The celebrated near-illiterate but fun-loving, habitually in the nude, and garrulous priest of the temple of Kālī (also called *Bhavatāriṇī* [Deliverer of the World]) at Daksineshvar, Ramakrishna *Paramahansa* (birthname Gadadhar [nickname Gadai] Chattopadhyay 1836–

86), earned virtual divinity from his disciples, devotees, and admirers for his nectar [*amṛta*] -like bedside conversations and sermons or *Kathāmṛta* (henceforth cited as *KM*) recorded by his devotee, the schoolmaster Mahendranath Gupta known as ŚrīM or M (1854–1932). His most ebullient devotee and eloquent propagandist *Svāmī* Vivekananda (birthname Narendranath Datta, 1863–1902 [nickname Naren]) proclaimed: ‘Basketfuls of philosophical books can be written on each single sentence spoken by the Master’ [*Ṭhākur* or ‘Reverend’, Ramakrishna’s popular moniker in Bengal] (*LP*, I: Gurubhāva-Pūrvārdha, p. 1: Vivekananda to Haramohan Mitra, c. 1886). His one-time rival, later a devotee, the *sahajiyā Vaiṣṇava* scholar Vaisnavacharan *Gosvāmī*, frankly told the Master: ‘I could find in the scriptures everything you say. But do you know why I come to you? To hear them from your mouth’ (*KM*, III, 34 [*GR*, 260]. Diary of 21 July 1883). Indeed, Ramakrishna’s reputation consists primarily and historically of his *kathā* and *samādhis*, that is, his *logia* and *syncope* (supposed to be a demonstration of his ecstatic mystical liaison with the Divine).

Interestingly enough, Ramakrishna, the talkative prophet of the fledgling British Indian Empire, is reminiscent of his forebears in the cultural history of other parts of the world, notably the Hellenic philosopher of the Athenian *agora* [marketplace] Socrates (c. 470–399 BCE) remembered in the writings of his student Plato (427–347 BCE) or the Hellenistic prophet in the *stoa* [portico] Zeno of Citium (334–262 BCE) remembered in the writing of Diogenes Laërtius (180–240) or the early modern German religious reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546), whose celebrated *Tishreden* [Table-talk] was recorded by the Zwickau pastor Conrad Cordatus (1480–1546) of the Holy Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the Indian’s unique status is defined by his marked contrast as a spiritual figure who, though neither completely

illiterate nor functionally literate, yet succeeded in attracting admirers and devotees in the metropolitan city of Calcutta due to his employment at the temple of the powerful and influential dowager *Rāṇī* Rasmani (1793–1861) as well as by his contact with the educated Calcutta middle class represented by the Brāhmos led by Keshabchandra Sen (1838–84). Arguably, it was the Brāhmo media that first publicised his unique performances of *samādhi* in Calcutta, that had already brought him accolades for his miraculous feat of dying seven times and coming back to life seven times (*KM*, IV, 190 [*GR*, 536]; 19 September 1884). Sadly, there has not been any detailed analysis of Ramakrishna’s informal sermons and conversations. The three distinguished scholars who boldly provided postmodernist interpretations of the impact of Ramakrishna’s *kathā* [conversation] on the urban middle-class, especially the *bhadralok* community of metropolitan Calcutta, signally failed to anatomise the Master’s *logia* (see Rosselli, ‘Ramakrishna and Elite of Bengal’; Sarkar, *Kathamrita as Text*; Chatterjee, ‘Religion of Urban Domesticity’).

The devotional hagiographical celebration of Ramakrishna’s characteristic mocking of a *paṇḍita* [scholar] or a *jñānī* [erudite or learned] and his debunking of institutional learning as mere means of earning [*cāikalābāndhā vidyā*] has so gripped the psyche of modern Indians in general, especially the college-educated modern evangelists and missionaries of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Order, that even any legitimate and reasonable query with proper academic qualifiers is suspect as subversion or apostasy. *Pace* John Money’s caution about the problematics of any certainty about the after-effects of childhood experiences (*Venuses Penuses*, 213) as well as the sanctified sneers at the use of my qualifiers attached to legitimate speculation by two titled monastic authors in the US, one at Santa Barbara, CA

and the other at Boston, MA—who can by no means be considered *academic scholars* (Tyagananda and Vrajaprana, *Interpreting Ramakrishna*, 90)—I place reasonable speculation based on circumstantial evidence as well as on plain deductive reasoning next to documented fact.<sup>1</sup> As an academic scholar, I find the former more meaningful than reliance on sheer faith, that is, in St. Paul’s terms, ‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11.1. *KJB Reference Bible*). Academic history can never be hagiography, although the latter is valorised by the faithful either as ‘alternative facts’ in the manner of a loquacious counsellor to an erstwhile US President or as ‘contrived facticity’, to cite a celebrity postcolonial postmodernist historian of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata (see Kellyanne Conway to NBC News’s Chuck Todd; see also Gautam Bhadra cited in *The Telegraph Online*). However, if a faith-based statement expressed in the categorical imperative passes for ‘fact’ and is deemed respectable and acceptable to some, it would be unfair to condemn or debunk any reasonable contrary scholarly opinion or exegesis used with appropriate qualifiers.

Reportedly, Ramakrishna never read any scriptures though, based on his reminiscences and casual conversations with his devotees, we are informed that the little Gadai studied in his village *pāṭhśālā* [rural primary school] from age five through seventeen, and later at the *ṭol* [Sanskrit grammar school] of his brother Ramkumar (1805–56) in Calcutta for a little

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<sup>1</sup> It is puzzling to recall how *Svāmī* Tyagananda of Boston, while soliciting my acquaintance via email, had found my paper on Ramakrishna’s religious consciousness presented to the Eighth International Conference of Vedanta Conference (31 October-3 November 1996) at Miami University ‘thought-provoking’, and frankly expressed his happiness ‘to get to know [me] via email (Tyagananda, *Email*). However, when subsequently we met in person at a conference, I started speaking to him in Bāṅlā, but he responded and carried on in English, never uttering a single word in this vernacular. All citations from the vernacular sources appear in my translation unless otherwise stated.

while. Reportedly, he was fond of reading (though there is no extant evidence of his skill in this regard) stories about Prahlada, legendary child devotee of Lord Vishnu, to a village neighbour and close family associate, the weaver Madhu Yugi. The boy is said to have hand-copied four religious plays [*pālā*] as well as portions of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* in Krittibas Ojha's (1381–1461) Bengali translation during 1848–49 (Ramakrishnananda [birthname Shashibhusan Chakravarti 1863–1911], *Ramakrishna*, 10, 14). However, most of the Master's insights were based on what he had heard (from the kathaks, *kīrtanīyās*, and pilgrim mendicants), remembered—he was reputed to be a *śrutidhara*, one gifted with a powerful memory (*LP*, I [Sādhakabhāva], 203)—and internalised. His spiritual wisdom was neither original nor deep, although the late Freda Matchet of Manchester believed that he possessed 'an extensive knowledge of the Hindu religious tradition' ('Teaching of Ramakrishna as Interpreted by Vivekananda', 172).

