

Ramakrishna

Ramakrishna Paramahansa *Ramkrīṣṇa Pôromôhongśa* (*রামকৃষ্ণ পরমহংস*); 18 February 1836 – 16 August 1886),^{[1][2][3][4]} born **Gadadhar Chatterjee** or **Gadadhar Chattopadhyay**,^[5] was an Indian Hindu mystic and saint during the 19th century Bengal.^[6] Ramakrishna experienced spiritual ecstasies from a young age, and was influenced by several religious traditions, including devotion toward the goddess *Kali*, *Tantra* (*shakta*), *Vaishnava* (*bhakti*),^[7] and *Advaita Vedanta*.^{[8][9]} Reverence and admiration for him among Bengali elites led to the formation of the *Ramakrishna Mission* by his chief disciple *Swami Vivekananda*.^{[10][11][12]}

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Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa



Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar

Personal

Born Gadadhar Chattopadhyay
18 February 1836
Kamarpukur, Bengal Presidency, British India (present-day Hoogly, West Bengal, India)

Died 16 August 1886 (aged 50)
Calcutta, Bengal Presidency, British India (present-day Cossipore, Kolkata, West Bengal, India)

Religion Hinduism

Nationality Indian

Spouse Sarada Devi

Founder of Ramakrishna Order

Philosophy Advaita Vedanta, Bhakti, Tantra, Sarva Dharma Samanyaya

Religious career

Guru Totapuri

Disciples	
Honors	Paramahansa
Cause of death	Throat cancer

Early life

Birth and childhood

Ramakrishna was born on 18 February 1836,^[1] in the village of Kamarpukur, in the Hooghly district of West Bengal, into a very poor, pious, and orthodox Brahmin family.^[13] Kamarpukur was untouched by the glamour of the city and contained rice fields, tall palms, royal banyans, a few lakes, and two cremation grounds. His parents were Khudiram Chattopadhyay and Chandramani Devi. According to his followers, Ramakrishna's parents experienced supernatural incidents and visions before his birth. In Gaya his father Khudiram had a dream in which Lord Gadadhara (a form of Vishnu), said that he would be born as his son. Chandramani Devi is said to have had a vision of light entering her womb from Shiva's temple.^{[14][15]}

Quotation

He is born in vain who, having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realise God in this very life.



The small house at Kamarpukur where Ramakrishna lived (centre). The family shrine is on the left, birthplace temple on the right

Although Ramakrishna attended a village school with some regularity for 12 years,^[16] he later rejected the traditional schooling saying that he was not interested in a "bread-winning education".^[17] Kamarpukur, being a transit-point in well-established pilgrimage routes to Puri, brought him into contact with renunciates and holy men.^[18] He became well-versed in the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavata Purana hearing them from wandering monks and the Kathaks—a class of men in ancient India who preached and sang the Purāṇas. He could read and write in Bengali.^[16] While the official biographies write that the name Ramakrishna was given by Mathura Biswas—chief patron at Dakshineswar Kali Temple, it has also been suggested that this name was given by his own parents.

Ramakrishna describes his first spiritual ecstasy at the age of six: while walking along the paddy fields, a flock of white cranes flying against a backdrop of dark thunder clouds caught his vision. He reportedly became so absorbed by this scene

that he lost outward consciousness and experienced indescribable joy in that state.^{[19][20]} Ramakrishna reportedly had experiences of similar nature a few other times in his childhood—while worshipping the goddess Vishalakshi, and portraying god Shiva in a drama during Shivaratri festival. From his 10th or 11th year of school on, the trances became common, and by the final years of his life, Ramakrishna's samādhi periods occurred almost daily.^[20] Early on, these experiences have been interpreted as epileptic seizures,^{[21][22][23][24]} an interpretation which was rejected by Ramakrishna himself.^{[23][note 1]}

Ramakrishna's father died in 1843, after which family responsibilities fell on his elder brother Ramkumar. This loss drew him closer to his mother, and he spent his time in household activities and daily worship of the household deities and became more involved in contemplative activities such as reading the sacred epics. When Ramakrishna was in his teens, the family's financial position worsened. Ramkumar started a Sanskrit school in Kolkata and also served as a priest. Ramakrishna moved to Kolkata in 1852 with Ramkumar to assist in the priestly work.^[26]

Priest at Dakshineswar Kali Temple

In 1855 Ramkumar was appointed as the priest of Dakshineswar Kali Temple, built by Rani Rashmoni—a rich woman of Kolkata who belonged to the kaivarta community.^[27] Ramakrishna, along with his nephew Hriday, became assistants to Ramkumar, with Ramakrishna given the task of decorating the deity. When Ramkumar died in 1856, Ramakrishna took his place as the priest of the Kali temple.^[28]

