SRI RAMAKRISHNA BHAGAVATA

This Book is Published with the Financial Assistance of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams under their Scheme "Aid to Publish Religious Books"

By
R. S. RAMABADRAN

With a Foreword by
SWAMI TAPASYANANDA

Published by
R. S. RAMABADRAN
MANIDVI PA ENCLA VE
35 (Old 14) VenkataKrishna Road
Mandaveli, Chennai-600 028
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Sri Ramakrishna as Ganesa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sri Sarada Devi as Saraswati</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sri Ramakrishna as Brahma</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sri Sarada Devi as Lakshmi</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sri Ramakrishna as Vishnu</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sri Sarada Devi as Sita</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sri Ramakrishna as Sita</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sri Ramakrishna as Rama</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sri Ramakrishna as Raghuvir</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sri Ramakrishna as Hanuman</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sri Sarada Devi as Radha</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Sri Ramakrishna as Radha</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sri Ramakrishna as Krishna</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Sri Ramakrishna as Gopala</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Sri Sarada Devi as Vishnupriya</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Sri Ramakrishna as Chaitanya</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Sri Ramakrishna as Nityananda</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Sri Sarada Devi as Uma</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Sri Sarada Devi as Parvati</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sri Sarada Devi as Sakti</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sri Ramakrishna as Siva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Bhavatarini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Phalaharini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Shodasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Simhavahini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Jagaddhatri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Kali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sri Ramakrishna as Kali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sri Sarada Devi as Durga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Sri Ramakrishna as Durga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna
(Thakur or Master)
The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi
Revered Srimat Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, *Vice-President*, Ramakrishna Math and Mission
FOREWORD

The 19th Century is generally recognised as a period of spiritual renaissance in India. During this time several eminent sages appeared in the north and south of this country. History has proved most of them to be only of provincial interest. But among them Sri Ramakrishna stands out as a personality of world-wide significance. Though he lived practically the whole of his life confined to the temple of Dakshineswar, the power emanating from him and the great relevance of his teachings to the requirements of the present day world have helped to spread their influence all the world over. This encounter between him and the world-consciousness has produced a body of literature and institutions that are attaining great popularity.

Sri Ramabadran’s “Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavata” is an example of the literary productions deriving inspiration from the personality of Sri Ramakrishna and his message. His knowledge of the Hindu Puranas and the Itihasas on the one hand and of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna on the other, have helped Ramabadran to find parallelisms in the Puranic lore for most of the incidents and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. In a very ingenious way he has superimposed these two mutually and formed a nexus providing matter for deep thought. The book provides stimulating reading.

Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore
Madras 600 004

Swami Tapasyananda
Om Namo Bhagavate Ramakrishnaya

PREFACE

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi are known among devotees as "Sarva-Deva-Devi-Swarupins" (embodiments of all gods and goddesses). This book, the first of a series of five or six volumes, is a humble attempt to study them as such.

The title "Bhagavata" for this series is no doubt a little ambitious and needs some explaining. There are certain centuries-old conventional requirements for religious books in Sanskrit to be styled a Purana such as The Bhagavata, which, perhaps, are not very relevant for a book written in English in this age. Generally speaking, all religious books which deal with the life and teachings of an Incarnation of God so as to inculcate devotion and faith in the minds of readers, such as this present work on Sri Ramakrishna, may be termed "Bhagavata".

Nevertheless, there are special reasons for the title of this book. Firstly, it relates many events from past Puranas like the Bhagavata and Itihasas like the Ramayana with the lives and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Secondly, it is modelled on the great Srimad Bhagavata in one important respect. The Bhagavata Purana identifies all great epoch-makers with Vishnu and concludes that Krishna is His greatest Avatar (Krishnastu Bhagavan Swayam). Similarly, this work identifies not only all previous Avatars including Krishna with Sri Ramakrishna, but also all deities. Therefore this series of books has been named "Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavata".
Each chapter of this book identifies Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Sarada Devi with a particular deity or Avatar. This arrangement has a special advantage and significance of its own for devotees. Swami Saradananda has stated in his great biography that on any day auspicious to a particular deity, the characteristics of that deity manifested themselves spontaneously in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore, on a day auspicious to each deity or Avatar, the relevant chapter identifying that particular aspect of divinity with Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Sarada Devi may be read with benefit by devotees. For example, on Ganesa Chaturthi, the chapter "Sri Ramakrishna As Ganesa" can be read and so on.

I consider myself singularly fortunate in having received a Foreword for this book on Sri Guru Maharaj from no less eminent an authority than my Guru, the Revered Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, himself. I am also indebted to Swami Raghaveshanandaji Maharaj, Manager, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, for kindly providing me with certain facilities during the execution of this book as well as for his advice in some matters. I am also indebted to Swami Yatatmanandaji Maharaj of Madras Math and to Sri C. S. Ramakrishnan in this regard.

I wish to thank my good friends Sri G. Maheswara Rao of M/s P.V. Ramachandra Rao Group of Companies, Srikalahasti (A.P.), as well as Sri P. Shivaji Kumar, an active devotee of Madras Math, for encouraging me to publish this book.

Suggestions, criticism and comments on this book are most welcome from readers.

Guru Purnima,
July 18, 1989
Madras.

— R.S. Ramabadran
1. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS GANESA

Ganesa is the deity which is worshipped first by Hindus before starting any enterprise. He is considered the Lord of obstacles (Vigneswara). When worshipped, Lord Ganesa grants discrimination (Buddhi) and success (Siddhi). Even the great sage Vyasa invoked Ganesa before composing the epic, *Mahabharata*.

According to the Puranas, Ganesa was created by the Divine Mother Parvati out of Herself. The Child’s head was accidentally cut off and an elephant’s head transplanted in its place. Various interpretations have been given for Ganesa and His elephant’s head. The curved proboscis of Ganesa is said to denote Om, the Pranava Mantra, which represents the Impersonal Brahman. The elephant’s head denotes intelligence; therefore Ganesa is the Lord of Buddh in whom Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, resides. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, is also said to reside in the head of an elephant. Once Ganapatya, the cult of Ganesa, was spread throughout the world. Even now He is one of the most popular deities of Hinduism.

Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples two stories from the Puranas regarding Ganesa. One day when Ganesa was a mere child, he tested a female cat in a playful mood and injured it. When he saw his mother Parvati afterwards, he was shocked to find injuries on Her person. Parvati explained to Ganesa that it was She who had become all beings; by injuring the cat, he had hurt Her. All male forms in the universe are Siva and
female forms, Sakti. Ganesa remembered the words of Parvati forever. When he attained to marriageable age, he refused to marry as all females were only his own mother Parvati. Therefore Ganesa maintained perfect continence, looked upon all women as his own mother and became the foremost among persons of divine knowledge.

Thus mentioning the greatness of Ganesa's knowledge and his filial relation with all women without exception, Sri Ramakrishna said, "My attitude to women is also the same; that is why I had the vision of the material form of the Universal Cause in my wedded wife and bowed down at her feet." Thus Sri Ramakrishna directly compared himself to Ganesa, and his own wife, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, to Parvati.

A most astonishing parallel to Sri Ramakrishna's story of Parvati, Ganesa and the injured cat is seen in the life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Almost the same story happened in the life of the Holy Mother!

Radhu, the niece of the Holy Mother, had a pet cat for which the Mother provided half a pound of milk every day. The cat used to lay quietly and fearlessly at the Mother's feet. The cat now and then stole things and Brahmachari Jnan, the Mother's attendant, was very angry with it. One day when he flung the cat away, the Mother looked pale with pain. Beating the cat was also a common occurrence. The Holy Mother called the Brahmachari and said, "Jnan, you should cook rice for the cats so that they may not have to go to others' houses; for the people will abuse us, my boy." Then she added, "Look here,
Jnan, don't beat the cats; for even in them am I." That was enough. The Brahmachari could no longer lift his hand against the cats. He even arranged to give them fishes, though he himself was a strict vegetarian! Brahmachari Rashbehari asked the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi one day, "Are you the mother of all?" "Yes," replied the Mother. "Even of these lower creatures?" pressed the inquirer. "Yes," answered the Mother. Just like Parvati in the Puranic story, the Holy Mother explained to her spiritual sons that she was present in all beings, even in pet cats!

Sri Ramakrishna also narrated to his disciples another popular Puranic story about Ganesa and Kartikeya, the sons of Siva and Parvati. Once Parvati Devi told her sons, "I will give my precious necklace of gems to one of you who comes first in circumambulating the universe and coming back to me." Kartikeya smiled derisively thinking of Ganesa's stout body and the slowness of his vehicle, the mouse. Sure of victory, Kartik started on his swift peacock to go round the world. Ganesa had the divine knowledge that the universe comprised of Siva and Sakti and was situated in them. So he quietly went around Siva and Parvati, worshipped them and took his seat. Kartik circumambulated the universe and returned after a long time. But Parvati placed the precious necklace (gave a celestial mango to Ganesa, in another version of the same story) around the neck of Ganesa, pleased with his divine knowledge and devotion.

This Puranic story told by Sri Ramakrishna perhaps illustrates the truth that the Gudichakha, one who stays where he is, knowing like Ganesa that God resides in the heart and is very near, is superior in
knowledge to the Bahudaka, one who goes on pilgrimages all around the world in search of spirituality. Sri Ramakrishna, who is foremost in divine knowledge like Ganesa, also taught: "Travel in all the four quarters of the earth, yet you will find nothing (no true religion) anywhere. Whatever there is, is only here (in Sri Ramakrishna's own person or within one's own heart.)"

Swami Chidbhavananda gives yet another interpretation of the Puranic story concerning Ganesa and Kartikeya as follows: "Both the brothers were wise in their own way. Kartikeya inquired into the manifest Prakriti and Ganesa into the unmanifest Purusha. A harmonious combination of these two inquiries constitutes true knowledge. Knowing the one to the exclusion of the other is imperfect knowledge. The scientific inquiry made by the modern man is a true search into Prakriti. It has taken him very near the Purusha. As Kartikeya's survey terminated in his coming back to the Divine, the scientist will soon come to know that the manifest universe has its origin and sustenance in the Cosmic Intelligence."

Sri Ramakrishna, like Ganesa, reached out straight away for the Purusha in his life, without 'circling around Prakriti.' He knew intuitively that Purusha is the Fruit, the Reality behind the interminable forest of Prakriti. Thakur compared the universe to a mango-garden, Purusha to the sweet mango-fruit and Prakriti to the leaves, twigs and the rest, when he taught: "Eat mangoes, but don't count the leaves." Just as Ganesa enjoyed the celestial mango given by Parvati in some versions of the Puranic story, Sri Ramakrishna ever tasted the mango of divine bliss.
Swami Saradananda writes in his great biography on Sri Ramakrishna that before hearing these Puranic stories from the Great Master, the disciples had no excessive devotion to the pot-bellied, elephant-faced God Ganesa, with the exudation flowing from his temples. Since they heard the story from Thakur’s holy mouth, they had the conviction that Ganesa was truly fit to be worshipped before all the gods, as indeed he is worshipped. It is therefore not surprising that while initiating Swami Sadashivananda into Sannyasa, Swami Vivekananda said, “Now think of Sri Ramakrishna and transform me into him and then him into Ganesa. Ganesa is the ideal of Sannyasa.” The Ramakrishna Order of Monks is modeled on the Ideal of Ganesa, which reveres all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna embodies in himself all the divine attributes of Ganesa. He is the repository of Buddhi (pure mind) and Siddhi (success in spiritual endeavours). In his own life, he observed strict Brahmacharya and looked on all women as the Divine Mother, like Ganesa. Like Vigneswara, the Lord of obstacles, Sri Ramakrishna removes all obstacles in sadhana faced by his devotees and enables them to attain perfection (Siddhi). Like Ganapati, Sri Ramakrishna is the foremost among all persons of divine knowledge. He is Vinayaka, One who does immense good to humanity in this age. If Ganesa is fond of sweetmeats called ‘modaka,’ Sri Ramakrishna was fond of sweets like ‘rasagollas.’ Though outwardly he was sometimes eager to taste good food like Ganesa, Sri Ramakrishna thereby only absorbed the adverse Karma of his devotees and removed obstacles facing them.
According to the Ganapafya cult, Sri Ganesa is ‘Sarva Deva Devi Varishta,’ the first and foremost among all gods and goddesses. Sri Ramakrishna is ‘Avatara Varishta,’ because he is the Avatar of Ganesa; he is the first and foremost among all Avatars because he is the first Incarnation in history to fully manifest all the divine attributes of Lord Ganesa.

2. SRI SARADA DEVI AS SARASWATI

Saraswati is one of the most important goddesses of India, worshipped since time immemorial. Like Ganga, Saraswati was originally a river-goddess in praise of whom there are hymns in the Rig-veda. Saraswati later came to be identified with Vak and evolved as the goddess of learning and music. Worship of Saraswati spread to Tibet, Java and Japan where stone images of the goddess have been discovered. Saraswati found a place in Buddhism and Jainism also and came to be identified with Manjushri, the Buddhist goddess of learning. She is described variously as Mahasaraswati, Aryavajra Saraswati, Vajravina Saraswati and Vajra-Sarada in Buddhism. Matangi, one of the ten Mahavidyas of Tantric religion, is identical with Saraswati.¹

Sri Ramakrishna directly spoke of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as Saraswati: “She is Sarada, Saraswati; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people should come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes.” On another occasion, he said,
“She is the communicator of knowledge, she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Shakti (Power).” And to his nephew Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna said, “My dear, her name is Sarada, she is Saraswati. That is why she likes to put on ornaments.”

Swami Gambhirananda writes in this connection. “The wisdom that he (Sri Ramakrishna) spoke of had no worldly connotation, but it meant that flowering of the mind whereby it can have a life-transforming vision of Divinity. This awakening of a higher consciousness was one of the main functions of the Mother ......To us, then, she is the mother, full of unquestioning affection; Sarada, the bestower of the highest wisdom; and the deity (Devi), full of purity, glory and supernatural power, and granting salvation to all.”

Swami Saradeshvananda cites two interesting instances which project the Holy mother as Saraswati. On one Panchami day auspicious for the worship of the Goddess Saraswati, a Brahmacharin of Belur Math sought the permission of Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Sivananda) before starting the worship of Saraswati in the image. Mahapurush Maharaj then said in a loud voice, “The Mother (Sri Sarada Devi) is verily Saraswati Herself. It is through her grace that we have the worship of Her at the Math. It is she alone who, by her grace, removes our ignorance and bestows knowledge and devotion.” Saying “Hail to the Mother, hail to the Mother!” Māhapurush Maharaj with his voice surcharged with devotion, directed his Pranams to the Mother with folded hands and great humility. That expression of his deep reverence for the Mother melted the hearts of all present.
A certain disciple-son of the Holy Mother who thus heard that she was Saraswati Herself became very happy remembering a past incident. He had once placed a white Kunda flower at the Mother’s feet. As soon as the Kunda flower touched her feet, he felt a unique wave of joy in his heart, as if the flower was laughing, spreading a wonderful beauty all around! The Mother, too, was in a happy vein. Now the understanding came to him that this was because the Kunda flower is a great favourite of the Goddess Saraswati. He had not heard then that our Mother was verily Saraswati Herself.

According to one interpretation, the word ‘Saras’ means lustre and therefore Saraswati is the goddess of lustre, purity and Sattva. Saraswati is generally portrayed as a snow-white goddess with white garments and everything associated with her is white in keeping with her purity. Appropriately, these details apply equally well to the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the manifestation of Saraswati in this age. The Holy Mother was purity itself so that she imparted purity and spirituality to all: she was the embodiment of the purest Sattva. Like Saraswati, the Holy Mother wore white-cloth after the Mahasamadhi of Thakur.

The Goddess Saraswati carries a rosary (japa-mala) in one of Her four hands as seen in Her pictures. The Holy Mother, like Saraswati, ever practised ‘japa’, for the sake of her innumerable children. She always preached the efficacy of ‘japa’ or repetition of God’s holy names and recommended that sincere sadhakas should repeat the Mantra at least 15,000 times a day, in order to keep the mind pure and make steady spiritual progress. While Sri Ramakrishna undertook all sorts of
spiritual practices, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi attained parity with him through ‘japa’ alone.

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was seen in her later life by thousands as an elderly woman of mature spiritual wisdom, like Saraswati. This was also proper for Gayatri, Savitri and Saraswati are portrayed as a little girl, a woman in the full bloom of youth and an elderly woman, being manifestations of divine power associated with sunrise, noon and sunset respectively.

On one particular Saraswati Puja day, probably in the year 1910, the Holy Mother was verily Saraswati Herself, imparting the Gayatri Mantra to a Christian convert and bringing him back into the Hindu fold. Regarding this event, Swami Gambhirananda writes, “Because of the Mother’s presence the worship of Saraswati was performed that year with great eclat. . . . Shri Debendranath Chatterji, post-master of Kothar, who had embraced Christianity in youth under a blind impulse, now felt repentant, and wishing to return to the Hindu fold, consulted many about the possibility of a reconversion. . . . Following her injunctions, Devendra Babu shaved his head, performed the purificatory rite and received the Gayatri Mantra and the sacred thread from Brahmachari Krishnalal. Then he approached the Mother in all humility for initiation, which she gladly granted him on the day of the worship of Saraswati, and blessed him by presenting to him a piece of cloth.”

Saraswati is also known as Vani, the goddess of all arts and sciences, especially music. Vani holds a ‘vina’ (a classical Indian musical instrument) in her left hand. In the Hindu concept of Vani, music is merged with spirituality. Indian music is traditionally attuned to
spirituality. Most composers of music in India are illumined saints or at least, devotees who tried to realise God through devotional music (Nadopasana). Purandaradasa, Tyagaraja, Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabhai, Guru Nanak, Ramprasad and several other saints used music as a medium of Bhakti. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were endowed with marvellous musical talents and had very sweet voices which enthralled listeners, like the sweet sounds coming out of the vina of Goddess Vani.