However, the *paramahansa* does not seem to have been afflicted by any existential/soteriological anxiety as to the meaning of life, of God, of salvation, and of the universe. All his spiritual problems, on the other hand, were the outcome of his inordinate desire to see Goddess Kālī as the real mother to a God-made child. *Svāmī* Saradananda's much-publicised story of Gadadhar's attempted suicide due to his colossal grief (or depression turned hallucinatory at his inability to behold the live form of the Divine Mother and his ultimate vision of the material appearance of the great goddess is based solely on the Master's reminiscences, but not corroborated by any other contemporary accounts (*LP*, I [Sādhakabhāva], 113–14). In fact, M had no clue as to its veracity. When a Parsee visitor

Mr Jinwala and his companion Dr De Melo asked him about the truth of the incident, M clearly stated that he had neither heard nor written about it (*MJ*, 232).

Saradananda's report on Ramakrishna's vision of the Goddess Kali could be explained in terms of the ascetic practices of the *Theravāda* Buddhists, who in their spiritual quest, experience dark despair (*nirveda* or disgust) or aggression to one's own self (in the parlance of Sigmund Freud, 1856–1939) *Der Schatten des Objekts fiel so auf das Ich* ['the shadow of the objects falling upon the ego'] but come out of this suicidal mood with miraculous enlightenment enabling a realisation of the efficacy of *vairagya* or *tristitia* (resembling an epiphany) (see Masson, 'The Psychology of the Ascetic', 618 n. 39). The entire experience, if factual, may be considered as some form of psychic/mystical process of transition from hallucination to hallelujah.

Nevertheless, the Master remained ill at ease whenever he felt he was not recognised as a *paṇḍit* or ignored, especially by anyone he wished to befriend. He seems to have been temporarily stupefied into silence when the noted educationist and social reformer Ashwinikumar Datta (1856–1923) told him frankly and sincerely that he was no scholar like Ramkumar of Kotrang, Barishal (Eastern Bengal). However, the Master showed his satisfaction when Datta told him that he was a fun-loving guy (*LR*, 406–7). Once Ramakrishna inquired of his devotee and the future compiler of *KM*, *ŚrīM*, whether a young visitor named Tejchandra Mitra (whom he was eager to initiate as his disciple) regarded him as a learned man [*jñānī*] (*KM*, III, 100 [*GR*, 662]. Diary of 9 November 1884). On another occasion, he asked M if there was any similarity between himself and 'a scholar or a monk' and felt relieved when the latter told his Master: 'God personally fashioned you with his

own hands willfully, whereas he created all others mechanically in accordance with [natural] law' (*KM*, III, 34 [*GR*, 261]. Diary of 21 July 1885).

## II

Ramakrishna often found himself in a precarious situation when he met intellectuals. For example, his disciple biographer *Svāmī* Saradananda (birthname Saratchandra Chakravarti, 1865–1927) writes that 'the childlike Master became afraid on many occasions like a boy whenever he heard that a famous person would come to see him. He feared what his visitor would think as he could not read or write. Also, he never knew when he would be in trance and lose control of his body and outfit.' (*LP*, II: Gurubhāva-Uttarārdha, 223). He was apprehensive and hesitant on his way to *Paṇḍit* Ishwarchandra *Vidyāsāgar's* (1820–91) home to meet him. He confided to his escort M like a child: 'My shirt is unbuttoned. Would this seem offensive?' (*KM*, III, 3 [*GR*, 100]. Diary of 5 August 1882). He was clearly nervous after he met the famous scholar and, as was his wont, experienced *samādhi*. He then asked for a drink of water. Thereafter, he began a talk on Brahman, the Vedas, *Purāṇas*, Tantras, the six systems of philosophy, and concluded his peroration by stating that, unlike these systems of learning, only Brahman has remained undefiled, because 'no one has so far been able to say what Brahman is.' To this piece of wisdom *Vidyāsāgar*, who 'had studied Hindu philosophy' and who 'used to perform ... the Hindu rituals', responded: 'That's wonderful! What a nice statement! I learnt something new today' (*KM*, III, 6–7 [*GR*, 101-2]. Diary of 5 August 1882). Ramakrishna, of course, duly reminded his learned host that 'mere scholarship is but empty' (*ibid.*, 10). He also found it psychologically compensatory to



respond to Ishvarchandra's condescending indifference to his song, sermon, and *samādhi* (Ibid., 16) by debunking the Ocean of Learning's excruciating erudition behind his back by this unkind quip: 'Vidyāsāgar is scholarly and charitable but lacks inner wisdom. God lies hidden within him' (*KM*, I, 89 [GR, 267]. Diary of 2 July 1883. See also Ray, *Vidyāsāgar O Paramahansa*).

The distinguished Bengali novelist and essayist, indeed the veritable emperor of literature [*sāhityasamrāt*] Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94), meeting the *paramahansa* at the Shobhabazar home of the latter's devotee Adharlal Sen (1855–85) declared, in response to Ramakrishna's query, that man's duties consisted of 'snacking, snoozing, and mating'. The Master was terribly upset and blurted out: 'What nonsense are you saying! One belches out the dirty stuff one swallows' (*KM*, V, 199 [GR, 669]. Diary of 6 December 1884. The veracity of M's report on Bankim in the *KM* has been interrogated in Ray, *Ramakṛiṣhṇa, Bankim O ShriM*). Continuing the conversation, Bankim asked, 'How could we know God's world without knowing something of this world?' and posited his anti-*paramahansa* thesis: 'We should first learn from books' (*KM*, V, 203 [GR, 672]. Diary of 6 December 1884). Ramakrishna recovered his position and gained recognition from Bankim and his associates only after he had performed his wonted *samādhi* while Trailokya Sanyal (1848–1915) was singing. He then began his ecstatic dance, and 'Bankim and his English-educated friends watched him in amazement' (ibid, 205. For Bankim, see Sil, 'Bankim *Redivivus*').

Ramakrishna's condition became pathetic when he came face to face with Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824–73), a flamboyant and fiery intellectual and the most celebrated poet of the time. Datta had 'expressed a desire for some religious instructions from the

Master', but the latter quite mysteriously became mute. As Ramakrishna recalled later: 'My mouth was pressed, as it were, by someone, and I was not allowed to say anything.' From his nephew and factotum Hridayram Mukhopadhyay (1840–99) and some other devotees of Ramakrishna, we learn that his condition normalised a little afterwards and he 'delighted Madhusudan's heart by singing in his sweet voice a few numbers of eminent *sādhakas* like Ramprasad Sen (c.1718–75) and Kamalakanta Bhattacharya (1769–1821). He thus taught him that devotion to God was the only essential thing in the world' (*LP*, II (Gurubhāva-Uttarārdha, 85) and engaged his learned visitor at Daksineshvar, the *nyāya paṇḍit* Narayana Shastri, to impart religious instruction to Madhusudan (*RC*, I, 110).

The Master tried desperately to prove his mettle before Shashadhar *Tarkacūḍāmaṇi* (1850–1928), a great scholar and a conservative Hindu. He had come to know about Shashadhar's popularity in the city for his erudite and impassioned exposition of Hinduism. When he saw him for the first time, he delivered a sermon warning the scholar that anyone attempting to become a missionary and evangelist without the *imprimatur* of Śrīśrījagadambā (an appellation of the Goddess Kālī) was sure to face utter ruin. A few days after this initial encounter, Shashadhar paid a visit to Daksineshvar. On hearing that the *tarkacūḍāmaṇi* would be coming there, Ramakrishna became so alarmed that he beseeched Narendra Jr. (*Chhota Naren*), Yogindra (*Svāmī* Yogananda, 1861–99), and a few others to stay with him. Upon meeting the *Paṇḍit*, the Master stared at him for some time with a smiling face and became ecstatic. He requested his visitor to say something, and when the latter expressed his desire for the Master's talk, Ramakrishna delivered an explanation of *Saccidānanda*.