After Ramkumar's death Ramakrishna became more contemplative. He began to look upon the image of the goddess Kali as his mother and the mother of the universe. Ramakrishna reportedly had a vision of the goddess Kali as the universal Mother, which he described as "... houses, doors, temples and everything else vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was an infinite shoreless sea of light; a sea that was consciousness. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me."^[29]

Marriage

Rumors spread to Kamarpukur that Ramakrishna had become unstable as a result of his spiritual practices at Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna's mother and his elder brother Rameswar decided to get Ramakrishna married, thinking that marriage would be a good steadying influence upon him—by forcing him to accept responsibility and to keep his attention on normal affairs rather than his spiritual practices and visions. Ramakrishna himself mentioned that they could find the bride at the house of Ramchandra Mukherjee in Jayrambati, three miles to the north-west of Kamarpukur. The five-year-old bride, Saradamani Mukhopadhyaya (later known as Sarada Devi) was found and the marriage was duly solemnised in 1859. Ramakrishna was 23 at this point, but the age difference was typical for 19th century rural Bengal.^[30] They later spent three months together in Kamarpukur. Sarada Devi was fourteen while Ramakrishna was thirty-two. Ramakrishna became a very influential figure in Sarada's life, and she became a strong follower of his teachings. After the marriage, Sarada stayed at Jayrambati and joined Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar at the age of 18.^[31]

By the time his bride joined him, Ramakrishna had already embraced the monastic life of a sannyasi; as a result, the marriage was never consummated. As a priest Ramakrishna performed the ritual ceremony—the *Shodashi Puja*—where Sarada Devi was made to sit in the seat of goddess Kali, and worshiped as the Divine Mother.^[32] Ramakrishna regarded Sarada as the Divine Mother in person, addressing her as the Holy Mother, and it was by this name that she was known to Ramakrishna's disciples. Sarada Devi outlived Ramakrishna by 34 years and played an important role in the nascent religious movement.^{[33][34]}

Religious practices and teachers

After his marriage Ramakrishna returned to Kolkata and resumed the charges of the temple again, and continued his *sadhana*. According to his official biographers, he continued his *sadhana* under teachers of Tantra, Vedanta and Vaishnava.

Rama Bhakti

At some point in the period between his vision of Kali and his marriage, Ramakrishna practised *dāsya bhāva*,^[note 2] during which he worshiped Rama with the attitude of Hanuman, who is considered to be the ideal devotee and servant of Rama. According to Ramakrishna, towards the end of this *sadhana*, he had a vision of Sita, the consort of Rama, merging into his body.^{[36][38]}

Bhairavi Brahmani and Tantra

In 1861, Ramakrishna accepted Bhairavi Brahmani, an orange-robed, middle-aged female ascetic, as a teacher. She carried with her the *Raghuvir Shila*, a stone icon representing Ram and all Vaishnava deities.^[7] She was thoroughly conversant with the texts of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and practised Tantra.^[7] According to the Bhairavi, Ramakrishna was experiencing phenomena that accompany



Dakshineswar Kālī Temple, where Ramakrishna spent a major portion of his adult life.



Sarada Devi (1853–1920), wife and spiritual counterpart of Ramakrishna

mahabhava, the supreme attitude of loving devotion towards the divine,^[39] and quoting from the *bhakti shastras*, she said that other religious figures like Radha and Chaitanya had similar experiences:^[40]

The Bhairavi initiated Ramakrishna into Tantra. Tantrism focuses on the worship of *shakti* and the object of Tantric training is to transcend the barriers between the holy and unholy as a means of achieving liberation and to see all aspects of the natural world as manifestations of the divine *shakti*.^{[41][42]} Under her guidance, Ramakrishna went through sixty four major tantric sadhanas which were completed in 1863.^[43] He began with mantra rituals such as japa and purascarana and many other rituals designed to purify the mind and establish self-control. He later proceeded towards tantric sadhanas, which generally include a set of heterodox practices called vamachara (left-hand path), which utilise as a means of liberation, activities like eating of parched grain, fish and meat along with drinking of wine and sexual intercourse.^[39] According to Ramakrishna and his biographers, Ramakrishna did not directly participate in the last two of those activities (some even say he didn't indulge in meat eating), all that he needed was a suggestion of them to produce the desired result.^[39] Ramakrishna acknowledged the left-hand tantric path, though it had "undesirable features", as one of the "valid roads to God-realization", he consistently cautioned his devotees and disciples against associating with it.^{[44][45]} The Bhairavi also taught Ramakrishna the kumari-puja, a form of ritual in which the Virgin Goddess is worshiped symbolically in the form of a young girl. Under the tutelage of the Bhairavi, Ramakrishna also learnt Kundalini Yoga.^[39] The Bhairavi, with the yogic techniques and the tantra played an important part in the initial spiritual development of Ramakrishna.^{[5][46]}

Vaishnava Bhakti

In 1864, Ramakrishna practised *vātsalya bhāva* under a Vaishnava guru Jatadhari.^[47] During this period, he worshipped a metal image of Ramlālā (Rama as a child) in the attitude of a mother. According to Ramakrishna, he could feel the presence of child Rama as a living God in the metal image.^{[48][49]}