Saraswati or Vani is the Sakti of Brahma, the creator-god and the world itself is said to be the embodiment of the Word or divine music. Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of the Divine Mother as Vani who appeared to create the world through music from Her Vina. Sister Nivedita writes, “Ramakrishna used to see a long white thread proceeding out of himself. At the end would be a mass of light. This mass would open, and within it he would see the Mother with a Vina. Then She would begin to play; and as she played, he would see the music turning into birds and animals and worlds and arrange themselves. Then she would stop playing and they would all disappear. The light would grow less and less distinct till it was just a luminous mass, the string would grow shorter, and shorter, and the whole world be absorbed into himself again.”

Such a vision of the Divine Mother perhaps arose in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna as he sang the song composed by the saint Ramprasad containing the following verses:
"The world has Thou charmed, Mother, Charmer of Siva.
Thou who playest on the vina.
Sitting on the huge lotus of Muladhara.
The body is the great vina
And Sushumna, Ida and Pingala are the strings thereof.

And thou playest on the three gamuts
With the great secret of qualitative differentiation."

The Hindu concept of Saraswati or Vani as the goddess of music and spiritual wisdom can be best understood in the words of Sri Ramakrishna, who in a different context, gave the following illustration of musical notes to explain spiritual realisation: "Take, for example, the natural and reverse orders of the musical scale. You raise the pitch of your voice in the natural order of 'do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do' (sa, re ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, sa) and lower it in the reverse order of 'do, si, la, sol, fa, mi, re, do.' Similarly you realise the knowledge of non-duality in samadhi, come down again and then remain in the I-consciousness."
The seven musical notes can thus be thought of as associated with the seven 'chakras' or centres of consciousness of the mind situated within the Sushumna nerve (Canal centralis) in the human body, which itself has been compared by Ramprasad with the vina of the Divine Mother. Krishna's flute as well as Vani's lute (vina) symbolise the Sushumna nerve and their notes awaken the spiritual consciousness of humanity.

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was the fullest manifestation of Vani, the Divine Mother who plays on the vina, sitting on the huge lotus of
Muladhara. She uttered holy siddha-mantras into the ears of her innumerable children and aroused their dormant spiritual powers. Her sweet words of wisdom, uttered with motherly affection, sounded like divine music emanating from Vani's vina to innumerable ears scorched by the discordant notes of worldliness. The Holy Mother was Vani Herself who played the seven-stringed vina, the Sushumna-Nadi of her devotees, thereby arousing their spiritual consciousness gently from the lowest Muladhara (which corresponds to the lowest note 'Sa' standing for Samsara or worldliness) upwards to the highest plane of Sahasrara (which corresponds to the highest note 'Ni' standing for Nirvana). To start with, the Holy Mother is 'Sa' for humanity, which stands for Saraswati; to end with the Holy Mother is Vani, which holy name ends with 'Ni'. Thus the Holy Mother as Vani ever uplifts humanity to the level of divinity, playing upon the entire gamut of musical notes ranging from 'Sa' to 'Ni'.

The manifestation of Saraswati in the form of the Holy Mother is therefore in conformity with Hindu traditions and beliefs, even to the minutest details. She is none other than Goddess Saraswati in all Her aspects such as Vak, Vani, Sarada and so on, born in this age to revive all arts and sciences. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is 'Sarva Shukla Saraswati,' the all-lustrous goddess of knowledge.
3. SRI RAMAkrishna AS BRAHMA

According to the Puranas, Brahma is the creator of the universe and the first Person of the Hindu Godhead consisting of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. These three Gods are only different aspects of Iswara or Brahman with attributes. When Iswara is creating the universe, He is called Brahman; when protecting and destroying the world, He is called Vishnu and Siva respectively. The word ‘Brahma’ literally means ‘ever expanding, limitless Infinite’ in Sanskrit.

The worship of Brahma was at its zenith in the beginning of creation during the Satya Yuga, the age of Truth. Brahma was so called because He was strongly identified then with Brahman with attributes. Since Brahman was worshipped in the Vedic Age predominantly in its formless aspect, perhaps the tradition developed in the Puranic Age that Brahma should not be worshipped through forms. The worship of Brahma has totally disappeared now among the Hindus, while the cults of the other two major Gods, namely, Vishnu and Siva, are still flourishing.

Brahma was a popular deity in India in very ancient times. Both worldly-minded demons like Hiranyakasipu and spiritually-minded sages like Viswamitra propitiated and obtained all sorts of boons from Brahma, the Father of the Universe, according to the Puranas. The Fish, Tortoise and Boar Avatars of Vishnu were originally attributed to Brahma, but were transferred to Vishnu subsequently with the rise of the Vishnu cult.

The worship of spiritual Gurus was very much in vogue in India in the ancient times, before the
concept of Avatar became popular. Brahma was then considered the foremost Guru; even now Brahma is indirectly admitted as the Supreme Guru by all Hindu cults. Local legends in holy places all over India usually state that Brahma started the worship of the deity (Brahmotsava) there. The Puranas glorifying Vishnu, Siva and Sakti usually assign to Brahma the position of preceptor and foremost devotee by stating that all the gods headed by Brahma went and supplicated the concerned deity for some favour or other.

Like Brahma, Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the deities of all cults and manifested himself as the foremost devotee and Guru to whom the votaries of all religions went individually and collectively at all times for spiritual guidance. Like Brahma uttering the four Vedas ceaselessly through His four mouths, Sri Ramakrishna also went on expounding spiritual truths tirelessly to all visitors in his last days. Like Brahma, Sri Ramakrishna was Satyamurti or Vedamurti, whose words were ever true (Veda-vak). From another angle also, Sri Ramakrishna was Brahma: he spoke of his own wife Sri Sarada Devi as Saraswati-incarnate, which directly means that he himself was Brahma, the divine spouse of Goddess Saraswati!

Brahma is the ideal of Karma Yoga. He is the ‘Gunavatar’ or embodiment of the quality of Rajas (activity). Ever established in Brahman, the Personal God Brahma ceaselessly creates all sentient and insentient worlds, though He has nothing to gain or lose by such ‘desireless work’ (Nishkama Karma). The Vedas state that God sacrificed Himself in order to initiate creation. The Puranas more explicitly state that out of the Creator Brahma’s body, both Manu
(original man) and Satarupa (original woman) were created. The four ancient Sanakadi Rishis, the seven ‘Sapta Rishis’ and the ten Prajapatis were all created out of various parts of Brahma’s body and mind. Sri Ramakrishna has also stated that his disciples and devotees were all born out of various parts of his own body; he put himself in the position of Brahma in this respect.

Sri Ramakrishna has indirectly admitted that he is Brahma, through his own ‘revelation’ in one place in *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which reads as follows:

**A REVELATION**

The Master (Sri Ramakrishna) has all his feelings stirred up. He lays his hand upon the heart and speaks.

MASTER (to Narendra and other disciples): I see—I realise that all things, every conceivable thing—comes out of this! (He asks Narendra by signs): What do you understand?

NARENDRA: Every conceivable thing, that is, all created objects come out of Thee!

MASTER: (rejoicing, to Rakhal): Do you see how he understands?¹

Since all created objects have come out of Sri Ramakrishna, he is none other than Brahma, as all Puranas state that the entire universe has come out of the body of Brahma, the creator of the universe.

The icon of Brahma has four heads facing the four quarters; and they represent the four Vedas, the four Yogas and the four Varnas or castes. Brahma’s faces have beards and His eyes are closed in meditation. In
His four arms Father Brahma carries a rosary, a water-pot, a book (Veda) and a sacrificial implement such as a kusa grass, a ladle or a spoon. Since Brahma holds sacrificial implements used in Vedic sacrifices, probably He was very popular in the days when the Vedic Karma-kanda was in vogue. Brahma is the Ideal of Karma Yoga and therefore it is no wonder that He was popular in the days of Vedic sacrifices. With the disappearance of Vedic sacrifices and rituals based on the Karma-kanda or work portion of the Vedas, the worship of Brahma has also disappeared in India. Only at Pushkar, Brahma is worshipped now though His icons are found in many places.

There is a famous verse beginning with ‘Brahmarpanam’ in the Bhagavad Gita (IV-24) which seems applicable to Brahma, the primordial sacrifier who created the universe out of His own body:

"Brahmarpanam brahma havirbrahmagnau
brahmanahutam
Brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamadhina."

which means, "The sacrifice in which the ladle with which the oblation is poured is Brahma, the oblation itself is Brahma, even so that act of pouring the same into the fire, which is again Brahma, by the sacrifier, who is Brahma — the goal reached by him, who is absorbed in such sacrifice as Brahma, is Brahma, alone."

Though the word ‘Brahma’ in this verse is usually taken to mean the Absolute Brahman, it is perhaps more logical to take it to mean the Personal God Brahma, the primordial sacrifier. The Absolute Brahman is totally inactive and without qualities (Nirguna), so that all activities such as sacrifices can only be attributed to Brahma, the Saguna Brahman or Iswara in His creative aspect.
This particular verse of the Bhagavad Gita is invoked by devotees of Sri Ramakrishna before partaking food offered to him. The sacramental food partaken by devotees, the fire in the body that digests the food, the sacrificer or devotee who partakes the food, the goal to be reached by devotees—all form together 'Corpus Ramakrishnai' (the body of Sri Ramakrishna). They are all Brahma or Hiranyagarbha, the original sacrificer out of whose body every object in the world has come out and who especially manifested Himself in the person of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in this age.

4. SRI SARADA DEVI AS LAKSHMI

The Divine Mother Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, is the consort of the protector-god Vishnu. Lakshmi embodies in Herself the Vedic deity Prithvi (Mother Earth) later worshipped in the Puranic age as Bhudevi as well as Sri, the harvest goddess. Sridevi and Bhudevi are both worshipped as the principal consorts of Vishnu. There is also a third consort of Vishnu called Niladevi, who is identified with Radha in South India. Sridevi, Bhudevi and Niladevi are all different manifestations of the great Mother-Goddess Mahalakshmi.

Lakshmi is especially worshipped by householders and merchants as she confers all sorts of wealth and enjoyments (Artha and Kama), most cherished and coveted by those in the householder stage of life.
(grahasta). She is worshipped as 'Ashta-lakshmi', that is, Lakshmi with eight facets conferring eight distinct blessings of life, as follows: Dhanyakalkshmi (conferring good harvest or food), Veeralakshmi or Dhairyalakshmi (conferring strength and vigour to produce and protect wealth), Sowbhagyalakshmi or Dhanalakshmi (conferring all health and wealth), Santhanalakshmi (conferring children), Karunyalakshmi or Varalakshmi (granting compassion and mercy so that the Jiva may benefit the world with his wealth), Gajalakshmi (conferring spiritual inclinations), Vidyalakshmi (conferring education and wisdom like Saraswati) and Vijayalakshmi or Jayalakshmi (conferring success in all noble endeavours).

Thus it can be seen that the Divine Mother Mahalakshmi first satisfies all legitimate worldly desires of mankind (Artha and Kama) as the first four Lakshmis conferring food (Dhanya), strength (Veera), wealth (Dhana), and good progeny (Santhana); she then grants spiritual blessings (Dharma and Moksha) as the last four Lakshmis, conferring on us compassion (Daya), spiritual inclination like that of the elephant which is seen worshipping Lakshmi with a garland in its trunk in pictures (Gaja), spiritual knowledge (Vidya) and spiritual perfection (Vijaya). Lakshmi is not only a goddess of wealth and beauty as popularly imagined but the very embodiment of divine grace; therefore Sri or Lakshmi is considered by Sri Vaishnavism to intercede on behalf of devotees with the Lord. Vaishnavas following Sri Ramanuja in South India place great emphasis on this doctrine of Sri and therefore call their religion 'Sri Vaishnavism.'
The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was none other than Mahalakshmi in all Her different aspects. Shortly before the birth of the Holy Mother in 1853 A.D., her father Ramchandra Mukhopadhyay dreamt that the goddess Lakshmi was about to be born as his daughter. In this connection, Swami Gambirananda writes: “Ramchandra was then in Calcutta in search of some means of earning money for his family......Then he fell asleep and dreamt that a little girl of golden complexion embraced him from behind by throwing her delicate arms around his neck. The incomparable beauty of the girl, as also her invaluable ornaments, at once marked her out of the common run. Ramchandra was greatly surprised and asked, ‘Who are you, my child?’ The girl replied in the softest and sweetest of voices, ‘Here am I come to you!’ Ramchandra woke up and the conviction grew in him that the girl was none other than Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, whose appearance implied that the time was auspicious for him to go out in quest of money.’”¹ Subsequent events also proved the correctness of Ramchandra’s conviction that he had dreamt of Lakshmi. When the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was born as his daughter shortly thereafter in 1853 A.D., there was marked improvement not only in the financial condition of Ramchandra’s family but also in the whole of Jayrambati.

The vision of Ramchandra Mukhopadhyay is corroborated by another remarkable event concerning the goddess Lakshmi which took place several years earlier in the life of Chandramani Devi, the mother of Sri Ramakrishna. This event occurred on the very night of ‘Kojagari Purnima’, the auspicious day for the
worship of Goddess Lakshmi which falls on the full-moon day in the Bengali month of Aswin (the end of October) immediately after the Durga Puja.

On Kojagari Purnima, the Bengalis worship Dhanyalakshmi, the harvest-goddess of foodgrains. Lakshmi is then worshipped in the ‘Navapatrika’ which is something like a female figure made out of a plantain tree and eight other plants and herbs. On Kojagari Purnima, vigil is kept by devotees in Bengal throughout the night with anxious expectations of meeting Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Lakshmi is supposed to call out, for showing Her favour to anyone who keeps vigil on that night, with the words ‘Ko Jagrati?’ (Who is awake?) from which comes the word ‘Kojagari’. Just as Durga Puja represents the home-coming of Mother Durga, Kojagari Purnima represents the home-coming of Mother Lakshmi in Bengal.

It was perhaps the year 1820 A.D., when Ramkumar, the eldest brother of Sri Ramakrishna, was about fifteen. On the Kojagari Purnima day that year, Ramkumar had gone to a house at Bhursubo to perform the evening worship of Kojagari Lakshmi. When her son did not return home though it was past midnight, Chandramani Devi became very restless. She came out of the house and waited anxiously for Ramkumar, while devotees throughout Bengal waited elsewhere for the arrival of Kojagari Lakshmi! She then saw a very beautiful girl, bedecked with various ornaments, coming from the direction of Bhursubo towards Kamarpukur. It did not strike Chandramani Devi then that it was most unusual to meet such a respectable girl alone at the dead of the night.
To the anxious enquiries of Chandramani Devi, the
divine girl replied that she was coming from Bhur-
subo, from the very house to which Ramkumar had
gone to perform the worship. She assured Chandramani
that he would return safely soon. Chandramani then
asked the girl bedecked with ornaments to come and
stay in her house. But the divine girl replied, "No
mother, I must go just now. I will come to your
house some other time." Then the divine girl walked
towards the paddy stacks (Dhanya) of the neighbour-
ing Laha family and disappeared without trace there
as if she were Dhanya-Lakshmi! Only then it struck
Chandramani Devi that the girl she had just seen
must have been Kojagari Lakshmi. Immediately she
informed her husband Kshudiram about it who
assured her that she had definitely seen the Goddess
Lakshmi!\(^2\)

Shortly after the Kojagari Lakshmi event Ramkumar
married and his wife brought good luck to the family
which prospered. All daughters-in-law who bring good
luck to the family are looked upon with respect and
love by Hindus as embodiments of Lakshmi. Much later
Lakshmi Herself became the auspicious daughter-in-law
Sri Sarada Devi of the Kshudiram family at Kamar-
pukur, thus literally fulfilling Her own assurance to
Chandramani Devi on the Kojagari Purnima day of
1820 that 'she would come to stay in her house some
other time.' What is more striking, the Holy Mother
came to the house of Chandramani as daughter-in-law
just like the divine girl bedecked with ornaments
seen by the latter on the Kojagari Purnima day in
1820!
Kojagari Lakshmi, wearing various divine ornaments, was seen by Chandramani Devi to disappear among the paddy stacks of the rich Laha family in 1820 A. D. From the same Laha family, Chandramani Devi had to borrow various gold ornaments to adorn the bride Sri Sarada Devi, who, at the time of her marriage to Sri Ramakrishna, was only a child of five years. When the time came to return the ornaments back to the Laha family, the eyes of Chandramani were filled with tears to think that she should muster the sternness to take away the ornaments from the girl’s person. Then Sri Ramakrishna himself came to her rescue and removed the ornaments deftly from the person of the sleeping child Sarada. When the young bride woke up next morning, she immediately asked for her ornaments, which had already been returned to the Lahas. With tears in her eyes, Chandramani took the girl on her lap and said by way of consoling her, “My child, my Gadadhār will give you afterwards many ornaments better than those.” Later Sri Ramakrishna literally fulfilled these words of his mother to his wife, though he was an all-renouncing monk. Thakur ever had that scene before his eyes and said to Hriday in his last days, “Just see how much money you have in your safe. Have a pair of gold ornaments made for her.” Sri Ramakrishna, in his memorable first vision of Sita, had seen her wearing bracelets with diamonds cut on the surface. Hence he had similar bracelets made for the Holy Mother at the cost of two hundred Rupees.

There is another important ‘ornament removal’ episode in the life of the Holy Mother. When she tried to remove her gold bracelets immediately after the Mahasamadhi of Thakur, he appeared in person
and taking hold of her hands, said, "Have I died that you are removing the signs of a married woman from your wrists?" The Mother then desisted from doing so. Later at Kamarpukur, when ignorant villagers criticised the Mother for continuing to wear the bracelets, she again had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna who told her, "Don't remove the bracelets from your hand. Don't you know the Vaishnava Tantra?" The Mother replied, "What is Vaishnava Tantra? I know nothing of it." "Gaurdasi will come this afternoon," said Thakur, "You will know from her." That very afternoon came Gauri-Ma who explained to the Mother with the help of the Vaishnava scriptures how there can be no such thing as widowhood for her, since her husband's body was not material but spiritual: 'There can be no widowhood for one who has Krishna as her husband.' Furthermore, she was none other than Lakshmi Herself, the goddess of fortune and the consort of Vishnu. For her to be without ornaments would mean the deprivation of the whole world of its good things. 