The gist of his talk was that *Saccidānanda* first became androgynous [*Ardhšnārīśvara*] to show that He is both male and female, and thereafter, He created separate entities of male and female. Until one's mind is lost in *Saccidānanda*, one needs to be both mindful of one's worldly duties and a devotee of *Saccidānanda*. Once the merger with *Saccidānanda* takes place, all worldly duties cease. He illustrated his point thus: 'Suppose, someone is singing "Nītāi is my mad *hati* [elephant]". At the beginning of the song, the singer maintains lyric, tune, and rhythm carefully. After a while, when the singer's mind has begun to merge [in God consciousness] by the *bhava* of the song, he sings "mad *hāti*, mad *hāti*".' While saying the second '*hā*' Ramakrishna lost his speech and consciousness for fifteen minutes. At the end of his trance, he told Shashadhar: 'My *Paṇḍit*, you are great. Just like the mistress of the house who, after finishing cooking and feeding everybody, goes for her bath and does not return to the kitchen, you too will go back after having spread His words never to return.' At this, the scholar shed tears and left the *paramahansa* (Aksaychaitanya, *Śrīrāmakṛṣṇa*, 367–69). After the *tarkacūḍāmaṇi*'s departure, the Master, reportedly, expressed his satisfaction that the dry (arrogant) *paṇḍit* had become 'diluted' (modest) following his visit to Daksineshvar (*KM*, III 90 [*GR*, 488]. Diary of 30 June 1884. For a critique of the *KM* account of the first meeting between the *tarkacūḍāmaṇi* and the *paramahansa* see Sil, *Crazy in Love of God*, Appendix B: '*Kathāmṛita* in the Doc', 197–200).

### III

Ramakrishna deployed comic or coercive tactics to deal with inquisitive and putatively troublesome strangers visiting him. In his characteristic fashion, the Master overwhelmed a

reputed Vaiṣṇava *paṇḍit* of Kalna, eastern Bengal, Bhagavandas *Bābājī*, by standing naked and angry in front of the latter, rebuking him sharply for his *presumption* to teach people (Aksaychaitanya, *Caitanya O Rāmakṛṣṇa*, 132–33). A certain Vaiṣṇava visitor from Katowa heard the Master state that King Bharata was reborn as a deer because the king thought of the animal at the time of his death. When the visitor insisted on direct evidence for this instruction before accepting it, Ramakrishna exploded: ‘I don’t know! ... You talk like a nitwit. Try to find ways of putting faith in God. You’re born as a human only to learn devotion’ (*KM*, IV, 251 [GR, 841. Diary of 1 January 1885). In a similar vein, he admonished Krishnadas Pal (1838–84), who dared to posit that the proper goal of human life should be to exert oneself for the betterment of the world, observing contemptuously that the latter possessed the ‘wit of a whore’s son’ [*rāṅḍīpuṅtir buddhi*] (*KM*, III, 10 [GR, 104]. Diary of 5 August 1882). An unsuspecting visitor named Shyam Basu had the gall to ask the *paramahansa* ‘How can you say that sin is punishable when you say that He is doing everything?’ the latter became furious: ‘What calculating cunning [*sonār beṅer buddhi*]! Asshole [*Ore podo*], just eat the mango. What would you gain by counting the trees, branches, and leaves in the grove?’ (*KM*, I, 249 [GR, 901]. Diary of 27 October 1885).

He once reprimanded an intransigent young man who refused to wash his feet after the toilet: ‘If I pee standing, you buggers have to do it prancing around (me)’ [*āmi yadi dāṅḍiyé muti, to śālārā pāk diyé mutbi*] (*LR*, 59). Similarly, he sought to convince Keshab of the existence of God by an apparently jejune story.

Well, Keshab, [is it true] that your Calcutta Babus deny the existence of God? A Babu was going up the stairs. He took one step, but before taking the next one he cried, ‘Oh! What happened

to my side!' and dropped unconscious. There was a hue and cry for a doctor. But before he came the man was gone. And such people say: 'There is no God!' (LR, 404-5).

He used another such baseless but funny story to teach his devotees the example of true devotion. It recounted the story of how 'Chaitanya once dressed a donkey in a [religious] garb and then prostrated himself before it' (KM, IV, 166 [GR, 537]. Diary of 19 September 1884). Still another vignette of this genre of tales is the myth of the *Homā* bird whose egg, laid high in the sky, is hatched in the air while falling downward. Upon realising the danger of falling to death, the newborn *Homā* chick begins to fly upward to its mother. This purportedly 'Vedic' illustration was meant for his beloved new acquaintance Narendranath Datta, who was compared to the *Homā* chick. According to M's report, the young man did not respond to the enamoured *paramahansa's* encomium but went out of the room (KM, I, 29-30 [GR, 88]. Diary of 5 March 1882). The *paramahansa* once startled and scared a visitor when he sensed that the latter would be querying his spiritual knowledge with a mischievously comical but quite effective antidote. He pretended to be crazy, and closing his eyes, began to utter:

*Bhuḍ bhuḍ bhuḍuk, bhuḍ bhuḍ bhuḍut, phuḍ phuḍ phuḍut. kuḍ kuḍ kuḍut* [denoting words that phonetically describe the sound of bubbling, fluttering, and chewing]. Am I possessed by a ghost? Would anyone call a shaman? People think that I am a realised saint, but they do not know that I am crazy. *Bhuḍ bhuḍ bhuḍut, phuḍ phuḍ phuḍut, kuḍ kuḍ kuḍut*" (JU, 103).

Ramakrishna occasionally composed cuss words [*kheyuḍ* or *khisti*] with human and animal genitalia. He, in fact, considered such expressions as meaningful as the *Vedas* and *Purāṇas* and was particularly fond of performing *japa* [ritual counting of rosary] by muttering

the word ‘cunt’. He told his devotees: ‘The moment I utter the word “cunt” I behold the cosmic vagina, which is *Mā Brahmamayī*, Mother of the Universe, and I sink into it’ [*yoni balileyi Jagajjananī Mā Brahmamayīké dekhé tāñté dubé yāi*] (*LR*, 79). He also beheld a large hemispherical rattan- basket-like naked buttock (*dhāmā poñd*) of a whore aged 35–40 years who, lifting her *sāñī*, was defecating profusely and noisily [*paṛpaṛ* or *bhaṛbhaṛ koré*] and explained that the Mother Goddess of Daksineshvar was showing him that the occult powers he sought as a divine boon were nothing but a prostitute’s poop (*KM*, III, 140 [*GR*, 745]. Diary of 12 April 1885; *KM*, IV, 261 [*GR*, 871]. 23 October 1885). Once, he was utterly unable to hold a discourse with educated and progressive Brahmo women visitors and told them point-blank, in irritation: ‘When I see your behaviour and hear you speak, I feel that God had made a terrible mistake. It would have been proper for him to have endowed you with penis rather than with vagina’ (cited in Mitra, *Rāmakṛṣṇa*, 93). On hearing that a pastor of the *Ādi Brāhmo Samāj* (founded by *Mahaṛṣi* Debendranath Tagore [1817–1905] in 1828) had married for the second or third time, the irate *paramahansa* called him a ‘shitting *guru*’ [*hego guru*] and his flock ‘farting disciples’ [*pedo śiṣya*] (*KM*, IV, 182 [*GR*, 580]. Diary of 2 October 1884). These examples make a mockery of Vivekananda’s wonted empty boast: ‘[My Master’s] lips never cursed anyone, never ever criticised anyone. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil; that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good’ (‘My Master’ online). All Protap Mozoomdar’s disgust with the Master’s scatology was right on the mark: Ramakrishna’s ‘speech was abominably filthy’ (letter of 1895 to Max Müller cited in idem, *Ramakrishna*, 62).