Ramakrishna later engaged in the practice of *madhura bhāva*, the attitude of the Gopis and Radha towards Krishna.^[36] During the practise of this *bhava*, Ramakrishna dressed himself in women's attire for several days and regarded himself as one of the Gopis of Vrindavan. According to Sri Ramakrishna, *madhura bhava* is practised to root out the idea of sex, which is seen as an impediment in spiritual life.^[50] According to Ramakrishna, towards the end of this *sadhana*, he attained *savikalpa samadhi*—vision and union with Krishna.^[51]

Ramakrishna visited Nadia, the home of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Nityananda Prabhu, the 15th-century founders of Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnava bhakti. According to Ramakrishna, he had an intense vision of two young boys merging into his body.^[51] Earlier, after his vision of Kali, he is said to have cultivated the *Santa bhava*—the child attitude – towards Kali.^[36]

Totapuri and Vedanta

In 1865, Ramakrishna was initiated into *sannyasa* by Totapuri, an itinerant monk who trained Ramakrishna in Advaita Vedanta, the Hindu philosophy which emphasises non-dualism.^{[52][53]}

Totapuri first guided Ramakrishna through the rites of *sannyasa*—renunciation of all ties to the world. Then he instructed him in the teaching of *advaita*—that "Brahman alone is real, and the world is illusory; I have no separate existence; I am that Brahman alone."^[54] Under the guidance of Totapuri, Ramakrishna reportedly experienced *nirvikalpa samadhi*, which is considered to be the highest state in spiritual realisation.^[55]

Totapuri stayed with Ramakrishna for nearly eleven months and instructed him further in the teachings of *advaita*. Ramakrishna said that this period of *nirvikalpa samadhi* came to an end when he received a command from the Mother Kali to "remain in *Bhavamukha*, for the enlightenment of the people". *Bhavamukha* being a state of existence intermediate between *samādhi* and normal consciousness.^[56]



The Panchavati and the hut where Ramakrishna performed his Advaitic sadhana. The mud hut has been replaced by a brick one.

Islam and Christianity

According to Swami Saradanandás biography, in 1866 Govinda Roy, a Hindu guru who practised Sufism, initiated Ramakrishna into Islam, and he practiced Islam for three days. During this practice, Ramakrishna had a vision of a luminous figure, and Swami Nikhilanandás biography speculates that the figure was 'perhaps Mohammed'.^{[57][58][59]} According to these accounts, Ramakrishna "devoutly repeated the name of Allah, wore a cloth like the Arab Muslims, said their prayer five times daily, and felt disinclined even to see images of the Hindu gods and goddesses, much less worship them—for the Hindu way of thinking had disappeared altogether from my mind."^[60] After three days of practice he had a vision of a "radiant personage with grave countenance and white beard resembling the Prophet and merging with his body".^[61] Kripal writes that this "would have been a heretical experience through and through" for most Muslims.^[57]

At the end of 1873 he started the practice of Christianity, when his devotee Shambhu Charan Mallik read the Bible to him. According to Swami Saradanandás biography, Ramakrishna was filled with Christian thoughts for three days and no longer thought of going to the Kali temple. Ramakrishna described a vision in which a picture of the Madonna and Child became alive and he had a vision in which Jesus merged with his body. In his own room amongst other divine pictures was one of Christ, and he burnt incense before it morning and evening. There was also a picture showing Jesus Christ saving St Peter from drowning in the water.^{[51][62][63]}

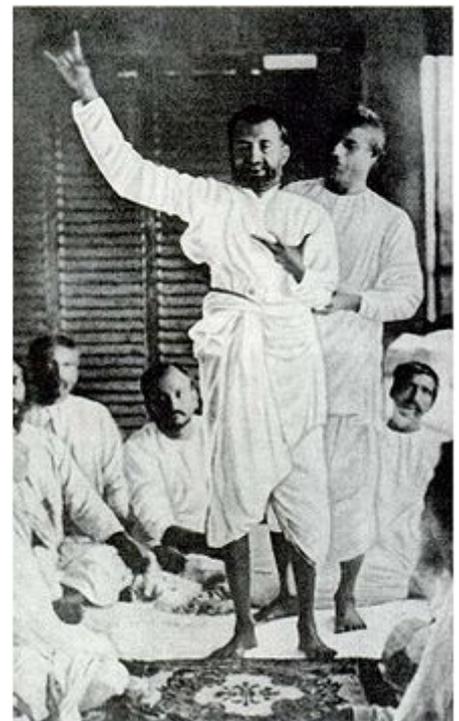
Popularisation

Keshab Chandra Sen and the "New Dispensation"