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi also spoke of herself as Lakshmi on more than one occasion. Once a devotee asked her, "Why do I see you as though making chapati like an ordinary woman? What are all these? Are all these Maya?" The Mother replied, "What else but Maya? Why should I be in such a state if not because of Maya? I should have been sitting by Narayana as His Lakshmi in Vaikuntha. It is just because the Lord likes to disport as a man."

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is indeed Ashta-lakshmi in all Her eight aspects. She is Dhanya-lakshmi, the goddess of food grains worshipped on
Kojagari Purnima, for she was born in agricultural surroundings in Jayrambati. Shortly after her birth, Jayrambati actually experienced prosperity with bumper harvests!

The Holy Mother is Veeralakshmi who confers strength, physical, mental and spiritual to her devotees. Swami Vivekananda has said of the Mother: “Sri Ramakrishna is, as it were, Narayana and the Mother, Lakshmi. One has to ask for strength before the Mother. Without strength (Virya or Virtue), nothing can be achieved”.

The Holy Mother is Sowbhagyalakshmi who blessed devotees by praying to Thakur that “her children might not suffer for want of simple food and clothing”.

The Holy Mother is Santhanalakshmi who fulfilled even the worldly wishes of women who prayed to her for children. The Mother asked such women to pray to Thakur and assured them that “before long, Thakur would place the objects of their desire (children) in their laps”. The Holy Mother was Sashti or Santhanalakshmi who granted and protected children.

The Holy Mother is Karunyalakshmi or Varalakshmi, the embodiment of divine grace. Once Kamarpukur and its environs were reeling under severe famine due to failure of rains. The Holy Mother was much moved by the plight of the villagers. By her grace there was sufficient rainfall which relieved the sufferings of the villagers.

The Holy Mother is Gajalakshmi, granting spiritual inclinations (Mumukshutvam) and strength to her innumerable devotees. She is Vidyalakshmi, who has bestowed spiritual illumination to thousands.

The Holy Mother is Vijayalakshmi or Jayalakshmi who grants success to all devotees in their noble
endeavours. Only after receiving her blessings, Swami Vivekananda ventured to leave India on his first mission to the West. His mission was crowned with unprecedented success (vijaya).

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is truly Sri Devi who intercedes on behalf of devotees with the Lord. In her own lifetime, the Mother accepted innumerable people, both good and bad, as her initiated disciples and prayed to Sri Ramakrishna for their spiritual welfare. The time-honoured Sri Vaishnavite concept of Sri as the bestower of divine grace was fulfilled to perfection in the life of the Holy Mother. The word 'Sri' has a number of meanings - holiness, honour, wealth and so on. The Holy Mother is Sri in every sense of term.

The Holy Mother is also Bhu Devi, Mother Earth. She bore with the utmost patience even the burdens of the vilest sinners who took refuge in her without the least murmur, just like Mother Earth.

According to Southern Vaishnavism, Sita and Rukmini are manifestations of Sri Devi; Andal is the manifestation of Bhu Devi and Radha is the embodiment of Niladevi. But Sri Sarada Devi is the simultaneous embodiment of Sri Devi, Bhu Devi and Niladevi, all three in one. She is Kojagari Lakshmi, the complete Purna-Lakshmi who is worshipped on the day of the fullmoon which symbolically represents completeness. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is Mahalakshmi or Ashta-Lakshmi Herself in all Her aspects.
5. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS VISHNU

Vishnu is one of the three major deities of Hinduism. 'Vishnu' literally means 'all-pervading' — God Immanent and Transcendent. According to Sri Vaishnavism, which was firmly established by Acharya Ramanuja, Vishnu manifests Himself in five ways: Para Vasudeva or God Absolute in the celestial world called Vaikuntha; Vyuha or an array of deities which govern the universe; Antaryamin, the indwelling Self of all beings; Avatar or Incarnation on earth and Archa, His manifestation in images. Of these five forms of Vishnu, the Avatar and Archa forms are considered the most important, as divine grace is showered by the Lord through them on suffering humanity.

A Vaishnava Acharya relates all these five forms of Vishnu through a beautiful simile: Para Vasudeva is Infinite like the waters of the ocean; Vyuha is like the array of rain-bearing clouds which carry water evaporated from the ocean; Avatar is the rain of divine grace; Archa is like a tank that collects the rain of divine grace showered by the Avatar for the use of posterity; and Antaryamin is like the water that sustains all life. Sri Ramakrishna also has compared the Avatar to the rain of the monsoon season; the Avatar surcharges the world with spirituality and quenches the thirst of suffering humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision about Narendra which appears to be in conformity with the Sri Vaishnavite concept of Vishnu. Thakur once said, "One day I saw that, through Samadhi, my mind was going up by a luminous path. Crossing the gross world consisting of sun, moon and stars, it entered into the subtle world of ideas. I saw beautiful forms of deities
there and came to the extremity of that region. I saw a
fence made of light there separating the realm of the
divisible from that of the indivisible. Leaping over the
fence, the mind entered the realm of the indivisible.
No person or thing with form existed there. As if afraid
to enter there, even the gods and goddesses possessing
heavenly bodies remained below. Then I saw seven wise
Rishis having bodies consisting of divine light only,
seated there in Samadhi. I felt that, in virtue and
knowledge, love and renunciation, they had excelled
even the gods and goddesses, not to speak of human
beings. Then I saw that a part of the homogeneous
mass of Light of the Abode of the Indivisible, devoid of
the slightest tinge of difference, became solidified and
converted into the form of a Divine Child. It came down
and awakened one of the seven Rishis and said, 'I am
going, you must come with me.' The Rishi silently nodded
his assent with delight and a part of his body and mind
converted into the form of bright light and came down
to earth by the reverse path. Hardly had I seen
Narendra for 'the first time when I knew that he was
that Rishi.'¹ Sri Ramakrishna later said that he himself
was the Divine Child which came down from the
Abode of the Indivisible.

The Abode of the Indivisible which consisted of a
homogeneous mass of light in Sri Ramakrishna's vision
corresponds to the Ocean of Milk where Para Vasudeva
resides. The seven sages in the realm of the indivisible
correspond to the Vyuha or array of manifestations of
Vishnu which govern the universe. The descent of the
Divine Child to earth from the Abode of the Indivisible
is Vishnu taking the new Avatar who is now adored as
Sri Ramakrishna. The gods and goddesses in the lower
regions as well as all creatures on earth constitute the
Antaryamin form of the Immanent Vishnu. Photographs and marble images of Sri Ramakrishna are the Archa (Image) forms of Vishnu in His latest Avatar. Thus Sri Ramakrishna’s vision confirms in a vivid manner the Sri Vaishnavite concept of the five-fold Vishnu! The Divine Child who sported as Ramlala and Gopala in olden times, has manifested Itself as Gadadhar at Kamarpukur in this age.

It is well known that Sri Ramakrishna is the Avatar of Gadadhar (literally, mace-holder), the famous deity of Vishnu of Gaya. Kshudiram, his father, had a wonderful dream at Gaya, after performing obsequial rites in honour of his ancestors there. He saw himself in the holy temple, in the act of offering worship to his forefathers, at the divine feet of Gadadhar-Vishnu. He then saw that the temple was filled with a divine light. A wonderful, divine being appeared, seated happily on a beautiful throne, whom his ancestors worshipped with folded hands. This divine Person had a luminous body, green like the colour of new Durva grass. He blessed Kshudiram and conferred on him a boon that He would be born as his son shortly. Kshudiram’s dream actually came true. On his return to Kamarpukur in April, 1835, he learnt that his wife Chandramani Dev had conceived. When the holy infant was born, Kshudiram named him Gadadhar, remembering his extraordinary dream at Gaya.

Ten Avatars of Vishnu, namely Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Varaha (boar), Narasimha (Man-Lion), Vamana (dwarf), Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna and Kalki, are most famous. When the Bhairavi Brahmani proclaimed Sri Ramakrishna as an Avatar, Mathur Babu raised the objection that the Avatars
cannot be more than ten. The Bhairavi then replied, "Why? Does not the Bhagavata speak at first of twenty-four principal incarnations and afterwards, of innumerable ones? Besides, the coming again of the great Lord (Sri Chaitanya) is distinctly mentioned in the Vaishnava books and a great similarity of the principal characteristics is found to exist between him (Sri Ramakrishna) and Sri Chaitanya." In fact, the principal characteristics of all the ten famous Avatars of Vishnu are found to exist in Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda has said, "Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna is the reformed and remodelled manifestation of all the past great epoch-makers in religion."

In the Matsya (Fish) Incarnation, Vishnu redeemed the Vedas which had disappeared and enabled Brahma to start creation. Like Matsya, Sri Ramakrishna has rejuvenated and made available to the world many a forgotten pathway to the Lord. He has re-established the eternal religion (Sanatana Dharma) in all its pristine glory. Once Sri Ramakrishna was in samadhi and a village woman observing it remarked, "He is happy like a fish swimming here and there in water." Thakur later said that her description of his samadhi was very apt. Thus Sri Ramakrishna is indeed the Fish Avatar of this age!

In the Kurma (Tortoise) Incarnation, Vishnu supported the Mandara mountain on his back with which the Devas (angels) and Asuras (demons) churned the ocean. Many wonderful things like Amirta (nectar) and Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, emerged from the ocean. Sri Ramakrishna is the Kurma Avatar of this age who is supporting true religion and spirituality on his back, when the whole world is churned by materialism and irreligion.
The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna written by Mahendranath Gupta is the nectar (Kathamrita) and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is the Lakshmi who emerged from the ocean of spirituality that is Sri Ramakrishna. Thus Thakur is the updated version of the ancient Kurma Avatar in the modern age.

In the Varaha (Boar) Incarnation, Vishnu lifted up the sinking land out of the sea. Like a spiritual Varaha, Sri Ramakrishna has lifted up the sinking Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion of India, out of the deluge of Western materialistic ideas.

In the Narasimha (Man-Lion) incarnation, Vishnu emerged out of a pillar, tore the demon Hiranyakasipu with His fingernails and protected His harassed devotee Prahlada. The mild Hindu race is ever devoted to the Lord like Prahlada: it has been harassed for centuries by foreign invaders; and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda are the Man-Lion (Narasimha) Avatar which has liberated the Hindu race and restored its self-confidence. They are verily Vedanta Kesaris, Lions of Vedanta in human form in this age!

In the Vamana (Dwarf) Incarnation, Vishnu suddenly increased His stature to gigantic proportions and measured all the three worlds with His foot as Trivikrama Sri Ramakrishna is the spiritual Vamana-Trivikrama Avatar of this age. He appeared in humble circumstances like Vamana and was taken to be a mad priest. But suddenly he went on increasing his spiritual stature to gigantic proportions with his tremendous sadhana so that he now appears to humanity as a spiritual Trivikrama!

Parasurama, the sixth Avatar of Vishnu, is famous for his unsurpassed penance (Tapasya) and implacable
anger against the Kshatriyas who had killed his father. In Sri Ramakrishna, only the sattvika aspects of previous Avatars are seen, as he is the refined and remodelled manifestation of them all. Therefore one finds in Sri Ramakrishna only the legandary ‘tapasya’ (penance) and spiritual lustre of Parasuram and not his anger.

Balarama, the eighth Avatar, is famous for his mighty weapon, the plough, and his super human strength. Sri Ramakrishna was born in a rural setting like Baladeva and Krishna. He had ploughed the fields of all religious paths with his mighty plough of sadhana and sowed the seeds of spirituality with his realisations. Thus Sri Ramakrishna is truly Baladeva, the mighty God-man of spirituality of this age.

Kalki is the future Avatar of Vishnu who is slated to be born at the end of the present Kali Yuga. Kalki, the tenth and last Avatar of Vishnu, is expected to bring the Kali Yuga to an end by destroying the wicked and ushering in the golden age (Satya Yuga). By his very birth, Thakur is said to have ushered in the Satya Yuga even within this present Kali Yuga. In this respect, Sri Ramakrishna is like the prophecied Kalki Avatar of Vishnu.

Among the ten Avatars of Vishnu, Rama and Krishna, the seventh and ninth Avatars respectively, are the most popular. Rama and Krishna epitomise all the ten Avatars of Vishnu. Sri Ramakrishna, in turn, epitomises all the Avatars of Vishnu, including Rama and Krishna. Literally and figuratively, Rama + Krishna = Ramakrishna! He has also proclaimed unequivocally, “He who was Rama and Krishna is Ramakrishna in this body, not just in the Vedantic sense”. The present Ramakrishna Avatar includes in its infinite spiritual mould all Avatars, past future. One should not fix a limit to the nature of Sri Ramakrishna!
Kaliprasad (Swami Abhedananda) was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who excelled in meditation. At the time of meditation he once saw that all the forms of gods and goddesses merged into the body of one form. When Sri Ramakrishna heard this, he said that Kali had seen the Vaikuntha, the heaven of Vishnu and that he would not see any deity with form thereafter. It is no wonder that Thakur’s words came true, for, was he not Vishnu Himself, descended from Vaikuntha as His latest and greatest Avatar?

The forms of all gods and goddesses merge into the divine person of Mahavishnu in Vaikuntha, as he is all pervading Supreme Being. The same thing happened repeatedly in the life of Sri Ramakrishna also. Actually, all the innumerable god and goddesses whom Thakur saw in his visions entered into his divine person at last and disappeared, just like what Swami Abhedananda saw in his aforesaid vision! Therefore, like Mahavishnu, His supreme Avatar Sri Ramakrishna is also “Sarva-Deva-Devi-Swarupin”, the embodiment of all gods and goddesses, all deities and Avatars.

One day while Sri Ramakrishna was listening to the reading of the Bhagavata in front of the Vishnu shrine in Dakshineswar temple, he went into ecstasy and had the vision of Krishna’s luminous form. He saw that a beam of light like a cord came out of His lotus feet and touched the holy book and then his own heart and remained simultaneously touching all three for some time. Thakur thus directly realised that “the three — the Bhagavata (scripture), the Bhakta (the devotee) and the Bhagavan (Lord) are the One and the One is the three.” Sri Ramakrishna himself was Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan, all-three-in-one!
6. SRI SARADA DEVI AS SITA

Sita, the wife of Rama, is the eternal ideal of Hindu womanhood. In fact, the great poet Valmiki named his epic only as ‘Sitayah Charitam Mahat’ (The great story of Sita), though the work is popularly known as ‘Valmiki Ramayana.’ Sita is the ideal Hindu wife, endowed with innumerable virtues like chastity, devotion, patience and forgiveness.

The name ‘Sita’ literally means ‘the furrow made by a plough.’ When the childless Janaka, the King of Mithila, was ploughing the field to prepare the ground for a sacrifice for the birth of a child, he found a female baby on the furrow made by his plough. Hence the divine child was called ‘Sita. Sita grew up into a beautiful princess whom King Janaka wanted to give in marriage only to an equally divine husband. Therefore Janaka stipulated that whoever wanted to marry Sita must string the great bow of Siva in his possession. The prince Rama effortlessly strung the divine bow and married Sita.

The marriage vow of Rama and Sita is still used in Hindu marriages in upper India, where the bride’s father gives away his daughter in marriage with these famous words of Janaka: “Here is my daughter Sita, who will ever tread with you on the path of Dharma. Take her hand in yours. Blessed and devoted, she will ever walk with you like your own shadow.” Thus every Hindu wife aspires to be like Sita, the ideal wife.

Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly told his disciples, “He who was Rama and Krishna has become Ramakrishna, but not in the Vedantic sense.” With equal validity, this self-avowal of Sri Ramakrishna may be restated with
respect to his divine consort, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, but not in the Vedantic sense.” The Holy Mother, who was extremely shy and modest, guarded her divine nature so closely that only on rare occasions such a self-avowal was involuntarily made by her.

When the Holy Mother was on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram in South India in 1910, she soliloquised on looking at the uncovered Siva image, “It is just as I had left it.” The devotees who were near at hand inquired, “What did you say, Mother?” The Mother at once corrected herself and said, “A meaningless something escaped out of my lips.” After the party had returned to Calcutta, one day Kedar Badu of Koalpara asked the Mother at the Udbodhan house, “How did you find Rameswara?” And the Mother again replied, “He is just as I had left him, my son.” Then the ever alert Golap-Ma who heard this asked her with enthusiasm, “What did you say, Mother?” Taken aback, the Mother said, “Why, what should I say? I was very much delighted to see it just as I had heard from you.”

On this Rameswaram incident in the life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Gambhirananda writes: “The devotees believe that the same personage who incarnated in the Treta Yuga as Sita, the ever-faithful consort of Ramachandra, and worshipped a Siva-image made of sand on the sea coast of Rameswaram, descended again as the all-enduring and ever-gracious Holy Mother, so that the sudden sight of the uncovered image carried her mind unconsciously across the vast span of thousands of years and the past appeared as a vivid present; and forgetful of immediate environment she made that spontaneous remark.”
There is circumstantial evidence to show that Sri Ramakrishna himself saw the Holy Mother as Sita. When Thakur practised Dasya Bhava towards Raghuvir looking upon himself as Hanuman, he had an extraordinary vision of Sita with his eyes open at the Panchavati. This vision made a profound impression on his mind and he remembered it vividly ever afterwards. In that vision Thakur noticed that Sita’s bracelets had diamonds cut on their surface. Hence he had such a type of bracelets made for the Holy Mother and then humourously remarked, “That’s my relationship with her.” Evidently Thakur saw the Holy Mother as Sita-incarnate.