#### IV

Ramakrishna's 'spiritual' sermons were usually filtered through anecdotes and allegories or sermons, some of which are idiosyncratic at best and patently puerile at worst. For example, he preached: 'Too much knowledge is called *ajñāna*, ignorance. To know only one thing is *jñāna*, knowledge, that is, God alone is real and exists in all beings. To converse with him is *vijñāna* [the ultimate knowledge] (*KM*, IV, 209 [*GR*, 598–99]. Diary of 5 October 1884). Obviously, he considered himself a *vijñānī*—one who has frequently conversed with *Saccidānanda* and the Divine Mother. Moreover, in his ecstatic and eccentric rhetoric, *jñāna* or 'mere knowledge of God' is male and *bhakti*, the quality of a *vijñānī*, is female. Thus, he explained, '*Jñāna* or knowledge being a male is obliged to stand and wait at the outer court of the Divine Mother's home, whereas *Bhakti* being female goes direct to the inner apartments, to the very presence of the Mother' (cited in Mookerjee, ed. *Ramakrishna*, 21–22). He also claimed the great goddess herself to be his tutor and mentor with respect to his education in *Vedānta*. Though he acknowledged the Punjabi *nāgā* [*nāṅgā* or *nyāṅgā*, that is naked] *sannyāsī* Totapuri as his *Vedānta* (*KM*, IV, 240 [*GR*, 832]. Diary of 9 August 1885), he claimed on another occasion:

Though I read nothing myself ... I have heard Vedas, the *Vedānta*, the *Darśanas*, and the *Purāṇas* from good and reliable scholars. Having heard them and understood what they contained, I made a garland of them with a string and hung it around my neck and offered it at the lotus feet of the Mother, saying 'Take all your scriptures and *Purāṇas*. Just give me pure devotion' (*LP*, I [Gurubhāva-Pūrvārdha], 67).

Presumably, the goddess taught him that 'the essence of the *Vedānta* is that *Brahmaṇ* is real and the world is an illusion' (*KM*, IV, 175 [*GR*, 544]. Diary of 19 September 1884).

Additionally, he received instructions from a young *sannyāsī* with a trident, who emerged from his own body and killed the evil self within him, the *Pāpapuruṣa*. Therefore, according to Ramakrishna, 'the *Brāhmaṇī* [*Bhairavī* Yogesvari, his Tantra instructor during c. 1861–66], Totapuri, and others ... told [him] ... what [he] ... knew already' (*LP*, I [Sādhakabhāva], 161). He, in fact, told Hriday that he had made that naked bloke [*nyāṅṅṭā-phyāṅṅṭā*] his *guru* merely 'to honour the injunctions and instructions of the Vedas' (*RC*, I, 77).

There is a deeper and troubling problem regarding his eagerness for his recognition as a scholar or *jñānī* by the people at large. It would thus be safe to assume that his real attitude to educated folk was doused in a heady mix of jealousy and inferiority complex. He once insisted that he 'was not in the least sorry' for not being able to read the *Vedānta* and other scriptures (*KM*, V, 131 [*GR*, 694]. Diary of 22 February 1885). On the other hand, he justified his scriptural inadequacy by arguing that 'scriptures only give hints and therefore it is not necessary to read a few scriptures' (*KM*, IV, 191 [*GR*, 587]. Diary of 2 December 1884). He exclaimed on one occasion: 'Mere knowledge of *Advaita*! *Hyāk thoo*—I spit on it' (*KM*, IV, 43 [*GR*, 358]. Diary of 23 December 1883).

He unhesitatingly manufactured meaningful words and legends to make his points. Once he told M and Rakhchalchandra Ghosh (birth name of *Svāmī* Brahmananda, (1863–1922):

When one talks to Jadu[lal] Mallik (1844–98), one can know everything about his houses, gardens, and company shares. That is why the sages advised Valmiki to chant the word 'marā' There is some meaning in this: 'ma' means God, and 'rā' the world. First God and then the world. (*KM*, IV, 55 [*GR*, 375]. Diary of 2 January 1884).



In his sermon on the *Bhāgavadgītā*, he said that it need not be read from cover to cover, but its title should be repeated ten times to learn its essence. He posited that *tyāga* [renunciation] is the essential message of *Gītā* and even mere repetition of the word *Gītā* produces the sound of the word *tyāgī* [renunciator] (*KM*, IV, 191 [G-R, 587]. Diary of 2 October 1884). He even said this to Vidyasagar when he visited the scholar (*KM*, III, 10 [GR, 104–5]. Diary of 5 August 1882). The only problem with the Master’s advice is that the word *Gīta*, repeated over and over, may sound like the nonsensical *tāgī* (*Gītā* reversed) but not *tyāgī*, something he could not know in view of his innocence of Sanskrit words and grammar. Ramakrishna was equally adept at manufacturing a myth or legend in the course of conversation, as we learn from a report of the Brāhmo leader Keshab Sen’s (1838–84) journal *New Dispensation* (26 May 1881):

One of the most noteworthy things he said the other day was that he believed in the identity of Janak and Nanc [*sic*] (Nanak). After the death of the former, the Lord blessed his spirit and expressed His joyful appreciation of the Rishi’s life. Greatly pleased, he said to him to the following effect— ‘Well done, good Rishi. Thou hast sanctified many by the purity and asceticism and by the noble example of a self-denying King thou hast set. So good a teacher thou shalt not sleep in heaven, but thou shalt go again into the world. Thy services, O Janak, are required in the Punjab. Go there, harmonise the scriptures, and draw together hostile sects. O thou apostle of union and reconciliation.’

This was interpreted as the Master’s ‘doctrine of unity’ of religions, which Keshab’s Brāhmo sect, the New Dispensation, approved of. We notice here Ramakrishna’s use of two names, Janak and Nanak, rhyming with each other neatly (Mookerjee, ed., *Ramakrishna*, 122). Incidentally, Ramakrishna had already been recognised as Guru Nanak by his Punjabi devotee Koar Singh (*KM*, IV, 241 [GR, 833]. Diary of 9 August 1885).

## V

Ramakrishna, as Protap Mozoomdar (1840–1905) observed frankly, ‘did not know a word of Sanskrit’ (cited in Müller [1823–1900], *Ramakrishna*, 62). The Master’s lack of a rudimentary knowledge of Sanskrit was noted by his Brāhmo admirer Shivanath Śāstrī (1847–1919). While trying to explain the comparative merits of *jñāna* [knowledge of God] and *bhakti* [love of God], he referred to the former as male, whereas it is a term in the neuter gender. With his wonted politeness, Śāstrī commented on the Master’s gender distribution as ‘very striking and peculiar’ (Mookerjee, ed. *Ramakrishna*, 21). Although innocent of Sanskrit or Bengali grammar, Ramakrishna possessed an uncannily creative imagination, using an oral Bengali vocabulary and inventing neologisms and homonyms to add homely homespun fun to his talks. To emphasise the uselessness of human birth, he told his devotees that even the newborn baby is aware of the utter futility of its birth; thus, it wonders where it has come and cries ‘*kāñhā e kāñhā e,*’ meaning ‘where am I, where am I.’ ‘*Kāñhā*’ means ‘where’ in Bengali and Hindi, and it does sound like an infant’s cry. Although the example and the explanation contained little grammatical substance, its intended spiritual message must have worked wonders on the ears and imaginations of his audience (*KM*, I, 173 [*GR*, 658]. Diary of 2 October 1884). He told a visitor that ‘ordinary *jīvas* are called *mānuṣ* [human beings]’ but ‘one endowed with *caitanya* [consciousness] is *mānhuñś*’ [a concocted Bengali word that is supposed to mean a *mānuṣ* possessing *huñś*, that is, consciousness, or, depending on the proper context, as here, God consciousness] (*KM*, IV, 209 [*GR*, 599; this sentence is elided in the *GR*]. Diary of 5 October 1884).