In 1875, Ramakrishna met the influential Brahmo Samaj leader Keshab Chandra Sen.^{[64][65]} Keshab had accepted Christianity, and had separated from the Adi Brahmo Samaj. Formerly, Keshab had rejected idolatry, but under the influence of Ramakrishna he accepted Hindu polytheism and established the "New Dispensation" (*Nava Vidhan*) religious movement, based on Ramakrishna's principles—"Worship of God as Mother", "All religions as true" and "Assimilation of Hindu polytheism into Brahmoism".^[66] Keshab also publicised Ramakrishna's teachings in the journals of *New Dispensation* over a period of several years,^[67] which was instrumental in bringing Ramakrishna to the attention of a wider audience, especially the Bhadralok (English-educated classes of Bengal) and the Europeans residing in India.^{[68][69]}

Following Keshab, other Brahmos such as Vijaykrishna Goswami started to admire Ramakrishna, propagate his ideals and reorient their socio-religious outlook. Many prominent people of Kolkata—Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Shivanath Shastri and Trailokyanath Sanyal—began visiting him during this time (1871–1885). Mazumdar wrote the first English biography of Ramakrishna, entitled *The Hindu Saint* in the *Theistic Quarterly Review* (1879), which played a vital role in introducing Ramakrishna to Westerners like the German indologist Max Müller.^[67] Newspapers reported that Ramakrishna was spreading "Love" and "Devotion" among the educated classes of Kolkata and that he had succeeded in reforming the character of some youths whose morals had been corrupt.^[67]

Ramakrishna also had interactions with Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a renowned social worker. He had also met Swami Dayananda.^[64] Ramakrishna is considered one of the main contributors to the Bengali Renaissance



Ramakrishna in bhava samadhi at the house of Keshab Chandra Sen. He is seen supported by his nephew Hriday and surrounded by brahmo devotees.

Vivekananda

Among the Europeans who were influenced by Ramakrishna was Principal Dr. William Hastie of the Scottish Church College, Kolkata. In the course of explaining the word *trance* in the poem *The Excursion* by William Wordsworth, Hastie told his students that if they wanted to know its "real meaning", they should go to "Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar." This prompted some of his students, including Narendranath Dutta (later Swami Vivekananda), to visit Ramakrishna.

Despite initial reservations, Vivekananda became Ramakrishna's most influential follower, popularizing a modern interpretation of Indian traditions which harmonised Tantra, Yoga and Advaita Vedanta. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna order, which eventually spread its mission posts throughout the world. Monastic disciples, who renounced their family and became the earliest monks of the Ramakrishna order, included Rakhai Chandra Ghosh (Swami Brahmananda), Kaliprasad Chandra (Swami Abhedananda), Taranath Ghoshal (Swami Shivananda), Sashibhushan Chakravarty (Swami Ramakrishnananda), Saratchandra Chakravarty (Swami Saradananda), Tulasi Charan Dutta (Swami Nirmalananda), Gangadhar Ghatak (Swami Akhandananda), Hari Prasana (Swami Vijnanananda) and others.

Other devotees and disciples

As his name spread, an ever-shifting crowd of all classes and castes visited Ramakrishna. Most of Ramakrishna's prominent disciples came between 1879–1885.^[34] Apart from the early members who joined the Ramakrishna Order, his chief disciples consisted of:^[49]

- *Grihasthas* or *The householders*—Mahendranath Gupta, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Mahendra Lal Sarkar, Akshay Kumar Sen and others.
- A small group of women disciples including Gauri Ma and Yogin Ma. A few of them were initiated into *sanyasa* through *mantra deeksha*. Among the women, Ramakrishna emphasised service to other women rather than *tapasya* (practice of austerities).^[70] Gauri Ma founded the Saradesvari Ashrama at Barrackpur, which was dedicated to the education and uplift of women.^[71]

In preparation for monastic life, Ramakrishna ordered his monastic disciples to beg their food from door to door without distinction of caste. He gave them the saffron robe, the sign of the Sanyasi, and initiated them with *Mantra Deeksha*.^[72]

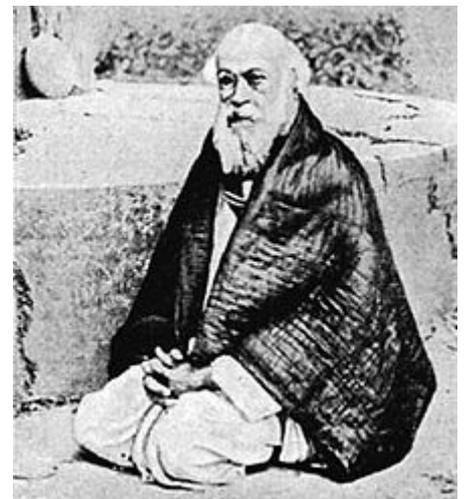
Last days

In the beginning of 1885 Ramakrishna suffered from clergyman's throat, which gradually developed into throat cancer. He was moved to Shyampukur near Kolkata, where some of the best physicians of the time, including Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, were engaged. When his condition aggravated he was relocated to a large garden house at Cossipore on 11 December 1885.^[73]