Even ordinary devotees saw in Sri Sarada Devi the Divine Mother Sita. Once the Mother was waiting on the railway platform at Vishnupur for a train to Calcutta when a porter discovered her and hurrying to her side said fervently, “You are my mother Sita; what a long time I have been searching for you! Where had you been so long?” And he began weeping. The Mother took mercy on him and asked him to bring a flower. The man offered that flower at her feet and she gave him a Mantra.

Swami Vivekanandanda also looked upon the Holy Mother as Sita. After his return from foreign countries, Swamiji said to the Mother, “By your grace, Mother, I did not have to cross the ocean by jumping in this age (like Hanuman in search of Sita), but went to those parts in their own ships; and there too, I noticed, how great is the glory of Thakur; what a number of good people have heard about him and accepted this idea from me with astonished eagerness.” Thus Swamiji compared himself to Hanuman and the Holy Mother to Sita in an indirect manner.
Speaking of ideal womanhood, Swami Vivekananda has said, "Sita is the name in India for everything that is pure and holy; everything that in woman we call woman. Sita—the patient, all suffering, ever faithful, ever-pure wife! Through all the suffering she had, there was not one harsh word against Rama. Sita never returned injury. Be Sita!" All these great qualities of Sita, the ideal woman of India, were fully manifest in the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in this age.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, the Holy Mother was in the same plight as Sita separated from her Rama. Then she went on a pilgrimage to holy places like Ayodhya, Brindavan and Kasi to assuage her grief. Like Sita, the Holy Mother ever spent her life thinking only of her divine consort. Her life-current was centred on her own Rama, namely, Sri Ramakrishna and her delight consisted in absorption in thoughts and talks about his glories. Like the ancient ideal marriage of Sita-Rama, the marriage of Sarada-Ramakrishna has set forth a new ideal for this age. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is thus an updated version of the Divine Mother Sita, the very embodiment of divine grace, in this age.

7. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS SITA

It is a basic tenet of Vaishnavism that the Lord can be reached only by the grace of the Divine Mother. According to Sri Vaishnavism, Sri or Lakshmi intercedes on behalf of devotees with Vishnu and according to Bengali Vaishnavism, Krishna can be realised only by propitiating
Radha first and obtaining Her grace. Similarly for the realisation of Rama, one should first propitiate the Divine Mother Sita, according to Sri Ramakrishna.

Before engaging himself in the path of Madhura Bhava for realising Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna knew that the grace of Radha was needed for success in that path and consciously propitiated Her first. While Thakur practised the Dasya Bhava towards Rama in the footsteps of Hanuman, he had a vivid vision of Sita at first; but it is not known for certain from his biographies whether he propitiated Sita deliberately in the beginning with the view to secure Her grace for the realisation of Rama. But it can be inferred that he should have done so, for it was Sita who appeared before him first.

When Sri Ramakrishna practised Dasya Bhava towards Rama assuming the mood of Hanuman, he was sitting under the Panchavati one day. Then he saw with his eyes open, when he was in normal consciousness, an incomparable, effulgent female figure, illumining the whole place. The extraordinary expression of that face, manifesting love, sorrow, compassion and endurance was not generally seen by Thakur even in the figures of goddesses. The figure walked slowly towards Sri Ramakrishna even as he was wondering who it was. Suddenly a black-faced monkey appeared out of nowhere and sat at her feet and someone in his mind exclaimed, "Sita, Sita who was all sorrow all her life, Sita the daughter of King Janaka, Sita to whom Rama was her very life." When Thakur was about to fall at the feet of Sita, repeatedly saying ‘Mother,’ she came quickly and entered his body. Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, Sri Ramakrishna lost all consciousness and fell down. Thakur said later, "I have been suffering like Sita all my life, perhaps because my first vision with the naked
eye was of her—Sita whose life from the start was a bundle of sufferings.” It is said that Sita then made a gift of her smile to Sri Ramakrishna. So those who saw Thakur smile, knew how Sita smiled.¹

Some interesting points may be noted regarding Sri Ramakrishna’s memorable vision of Sita, so graphically described by Swami Saradananda. The name ‘Panchavati’ (literally, a grove of five trees) is familiar to all devotees of Rama and Ramakrishna. At a place called Panchavati in a forest in Western India, Sita and Rama spent sometime happily during their exile. Sri Ramakrishna planted five trees called Panchavati near the Dakshineswar Kali temple with the help of Hriday exclusively for his spiritual sadhanas and saw innumerable visions in that grove. Therefore it is very appropriate that one of the first visions that Thakur saw at the Panchavati at Dakshineswar was that of Sita.

‘Sundara Khandā’ is the famous section of the Ramayana which describes how Hanuman first met and consoled the sorrow-stricken Sita under the Asoka tree in Lanka when she was about to end her life. Hanuman first saw Sita in her grief-stricken aspect and appropriately Sri Ramakrishna; who had so thoroughly identified himself with Hanuman, also saw Sita first in the same aspect! In the coronation of Rama, Sita received a precious pearl necklace from Rama and she put it around Hanuman’s neck, with the smile of divine grace brightening her face as she did so. Thus Sita rewarded the wonderful devotion of Hanuman. Sita seems to have been equally pleased with the devotion of Sri Ramakrishna, which was no less than Hanuman’s. Having awarded the precious pearl necklace to Hanuman for his devotion, Mother Sita wanted to reward Sri Ramakrishna also suitably. But she had no such pearl
necklace with her anymore. Therefore Sita awarded her wonderful, pearly smile itself to Sri Ramakrishna, in lieu of the pearl necklace!

When Sita entered into the body of Sri Ramakrishna, he lost all normal consciousness and entered into samadhi. He became totally identified with Sita and must have had visions of Rama too. After this first vision of Sita, Sri Ramakrishna often looked upon himself as Sita and practised devotion to Rama. Just as Sri Ramakrishna practised the Madhura Bhava towards Krishna looking upon himself as Radha, it appears certain that he also practised the ‘Kanta Bhava’ (mode of devotion, looking upon the Lord as one’s husband) towards Rama assuming the mood of Sita. This rare mode of devotion to the Lord may simply be termed ‘Sati Bhava’, the attitude of a wife towards the Lord. This means no less than a revolutionary development in Vaishnavism for no man before Sri Ramakrishna has practised ‘bridal mysticism’ towards Rama looking upon himself as Sita!

In the great biography written by Swami Saradananda, it is not explicitly stated that Sri Ramakrishna practised ‘Kanta Bhava’ towards Rama assuming the mood of Sita. But in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna there are several passages which suggest that he did so. Sri Ramakrishna himself has said, “Assuming Radha’s attitude I would cry for Krishna and assuming Sita’s attitude I would cry for Rama.”

After singing the song, “You must save me, sweetest Mother! Unto You I come for refuge, helpless as a bird imprisoned in a cage...,” Sri Ramakrishna prayed once to the Divine Mother to make him like Sita. ‘M’ records in the Gospel in this connection:
Master: "But why? Why should I live like a 'bird imprisoned in a cage?' Fie! For shame!"

"As the Master said these words he went into an ecstatic mood. His body became motionless and his mind stopped functioning; tears streamed down his cheeks. After a while he said, "O Mother, make me like Sita, completely forgetful of everything — body and limbs — totally unconscious of hands, feet and sense organs — only the one thought in her mind, 'Where is Rama?"

"Was the Master inspired by the ideal of Sita to teach M. the yearning that a devotee should feel for God? Sita's very life was centred in Rama. Completely absorbed in the thought of Rama, Sita forgot even the body, which is so dear to all."

Sri Ramakrishna also taught that one must become like Sita to understand Rama:

Master: "The whole thing in a nutshell is that one must develop ecstatic love for Satchitananda. What kind of love? How should one love God? Gauri used to say that one must become like Sita to understand Rama; like Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, to understand Bhagavan, Siva. One must practice austerity, as Bhagavati did, in order to attain Siva. One must cultivate the attitude of Prakriti in order to realize Purusha — the attitude of a friend, a handmaid, or a mother.

"I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything — her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama."

M: "Yes, Sir. She was mad with love for Rama."
Master: “Mad! That’s the word. One must become mad with love in order to realize God. But that love is not possible if the mind dwells on ‘woman and gold.’”

Sri Ramakrishna was mad with such love of God, especially during his days of sadhana. He often felt himself to be Sita and saw Rama everywhere. Filled with Sita-Rama consciousness, he saw the divine couple everywhere.

At times Sri Ramakrishna was so thoroughly absorbed in thoughts about Sita that even a prostitute reminded him of the ever pure Sita. He once said, “One day I saw a woman in blue standing near the bakul tree. She was a prostitute. But she instantly kindled in me the vision of Sita. I forgot the woman. I saw that it was Sita herself on her way to meet Rama after her rescue from Ravana in Ceylon. For a long time I remained in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world.”

It is the Divine Mother Sita who has become the universe. Sri Ramakrishna has said, “Names and forms are but the manifestations of Prakriti. Sita said to Hanuman, ‘My child, in one form I am Sita, in another form I am Rama. In one form I am Indra, in another form I am Indrani. In one form I am Brahma, in another form I am Brahmani. In one form I am Rudra, in another, Rudrani.’ Thus Sita was ‘Sarva deva devi swarupini’—the embodiment of all gods and goddesses, just like Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

It has been said of Sri Chaitanya that Krishna wanted to enjoy the Madhura Bhava of Radha and for that purpose He incarnated Himself as Chaitanya, who was Krishna in the sheath of Radha. Similarly it seems that
Rama was so much impressed by the wonderful love and devotion of Sita that he wanted to enjoy such Kanta Bhava himself; therefore Rama incarnated himself for that purpose as Sri Ramakrishna, who was Rama in the sheath of Sita!

8. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS RAMA

The name ‘Rama’ is considered by Hindus as a potent redeeming Mantra. ‘Rama’ literally means a very attractive person, who gives joy to all. It is said that taking the vital syllable ‘Ra’ from the Narayana Mantra ‘Om Namo Narayanaya’, and the vital syllable ‘Ma’ from the Siva Mantra ‘Om Namah Sivaya’ the name Rama was formed by sage Vasishta and given to the divine child of Dasaratha. This implies that Rama is the simultaneous embodiment of both Vishnu and Siva. But Rama is generally considered by the masses as an Avatar of Vishnu only. In the Ramakrishna Avatar this liberal concept regarding Rama has actually been vindicated. Thakur was regarded by his father Kshudiram as a manifestation of the Vishnu deity of Gaya, while his mother Chandramani Devi perceived him as the embodiment of divine light which emanated from a Sivalinga. Sri Ramakrishna is thus Rama, the simultaneous embodiment of Narayana and Siva.

Sri Ramachandra was born on the ninth lunar day while Sri Ramakrishna was born on the second lunar day. Yet Rama was also closely associated with the second lunar day like Sri Ramakrishna as explained by Thakur himself once.
Sri Ramakrishna once said, "This day I have had the pleasure of looking at the moon of the second lunar day. I say moon of the second lunar day with a special meaning.

"Sita said to Ravana, 'Thou art the full moon and my Ramachandra is the moon of the second lunar day.' Ravana was highly pleased until the sense was explained to him. Sita meant to say that the fortune of Ravana had reached its climax, and that it must be on the wane like the full moon. Not so the fortune of Sri Ramachandra which had reached only the second lunar day. His fortune like the moon of the second lunar day was not on the wane, but must ever grow day by day. Ramachandra must increase, but Ravana must decrease."\(^1\)

Sita thus identified Rama with the second lunar day. True to her words, Rama chose to be born on the auspicious second lunar day in his incarnation as Sri Ramakrishna. Ravana represents worldliness and Adharma, while Rama stands for spirituality and Dharma. Swami Vivekananda has said that with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, a new Satya Yuga has come into existence. This means that gradually Adharma (Ravana) will decrease and Dharma (Rama) will increase in this age, due to the influence and divine power of Thakur. Thus Sita's words, "Ramachandra must increase, but Ravana must decrease" are figuratively true even in this age!

According to Bengali traditions, Sri Ramachandra was a great votary of the Divine Mother Durga. It is said that the nine day festival of Navaratri (Durga Puja in Bengal) was celebrated in spring before the time of Rama. But Sri Rama worshipped Durga in autumn and in his footsteps, people also began to worship Durga in spring only. During the Navaratri or Dussera festival, the
Ram-lila (the Divine play of Rama) is staged in North India. Sri Ramakrishna has repeatedly testified that he was Rama-incarnate. Certainly, the devotion to the Divine Mother that Rama manifested found its fullest expression in His Avatar as Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna’s unparalleled devotion to the Divine Mother Kali reminds us of Rama’s wonderful worship of Durga which is described by the poet Krittivasa in His Bengali Ramayana. Swami Vivekananda recounted this story once to Sister Nivedita and others. Rama was called ‘the blue-lotus eyed’ and he trusted to the Mother to help him to recover Sita. But Ravana had prayed to the Mother too, and Rama came and found him in her arms, so he knew he must do something tremendous, and he vowed one hundred and eight blue lotuses to her image if she would help him. Hanuman went off and got the lotuses, and Rama began the great ‘call upon the Mother’. (It was autumn and the time of Her Puja was in spring, so that the Great Mother worship had ever since been held in September.) Now he covered Her feet with blue lotuses till one hundred and seven were offered (and the Mother had stolen one); and lo, the last was missing. But Rama was determined. He was not to be beaten, and calling for a knife, he was about to cut out his own eye that the number of blue lotuses might be complete. And that won the Mother; and She blessed the great hero, so that his arms prevailed.  

Tremendous and highly dramatic indeed was Rama’s worship of the Divine Mother; but it falls far short of Sri Ramakrishna’s wonderful worship of Kali. While Rama was willing to sacrifice only one eye to the Mother, Sri Ramakrishna went to the extent of trying to cut off his own head with the sword of Bhavatarini Kali, because the
Mother did not reveal Herself to him! Besides, Rama worshipped the Mother for the mundane purpose of defeating Ravana, while Sri Ramakrishna's worship was purely 'love for love's sake' his devotion was motiveless. Thus Sri Ramakrishna excelled even Sri Ramachandra in his devotion to the Divine Mother!

The Ramlala episode is one of the highlights in the sadhana days of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1864 A.D., a Ramavat monk called Jatadhari (literally, one with matted hair) visited Dakshineswar. He worshipped a metal image of 'Ramlala' (the child Rama), looking upon him as his own child. After several years of sadhana, Jatadhari had attained success in Vatsalya Bhava, the parental mode of Bhakti towards the Lord. A luminous and living form of the divine Child Rama actually appeared out of his metal image from time to time and played with that saint. In course of time, Jatadhari had a continuous vision of the luminous form of Ramlala, plunging him into ecstasy. Thereafter Jatadhari travelled to various places of pilgrimage accompanied by his beloved Ramlala and came to Dakshineswar sometime around the year 1864.

From his very first meeting with Jatadhari, Sri Ramakrishna found out the mystery of Ramlala. He had great respect for Jatadhari and got himself initiated into the Mantra of Rama, accepting the saint as his guru. Thakur supplied all articles from the store of the Dakshineswar Temple to Jatadhari for the worship of Ramlala. He spent long hours with Jatadhari watching his service of Ramlala. The luminous, divine figure of Ramlala also appeared to the vision of Sri Ramakrishna and started playing all sorts of pranks with him.

Ramlala accompanied Sri Ramakrishna everywhere. Sometimes he importuned Thakur to take him on his lap.
He would sometimes go to the Ganga and splash water there. Once, like an angry mother, Thakur immersed the mischievous child Ramlala in the Ganges water. He actually saw Ramlala pant for breath and took him out of water, feeling extremely sorry. At another time, Thakur gave Ramlala parched rice, not properly husked, which lacerated the tender child’s tongue. Thakur was pained in the extreme to see the suffering of Ramlala and wept bitterly even while narrating the incident to his disciples several years later. Such was the love and attraction Sri Ramakrishna felt for Ramlala that the latter preferred him even over Jatadhari!

‘Jatadhari stayed for a long time at Dakshineswar. One day, with tears in his eyes, he entrusted the metal image of Ramlala to Sri Ramakrishna and said, “Ramlala has shown himself to me in the way I wanted to have his vision and has thus quenched the thirst of my life. I am now in such a state that I feel happy at his happiness. Therefore I can leave him with you and go elsewhere.”’ Then Jatadhari left Dakshineswar without his beloved image of Ramlala.

By virtue of his association with Sri Ramakrishna, the monk Jatadhari attained to love of God that was free from all selfishness and therefore he could leave Ramlala behind. From the realisation of Rama through the metal image, Jatadhari attained to the almost non-dual state of seeing Rama everywhere; he realised the truth of Sri Ramakrishna’s favourite Hindi couplet, “Rama who is the son of Dasaratha, is in every -being; the same Rama is immanent in the universe and yet transcends it.” The Ramlala episode in Sri Ramakrishna’s life, once again vindicates the efficacy of Hindu worship of God through images.
There are several striking parallels in the devotional lives of Kshudiram, Bhairavi Brahmani and Jatadhari. They all practised Vatsalya Bhava towards Rama or Raghuvir beginning with the worship of gross emblems of Rama; they were all spiritual mentors of Sri Ramakrishna and their spiritual lives culminated when they came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna, who was Rama-incarnate.

The biographer Swami Saradananda does not clarify whether Jatadhari realised that He, whom he was worshipping as Ramlala, had manifested Himself again in the divine person of Sri Ramakrishna and that was why Ramlala, the divine child, became so attached to Sri Ramakrishna. Jatadhari was a highly advanced soul and most probably he directly realised that Sri Ramakrishna was none other than Ramlala in flesh and blood; and that was probably the main reason why he came forward to leave his darling Ramlala with Thakur.

When Sri Ramakrishna was practising devotion to Sri Ramachandra, large numbers of Ramavat Babajis, men of fervent renunciation and devotion to Rama poured into the Dakshineswar temple. One Ramavat Sadhu kept a book, on every page of which was written ‘Aum Rama’ in red ink in large letters. When Sri Ramakrishna asked that Sadhu about it, he said, “What is the use of reading a large number of books? From the Lord, the Vedas and the Puranas have come out. He and His name are non-separate. Therefore what is contained in the four Vedas, the eighteen Puranas and all other scriptures, is there in any one of His names. That is why His name is my only companion.” Thakur himself shared the view of this Ramavat monk. He read very little but his realisations exceeded even what are stated in the four Vedas, eighteen Puranas and other scriptures! When Sri Ramakrishna
practised devotion to Rama, Dakshineswar turned into a veritable Ayodhya for the time being!