He made a pun on the word *mantor* [colloquial form of *mantra* in *tatsama* Bengali] and *man tor* [your mind or your wish] and entertained his august Brāhmo visitor Keshabchandra Sen (1838–84) by singing ‘*āmrā jāni man tor dilām tore sei mantor*’ [we know your mind, that is, what you want, and thus minister that *mantra* or *mantor*] (*KM*, V, 12 [*GR*, 95]. Diary of 2 April 1882). Similarly, he counselled his *bhadralok* admirer from the city, Ishan Mukhopadhyay, on the technique of participating fully in the mundane world and yet remaining indifferent to its tribulations. ‘*Golmāle māl āche. Gol cheḍe mālṭi nebe,*’ he said (*KM*, I, 146 [*GR*, 475]. Diary of 25 June 1884). While it is difficult to extract the meaning of the Master’s manipulation of a pun in Bengali—*māl* [substance or cream] and *golmāl* [commotion]—my English translation runs something like this: ‘There is cream in commotion. Take the cream and trash the commotion.’ Most probably, the intended meaning of this sermon is, according to *Svāmī* Nikhilananda (Dineshchandra Dasgupta [895–1973], the famous, though not entirely flawless, translator of the *KM*): ‘The world is indeed a mixture of truth and make-believe. Discard the make-believe and take the truth.’ On Keshab’s steamship, the *paramahansa* told his audience about his ‘secret’ *sadhana*: ‘Sometimes I would fancy myself as the *Brāhmiṇī* duck calling for its mate [‘*āmi dāktum “cakā” ār āmār bhitar theke rā āsto “cakī”*’] ... I would be a kitten calling the mother cat and there would be the response of the mother’ [‘*āmi baltum “mew” ār yena, dhāḍī beḍāl balto “myāo”*’] (Gupta, ‘Ramakrishna,’ in Banerji, *Keshab Chandra and Ramakrishna*, 259–60).

While lecturing on salvation, Ramakrishna spoke of the calf’s wailings: ‘hamba hamba!’ It is born to suffer because it is slaughtered for its hide, which goes to the making of shoes

and drums, and its guts are used to make strings for the cotton carders. The carding machine, while in use, emits the sound 'tuhu tuhu!' The calf achieves salvation only when its guts in the form of the carder's string produce the 'tuhu tuhu' note. He explained that 'hamba hamba' means 'me me,' a sign of the egotism that causes all suffering, 'tuhu tuhu' means 'you you' and thus the gut says: 'O God, you're the doer and I am nothing' (KM, I, 160 [GR, 633]. Diary of 19 October 1884). Therefore, egotism is the root of evil, and surrender to God is the way to salvation. Puzzlingly enough, Ramakrishna seems unaware of committing an unintended heresy in this sermon. First, he misrepresents the cow's cry; it is not 'hamba hamba' but 'mow mow' or 'moo moo'. The Master's plan to make a sermon on egotism, in Bengali '*hāmbaḍāi*,' that is, the attitude of '*hām baḍā*' ['I am great'], conveniently meshed with his contrived cow-cry of 'hamba hamba'. Even more egregious for a moderately educated Hindu is Ramakrishna's use of the example of the Hindu holy quadruped (Lord Kṛṣṇa's pastoral herd and the Great God or Mahādeva's carrier Nandī) as the harbinger of evil. By the same token, the Master's sermon on salvation is based on the sound 'tuhu tuhu' issuing from the carding 'machine' strings, thus indirectly making the carders (who use dead cows' guts) agents of salvation. The gist of this much-acclaimed sermon of the *paramahansa* is that a live cow is the root of evil, ego [*aham*], while a dead cow or the dead cow's gut is the agent of salvation [*mukti*].

## VI

As per Saradananda's report, Ramakrishna achieved renown as '*bhavarog vaidya*' [doctor of the mundane malaise] capable of 'noticing and diagnosing the reactions in the human

body caused by excesses of spiritual emotions' (*LP*, I [Gurubhāva-Pūrvārdha], 207; see also Rolland [1866–1944], *Prophets of New India*, 135 n. 4). In fact, Saradananda writes that Ramakrishna was quite curious to know who the people were, what they wanted, and how they could be influenced:

We noticed that he would stare at a visitor in a peculiar way. If he felt attracted to him, he would engage him in a general spiritual talk and ask him to visit with him again. In course of time as that man repeated his visits, he would, unbeknownst to him, observe his limbs, his attitude toward *kāminī-kāñcana*, as well as the extent of his thirst for enjoyment and his attraction for him as revealed by his behaviour and speech. He would notice all this minutely with a view to arriving at a definite determination of his latent spirituality (*LP*, II [Ṭhākurer Divyabhāva O Narendranath], 155).

Ramakrishna claimed that he 'can see everything in people's mind like articles in a glass case' (*LP*, I [Gurubhāva-Pūrvārdha], 78). He especially let it be known among his followers that he possessed the faculty to ascertain human character by observing people's physiognomy and their habits, such as breathing and answering calls of nature. He held that,

during sleep, a renunciant did not breathe in the same way; a man given to enjoyment did it one way, and a renunciant did it in different way. Then, while pissing, the worldly person had his stream of urine deflected to the left, the renunciant to the right. The shit of a *yogi* was never touched by hogs and so on (*LP*, II [Ṭhākurer Divyabhāva O Narendranath], 161).

He declared further:

a person's potentials can be discerned to a great extent by his physical characteristics. A fraud has a heavy hand. A flat nose is not good .... Pigeon-breast is not a good sign. The same goes for one who is bony with protruded elbow joints and unshapely hand, and having light brown

eyes like a cat. Mean nature is marked by lips shaped like a dom's [a dom belongs to the scavenger caste considered untouchable in the contemporary Hindu society] (*KM*, 206 [*GR*, 597]. Diary of 5 October 1884).

He had few qualms about considering his provider of victuals and devotee Shambhucharan Mallik (d. 1877) a born crook because of his snub nose! (*Ibid.*). He also suggested that a circumcised penis, like that of a Muslim, was a sign of bad character (*KM*, IV, 207. Diary of 5 October 1884. Nikhilananda omits this sentence in the *GR*, 597).

He, in fact, exhibited his obsession with the male genitalia, the *liṅga*, in his boyhood pranks [*phachkimi*], as well as in his spiritual practices as an adult. He also posited an iconically accurate, though embarrassing for devout Hindus even to this day, meaning of *śivaliṅga* (*m*) worshipped in temples:

Do you know the import [*bhava*] of Śiva worship? It is worship of Śiva's *liṅga* [phallus] and worship of the vagina [*māṭṛsthān*] and [*pitṛsthān*].<sup>2</sup> The devotee performs the worship uttering 'O Lord, see that I may not be born again. I may not have to pass through blood and semen via the vagina [*māṭṛsthān*] anymore' (*KM*, II, 155 [*GR*, 569]. Diary of 11 October 1884).