During his last days, he was looked after by his monastic disciples and Sarada Devi. Ramakrishna was advised by the doctors to keep the strictest silence, but ignoring their advice, he incessantly conversed with visitors.^[68] According to traditional accounts, before his death, Ramakrishna transferred his spiritual powers to Vivekananda^[73] and reassured Vivekananda of his avataric status.^{[73][74]} Ramakrishna asked Vivekananda to look after the welfare of the disciples, saying, "keep my boys together"^[75] and asked him to "teach them".^[75] Ramakrishna also asked other monastic disciples to look upon Vivekananda as their leader.^[73] Ramakrishna's condition gradually worsened, and he died in the early morning hours of 16 August 1886 at the Cossipore garden house. According to his disciples, this was *mahasamadhi*.^[73] After the death of their master, the monastic disciples led by Vivekananda formed a fellowship at a half-ruined house at Baranagar near the river Ganges, with the financial assistance of the householder disciples. This became the first Math or monastery of the disciples who constituted the first Ramakrishna Order.^[34]



Some Monastic Disciples (L to R):
Trigunatitananda, Shivananda,
Vivekananda, Turiyananda,
Brahmananda Below Sadananda.



Mahendranath Gupta, a householder devotee and the author of *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-kathamrta*

Teachings

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

The principal source for Ramakrishna's teaching is Mahendranath Gupta's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* which is regarded as a Bengali classic.^{[76][77]} Kripal calls it "the central text of the tradition"^[78] The text was published in five volumes from 1902 to 1932. Based on Gupta's diary notes, each of the five volumes purports to document Ramakrishna's life from 1882–1886.

The most popular English translation of the *Kathamrita* is *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Nikhilananda. Nikhilananda's translation rearranged the scenes in the five volumes of the *Kathamrita* into a linear sequence. Philosopher Lex Hixon writes that the *Gospel* is "spiritually authentic" and a "powerful rendering of the *Kathamrita*".^{[79][80]} Malcolm Mclean^[81] and Jeffrey Kripal argue that the translation is unreliable,^[80] though Kripal's interpretation is criticized by Hugh Urban.^[82]

Style of teaching

Ramakrishna's teachings were imparted^[5] in rustic Bengali, using stories and parables.^[5] These teachings made a powerful impact on Kolkata's intellectuals, despite the fact that his preachings were far removed from issues of modernism or national independence.^[83]

Ramakrishna's primary biographers describe him as talkative. According to the biographers, Ramakrishna would reminisce for hours about his own eventful spiritual life, tell tales, explain Vedantic doctrines with extremely mundane illustrations, raise questions and answer them himself, crack jokes, sing songs, and mimic the ways of all types of worldly people, keeping the visitors enthralled.^{[72][84]}

Ramakrishna used rustic colloquial Bengali in his conversations. According to contemporary reports, Ramakrishna's linguistic style was unique, even to those who spoke Bengali. It contained obscure local words and idioms from village Bengali, interspersed with philosophical Sanskrit terms and references to the Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras. For that reason, according to philosopher Lex Hixon, his speeches cannot be literally translated into English or any other language.^[85] Scholar Amiya P. Sen argued that certain terms that Ramakrishna may have used only in a metaphysical sense are being improperly invested with new contemporaneous meanings.^[86]

Ramakrishna was skilled with words and had an extraordinary style of preaching and instructing, which may have helped convey his ideas to even the most skeptical temple visitors.^[34] His speeches reportedly revealed a sense of joy and fun, but he was not at a loss when debating with intellectual philosophers.^[87] Philosopher Arindam Chakrabarti contrasted Ramakrishna's talkativeness with the Buddha's legendary reticence, and compared his teaching style to that of Socrates.^[88]

God-realization

Ramakrishna emphasised God-realisation as the supreme goal of all living beings. Ramakrishna taught that *kamini-kanchana* is an obstacle to God-realization. *Kamini-kanchana* literally translates to "woman and gold." Partha Chatterjee wrote that the figure of a woman stands for concepts or entities that have "little to do with women in actuality" and "the figure of woman-and-gold signified the enemy within: that part of one's own self which was susceptible to the temptations of ever-unreliable worldly success."^[89] Carl T. Jackson interprets *kamini-kanchana* to refer to the idea of sex and the idea of money as delusions which prevent people from realising God.^[90] Jeffrey Kripal translates the phrase as "lover-and-gold" and associates it with Ramakrishna's alleged disgust for women as lovers.^[91] Swami Tyagananda, considered this to be a "linguistic misconstruction."^[92] Ramakrishna also cautioned his women disciples against *purusa-kanchana* ("man and gold") and Tyagananda writes that Ramakrishna used *Kamini-Kanchana* as "cautionary words" instructing his disciples to conquer the "lust inside the mind."^[93]