Like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda was also a great votary of Rama from his childhood. At the age seven, Narendra knew by heart passages of great length from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. His boyish imagination was captivated by the life of Rama and he purchased a clay image of Sita-Rama and worshipped it with flowers for sometime. The Ramayana had a great fascination for him. Much later, Swamiji was initiated by Sri Ramakrishna into the name of Rama at the Cossipore garden house. As soon as Thakur did so, Naren’s emotions were stirred to tremendous heights. Towards the evening he began to circle around the house, repeating “Rama! Rama!” in a high and excited tone. This emotional storm subsided in a few hours and Naren became his old self again.6

Once at the Tari Ghat railway station in mid-summer, the wandering monk Swami Vivekananda was suffering from intense thirst and hunger. A heartless Baniya, who did not approve of Sannyasa, watched his plight and taunted him. The Baniya trader helped himself to nice puries and laddus, while the starving Swami looked on calmly, not a muscle of his face moving. Then literally ‘by the will of Rama’ a man came in a hurry and served the starving Swami with sweets, puries and curry, despite the Swami’s protest that he must have been mistaken for somebody else.

Then the newcomer said, “Why, I am a sweetmeet vendor and was having a nap after my noon meal. And I dreamt that Shri Ramji was pointing you out to me and telling me that He was pained to see you without food from the previous day and that I should prepare some
puries and curry and bring them to you at the railway station with some sweetmeats, nice cold water, and a Durry for you to sit on. I woke up, but thinking it was only a dream I turned on my side and slept again. But Shri Ramji, in His infinite graciousness, came to me again and actually pushed me to make me get up and do as He had said". While Swamiji thanked his host with tears in his eyes, the jeering Baniya was taken aback at this amazing turn of events and begged the Swami's pardon, taking the dust of his feet.

There is no doubt whatsoever that it was Sri Ramakrishna who appeared in the sweetmeat vendor's dream as Shri Ramji and urged him to provide succour to the starving Swami Vivekananda in distress. Thakur himself used to say repeatedly, even on his deathbed, that he was none other than Rama and Krishna. Besides, Swamiji experienced many times in his life the protecting hand of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the incarnation of Sri Ramachandra, four of the five Vaishnava modes of Bhakti stand out in bright colours through certain characters: the Dasya Bhava of Hanuman (servant), the Vatsalya Bhava of Kauralya and Dasaratha, the Sakhyya Bhava of Sugreeva (friend), Lakshmana and Bharata (brothers) and the Santa Bhava of the Rishis of the forest. Sri Ramakrishna surely realised Rama from all these devotional angles. He identified himself with Hanuman, practised the Dasya Bhava and realised Raghu-vir; under the influence of the Ramavat monk Jatadhari, he identified himself with Kausalya (or Dasaratha), practised the Vatsalya Bhava and realised Ramlala.

The devotional mode of Santa Bhava practised by the Rishis towards Rama is tinged with Jnana or the knowle-
edge of the immanence of God in all creatures. The *Adhyatma Ramayana*, which was a favourite scripture of Sri Ramakrishna, teaches such a synthesis of Jnana and Bhakti. One day at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna saw a butterfly flying with a tiny stick stuck into its tail. He was pained that some mischievous boy had done it, but at the next moment he was inspired and burst into laughter saying, "O Rama, You have brought Yourself to this plight." Thakur’s realisation of Rama even in a tiny butterfly is evidently Santa Bhava, devotion tinged with knowledge.

Regarding the Chaitanya incarnation, it is said that Krishna wanted to enjoy the Madhura Bhava of Radha and therefore incarnated himself as Chaitanya for this purpose. Similarly it can be said that Sri Ramachandra wanted to enjoy simultaneously the Dasya Bhava of Hanuman, the Vatsalya Bhava of Kausalya and Dasaratha, the Sakhyam Bhava of Sugreeva, Lakshmana and Bharata, the Santa Bhava of the Rishis, and the Kanta Bhava of Sita and therefore incarnated Himself as Sri Ramakrishna for this multi-purpose! Just as Sri Chaitanya was Radha-Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna was Sita-Rama, that is, Rama in the spiritual mould of Sita.

Self-avowal is considered an important proof of an Avatar. Accordingly, Sri Ramakrishna has clearly stated, "He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna, not just in the Vedantic sense." Perhaps there is more of Rama than Krishna in the Ramakrishna incarnation. This is only proper: two incarnations have appeared in Bengal in quick succession, of which the first, namely Chaitanya, was strongly inclined towards Krishna; and therefore it is but meet that the second Avatar, namely
Sri Ramakrishna, should incline towards Rama. In the family tree of Kshudiram, at least 16 names are seen to contain the name of Rama.

Sri Rama and Hanuman were great exponents of Karma Yoga, which, according to Swami Vivekananda, is the great need of the hour of India. Swamiji wanted Indians to take up the worship of Rama with his bows and arrows, and Hanuman with his mighty deeds, and thereby become great Karma-yogis working for the uplift of India. Hence in the Ramakrishna incarnation, there is more of Rama than Krishna, and in his name, Rama is first and Krishna is only next!

9. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS RAGHUVIR

Raghuvir literally means ‘the hero of the dynasty of Raghu.’ It is a name of Lord Rama who was born in the celebrated solar dynasty of kings who ruled Ayodhya in the ancient days. Raghu was one of the earliest kings of this solar dynasty, whose fame was such that the entire dynasty came to be called the Raghuvamsa. Vishnu Himself was born in the dynasty of Raghu as the great hero Ramachandra, who is also known as Raghuvir. Raghava, Raghunatha, Raghupati and Raghuram are popular synonyms for Raghuvir. There are numerous temples all over India dedicated to Raghunathji or Rama.

Kshudiram Chatterji, Sri Ramakrishna’s father, was greatly devoted to the deity Raghuvir. Indeed the whole dynasty of Kshudiram was devoted to Rama. Almost all male members of this family were named after Rama.
Kshudiram’s dynasty is indeed the modern Raghuvamsa, for Sri Ramakrishna, who was none other than Raghuvir, was born in it! Therefore it is not at all surprising to find incidents in the life of the great sage Kshudiram prior to the birth of Sri Ramakrishna which portended that Raghuvir himself would be born to him.

A few years before the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, the pious Kshudiram once went to another village on foot. On his way back he rested under a tree and fell asleep. He then saw in a dream his favourite deity Raghuvir in the guise of a divine Boy, His body green like the tender blades of Dhruva grass. Pointing to a particular spot, the Boy said, “I have been staying here for a long time without food and anyone to take care of me. Take me to your house: I have a desire that you should serve Me.” Kshudiram protested that he was too poor to serve the Lord but the Boy Raghuvir insisted on being served by him. Then Kshudiram woke up and found a spot, exactly as seen by him in the dream. He saw a beautiful Salagrama stone emblem of Vishnu there, guarded by a snake with expanded hood, as if it was Adisesha, the mythological thousand-hooded snake which forms the bed of Vishnu! Crying out “Glory to Raghuvir,” Kshudiram took the Salagrama stone home, the snake disappearing as he approached it. On close examination, he found it to be a Raghuvir-sila. With joy and wonder, Kshudiram installed the Raghuvir Salagrama in his house and started to worship it daily.¹

It is said that Kshudiram visited the holy cities of Vrindavan, Ayodhya and Benares while at Deregur and named his first son and daughter — who were born not long after this event — Ramkumar and Katyayani in memory of this pilgrimage. Kshudiram’s pilgrimage to
Ayodhya took place shortly before the birth of his first son Ramkumar in 1805 A.D. He little knew then that Sri Ramachandra of Ayodhya Himself would be born as his ‘Kumar’ (son) long afterwards in the year 1836 A.D.!

Kshudiram went on a pilgrimage to Gaya in 1835 A.D. and offered Pinda (rice balls) to his departed ancestors. He worshipped the deity Vishnu there. One day he experienced a wonderful dream in which he saw a divine being, green in colour like Raghuvir. The Lord wanted to be born as his son this time! Once again Kshudiram expressed the fear that he was too poor to serve the Lord, but once again the Lord insisted that He would accept his services gladly.²

Sri Ramakrishna was soon born as Kshudiram’s son. Thus the same Raghuvir who manifested Himself to Kshudiram at first in the form of a Salagrama stone-image (Archa), now manifested Himself in flesh and blood (Avatar) in his house! True to his first vision of Raghuvir as a divine Boy, Kshudiram saw his divine son Gadadhar only as a boy; for he passed away uttering the name of Raghuvir thrice, when his divine son was only seven years old! Perhaps Kshudiram cherished the Vatsalya attitude towards Raghuvir and looked upon Him as his son; therefore, both his favourite deity Raghuvir and his son Gadadhar appeared to him only as Ramalala, the Divine Child.

In 1861 A.D., the Bhairavi Brahmani, the woman-guru of Sri Ramakrishna, arrived at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. She was delighted to meet Sri Ramakrishna and was filled with motherly love towards him from the beginning. The Bhairavi had a long chat with him on that day and identified his divine inebriation of Mahabhava. In the evening, she took some provisions from
the Kali temple as Bhiksha. She cooked the food at the Panchavati, offered it to the Raghuvir-Salagrama which hung from her neck and meditated. She then had an extraordinary vision of Raghuvir, her chosen Ideal, and fell into deep samadhi.

When the Bhairavi opened her eyes, she found Sri Ramakrishna eating the cooked food offered to Raghuvir. He had been attracted by the devotion of the Brahmani and had come to the Panchavati in a state of ecstasy. Thakur must have identified himself completely with Raghuvir, for the Bhairavi found that his action tallied perfectly with the vision that she had just seen! Coming down from ecstasy soon, he apologised for the sacrilege of eating the food that was meant by the Bhairavi for Raghuvir. But the Bhairavi felt that her long years of sadhana had borne fruit by the appearance of Raghuvir in the form of Sri Ramakrishna and that there was no need for ceremonial worship on her part any more. She then discarded the stone symbol of Raghuvir that she had worshipped for years in the Ganga with tears of joy, for she had obtained the permanent living vision of Raghuvir in the body and mind of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus on the very first day of her meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, the Bhairavi Brahmani realised the truth that he was none other than Raghuvir Himself!

It is remarkable that both Kshudiram and Bhairavi Brahmani first worshipped Raghuvir through the Salagrama stone emblem. Then they had visions of Raghuvir. At last they beheld Raghuvir Himself in flesh and blood in the divine person of Sri Ramakrishna. This sequence was again repeated in the life of the Vaishnava monk Jatadhari, with the difference that he worshipped an image of the Child Rama instead of the Raghuvir Salagrama.
The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was also greatly devoted to Raghuvir, the tutelary deity of her husband’s family. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the Mother stayed at Kamarpukur for some time. She suffered from extreme poverty and loneliness then. Soon she began to have many visions of Thakur which freed her from all fears. One day Sri Ramakrishna appeared before her and said, “Feed me with khichudi.” It might be mentioned here that ‘khichudi’ is a favourite food offered to Raghuvir in North India where the Lord was born. The Mother thought that as the deity Raghuvir was identical with Sri Ramakrishna, though they differed in form, it would be enough to offer the khichudi to the former. Then she offered the khichudi to the Raghuvir-Sila thinking all the while in a spiritual mood that Sri Ramakrishna himself was having his meal. Thus to the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna was none other than Raghuvir.

The mighty hero Raghuvir often behaved like ordinary human beings; when Sita was abducted by Ravana, he wept inconsolably. At the same time, he performed superhuman feats like annihilating powerful demons like Kara and Ravana. Similarly Sri Ramakrishna’s childlike innocence and sweetness charmed all people: he seemed softer than a rose! Nevertheless Thakar manifested superhuman strength and infinite spiritual powers when the occasion demanded them. At his mere touch, even great sinners like Girish Chandra Ghosh turned into golden characters. Swami Saradananda writes in this connection: “Describing the superhuman character of Sri Ramachandra, the king of Ayodhya, the famous poet (Bhavabhuti) of India wrote: Who can know the minds of superhuman souls, harder than adamant (diamond) but softer than flowers? The same remark applies to Sri Ramakrishna also.”


10. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS HANUMAN

Hanuman is the most popular hero of the Ramayana, excelling Sri Rama himself from the moment he enters the picture. He is ‘Ramayana Mahamala Ratna’, the priceless gem in the great necklace that is the Ramayana. Shrines dedicated to Hanuman in India far outnumber those of Rama himself.

Hanuman, known variously as Mahavir (great hero), Anjaneya (son of Anjana) and Maruti (son of Marut or Vayu, the wind-god) was endowed with superhuman strength even from birth. He stands for perfect continence, superhuman strength, unsurpassed devotion to the Lord, uncommon wisdom and humility. Hanuman stands for renunciation and service, the eternal ideals of India. He is the ideal devotee worthy of emulation by all votaries of the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in a Vaishnava family traditionally devoted to Rama. Thus it is no wonder that he was spontaneously attracted by the Hanuman ideal. Shortly after his first vision of Kali, Thakur’s attention turned towards the realisation of Raghuvir (Rama), the tutelary deity of his family. He then practised the Dasya Bhava (servant mode of devotion to the Lord) looking upon himself as Mahavir, sometime during 1856-1859 A.D.

Thakur said later that thinking of Hanuman incessantly at that time, he became so much absorbed that he forgot altogether for sometime his separate existence and individuality. “At that time,” said Thakur, “I had to walk, take my food, and do all other actions like Mahavir. I did not do so of my own accord, but the actions so happened of themselves. I tied my cloth round my waist so that it might look like a tail and walked jumping;
I ate nothing but fruits and roots, which again I did not feel inclined to eat when skinned. I spent much of my time on trees and always cried, 'Raghuvir, Raghuvir,' in a deep voice. Both my eyes assumed a restless expression like those of monkeys and it is marvellous that the lower end of the backbone lengthened at that time by nearly an inch.'\textsuperscript{1} However the elongation of the coccyx disappeared in Thakur's body as the mastery of the mood of Hanuman ceased. This account of Sri Ramakrishna shows to what extent his mind and body were identified at that time with Hanuman.

Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision of Sita during his practice of Dasya Bhava. He must have had visions of Rama also at that time, though this has not been stated explicitly in his biography written by Swami Saradananda. But one day, probably in the year 1866, when Tota Puri and Haladhari were discussing the Adhyatma Ramayana, Thakur had the vision of Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana.\textsuperscript{2}

Sri Ramakrishna kept a picture of Hanuman in his room at Dakshineswar which he worshipped. He often got into the mood of Hanuman and used to say, "Let me give you an idea of my way of thinking. Somebody put it to Hanuman, the great lover of God, 'What day is it of the lunar fortnight?' Hanuman replied, 'My dear fellow, please excuse me. I know nothing of the days of the week, the day (tithi) of the lunar fortnight, or the stars telling of one's destiny on a particular day. That is not my line. I meditate on God and God alone.'" Like another Hanuman in this Kaliyuga, Sri Ramakrishna also asked his cousin Haladhari once on a fullmoon day, "Brother, is it the night of the new moon?"\textsuperscript{3} Thakur
hardly noticed the days of the week, the tithi etc., especially during his years of sadhana.

Sri Ramakrishna once said, "Just imagine Hanuman's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God. When he was running away with the heavenly weapon that had been secreted in the crystal pillar, Mandodhari began to tempt him with various fruits so that he might come down and drop the weapon (with which alone her husband Ravana could be killed). But he couldn't be tricked so easily. In reply to her persuasions, he sang this song:

"Am I in need of fruit?
I have the fruit that makes this life
Fruitful indeed. Within my heart
The Tree of Rama grows,
Bearing salvation as its fruit.
Under the Wish-fulfilling Tree
Of Rama do I sit at ease,
Plucking whatever fruit I will.
But if you speak of fruit—
No beggar, I, for common fruit.
Behold, I go,
Leaving a bitter fruit for you."

As Sri Ramakrishna was singing this song, he went into samadhi.... After a long time the Master came back to ordinary consciousness...... He shed tears of joy as he repeated the holy name of Rama. Thus Sri Ramakrishna also "sat at ease under the Wish-fulfilling Tree of Rama" like Hanuman.
Thakur used to say, "Hanuman after having the vision of God both with form and without, remained firmly dedicated to the form of Rama, the embodiment of Consciousness and Bliss." He reconciled the three viewpoints of Dwaita (dualism), Visishtadvaita (qualified monism) and Advaita (monism) by citing the example of the three attitudes of Hanuman towards Rama. Hanuman sometimes considered himself as a servant of Rama (Dwaita), at other times as a part of Rama (Visishtadvaita), and as Rama himself (Advaita).

Hanuman is more popular with devotees than Rama himself. The reason for this is not difficult to seek. Sri Ramakrishna himself has observed that the orderly is more influential than the judge. He often taught that nothing is higher than faith, by citing the example of Mahavir:

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar): "You must have heard of the power of faith. Ramachandra was God Incarnate; you know how he had to build a bridge across the sea. But Hanuman, the great lover of the Lord, had infinite faith in the power of His name. He repeated that Name and behold, he found himself at once on the other side! Here, you see, to show the power of faith the Lord Himself had to build a bridge, while the devotee who had faith in His Name needed no bridge to carry him across. (The Master and his disciples all laugh.)"