He candidly reported on his childhood play and practices, especially that related to the ritual worship of Lord Śiva, his divine father. 'During the days of my madness [c. 1856–66], I used to worship my own penis as the Śiva *liṅga*. Worship of live *liṅga*. I even decorated it with a pearl, something that I can't do now-a-days' (*KM*, IV, 106 [*GR*, 491. Nikhilananda omits a complete sentence in his translation]. Diary of 3 July 1884). He confessed that while

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Ramakrishna provides here a visually accurate description of Śiva worship as the dual worship of *liṅga* (male) and *yoni*, as the iconic representation of this Hindu god shows the upright *liṅga* placed on a base in the shape of *yoni* (female).

he was engaged in Tāntrika practices with the *Brāhmaṇī*, he used to ‘worship’ the dicks [*dhan*, literally ‘treasure’] of young boys with flower and sandal-paste (*KM*, IV, 231-32 [*GR*, 813-14. Nikhilananda omits part of the sentence. Diary of 15 July 1885). He is reported to have ‘touched’ in ecstasy the Brāhmo activist Vijaykrishna *Gosvāmī*’s (1841–99) penis with a view to driving the latter’s lust away (*RP*, 163). In this context, let us recall that he once took his future disciple, the young Gangadhar Ghatak (or Gangopadhyay, later *Svāmī* Akhandananda (1864–1937), inside the Kālī temple at Daksineshvar and told the teenager to look at the statue of Śiva. Enchanted, the boy beheld a breathing, live Śiva, while his Master was in a state of utter inebriation and without his clothes (*SK*, 32–33).

Likewise, the Master claimed to possess an intimate knowledge of the female anatomy and attitude—body and mind. The presumption is that he had always avoided sexual thought and practice and cultivated a transcendental moral ideal. Indeed, he contemptuously described the female body as nothing but ‘such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, worms, piss, shit and the like’ (*KM*, III, 19 [*GR*, 113]. Diary of 24 August 1882). Therefore, it is puzzling to note the knowledge about the ways of women that he imparted to Mathur’s married daughter. Saradananda reports how the Master once dressed up Mathur’s daughter in his own hands and ‘having instructed her on the various ways to entertain her husband, held her hand like her girlfriend and conducted her to her spouse’s presence’ (*LP*, I [Sādhakabhāva], 267–68). He also seems to have had a fair knowledge of the *femme fatale*. As he reported, ‘I could recognise wayward women: widows who parted their hair in the middle [*siṅthikāṭā*] and anointed their bodies with great care. They have little modesty. They sit in a typical manner.’ Having thus waxed eloquent on this topic,

Ramakrishna suddenly became self-conscious and hastened to conclude by saying 'Enough of worldly talk' (*KM*, V, 46 [*GR*, 240]. Diary of 10 June 1883). On another occasion, he displayed his knowledge of female physiognomy. Saradananda reports:

The Master sometimes said that the outward shape of that particular organ, with the help of which women acquire the glory of motherhood [boobs, in Ramakrishna's unpretentious patois, *māī*], indicates their inclination to sensual pleasure. He said that its shape varied. Some of its forms indicated a very small amount of animality. Again, he said that those whose buttocks bulge out [steatopygia], like black ants, harbour that inclination strongly (*LP*, II [Ṭhākurer Divyabhāva O Narendranath], 163).

Ramakrishna's apparent interest in female breasts could be seen in one of the didactic stories he loved to relate to his devotees. In one such story, he had a young *sādhu* behold a young girl's breasts and believe that she had abscesses on her chest. When the puzzled young ascetic was told that 'God would supply milk to the girl's breasts because she would give birth to a child,' his faith in divine dispensation was so augmented that, 'struck with wonder', he said: 'Then I need not beg. There must be food for me too' (*KM*, III, 92 [*GR*, 656]. Diary of 9 November 1884).

He also claimed to have beheld God in the vagina after witnessing the mating of a dog and a bitch (*KM*, III, 33 [*GR*, 260]. Diary of 21 July 1883). He recalled his rapture after having witnessed the so-called Tantric heroic rite at the behest of the *Brāhmaṇī* Yogeshvari: 'I remember the day when I beheld in the supreme pleasure of sex of a pair of lovers nothing but the blissful sport of Śiva and Śakti and was enchanted and entranced' (*LP*, I [Sādhakabhāva], 206). He told his devotees and visitors: 'One day [the Divine Mother] showed me Śiva and Śakti copulating with each other. Śiva and Śakti existing in men,



animals, trees, and plants—male and female! And [all] engaged in copulation’ (KM, IV, 56 [GR, 376: Nikhilananda’s translation is woefully inadequate, even inaccurate]. Diary of 2 January 1884).

## VII

As a matter of fact, the Master considered women, especially widows, voluptuous and immoral (see Sil, *Crazy in Love of God*, 42–44). Erikson postulates that one of the underlying causes of acute identity confusion is ‘a severe sexual traumatisation’ in childhood (*Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 179). Masson maintains that Ramakrishna had suffered some real trauma, most probably sexual seduction, in his childhood, which might explain his sexual choices (Masson, *Oceanic Feeling*, 10–11; idem, ‘Psychology of Ascetic’, 623) as well as his animus against the widows despite the fact that he owed his comfort, happiness, and livelihood to a few women all but one of whom—his wife Saradamani (1853–1920)—were widows such as Prasannamayi, Chandramani (his mother, 1791–1876), Aghormani (*Gopāer-mā*, 1822–1906), and above all, *Rāṅī* Rasmani Das (owner of the Daksineshvar temple where Gadadhar was employed as the priest of the Goddess Kālī or *Bhavatāriṅī*).

Masson’s hunch is confirmed by Ramakrishna’s observation that ‘Many women shed fake tears to ensnare good-looking young men. Hence their “attitude of Gopāla”’ (KM, II, 154 [GR, 603]. Diary of 11 October 1884). The child Gadai’s intimacy with the village belles at the home of the local worthy Sitanath Pyne has been well-publicised. Best known is his relationship with the buxom child-widow or, to borrow Ramakrishna’s preferred patois Bengali, *kaḍe rāṅḍī* Prasannamayi, daughter of the village landlord Dharmadas Laha (1798–

1860), which led to the boy's frequent lapses in *samādhi* and identity with historical and mythical figures as Chaitanya and Krishna' (*LP*, 1 [Pūrvakathā O Vālyajīvan], 134). What the women of Kamarpukur did with the ecstatic cuddly boy every afternoon for their postprandial pleasure by treating him as their Krishna while pretending to be his *gopīs* [dairymaids] is anybody's guess (*LP*, 1 [Pūrvakathā O Vālyajīvan], 132; see also Sen, *Rāmakṛṣṇapūn̄thi*, 9–15). In later years, the *paramahansa* was upset upon receiving a disturbing news of one of his young devotees and lamented:

Haripada [Ghoṣ] has come under the spell of a wench [*māgī*] from Ghoṣpādā. She puts on an affectionate attitude toward him, but Haripada is a child and does not understand anything. Women like her behave that way whenever they see young boys. I heard that Haripada even lies on her lap, and she feeds him with her own hands. I shall warn him that is not good. That very filial affection will lead to undesirable feelings ... These women practice spiritual discipline with men; they regard men as Lover Kṛṣṇa [*Rāgakṛṣṇa*] (*KM*, IV, 189 [*GR*, 535–36]. Diary of 19 September 1884).