After Sri Ramakrishna's Passing Away:
1) Mahendranath Gupta 2) Sarad Chandra Ghosh 3) Man Mohan Ghosh 4) Nityananda 5) Thea 6) Sri Ramakrishna 7) Dakshinamurti
8) Sivananda 9) Ramakrishna 10) Nityananda 11) Sri Ramakrishna 12) Sri Ramakrishna 13) Sri Ramakrishna 14) Sri Ramakrishna 15) Sri Ramakrishna
16) Sri Ramakrishna 17) Sri Ramakrishna 18) Sri Ramakrishna 19) Sri Ramakrishna 20) Sri Ramakrishna 21) Sri Ramakrishna 22) Sri Ramakrishna 23) Sri Ramakrishna 24) Sri Ramakrishna 25) Sri Ramakrishna 26) Sri Ramakrishna 27) Sri Ramakrishna 28) Sri Ramakrishna 29) Sri Ramakrishna 30) Sri Ramakrishna 31) Sri Ramakrishna 32) Sri Ramakrishna 33) Sri Ramakrishna 34) Sri Ramakrishna 35) Sri Ramakrishna 36) Sri Ramakrishna 37) Sri Ramakrishna 38) Sri Ramakrishna 39) Sri Ramakrishna 40) Sri Ramakrishna 41) Sri Ramakrishna 42) Sri Ramakrishna 43) Sri Ramakrishna 44) Sri Ramakrishna 45) Sri Ramakrishna 46) Sri Ramakrishna 47) Sri Ramakrishna 48) Sri Ramakrishna 49) Sri Ramakrishna 50) Sri Ramakrishna 51) Sri Ramakrishna 52) Sri Ramakrishna 53) Sri Ramakrishna 54) Sri Ramakrishna 55) Sri Ramakrishna 56) Sri Ramakrishna 57) Sri Ramakrishna 58) Sri Ramakrishna 59) Sri Ramakrishna 60) Sri Ramakrishna 61) Sri Ramakrishna 62) Sri Ramakrishna 63) Sri Ramakrishna 64) Sri Ramakrishna 65) Sri Ramakrishna 66) Sri Ramakrishna 67) Sri Ramakrishna 68) Sri Ramakrishna 69) Sri Ramakrishna 70) Sri Ramakrishna 71) Sri Ramakrishna 72) Sri Ramakrishna 73) Sri Ramakrishna 74) Sri Ramakrishna 75) Sri Ramakrishna 76) Sri Ramakrishna 77) Sri Ramakrishna 78) Sri Ramakrishna 79) Sri Ramakrishna 80) Sri Ramakrishna 81) Sri Ramakrishna 82) Sri Ramakrishna 83) Sri Ramakrishna 84) Sri Ramakrishna 85) Sri Ramakrishna 86) Sri Ramakrishna 87) Sri Ramakrishna 88) Sri Ramakrishna 89) Sri Ramakrishna 90) Sri Ramakrishna 91) Sri Ramakrishna 92) Sri Ramakrishna 93) Sri Ramakrishna 94) Sri Ramakrishna 95) Sri Ramakrishna 96) Sri Ramakrishna 97) Sri Ramakrishna 98) Sri Ramakrishna 99) Sri Ramakrishna 100) Sri Ramakrishna

The disciples and devotees at Ramakrishna's funeral

Ramakrishna preferred "the duality of adoring a Divinity beyond himself to the self-annihilating immersion of nirvikalpa samadhi", and he helped "bring to the realm of Eastern energetics and realization the daemonic celebration that the human is always between a reality it has not yet attained and a reality to which it is no longer limited"^[94]

Metaphysics

To a devotee Sri Ramakrishna said:

It has been revealed to me that there exists an Ocean of Consciousness without limit. From It come all things of the relative plane, and in It they merge again. These waves arising from the Great Ocean merge again in the Great Ocean. I have clearly perceived all these things.^[95]

Ramakrishna regarded the Supreme Being to be both Personal and Impersonal, active and inactive:

When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive - neither creating nor preserving nor destroying - I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active - creating, preserving and destroying - I call Him Sakti or Maya or Prakriti, the Personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and Impersonal are the same thing, like milk and its whiteness, the diamond and its lustre, the snake and its wriggling motion. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one.^[96]

Ramakrishna regarded maya to be of two natures, *avidya maya* and *vidya maya*. He explained that *avidya maya* represents dark forces of creation (e.g. sensual desire, selfish actions, evil passions, greed, lust and cruelty), which keep people on lower planes of consciousness. These forces are responsible for human entrapment in the cycle of birth and death, and they must be fought and vanquished. *Vidya maya*, on the other hand, represents higher forces of creation (e.g. spiritual virtues, selfless action, enlightening qualities, kindness, purity love, and devotion), which elevate human beings to the higher planes of consciousness.^[97]