Not only Sri Ramakrishna, but also his two foremost disciples, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda, were very much devoted to Mahavir, the Ideal of Service. Narendra, at the age of six, learnt by heart the whole of the Ramayana done to music. At that time while he was listening to the reading of the Ramayana, young Narendra looked around to see whether according to Hanuman's promise, he, the great hero and servant of Rama, was present.
The practice of Dasya Bhava by Sri Ramakrishna, identifying himself totally with Hanuman, is significant for this age. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out that this is the ideal we should follow now. Swamiji has said, "You have now to make the character of Mahavira your ideal. See how at the command of Rama-chandra he crossed the ocean. He had no care for life or death! He was a perfect master of his senses (Jitendriya) and wonderfully sagacious (Buddhimatam Varishta). You have now to build your life on this great ideal of personal service. Through that, all the other ideals will gradually manifest in life. Obedience to the Guru without questioning, strict observance of Brahmacharya—this is the secret of success. As on the one hand Hanuman represents the ideal of service, so on the other side he represents leonine courage, striking the whole world with awe...... Such wholehearted devotion is wanted...... In eating, dressing or lying, in singing or playing, in enjoyment or disease, always manifest the highest courage."

Needless to say, Swami Vivekananda himself manifested all the great qualities of Hanuman. He even compared himself instinctively to Mahavir once! After his return from foreign countries, Swamiji said to the Holy Mother, "By your grace, Mother, I did not have to cross the ocean by jumping in this age (like Hanuman), but went to those parts in their own ships."7

Swami Brahmananda has made the chanting of the 108 names of Rama which ends with emotive verses addressed to Mahavira, a regular feature of the Ekadasi prayers at the Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres. Sri Maharaj, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, who was extremely sensitive to spiritual things, actually detected the presence of Hanuman once in the audience, during the chanting of
Ramanama at Benares, thus confirming the traditional belief held by devotees of Rama. A special seat is therefore kept for Sri Hanuman during the chanting of Ramanama at the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

It is said of the Madhura Bhava of Sri Radha that Sri Krishna himself wanted to be in the position of Radha to taste such Prema and therefore he incarnated himself as Sri Chaitanya. With equal validity, it may be said of the Dasya Bhava of Sri Hanuman that Rama himself wanted to be in the state of Hanuman in order to enjoy Dasya Bhakti and therefore he incarnated himself as Sri Ramakrishna!

11. SRI SARADA DEVI AS RADHA

The character of Sri Radha represents bridal mysticism or rather extra-marital love of the Lord, at its best. Radha was the foremost of the Gopis of Vraja, who excelled in divine love for Krishna, God incarnate. Radha excelled in Madhura Bhava (sweet mode of devotion) towards Krishna and attained to Mahabhava, the highest stage of love of God. Radha’s Madhura Bhava was popularised by Sri Krishna Chaitanya in the 16th century. Sri Ramakrishna practised this sadhana and realised his identity with Radha. There are also significant incidents in the life of Sri Sarada Devi which reveal that she was Nitya Radha incarnate.

One day Sri Ramakrishna went to the Nahabat building and asked Gauri-Ma in the Holy Mother’s presence, “Tell me, Gaur-dasi, whom do you love more,
me or her (the Holy Mother)." Gauri-Ma avoided a direct answer, but sang in a sweet voice:

You aren't greater than Radha, O Flute-player (Krishna),

People in danger call on you as Madhusudhana;
But when 'tis Your turn to cry, You make your flute call,
"O Radha, you young maid."

The meaning of Gauri-Ma's song was very clear. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was Radha, superior even to Sri Ramakrishna, who was none other than Krishna. The Mother pressed Gauri-Ma's hand in sheer shame and Thakur left smiling in utter discomfiture.¹ Sri Ramakrishna spoke of Gauri-Ma as one of the Gopis of Vraja reborn, which lends additional weight to her opinion!

Just before his Mahasamadhi at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna reminded the Holy Mother of her real nature and invited her to shoulder the responsibility of imparting spiritual instruction to others. Once he sent young Sarada (later Swami Trigunatitananda) to the Mother for initiation, quoting a Bengali couplet to put faith in him:

"Infinite is the Maya of Radha which defies definition—A million Krishnas and a million Ramas have birth, live and die."²

Thus Sri Ramakrishna himself seconded Gauri-Ma's opinion with yet another couplet equating the Holy Mother with Radha. It seems that the Mother didn't initiate Sarada that day, for she spoke of Swami Yogananda as her first disciple. However, true to the words of Thakur identifying her with Radha, the Holy Mother initiated Swami Yogananda at Vrindavan, which holy place is associated with Radha and Krishna. The Mother was very much in the mood of Radha at Vrindavan.
After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna on August 16, 1886, the Holy Mother was overwhelmed by intense grief, like that of Sri Radha when separated from her Krishna. The devotees then took her on a pilgrimage to holy places like Kasi and Vrindavan, so that she would be away from places fresh with Thakur’s memory. The Mother started for Vrindavan on August 30, 1886 with Golap-Ma, Swami Yogananda and others.

The Holy Mother met Yojin-Ma at Vrindavan, who had come there sometime before the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna. Vrindavan is full of spots associated with Radha and Krishna — the Yamuna river, the Nikunja grove wetted by Sri Radha’s tears of separation, the pastures of Vraja hallowed by the pangs of separation of the Gopis searching for Krishna who could not be found anywhere. This only added fuel to the fire of the Holy Mother’s grief. Yojin-Ma also began to mourn the loss continually. Then Sri Ramakrishna appeared to the Holy Mother and Yojin-Ma one night and said, “Well, my dears, why do you weep so much? Here am I. Where indeed could have I gone? It is just like walking from this room to that.” It was as if Krishna was revealing himself to Radha and other Gopis, after hiding away from them for some time!

This vision of Sri Ramakrishna reassured the Holy Mother but her pang of separation found a different channel of expression. In the section of the Bhagavata called the Gopi Gita, it is described how the Gopis, unable to withstand the grief caused by the sudden disappearance of Krishna from their midst, identified themselves with Krishna due to their intense love and started impersonating him in various ways like playing the flute. In the body and mind of the Holy Mother also, a similar self-absorption
was seen. One does not know, she might have then thought herself as Radha, the sweetheart of Krishna and of Sri Ramakrishna as Krishna and was thus lost in the bliss of union in the Vrindavan of her heart! It is said that she once told a devotee, "I, indeed, am Radha."³

One day in Vrindavan, Sri Sarada Devi behaved exactly like Sri Ramakrishna, in a state of deep samadhi. Yogin-Ma then repeated the Lord’s names in her ears for a long time. While coming down to normal consciousness, the Mother said, "I shall eat," just as Thakur used to say. She took food, water and betel-nut exactly in the same manner as Thakur. At that time Swami Yogananda put several questions to her to which she replied like Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, all her gestures and postures at that time resembled those of Thakur.⁴ After coming back to the normal plane, the Holy Mother herself admitted that Sri Ramakrishna had engulfed her for the time being. Just as Radha identified herself with Krishna through Prema, the Holy Mother identified herself with Sri Ramakrishna at Vrindavan. This is a modern replay of the Radha-Krishna Ideal in this age.

The Holy Mother stayed at Vrindavan for about a year. She went round the temples daily. She must have been blessed with many visions of Radha and Krishna at that time, though she never gave them out. The Mother and her party also undertook a ceremonial circumambulation of Vrindavan for more than a fortnight. To Yogin-Ma and others, she then appeared to be in a spiritual mood at various places and having visions too. Now and then they put questions to her out of curiosity, but the Holy Mother put them off with the simple answer, "No, that’s nothing; move on."⁵ Santa Bhava, the tranquil mood, predominated in the personality of the Holy Mother and
only rarely others caught glimpses of her spiritual greatness.

There are interesting comparisons and contrasts between the Radha-Krishna and Sarada-Ramakrishna incarnations. The grief that Sri Sarada Devi felt after the disappearance of Sri Ramakrishna has been compared by her biographers to Radha's pangs of separation over the sudden disappearance of Krishna. Radha was eighteen years older than Krishna, it is said, whereas Sarada was nearly eighteen years younger than Ramakrishna. Krishna was not the actual husband of Radha, but only a child of Yasoda, yet Radha cherished him as the Beloved. Ramakrishna was the actual husband of Sarada, yet she looked upon him as her child.

Like Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi also had profound spiritual experiences concerning Radha and Krishna at Mathura-Vrindavan. By her well-controlled practice of Viraha-Bhakti (devotional yearning), Sri Sarada Devi might be said to have made her own contribution to the path of Madhura Bhava. Santa Bhava was predominant in the Holy Mother's spiritual life. By incarnating Herself as Sri Sarada Devi, the Divine Mother Nitya Radha might be said to have quietly established the Santa Bhava, the neglected aspect of Madhura Bhava towards the Lord.
12. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS RADHA

Sri Radha is the classical Hindu ideal of Prema Bhakti (extreme love of God) and Madhura Bhava (extra-marital mode of loving God as the Beloved, the ‘sweet’ mood). Radha was the wife of Ayan Ghosh. She was the chief of the Gopis of Brindavan, who all had unparalleled love for Krishna, God-Incarnate. The simple shepherdesses of Gokula loved the divine child Krishna more than their own husbands and children. Among them all, Sri Radha alone manifested the Mahabhava with nineteen divine symptoms of love for Krishna. The unsullied love of the Gopis towards Krishna is described in the Bhagavata Purana, though there is no mention of Radha in it.

Though having a male body, Sri Ramakrishna was ideally suited from birth to imagine himself to be a female Gopi like Radha, look upon Krishna as the Beloved and practise the Madhura Bhava. There was an extraordinary coexistence in Sri Ramakrishna of both manly and womanly temperaments. Even as a mere child, he put on female dresses and acted female parts in dramas. When he was in the woman’s mood and dress, his movements, speech, smile, glance, gestures and other actions of body and mind would become completely womanly.

Swami Turiyananda has said, “Today’s imagination is tomorrow’s realisation.” This is certainly true with respect to Sri Ramakrishna’s practice of the Madhura Bhava! In early childhood, he imagined himself to be Radha and later realised Radha and Krishna. Even while he was growing up in Kamarpukur, the young boy Gadadhar felt the impulse of the female mood of Radha. Considering his male body to be an obstacle to the realisation of Krishna, Gadadhar imagined that he would
be a child-widow in a Brahmin family and would not know anyone for a husband except Krishna. There would be some means of bare subsistence of coarse food and clothes. He would sing songs and weep in longing for Krishna, who would also come and go without the knowledge of others. Such childhood dreams of communing with Krishna were fulfilled later in Sri Ramakrishna’s life when he took up the sadhana of Madhura Bhava under the influence of the Bhairavi Brahmani.¹

In 1864 A.D., after succeeding in other Vaishnava modes of devotion like the Dasya Bhava and Vatsalya Bhava, Sri Ramakrishna’s mind set itself upon the path of Madhura Bhava. He put on female dresses and lived in female company. The ladies of Mathur’s family, with whom he spent his time, felt that he was indeed a woman and treated him as such. When he picked flowers in the garden early in the morning, Mathur and Hriday would note that he put his left leg forward first like a woman. The Bhairavi Brahmani also said, “I mistook him often for Sri Radha when I saw him plucking flowers in that manner.” Thakur would then make garlands and adorn the image of Radhakanta in the Dakshineswar temple. Just as the Gopis of Vraja propitiated the deity Katyayani for attaining Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna also prayed to the Divine Mother for success in his practice of bridal mysticism towards Krishna.²

Sri Ramakrishna engaged himself in the service of Krishna with an undivided mind and prayed to Him day and night. Months passed but he never flagged in his devotion. Gradually Sri Ramakrishna’s prayer and devotion developed into extremely intense yearning for complete union with Krishna, the Beloved. Such a high devotional mood is called the Mahabhava — yearning that
churns the blood of one's heart, plays havoc with one's mind and devastates one's body and sense organs. Under that 'viraha bhakti' or intense yearning for Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna suffered unbearable burning pain and intense heat in the body. Thakur himself said later that drops of blood oozed out then at times from every pore of his body under the powerful sense of separation from Krishna. All the joints of his body seemed loosened or almost dislocated, the senses completely desisted from functioning and the body lay motionless and unconscious sometimes like that of a dead man—all because of the extreme anguish of the heart.³

Srimati Radharani alone, the devotional scriptures say, realised the Mahabhava, the ultimate kind of transcendental love for the Lord and left its perfect ideal in the world. Krishna is said to be eternally captivated by the love of Radha, which is devoid of the slightest tinge of lust and fulfils the desires of devotees. Nobody can have the vision of Krishna but by the grace of Radha. These are the settled doctrines of Sri Chaitanya's Vaishnavism. In Southern Sri Vaishnavism, Radha's Madhura Bhava towards Krishna never found favour with the Acharyas; it practically disappeared with the Alwars. Radha is not worshipped in the South. But Sri Andal, who practised the Madhura Bhava on the model of Radha towards Krishna with complete success, is worshipped invariably with Krishna in the Vishnu temples. Andal is thus the Radha of the Tamil country.

Understanding that the attainment of the vision of Krishna was impossible without Radha's grace, Sri Ramakrishna applied himself thoroughly for gaining her favour. He incessantly offered at the feet of Radha, the embodiment of love, the ardent emotions of his heart. Very
soon, Thakur was blessed with the vision of the holy form of Sri Radha, devoid of the slightest tinge of lust. The divine form of Radha also entered into his body and disappeared like the forms of other deities whenever he had their visions for the first time. "Is it ever possible," Sri Ramakrishna said later, "to describe the glory and sweetness of that incomparable, pure, bright form of Radha, who renounced her all for the love of Krishna? The splendour of her body was bright yellow like the pollens of Nagakesara flowers."*

From now on, Sri Ramakrishna began to realise himself as Radha in ecstasy. He completely lost the consciousness of his separate existence, due to his profound contemplation of Radha. After his vision of Radha, his Madhura Bhava ripened into the extremely rare Mahabhava, just as in the lives of Radha and Sri Chaitanya. The Bhairavi Brahmani and the great Vaishnavite leader Vaishnavacharan, who were well-versed in the Vaishnava scriptures, marvelled at the physical and mental signs of Mahabhava in the holy person of Bhagavan Sri Rama-krishna and offered him their heart-felt worship and reverence.

Speaking of the Mahabhava, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "It is written in the devotional scriptures that nineteen kinds of emotions manifested in one receptacle are together called the Mahabhava. The whole life of a man is required for the practice of one such emotion before he can attain perfection in it. Nineteen such moods were fully manifested altogether here (showing his own body) in one receptacle." The Bengali Vaishnavas assert that Sri Chaitanya was Radha herself, because he manifested the Mahabhava for Krishna. By the same criterion, Sri Ramakrishna is also Radha herself.†
Shortly after attaining the vision of Radha and realising himself to be Radha, Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision of Krishna, blue like a flower of grass. At that time Sri Ramakrishna completely lost himself in the thought of Krishna, like the Gopīs of Vraja and sometimes regarded himself and all beings, from Brahma down to a blade of grass, as forms of Krishna.

It was in the year 1864 A.D., that Sri Ramakrishna had visions of Radha and Krishna and realised his identity with Radha-Krishna. In 1868 A.D., he went on a pilgrimage to Brindavan and Varanasi, along with Mathur Babu’s party. At Mathura, Brindavan and Vraja, hallowed with the memories of Radha and Krishna, probably Sri Ramakrishna was once again transported to the wonderful mood of Mahabhava, for he was again seen by other devotees as Radha. He was in a very high state of Bhavasamadhi when he saw the image of Vankavihari (Krishna, bent in three parts of the body) — he lost himself and ran to embrace Him. Thakur visited Nidhuvan, Govardhan and other places of Vraja and liked them more than Brindavan.

At Nidhuvan, Sri Ramakrishna was delighted to meet a great woman-saint called Ganga Mata, about sixty years of age. Since Ganga Mata was in spiritual ecstasy for long periods and had realised Radha and Krishna, the people of Nidhuvan regarded her as Lalita, the principal companion of Radha, who had come down to teach people divine love. As soon as Gangamata saw Sri Ramakrishna, she recognised in him the signs of Mahabhava. She called him Dulali, the darling friend, thinking that Radha had incarnated herself as Sri Ramakrishna and come down to earth. They became such thick friends that Mathur and others were afraid that Thakur might refuse to return to
Dakshineswar. Only his love and concern for his aged mother Chandramani Devi made Thakur give up his desire to stay at Vraja for life.⁶

Swami Vivekananda didn’t like the idea of a male looking upon himself as a female lover of God in order to practise the Madhura Bhava or bridal mysticism. This is a very difficult and even a dangerous path for those who have not yet controlled the senses. Hence Swamiji recommended other modes of devotion to people.

In his younger days at Dakshineswar, Swami Vivekananda doubted even the historicity of the divine play of Radha and Krishna at Brindavan. Sri Rama-krishna then said, “Very well, let us take for granted that there was never one called Radha and that some loving sadhaka had an imaginary conception of Radha’s personality. But while picturing that character, the sadhaka, you must admit, had to lose himself completely in Radha’s mood, and thus he became Radha. It is therefore proved that the play at Vrindavan was thus enacted in the outer world also.”⁷ Thakur spoke from direct experience, as he himself was one such wonderful sadhaka who had succeeded in becoming Radha! Like Nammalwar, Andal, Chaitanya and Meera Bhai, Sri Ramakrishna also became Radha and thereby rejuvenated the perennial Krishna ideal of India in this skeptical age. Not content with orally defending the Radha ideal, Thakur actually manifested himself as Radha to Swami Vivekananda.

One night the young Narendra Nath dreamt that Sri Ramakrishna came to him and said, “Come! I will show you the Gopi Radha.” Narendra followed him. After having gone some distance, Thakur turned to him and said, “Where else will you go?” Saying this, Thakur transformed himself into the beautiful personality and exquisite
form of Radha herself. This so affected the conscious mind of Narendra that though he was then a member of the Brahmo Samaj who believed in the formless Brahman, he began to appreciate the Radha ideal and started singing songs about the love of Radha, the individual soul, for Sri Krishna, the indwelling Beloved One. Sri Ramakrishna thereafter said to Mahendra Nath Gupta one day, "Narendra now respects Radhika very much. He says that if anyone wants to know how to love Satchidananda, he can learn it from her."