However, we need to note Ramakrishna's repressed attraction for the *rāñḍī* or *vidhabā* [widow], in other words, his schizophrenic love-hate attitude to widows. An even better explanation of his attitude may be that he had *paraphilia*, 'an erotosexual syndrome in which a person is reiteratively responsive to and dependent on atypical ... stimulus imagery, in fantasy or practice' (Money, *Venuses Penuses*, 454). *Paraphilia* stems from G-I/R [Gender-Identity/Role] disorder in which 'there is ambivalence, confusion, or male/female transposition relative to one's personal sense of masculinity or femininity' resulting in the development of a 'feminine obligatory male homosexual personality betraying his "G-I/R status" in his speech, gait, and often exaggerated feminine mannerisms and etiquette' (ibid.,

466-68). We have Ramakrishna's confession of his failure to develop as a normal male: 'I desired so much to marry, to be able to visit my in-laws' home, have lots of fun! But, alas, what befell me!' (KM, IV, 201 [GR, 593]. Diary of 5 October 1884). As Saradananda reports:

a desire under the impulse of his inherent feminine mood used to arise in Master's mind in his adolescence. Knowing that the *gopīs* of Vraja had Kṛṣṇa, the embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, because they were born as women, he used to think that he too would have been blessed enough to worship and enjoy Kṛṣṇa, had he been born with a female body. Considering his male body to be an obstacle to his attainment of Kṛṣṇa, he then imagined that were he to be born again, he would become a very beautiful child-widow [*kaḍe rāñḍī*] with long hair, in a Brāhmaṇ family and would not consider anyone except Kṛṣṇa as husband.

While living with his widowed mother, Gadadhar went on fantasising that

in the daytime, after finishing the household chores, he would spin yarn singing songs about Krishna, and after dusk would be ardently weeping by himself from longing to feed Krishna with his own hands the sweets made of ... milk. And the Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa would be pleased ... and would suddenly appear as a cowherd boy to partake of them (LP, I [Sādhakabhāva], 276)

## VIII

Ramakrishna's sermons against women were founded on his attitude to human sexuality. His sombre renouncer reputation was a significant factor behind his *paramahansa* image. A *paramahansa* is traditionally thought of as one of the two sub-categories of *avadūta* ascetics, the other being a *parivrājaka* [peripatetic]. An *avadūta* is one who rejoices in as well as renounces all creature comforts. He experiences or exhibits total detachment while retaining a markedly uxorious habit, as was the case with Chaitanya's principal associate Nityananda (1474–1540), who was a paradigmatic *avadūta* (for *avadūta* see

*Mahānirvānatantram*, 8). In a way, Ramakrishna, too, was a paradigmatic *paramahansa* as he exhibited a markedly ambivalent attitude to women and wealth that often reached schizophrenic proportions. As a young man, he exhibited his phobia of women and reacted pathetically at the insinuation of sex. ‘I am terribly scared of women,’ he confessed candidly. ‘I see them as a tigress coming to devour me. Besides, I see large ogres in their limbs. I find all of them as ogres’ (*KM*, IV, 201 [*GR*, 593]. Diary of 5 October 1884). During the period of his so-called *divyonmattatā* [divine madness], his relatives and employers thought that his mental condition was the outcome of his relentless continence. Once his nephew Hriday procured a prostitute to entice his uncle from the path of divine love to that of carnal love. When Ramakrishna sighted the siren, he was overtaken by a mortal fear of being stung by a poisonous python (Sen, *Rāmakṛṣṇapuñthi*, 74–75). Reportedly, he remained impervious to provocation by a woman who made ‘a very ugly gesture’ [*ati kutsit bhāv*], but he was terribly upset (*JV*, 36).

The New Zealander Ramakrishna scholar Malcolm McLean has observed perspicaciously that ‘Ramakrishna seemed to see women predominantly in sexual terms’ (McLean, ‘Women as Mother Goddess,’ 17). He confessed to a feeling of lust after staring at the curves of a full-figured young woman on the banks of the Hooghly River in a wet *sāñī* through which ‘the beauty of her body had become acutely accentuated’ [*soundaryer prakharatā vardhita*] and then his bolting back home like a madman weeping and praying to Kālī to calm him down (*JU*, 34–35). Satyacharan Mitra reported on the Master’s ‘Waterloo’ or ‘Kuruksetra’ battle with temptation when he was sent by his employer Mathur to a room full of ravishing *filles de joie*. When a young temptress disrobed the flabbergasted

priest and grasped his genitals and ‘squeezed him in various obscene ways, he began to weep profusely and pray to them, calling them Goddess Kālī’ (*JU*, 37–38). Years later, he admitted publicly: ‘Listen, lust lingers until God is realised. Even then, so long as the body lasts, a little of it persists; but then it cannot surface. Do you think I am altogether free from it?’ (*KM*, IV, 83 [*GR*, 409. Diary of 23 March 1884; V, 55 [*GR*, 250]. Diary of 17 June 1883).

To overcome this embarrassing dilemma, he took recourse to misogynist thought and talk. He went to the length of insisting that ‘the company of a young woman can evoke desire even in a lustless man’ (*KM*, IV, 68 [*GR*, 387]. Diary of 2 February 1884). He advised his devotee Narayan to cover himself with a thick wrapper to keep his holy body safe from the blast of profane air emanating from all women except his mother (*KM*, IV, 203 [*GR*, 595]. Diary of 5 October 1884). ‘Never trust your wife even if she is devoted to God [*bhaktimatī*]’, the *paramahansa* ruled (*MJ*, 81). He preached: ‘Never trust a woman even if she rolls down on the floor weeping in devotion’ (Datta, *Ramakrishnadever Upadeś* 142 (# 508). Indeed, Masson’s shrewd observation that ‘the ascetic exists, because he is tempted ... [H]is phobic avoidance of women bespeaks an unusually intense desire for contact’ is right on the mark (‘Psychology of Ascetics’, 616).

## IX

With all his worth and warts, Ramakrishna, a popular man of god, morphed into a famous godman. His popularity owed much to his personality and performance as well as to the ambience of his abode. Free from the austere atmosphere of a monastery, Daksineshvar was a veritable ‘mart of bliss’ [*Ānandaniketan*], an extended holy family presided over by a

‘male-mother’ figure (in the American poet Robert Bly’s terms), who made no demand upon his visitors (Moyers, ‘Moyers: A Gathering of Men’). The latter, especially the adolescents among them, on the other hand, found in their older mentor the proverbial Irish *leprechaun* or the legendary court-jester Gopal *Bhār* of colonial Bengal, a trusting friend and an affectionate counsellor, and in his ‘nurturant environment’ a psychologically stable refuge from the demands of the adult world, a comic individual who treated them as equals and kept them amused with songs, stories, sermons, and *samādhi*. Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay saw about seventeen or eighteen ‘very bright and jolly’ young boys with the Master who ‘spoke to them in a lighter, more humorous vein, cutting jokes with them and testing them by asking some of them to go home and to marry. And he reminded them that anybody who relieves a poor man by marrying his daughter attains some virtue’ (*RH*, 368). ‘How happy we were with the Master,’ Brahmananda recalled in his advanced years. ‘We used to have a cramp due to constant laughter ... He could figure out anyone’s mental distress by looking at him and make him forget his misery by touching his chest’ (*RP*, 157). The *paramahansa* used to say: ‘I can’t stand a sad face’ (*LM*, 111). As he admitted, he was but a ‘pigeon of pleasure’ [*sukher pāyṛā*] who ‘used to frequent only affluent families’ and who ‘would run away from the home where [he] ... saw misery and problems’ (*KM*, V, 45 [*GR*, 240]. Diary of 8 June 1883).<sup>3</sup>