Society

Ramakrishna taught that *jatra jiv tatra Shiv* (wherever there is a living being, there is Shiva). His teaching, "Jive daya noy, Shiv gyane jiv seba" (not kindness to living beings, but serving the living being as Shiva Himself) is considered as the inspiration for the philanthropic work carried out by his chief disciple Wekananda.^[98]

In the Kolkata scene of the mid to late nineteenth century, Ramakrishna was opinionated on the subject of Chakri. Chakri can be described as a type of low-paying servitude done by educated men—typically government or commerce-related clerical positions. On a basic level, Ramakrishna saw this system as a corrupt form of European social organisation that forced educated men to be servants not only to their bosses at the office but also to their wives at home. What Ramakrishna saw as the primary detriment of Chakri, however, was that it forced workers into a rigid, impersonal clock-based time structure. He saw the imposition of strict adherence to each second on the watch as a roadblock to spirituality. Despite this, however, Ramakrishna demonstrated that Bhakti could be practised as an inner retreat to experience solace in the face of Western-style discipline and often discrimination in the workplace.^[99]

His spiritual movement indirectly aided nationalism, as it rejected caste distinctions and religious prejudices.^[83]

Reception and legacy

Ramakrishna is considered an important figure in the Bengali Renaissance of 19th–20th century. Several organisations have been established in his name.^[100] The Ramakrishna Math and Mission is the main organisation founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897. The Mission conducts extensive work in health care, disaster relief, rural management, tribal welfare, elementary and higher



The marble statue of Ramakrishna at Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission

education. The movement is considered as one of the revitalisation movements of India. Amiya Sen writes that Vivekananda's "social service gospel" stemmed from direct inspiration from Ramakrishna and rests substantially on the "liminal quality" of the Master's message.^[101]

Other organisations include the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society founded by Swami Abhedananda in 1923, the Ramakrishna Sarada Math founded by a rebel group in 1929, the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission formed by Swami Nityananda in 1976, and the Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission founded in 1959 as a sister organisation by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.^[100]

Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem on Ramakrishna, *To the Ramakrishna Paramahansa Ramakrishna Deva*^[102]

Diverse courses of worship from varied springs of fulfillment have mingled in your meditation.

The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite has given form to a shrine of unity in your life
where from far and near arrive salutations to which I join my own.

During the 1937 Parliament of Religions, which was held at the Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta, Tagore acknowledged Ramakrishna as a great saint because

...the largeness of his spirit could comprehend seemingly antagonistic modes of sadhana, and because the simplicity of his soul shames for all time the pomp and pedantry of pontiffs and pundits.^[103]

Max Müller, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Aurobindo, and Leo Tolstoy have acknowledged Ramakrishna's contribution to humanity. Ramakrishna's influence is also seen in the works of artists such as Franz Dvorak (1862–1927) and Philip Glass.

Views and studies

Darśhana

Ramakrishna's *darśhana*, or religious practice and worldview contained elements of bhakti, Tantra and Vedanta.

Bhakti and Tantra

Max Müller^[note 3] portrayed Ramakrishna as

...a Bhakta, a worshipper or lover of the deity much more than a Gñānin or a knower.^{[105][106]}

Postcolonial literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote that Ramakrishna was a "Bengali bhakta visionary" and that as a bhakta, "he turned chiefly towards Kali."^[107]

Indologist Heinrich Zimmer was the first Western scholar to interpret Ramakrishna's worship of the Divine Mother as containing specifically Tantric elements.^{[108][109]} Neeval also argued that tantra played a main role in Ramakrishna's spiritual development.^[108] Jeffrey J. Kripal argued that Ramakrishna rejected Advaita Vedanta in favour of Shakti Tantra.^[110]

Transformation into neo-Vedantin

Vivekananda portrayed Ramakrishna as an Advaita Vedantin. Vivekananda's approach can be located in the historical background of Ramakrishna and Calcutta during the mid-19th century.^[111] Neevel notes that the image of Ramakrishna underwent several transformations in the writings of his prominent admirers, who changed the 'religious madman' into a calm and well-behaving proponent of Advaita Vedanta.^[36] Narasingha Sil has argued that Vivekananda revised and mythologised Ramakrishna's image after Ramakrishna's death.^[112] McDaniel notes that the Ramakrishna Mission is biased towards Advaita Vedanta, and downplays the importance of Shaktism in Ramakrishna's spirituality.^[113] Malcolm McLean argued that the Ramakrishna Movement presents "a particular kind of explanation of Ramakrishna, that he was some kind of neo-Vedantist who taught that all religions are the same."^[114]

Carl Olson argued that in his presentation of his master, Vivekananda had hid much of Ramakrishna's embarrassing sexual oddities from the public, because he feared that Ramakrishna would be misunderstood.^[115] Tyagananda and Vrajaprana argue that Olson makes his "astonishing claim" based on Kripal's speculations in *Kali's Child*, which they argue are unsupported by any of these source texts.^[116]