Sri Ramakrishna often expounded on the Radha ideal, which receives the highest veneration and worship from devotees of Sri Chaitanya. He spoke of different aspects of Radha: "There are different aspects of Radha. In Her seductive aspect, She was Chandravali; in Her aspect of love, She participated in Sri Krishna's life at Vrindavan. Nandaghosh, Krishna's foster-father, had the vision of the Eternal Radha."

Thakur said further, "First is the seductive Radha (Kama Radha), then the Radha of love (Prema Radha). If you go further, you will see the Eternal Radha (Nitya Radha). It is like taking off the layers of an onion one by one. First the red layers, then the pink, then the white. Afterwards you don't find any more layers. Such is the nature of the Eternal Radha, Radha the Absolute. There the discrimination following the process of 'Not this, not this' 'Neti, neti) comes to an end.

"There are two aspects of Radha-Krishna: the Absolute and the Relative. They are like the sun and its rays. The Absolute may be likened to the sun and the Relative to the rays."
We have studied both the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna as Radha. There are thus two Radhas in the Ramakrishna Incarnation, compared to only one in the Chaitanya and Krishna Incarnations! Sri Ramakrishna represents Prema Radha and the Holy Mother Nitya Radha, as it were.

Prema-Radha is the embodiment of nineteen kinds of emotions, fully representing the four devotional moods of Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya and Madhura Bhavas. Beyond the state of Prema Radha is the highest state of Nitya Radha, who is the very embodiment of Santa Bhava, the tranquil mood full of Jnana, beyond all emotions. In the turbulent state of Prema-Radha, there is a maximum display of purified, sattvika emotions of nineteen kinds. Prema-Radha is like the Atlantic Ocean of Love, which is full of big storms and mountain-high waves. Nitya Radha is like the peaceful Pacific Ocean of Love, which however is deeper than even the Atlantic Ocean.

The mercurial spiritual personality, Sri Ramakrishna, was like the roaring Atlantic Ocean of Love. His life was full of sensational samadhis! He was the very embodiment of Prema-Radha. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was like the silent, but deeper Pacific Ocean of Love: she was Nitya Radha! Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were after all Krishna, who both tried to imitate Radha, despite having male bodies. The Holy Mother was, however, Radha Herself; she was Nitya Radha, the eternal Radha, and hence there was no need for her to prove to the world that she was Radha, by displaying the Mahabhava with nineteen kinds of emotions as its spiritual sign-boards!

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the Nitya Radha, is thus superior to Sri Ramakrishna, who was only Krishna
masquerading as Radha. The Sarada-Ramakrishna Incarnation has thereby demonstrated the truth of the following Bengali saying which means that Radha, the Divine Mother is infinitely superior to Krishna, the Divine Lord: "Infinite is the Maya of Radha which defies definition - a million Krishnas and a million Ramas have birth, live and die."

13. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS KRISHNA

The divine child Gadadhar attracted all the pious womenfolk of Kamarpukur from his birth, like the child Krishna of Gokula. The Vaishnava religion of Sri Chaitanya prevailed in Kamarpukur and a simple poetic faith was the basis of their religion. Prasannamayi and other elderly women saw in the young boy Gadadhar the manifestation of Krishna.

Gadadhar fascinated the pastoral people of Kamarpukur with his wonderful singing, story-telling and play-acting. He used to read Puranas like the Bhagavata to the women and delight them with his mimicry of village folks. He would sometimes put on woman's dress and ornaments and act like Radha and other Puranic characters. His gestures, voice and movements would then be exactly feminine. He would sometimes go into ecstasy while reading or singing and the women would then worship him, looking upon him as Krishna or Gauranga. People would confide in him their innermost thoughts, seek his advice and follow it. The villagers instinctively identified Gadadhar with the divine Krishna so much that they even made a gold flute and costumes for his use during impersonations. Like the mischievous boy Krishna of Vraja,
Gadadhar once splashed water and spied on women when they were taking their bath in the village tank, before he was corrected by his mother Chandramani Devi. Gadadhar was full of fun and frolic like the frisky boy Krishna. Therefore it will be no exaggeration to say that Kamarpukur has become another Vrindavana by the birth and childhood sports of Sri Ramakrishna.

The divine child Krishna performed numerous superhuman feats at Mathura-Vrindavan, which are recounted in the Bhagavata Purana. There are two episodes in Sri Ramakrishna’s life which parallel two of Krishna’s feats, even though Thakur looked down upon miraculous powers with contempt and never flaunted his undoubted yogic powers. Krishna once danced on the hood of the terrible snake Kaliya which was poisoning the river Yamuna and causing terror among the populace. Thus Krishna tamed the snake Kaliya.

During his last days at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna was completely bedridden with throat cancer. Niranjan and others went one evening to collect toddy by tapping a date palm on the southern boundary of the Cossipore garden house. Thakur knew nothing about it. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi suddenly saw Sri Ramakrishna darting down like an arrow and wondered how he, who then needed help even to change on his bed, could rush down like that. Startled, the Mother checked whether Thakur was in the sick room, but could not find him there. After a while she saw Sri Ramakrishna coming to his room upstairs as swiftly as he went down. When the Mother asked him about it with curiosity, Sri Ramakrishna said, “Did you indeed notice it? The boys were merrily proceeding to drink the juice of the palm tree. I saw that there was a black cobra, so ferocious that it would have bitten
them all. The boys did not know this. So I went there by a different route to drive it away and I told it, 'Don't enter here again!'” Thakur warned her not to divulge the matter to others. This incident is the “Kaliya-Mardana Lila” (The divine sport of taming a serpent) of Sri Ramakrishna's life!

The Mahabharata recounts how Sri Krishna satisfied the hunger of the sage Durvasa and his numerous disciples by just eating a green leaf himself. Once sage Durvasa arrived at an inopportune time with his numerous disciples at the camp of the Pandavas in the forest. Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, was in a fix: she didn't know how to feed the sage, who was known for his short temper and curses. Then Krishna appeared and ate a little green leaf that was sticking to a vessel and said that he was satisfied. This little act of Krishna had the wonderful effect of satisfying the appetite of Durvasa and his disciples to such an extent that they all felt as if they had eaten up to the throat. Durvasa then sent word to the Pandavas that he would not be coming for meals. A similar incident happened also in the life of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

During his last illness, Golap-Ma wanted to take Sri Ramakrishna to an expert physician whom she knew. The next morning, Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by Golap-Ma, Latu and Kali went to Calcutta to see the physician. On their way back to Dakshineswar, they felt very hungry and had only four paise with them. Thakur asked Kali to buy some sweets with that little money. Much to the surprise of all, he ate them all and drank water from the Ganges and said, “Ah, I am satisfied.” As Sri Ramakrishna declared his satisfaction, the hunger of all three, who were mutely watching, vanished. They
felt quite satisfied, though they didn’t know how or why. Like Krishna in the Mahabharata story, Sri Ramakrishna satisfied the hunger of others by eating a little food himself.

Regarding the above mentioned incident in the life of Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna once said, “Satisfy God and everyone will be satisfied. If He is pleased, the world is pleased. Once the Lord ate a few greens from Draupadi’s cooking-pot and said, ‘Ah, I am satisfied.’ Immediately the whole world and all its living beings were satisfied; they felt as if they had eaten their fill. But was the world satisfied or did it feel that way when the rishis ate their food?” By the same logic, Sri Ramakrishna is also the Lord since he appeased the hunger of Golap-Ma, Latu and Kali by eating a little food himself. This incident in the life of Sri Ramakrishna projects him as Krishna Himself.

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of his disciple Rakhal Chandra Ghosh (Swami Brahmananda) as a companion of Sri Krishna in his past birth. Prior to meeting Rakhal, Thakur saw in a vision a boy dancing with Krishna on a lotus in the Ganges and identified that divine boy with Rakhal. Swami Brahmananda also had the same vision in his last days and exclaimed, “Ah, that inexpressible light! Ramakrishna, the Krishna of my Ramakrishna.....I am the shepherd boy. Put anklets on my feet, I want to dance with my Krishna. I want to hold his hand—the little boy Krishna.....Ah, Krishna, my Krishna, you have come! Krishna.....Krishna.....Can’t you see him? Haven’t you eyes to see? Oh, how beautiful! My Krishna......on the lotus.....eternal.....the sweet one!” This wonderful vision of Swami Brahmananda directly identifies Sri Ramakrishna with Krishna, the Divine Child of Gokula.
At least on two occasions, Swami Vivekananda also directly manifested himself as Krishna. Regarding how Krishna addressing Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra ought to be painted, Swamiji once told a friend, "Shri Krishna ought to be painted as He really was, the Gita personified; and the central idea of the Gita should radiate from His whole form as He was teaching the path of Dharma to Arjuna, who had been overcome by infatuation and cowardice."

So saying Swamiji posed himself in the way in which Shri Krishna should be portrayed, and continued: "Look here, thus does he hold the bridle of the horses—so tight that they are brought to the haunches, with their forelegs fighting the air, and their mouths gaping. This will show a tremendous play of action in the figure of Shri Krishna. His friend, the world-renowned hero, casting aside his bow and arrows, has sunk down like a coward on the chariot, in the midst of the two armies. And Shri Krishna, whip in one hand and tightening the reins with the other, has turned Himself towards Arjuna, with his child-like face beaming with unworldly love and sympathy, and a calm and serene look—and is delivering the message of the Gita to his beloved comrade. Now tell me what idea this picture of the Preacher of the Gita conveys to you."

The friend: "Activity combined with firmness and serenity."

Swamiji: "Ah, that's it! Intense action in the whole body, and withal a face expressing the profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky. This is the central idea of the Gita—to be calm and steadfast in all circumstances, with one's body, mind and soul centred at His hallowed Feet!"
Needless to say, Swami Vivekananda himself was the Gita personified: like the great Krishna Himself, he combined intense action in the whole body with the profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky.

Swami Vivekananda not only posed as Krishna, the Preacher of the Gita, but actually manifested himself as Krishna once to Josephine MacLeod in New York. Miss MacLeod later said regarding this event, "I first met Swamiji in New York when my elder sister Mrs. Sturges had her days of courtship with Mr. Leggett...... At that time I used to read the Gita, translated by Mohini Mohan Chatterjee. One day we two sisters came to New York by the Hudson River and went to listen to Swami Vivekananda's lecture. The subject of the talk was the Gita. More than one hundred persons were present, they were all scattered in the room. When Swamiji started speaking ...... I lifted up my eyes and saw with these very eyes (she pointed to her own eyes) Krishna himself standing and preaching the Gita. That was my first wonderful vision. I stared and stared ...... I saw only the figure and all else vanished.""

There are two important facets to the Krishna Avatar: one is Krishna, the Pastoral, who is eulogised in the Bhagavata Purana; and the other is Krishna, the King-maker and the preacher of the Gita of the Mahabharata. In the Incarnation of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, the pastoral Krishna of the Bhagavata manifested Himself predominantly in Sri Ramakrishna and Krishna, the great teacher of Vedanta who preached the Gita, manifested Himself prominently through Swami Vivekananda.
14. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS GOPALA

Gopala is one of the most popular names of Krishna. 'Gopala' literally means 'protector of cows or Jivas.' The word 'Go' in Sanskrit means a cow as well as a Jiva. Since Krishna grew up as a cowherd boy of Brindavan he is especially famous as Gopala. Tiny metal images of the crawling Baby Gopala with a ball of butter in the right-hand are worshipped at home by some Hindus. Gopala is the great Ideal of those Hindus who practise the Vatsalya Bhava, the parental mode of devotion to the Lord.

Krishna is unique among Avatars in that even as the mere baby Gopala, he performed several miracles and superhuman feats. The wicked Kamsa knew that his nephew Krishna was destined to kill him one day and so he sent several demons to Gokula to kill the child Gopala. The demons plotted ingenious schemes with the help of their magical powers to kill the divine child, but they were all slain with effortless ease by Gopala and his brother Balarama. The Bhagavata Purana narrates many wonderful exploits of the Baby Gopala. Countless people have been attracted by the divine sports of the Child Gopala and many have attained spiritual illumination by worshipping him through the parental mode of devotion.

The Gopala aspect of God was especially manifest in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna in a natural manner. Like Gopala, he was born and brought up in pastoral surroundings in Kamarpukur. Prasannamayi and other elderly women of Kamarpukur saw in Gadadhar the manifestation of the divine Boy Gopala and loved him even more than their own sons.¹ This divine, child-like innocence and sweetness remained with Sri Ramakrishna throughout his life and evoked maternal feelings
in all women who met him. It is, therefore, no wonder that devout women like the Yogeswari Bhairavi Brahmani and Aghoremani Devi saw in the grown-up man Sri Ramakrishna only their beloved child Gopala.

The Bhairavi Brahmani, who was well-versed in both Tantric and Vaishnavite sadhanas, met Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali temple in the year 1861 A.D. Thakur was then a young man of twenty four, but the Brahmani instinctively felt from the beginning that he was none other than her beloved Child Gopala. She was often overwhelmed by Vatsalya Bhava towards Sri Ramakrishna. Once in the mood of Mother Yasoda, she came to feed Sri Ramakrishna with a plateful of sweets, looking upon him as Gopala. When she approached Thakur, she saw Mathur Babu along with him and carefully restrained herself and handed over the plate to Hriday to be given to Thakur to eat from.²

The Bhairavi Brahmani stayed at the Devamandal Ghat in Ariadaha, north of Dakshineswar. Once in the mood of Vatsalya Bhava, with butter in hand, the Brahmani cried, “Gopala, Gopala” shedding profuse tears of divine love. Sri Ramakrishna then felt an irresistible desire to meet the Brahmani, ran two miles all the way from Dakshineswar to Devamandal Ghat like a child running to meet its mother, sat down near her and ate up the butter in her hand! People then took the Brahmani to be Mother Yasoda herself, grieving on account of separation from her child Gopala.³

One of the most moving episodes in Sri Ramakrishna’s life is the story of Gopal-Ma. Aghoremani Devi was a child-widow who grew up in her parental home. Later she became intimate with the widow of one
Govinda Chandra Datta, who constructed a temple at Kamarhati. She stayed in one of the rooms at the women’s quarter at the Kamarhati temple on the bank of the Ganges. Aghoremani Devi was initiated by her guru into the Mantra of Gopala. For thirty years she lived an austere life at Kamarhati practising japa day and night and calling on the divine child Gopala. The deity responded to her fervent prayers in a wonderful manner through Sri Ramakrishna, who was none other than Gopala Incarnate.

In December 1884, Aghoremani Devi with her companion Kamini, paid a visit to the well-known Paramahamsa Deva of Dakshineswar. She felt an irresistible attraction to Sri Ramakrishna from the first. After a few days, she felt a desire to see Sri Ramakrishna while performing japa. The poor widow purchased a few pieces of Sandesh of inferior quality and went to Dakshineswar. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw her, he was eager to eat what she had brought. Since others had brought many good things for Thakur, she was ashamed to give him the cheap sweets. But Thakur ate the sweets brought by her with great relish, like Krishna who ate the humble parched rice brought by his poor friend Kuchela. In subsequent visits too, Aghoremani found that Thakur was keen to eat the food cooked by her and never talked about religious things. Nevertheless she felt a divine attraction towards Sri Ramakrishna. Two months passed thus.

One morning at three, the Brahmani of Kamarhati sat for japa. After finishing japa, she began to perform Pranayam before offering the result of her japa to Gopala. Suddenly she saw Sri Ramakrishna sitting near her to the left, with the palm of his right hand half-
clenched! Greatly astonished, Aghoremani caught hold of his left hand, when the figure of Sri Ramakrishna vanished and a ten-month old real Gopala, as though of flesh and blood, materialised. The beautiful child Gopala crawled with one of his hands raised and said to her, “Mother, give me butter.” From that moment onwards, Aghoremani Devi became ‘Gopala’s Mother.’ She was overwhelmed by that spiritual experience. She wept because she had no butter on hand and gave Gopala a dry ball of coconut. She couldn’t perform japa any more as Gopala snatched away the rosary, rode on her shoulder and crawled all over the room.

That morning, Aghoremani walked straight to Dakshineswar in a state of Bhava Samadhi with her Gopala, crying, “Gopala, Gopala.” She reached Sri Ramakrishna’s room at about 7.30 a.m. She was not properly dressed, and looked like one mad, with the eyes gone upto the forehead, her sari sweeping the ground. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw Aghoremani, he entered into ecstasy. When Gopala’s mother came and sat by his side, he sat on her lap like a child! Gopal-Ma then fed Sri Ramakrishna with her own hand with cream, butter and thickened milk that she had brought. With unspeakable joy, she danced round the room. Sri Ramakrishna saw it and said with a smile to a woman devotee who was present. “Just see, she is completely filled with bliss, her mind has now gone to the sphere of Gopala.”

Gopal-Ma saw that the restless divine child Gopala vanished into the person of Sri Ramakrishna sometimes and came out of him again. Thakur passed his hand over her heart to pacify her. Gopal-Ma stayed the whole day at Dakshineswar. She took her bath and food there. Then Thakur pacified her a little and sent her home before
sunset. Aghoremani Devi lived continuously for two months in a divine mood, taking care of the child Gopala. She knew that Sri Ramakrishna was none other than her Gopala. After two months she didn’t see the divine form of the deity Gopala continuously, but could see him whenever she meditated. Sri Ramakrishna told Gopal Ma, “You have achieved much. The body can’t continue in the Kali Yuga if such a state persists for a long time.”

The mother and Child aspects of God certainly respond to spiritual aspirants in the Kali Yuga: Gopal-Ma’s wonderful spiritual realisations prove the truth of the saying.