Most people, it would seem, came to Daksineshvar not only to behold a naked adult male sing, swoon, and dance but also to participate in the holy man’s circulation of grace

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<sup>3</sup> This habit of associating with affluence would persist throughout his life, and it would be the lifestyle pattern for almost all the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

(Tambiah, 'Charisma of Saints', 340). Undoubtedly, a few of his devotees came for his spiritual ministrations, if and when these were purveyed, but the majority came to have a good time, so to speak. Despite its stark devotionism, *Svāmī* Atulananda's (monastic name Cornelius Heijblom, 1870–1966, of The Netherlands) quip made three decades after the Master's *mahāsamādhi* is perhaps most appropriate in respect of the latter's impact on his erotic community of Daksineshvar: 'Let us think of R.K. [Ramakrishna] as joy ... We have nothing to fear, for he is all joy' (*With the Swamis in America*, 136: Atulananda's letter from Mayavati [correspondent unknown], 22 October 1916). Ramakrishna made it a point to stay naked and sing and dance ecstatically to sustain his public image of the *pāgal thākur*. At his devotee Sureshchandra (*alias* Surendranath) Mitra's (1850–90) home, Ramakrishna was eating naked but told a roomful of devotees that he had learnt to take care of his clothes and so never stayed naked as before. At this they began to laugh. Then he looked at himself only to discover that he had been sitting and eating there without any clothes on; they were tucked under his armpit. The embarrassed *paramahansa* exclaimed: 'Oh shit [*āre chyā*]! I could never improve! I just can't remember to wear clothes! (*RA*, 78). He then confessed, apparently somewhat conceitedly, 'On my mother [*māiri balci*], I have become civilized.' and on being told that he still was naked, he responded unruffled: 'I want to be civilized, but Mahāmāyā does not allow me to keep cloth on my body. Is it my fault?' (*LM*, 56).

Perhaps the Master realised towards the end of his life that he had, in fact, succeeded in developing a large following, and he was shrewd enough to anticipate the enormous following he would acquire posthumously. He told his wife Saradamani with uncanny accuracy: 'I shall be worshipped in every home hereafter, I say this upon oath, so help me

God' (Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother*, 134). Part of the reason for this success lay in the Master's methods of teaching and preaching. He declared that one does not need training, learning, or a sudden *satori*, as the Japanese say or what the Christians celebrate as *fiducia* or faith, or as the Hindus practice, *bhaktor* devotion. As he taught, 'the path of *bhakti* blossoms in the heart of a devotee spontaneously and easily—it is that easy, that *sahaja*.' This is the message of Godmad Gadadhar, Carl Jung's (1875–1911) classic Indian, who 'does not think,' but like a worthy primitive, 'perceives the thought,' and who has 'rescued the gods,' who 'live with him ('What India Can Teach Us', 527, 529). The distinguished eighteenth-century theologian Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769) had posited that '*Ein begriffener Gott ist kein Gott*' ['a God who is understood is no God'] (cited in Otto, *Dionysus*, xix: translator's Introduction). Contrarily, although Ramakrishna's deities were no distant dazzling divinities, they, nevertheless, had become his playmates, lovers, or parental figures, thereby his equals, thus enabling him to claim nonchalantly, albeit lovingly: 'I came to realise that Bhagavan, Bhakta, and the *Bhāgavata*—God, Devotee, and Scripture—are in reality one and the same' (*GR*, 25: Nikhilananda's Introduction). He confided to his Vaiṣṇava associate Nabadvip Goswamī his ardent desire for intimacy with God: 'O Lord, I need You. May You never enchant me with your cosmic illusion [*māyā*]. I just want You' (*KM*, III, 34 [*GR*, 201]. Diary of 21 July 1883). In a conversation with his Brāhmo acolyte Keshab Sen, the Master proclaimed the devotee's right to have a friendly dalliance with the divine: 'Why should I cry "*Brahman, Brahman*"! I'll call on Him in every *bhava* ... I'll have fun with God' (*KM*, III, 177 [*GR*, 478]. Diary of 30 June 1884).



## Abbreviations

BE Bengali Era that follows the Common Era (CE) by 593 years 3 months 14 days.

*CW* Svāmī Vivekananda. *Complete Works*. 8 vols. Mayavati Memorial edn. 1989. 14<sup>th</sup> rpt. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990.

*GR* *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Svāmī Nikhilananda's (birthname Dineshchandra Dasgupta, 1895-1973) translation of *KM*. 1942. Seventh printing. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984.

*JV* Ramchandra Datta. *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇa Paramahaṁsadever Jīvanvṛttānta*. 1890. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. 1950. Rpt. With minor rev. Kalikata: Udbodhana Kāryālay, 1995.

*JU* Satyacharan Mitra. *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇa Paramahaṁsa (Jīvanī O Updeś)*. Calcutta: Great India Press, 1308 BE

*KM* *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇakathāmṛta*, comp. (ŚrīM) Mahendranath Gupta. 5 *bhāgas*. 1308-39 BE. Kalikata: Kathāmṛta Bhavan, 1394 BE.

*LM* Vaikunthnath Sanyal, *Śrīśrīrākṣṇa-līlāmṛta*. 1343 BE. New ed. Kalikata: Nabapatra Prakāśan, 1390 BE.

*LP* Svāmī Saradananda. *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇalīlāprasaṅga*. 5 pts. | 2 vols. Kalikata: Udbodhan Karyalay, 1398 BE. Vol. 1 in 3 pts.: (Pūrvakathā O Vālyajīvan, Sādhakabhāva, and Gurubhāva). Vol. 2 in 2 pts. (Gurubhāva-Uttarārdha and Ṭhākurer Divyabhāva O Narendranath).

*LR* *Life of Sri Ramakrishna from Various Authentic Sources*. 1924. Second ed. 1928. Eighth impression. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964.

*MJ* Abhaychandra Bhattacharya, *ŚrīMar Jīvandarśan*. Kalikata. Graṇtha Bhāratī, 1397 BE.

*RA* Datta, Mahendranath. *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇer Anudhyān*. Ed. Dhirendranath Basy. 1350 BE. Revised 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Calcutta: The Mahendra Publishing Committee, 1396 BE.

*RC* Barman, Gurudas (*alias* Priyanath Singha). *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇacarit*, 2 vols. Kalikata: Kalinath Singha, 1316 BE.

*RH* Chetanananda, *Svāmī*. Ed. & trans. *Ramakrishna as We saw Him*. 1990. First Indian ed. 1992. Rpt. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993.

*RP Svāmī* Jagadishvarnanda, comp. & ed., *Śrīśrīrāmakṛṣṇa-pārṣad-prasaṅga*. 1357 BE. Belur: Śrīśrī" How happy we were rīrāmakṛṣṇa Dharmacakra, 1398 BE.

*SK Svāmī* Akhandananda, *Smṛti-kathā*. Fourth ed. Kalikata: Udbodhan Kāryālay, 1983.

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