Sumit Sarkar argued that he found in the *Kathamrita* traces of a binary opposition between unlearned oral wisdom and learned literate knowledge. He argues that all of our information about Ramakrishna, a rustic near-illiterate Brahmin, comes from urban *bhadralok* devotees, "...whose texts simultaneously illuminate and transform."^[117]

Amiya Prosad Sen criticises Neevel's analysis,^[118] and writes that "it is really difficult to separate the Tantrik Ramakrishna from the Vedantic", since Vedanta and Tantra "may appear to be different in some respects", but they also "share some important postulates between them".^[119]

Psychoanalysis

Romain Rolland and the "Oceanic feeling"

The dialogue on psychoanalysis and Ramakrishna began in 1927 when Sigmund Freud's friend Romain Rolland wrote to him that he should consider spiritual experiences, or "the oceanic feeling," in his psychological works.^{[120][121]} Romain Rolland described the mystical states achieved by Ramakrishna and other mystics as an "'oceanic' sentiment", one which Rolland had also experienced.^[122] Rolland believed that the universal human religious emotion resembled this "oceanic sense."^[123] In his 1929 book *La vie de Ramakrishna*, Rolland distinguished between the feelings of unity and eternity which Ramakrishna experienced in his mystical states and Ramakrishna's interpretation of those feelings as the goddess Kali.^[124]

In his 1991 book *The Analyst and the Mystic*, Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar saw in Ramakrishna's visions a spontaneous capacity for creative experiencing.^[125] Kakar also argued that culturally relative concepts of eroticism and gender have contributed to the Western difficulty in comprehending Ramakrishna.^[126] Kakar saw Ramakrishna's seemingly bizarre acts as part of a *bhakti* path to God.

Kali's Child

Narasingha Sil,^[127] Jeffrey Kripal,^[57] and Sudhir Kakar,^[128] analyse Ramakrishna's mysticism and religious practices using psychoanalysis,^[129] arguing that his mystical visions, refusal to comply with ritual copulation in Tantra, *Madhura Bhava*, and criticism of *Kamini-Kanchana* (women and gold) reflect homosexuality



Photograph of Ramakrishna, taken on 10 December 1881 at the studio of "The Bengal Photographers" in Radhabazar, Calcutta (Kolkata).

In 1995, Jeffrey J. Kripal argued in his controversial^{[130][131]} *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*, a psychoanalytic study of Ramakrishna's life, that Ramakrishna's mystical experiences were symptoms of repressed homoeroticism.^[132] Kripal also argued in *Kali's Child* that the Ramakrishna Movement had manipulated Ramakrishna's biographical documents, that the Movement had published them in incomplete and bowdlerised editions (claiming among other things, hiding Ramakrishna's homoerotic tendencies), and that the Movement had suppressed Ram Chandra Datta's *Srisriramakrsna Paramahamsadever Jivanavrttanta*^[57]

These views were disputed by Swami Atmajnanananda who wrote that *Jivanavrttanta* had been reprinted nine times in Bengali as of 1995,^[133] and other scholars and psychoanalysts, including Romain Rolland,^[72] Alan Roland,^{[120][134]} Kelly Aan Raab,^[135] Somnath Bhattacharyya,^[136] J.S. Hawley.^[137]

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See also

- List of Hindu gurus and saints
- Dakshineswar Kali Temple
- Relationship between Ramakrishna and Swami Wekananda
- The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Notes

1. According to Anil D. Desai, Ramakrishna suffered from psychomotor epilepsy^[24] also called temporal lobe epilepsy.^[25] See Devinsky, J.; Schachter, S. (2009). "Norman Geschwind's contribution to the understanding of behavioral changes in temporal lobe epilepsy: The February 1974 lecture"*Epilepsy & Behavior*. **15** (4): 417–24. doi:10.1016/j.yebeh.2009.06.006(<https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.yebeh.2009.06.006>)PMID 19640791 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19640791>) for a description of characteristics of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy including increased religiosity as "a very striking feature." See also Geschwind syndrome for descriptions of behavioral phenomena evident in some temporal lobe epilepsy patients, and Jess Hill *Finding God in a seizure: the link between temporal lobe epilepsy and mysticism*(<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/encounter/the-link-between-temporal-lobe-epilepsy-and-mysticism/5956982>)or some first-hand descriptions of epilepsy-induced "visions and trance-like states."
2. The Vaishnava Bhakti traditions speak of five different moods,^[35] referred to as *bhāvas*, different attitudes that a devotee can take up to express his love for God. They are *śānta*, the "peaceful attitude"; *dāsyā*, the attitude of a servant; *sakhya*, the attitude of a friend; *vātsalyā*, the attitude of a mother toward her child; and *madhura*, the attitude of a woman towards her lover.^{[36][37]}
3. In his influential^[104] 1896 essay "A real mahatma: Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev" and his 1899 book *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*

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