In the year 1885, Balaram Bose performed the car-festival of Lord Jagannath in his house which was attended by Sri Ramakrishna, Gopal-Ma and other devotees. Shortly before Aghoremani came Sri Ramakrishna assumed the form of Gopala as seen in His metal images, in the crawling posture with the right hand raised in the gesture of asking for some food with the face turned upwards, with wistful eyes expressing delight and wanting something. All said of Aghoremani Devi, “Ah, the wonderful devotion! Thakur has assumed the form of Gopala Himself on account of the urge of devotion.” Though Sri Ramakrishna was then an old man, his childish posture appeared divine and struck onlookers as wonderful and genuine. He was seen and felt by all those present as Gopala on that occasion.

There is also an interesting incident in the life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi which equates Sri Ramakrishna with Gopala. Small images of Gopala are worshipped in many Hindu households. From Vrindaban the Holy Mother brought a small image of the crawling Gopala, which lay thereafter at her Jayrambati house without any worship. One day, as the Mother lay on her
cot, she saw Gopala crawling to the cot and saying, "You brought me here, but have shelved me away — you don’t give me any food, you don’t worship. If you don’t worship me, none will." The Mother got up at once, brought out Gopala from where he was and kissed him by touching his chin with her hand, and after offering him some flowers, placed him near Thakur’s picture. From that day onwards Gopala never again missed his daily worship along with Thakur’s. The Holy Mother regarded her own husband Sri Ramakrishna as her child — so universal and complete was her divine motherhood! Evidently she did not find any distinction between Thakur and Gopala and so she worshipped them together on an equal footing.

The popular Bengali saying, 'Mother Kali is awake in the Kali Yuga, Gopala is awake in the Kali Yuga' was fully vindicated in the Sarada-Ramakrishna Incarnation. Mother Kali became fully awake and living in the form of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Gopala became fully awake and living in this age in the divine person of Sri Ramakrishna.

15. SRI SARADA DEVI AS VISHNUPRIYA

Whenever the Lord comes down as an Avatar, His Sakti also accompanies him in a feminine guise. The descents of Sita with Rama, Radha with Krishna, Vishnupriya with Chaitanya and Sarada with Ramakrishna prove this fact. The Holy Mother often pointed out her eternal relationship with Thakur in this manner to a chosen few. When Nalini Sarkar of Midnapore asked her once, "Mother, did you come with all incarnations?", she replied, "Yes, my son".¹
sunset. Aghoremani Devi lived continuously for two months in a divine mood, taking care of the child Gopala. She knew that Sri Ramakrishna was none other than her Gopala. After two months she didn’t see the divine form of the deity Gopala continuously, but could see him whenever she meditated. Sri Ramakrishna told Gopal Ma, “You have achieved much. The body can’t continue in the Kali Yuga if such a state persists for a long time.”

The mother and Child aspects of God certainly respond to spiritual aspirants in the Kali Yuga: Gopal-Ma’s wonderful spiritual realisations prove the truth of the saying.

In the year 1885, Balaram Bose performed the car-festival of Lord Jagannath in his house which was attended by Sri Ramakrishna, Gopal-Ma and other devotees. Shortly before Aghoremani came Sri Ramakrishna assumed the form of Gopala as seen in His metal images, in the crawling posture with the right hand raised in the gesture of asking for some food with the face turned upwards, with wistful eyes expressing delight and wanting something. All said of Aghoremani Devi, “Ah, the wonderful devotion! Thakur has assumed the form of Gopala Himself on account of the urge of devotion.”

Though Sri Ramakrishna was then an old man, his childish posture appeared divine and struck onlookers as wonderful and genuine. He was seen and felt by all those present as Gopala on that occasion.

There is also an interesting incident in the life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi which equates Sri Ramakrishna with Gopala. Small images of Gopala are worshipped in many Hindu households. From Vrindaban the Holy Mother brought a small image of the crawling Gopala, which lay thereafter at her Jayrambati house without any worship. One day, as the Mother lay on her.
cot, she saw Gopala crawling to the cot and saying, "You brought me here, but have shelved me away — you don't give me any food, you don't worship. If you don't worship me, none will." The Mother got up at once, brought out Gopala from where he was and kissed him by touching his chin with her hand, and after offering him some flowers, placed him near Thakur's picture. From that day onwards Gopala never again missed his daily worship along with Thakur's.  The Holy Mother regarded her own husband Sri Ramakrishna as her child — so universal and complete was her divine motherhood! Evidently she did not find any distinction between Thakur and Gopala and so she worshipped them together on an equal footing.

The popular Bengali saying, 'Mother Kali is awake in the Kali Yuga, Gopala is awake in the Kali Yuga' was fully vindicated in the Sarada-Ramakrishna Incarnation. Mother Kali became fully awake and living in the form of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Gopala became fully awake and living in this age in the divine person of Sri Ramakrishna.

15. SRI SARADA DEVI AS VISHNUPRIYA

Whenever the Lord comes down as an Avatar, His Sakti also accompanies him in a feminine guise. The descents of Sita with Rama, Radha with Krishna, Vishnupriya with Chaitanya and Sarada with Ramakrishna prove this fact. The Holy Mother often pointed out her eternal relationship with Thakur in this manner to a chosen few. When Nalini Sarkar of Midnapore asked her once, "Mother, did you come with all incarnations?", she replied, "Yes, my son".1
Sri Ramakrishna often spoke of himself as the embodiment of Chaitanya, Nityananda and Advaita—all three in one body. Therefore one would expect to find in the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi the characteristics of Vishnupriya, Jahnava and Sita, the Saktis (wives) of Chaitanya, Nityananda and Advaita respectively.

Vishnupriya Devi was the second wife of Sri Chaitanya, known as Nimai in his pre-monastic life. His first wife Lakshmi had died earlier at the age of sixteen. Vishnupriya was endowed with all auspicious qualities befitting her divine husband. But Nimai’s mind soon turned irresistibly towards Krishna and he could no more continue the householder’s life. He took sannyasa at the age of 24, leaving his young wife Vishnupriya to take care of his aged and broken-hearted mother Sachi Devi. Sri Chaitanya’s sannyas is as poignant as that of Buddha’s. It has became one of the immortal themes of Bengali Vaishnavism.

‘Nimai Sannyas’ (The Sannyasa of Sri Chaitanya) was staged as a Bengali drama by Girish Chandra Ghosh in his Star Theatre, which was once seen and appreciated by Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur also took sannyasa before undertaking Vedantic sadhana in the year 1865 A.D. But he did it secretly so that the feelings of his aged mother Chandramani Devi would not be wounded. Unlike Sri Chaitanya, Thakur didn’t abandon his wife either. Thus the poignant scenes which followed ‘Nimai Sannyas’ were carefully avoided in the Ramakrishna Avatar; at the same time Thakur was as great a sannyasin in every respect as Sri Chaitanya was. ‘Gadai Sannyas’ (The Sannyasa of Sri Ramakrishna) is thus an improvised version of ‘Nimai Sannyas’. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Sri Chaitanya, an Incarnation of God, took sannyasa so that
others would salute him; all those who salute an Avatar achieve liberation. Sri Chaitanya's early abandonment of Vishnupriya Devi was therefore without any blame.

Vishnupriya's life after her divine husband left as a sannyasin reminds us of the Holy Mother's life after the Mahasamadhi of Thakur. She devoted most of her time to devotional practices and mental worship of her divine husband, Sri Chaitanya. Vishnupriya counted a grain of rice uttering the name of God along with it. When the intended count was over, she cooked the rice for her only meal of the day. She took care of her aged mother-in-law Sachi Devi. The Holy Mother also devoted herself to the service of Chandramani Devi, her aged mother-in-law. After the Mahasamadhi of Thakur in 1886, Sri Sarada Devi also spent her life in the worship of her divine husband as God, just like Vishnupriya Devi.

The personal qualities of Vishnupriya were also seen in the Holy Mother to a large extent. Vishnupriya was extremely bashful like Sarada and rarely met anyone outside her family circle. Before the devotees of Sri Chaitanya, Vishnupriya appeared behind a curtain, so that only her feet were visible. Sri Sarada Devi's life was a replay of Vishnupriya's in these respects. Both the ladies led austere lives, in general, characterised by devotion, renunciation and service befitting the consorts of Incarnations of God.

Jahnava was the second wife of Sri Nityananda, the spiritual twin of Sri Chaitanya. When Sri Nityananda passed away, his son Virabhadra, who later became a great Vaishnava teacher, was very young. Therefore Nityananda's mantle fell on Jahnava, who was thoroughly fitted for the task. She possessed a dominant personality and was well-read in the Bhagavata and other Vaishnavite
scriptures. She maintained a close contact with the Goswamins of Vrindavan, such as Sanatana, Rupa and Jiva. Jahnava thereby curbed the fissiparous tendencies that had surfaced in Chaitanya's Vaishnavism. She attended the festivals and gatherings to which the leading Vaishnavites were invited and her status was in no way inferior to the most prominent of the leading Goswamins. Thus Jahnava was the Sangha-Mata of Bengali Vaishnavism.

Jahnava's close contact with the direct disciples of Sri Chaitanya finds a parallel in the Holy Mother's spiritual relationship with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Like Jahnava who attended Vaishnava festivals, the Holy Mother also attended important functions at the Belur Math like the Durga Puja. Just as Jahnava cemented the Chaitanya Sangha by acting as an important link between the direct disciples of Sri Chaitanya at Vrindavan and his householder devotees at Bengal, Sri Sarada Devi was also an integrating spiritual force who bound together the monastic disciples and the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna with the invisible cords of her motherly love.

Sri Advaita Acharya lived long after the passing away of Sri Chaitanya. Even during Sri Advaita's lifetime, his wife Sita took charge of the groups of Vaishnavas who gathered round him and she had a following of her own. Two of them, Nandini and Jangali, her personal servants, were reputed to have extraordinary powers. Thus Sita's spiritual eminence has earned for her permanent recognition among the leaders of Gauḍāyya Vaishnavism.

The Holy Mother also played a role similar to that of Sita. She took charge of innumerable devotees of Sri Ramakrishna by giving them spiritual initiation.
Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were to Sri Sarada Devi what Nandini and Jangali were to Sita.

Vishnupriya Devi admittedly did not take an active part in the spiritual administration of the Chaitanya Sangha. But she did one thing important: she was the first to start the worship of Sri Chaitanya by having the first image of her husband carved out of margosa wood and installing it in a shrine. Similarly the first real worship of Sri Ramakrishna was started by his wife Sri Sarada Devi. The first copy of the photograph of Thakur that is now worshipped in thousands of homes was rejected because it was very black. It was given to a Brahmin of Dakshineswar who shortly thereafter left it in the custody of the Holy Mother. The Brahmin never returned to claim it. The Mother placed it along with other deities and went on worshipping it with flowers and food. One day Sri Ramakrishna came to the Nahabat and found this out. This dark photograph gradually became lighter! Thus the Holy Mother started the worship of the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna even during his lifetime.

Sukumar Sen observes, "Chaitanya’s faith put new life into the people, and by raising the position of Radha above that of Krishna, it indirectly put a premium on the merit of womanhood as such. It is then no wonder that from the middle of Sixteenth Century women spiritual leaders or gurus made their sporadic but unmistakable appearance in Bengali Vaishnavism. The first two Vaishnava Acharyas were the junior wives of Nityananda and Advaita, the two leaders of Vaishnavism in Bengal after Chaitanya."

The elevation of women which was started in Bengal by the Chaitanya movement has been taken up and further accelerated by the Ramakrishna movement. If Chaitanya
exalted Radha above Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna, exalted the Mother Goddess Kali above all deities by his example. In the footsteps of Jahnava and Sita, the Bhairavi Brahmani the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Sister Nivedita and Gauri-Ma all became Acharyas in their own right in the Ramakrishna movement. A separate monastery for women named ‘Sarada Math’ has also come up to continue the liberation of women. Vishnupriya Devi, Jahnava and Sita were thus forerunners of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the greatest woman-Acharya the world has ever seen, who embodied in herself all previous Acharyas.

16. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS CHAITANYA

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is perhaps the greatest teacher of Bhakti the world has ever known. Sri Chaitanya (1486-1533 A.D.), also known popularly as Gauranga and Nimai, started his life as a Sanskrit scholar and teacher, but a visit to Gaya turned the course of his life. He was initiated into the Gopala Mantra by Iswara Puri at Gaya. He renounced the world soon at the age of 24 and went on a pilgrimage to South India which lasted for six years. He manifested the ecstatic devotional fervour of the great Tamil Alwars and later popularised the path of Madhura Bhava towards Krishna which had been practised and perfected by Sri Nammalwar and Sri Andal several centuries earlier. Chaitanya spent the last eighteen years of his life at Puri and made Jagannath the main deity of his cult of Krishna. Sri Chaitanya is worshipped by Bengali Vaishnavites as the Avatar of Krishna in the spiritual mould of Radha.
Sri Ramakrishna was cast in the same spiritual mould of Sri Chaitanya with the difference that the ecstatic devotion which the latter manifested exclusively towards Krishna was manifested by the former towards all deities and Avatars. There are numerous coincidences between these two great Incarnations of God: birth in Bengal in a Vaishnavite Brahmin family, significant association with the holy Vishnupada of Gaya and constant spiritual ecstasy especially in the later half of life.

The Yogeswari Bhairavi Brahmani, who arrived at Dakshineswar in 1861 A.D., was the first to detect the unmistakable signs of the extremely rare spiritual state of Mahabhava in Sri Ramakrishna and proclaim him as the reincarnation of Sri Chaitanya. Sri Ramakrishna was at once attracted to the highly spiritual soul Bhairavi and told her about all his extraordinary spiritual visions, constant burning sensation in the body, loss of consciousness while taking about God and so on, due to which he was then considered by the populace as mad.

The Bhairavi Brahmani was well-versed in the scriptures of Sri Chaitanya’s school of Vaishnavism. She diagnosed Sri Ramakrishna’s condition as Mahabhava brought about by extreme yearning for God and prescribed that he should wear garlands and apply sandal-paste on his body just like Sri Chaitanya did such in a state. Sri Ramakrishna did so and found good relief from all his physical problems caused by his ‘Viraha Bhakti’ (devotional hankering).

The Brahmani also recalled Sri Chaitanya’s prophecy in the Chaitanya Bhagavata about his second-coming: “Throwing his arms around Advaita’s neck, Sri Chaitanya says again and again: ‘I will manifest my wonderful play once more. My form will be that of bliss, during the
singing of the glory of God.’” She quoted again: “Gora (Sri Chaitanya) acts hisplay even today. It is persons of the rarest good fortune that are privileged to witness it.”1 The Bhairavi Brahmani was herself one such person of the rarest good fortune who was privileged not only to witness but to proclaim to the world Sri Chaitanya’s wonderful play in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna narrated to the Bhairavi a wonderful vision he had seen while going in a palanquin from Kamarpukur to Sihar in the year 1861: two beautiful boys of a tender age came out of his body, walked merrily by the side of the palanquin for a long time and then merged with his body again. The Bhairavi then said, “My child, what you have seen is all true; Chaitanya is manifest this time in Nityananda’s sheath—Nityananda and Chaitanya have come together this time and are both residing in one and the same receptacle.”9

Sri Ramakrishna had a similar experience again at Navadwip (Nadia), the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya, when he went on a pilgrimage there along with Mathur Babu in the year 1870 A.D. He saw only wooden images of Sri Chaitanya everywhere at Nadia and was disappointed. But on the return trip, Sri Ramakrishna again saw two divine boys in a vision. As he was getting into the boat, he saw two wonderful boys of incomparable beauty with complexions of molten gold and with haloes of light around their heads; they came running towards him in the sky and entered his body. This vision convinced Sri Ramakrishna beyond all doubt that Sri Chaitanya and his spiritual twin Sri Nityananda were both divine incarnations.8

In the year 1875 A.D., Sri Ramakrishna felt a strong desire to witness the wonderful Sankirtan of Sri Chaitanya
and his followers which the Divine Mother Kali fulfilled immediately. Standing outside his room, Thakur saw wonderful waves of devotees singing 'kirtan' and dancing from the Panchavati to the main gate of the Dakshineswar temple who all then disappeared behind a tree. He saw Sri Chaitanya with his companions Nityananda and Advaita on either side. They were all in high states of spiritual ecstasy; some people lost all control over themselves in their divine bliss and some danced wildly. He saw the faces of Balaram Bose and Mahendranath Gupta in that party.

Sri Ramakrishna himself told Narendra repeatedly that he (Thakur) was Chaitanya incarnate. Narendra also found many extraordinary events in Thakur’s life which forced him to acknowledge that fact. One day in 1884, Narendranath related to Sarat (Swami Saradananda) his own spiritual experiences in this regard. Naren suddenly burst out with the Bengali song—

"Gora Ray (Chaitanya) distributes the wealth of his love,
Nitai Chand calls, 'Come, come.'
Come, O You, who long to have it,
Jarfulls of love are being poured out,
Yet it does not get exhausted.
Santipur is being flooded and Nadia is swept off!
Nadia is swept off by the current of Gora’s love."

Narendra then said gently, "He (Sri Ramakrishna) is actually distributing love. Gora Ray is bestowing love, devotion, divine knowledge, liberation and whatever else one may desire, on whomsoever he likes. Oh, the wonderful power! (He sat silent and remained motionless for a while.) I was lying on my bed at night with the door of my room bolted from within, when he suddenly
attracted me and took me — the one that lives within this body — to Dakshineswar. Giving me a great deal of instruction and talking on various subjects, he allowed me to return. He can do anything he likes, this Gora Ray of Dakshineswar can do anything."

Regarding the spiritual experiences of Sri Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna has said: "Chaitanyadeva used to experience three spiritual states: the super-conscious, the semi-conscious and the conscious. In the inmost state he would see God and go into samadhi. He would be in the state of jada samadhi (Nirvikalpa Samadhi). In the semi-conscious state he would be partially conscious of the outer world. In the conscious state he would sing the name and glories of God.

"Sometimes there appears that unique composite light which may be called the lunar-solar light and to this may be compared the unique Incarnations like Chaitanya Deva, who are marked alike by Bhakti and Jnana. Their case is like the sun and the moon appearing in the firmament at one and the same time. The manifestation of Jnana and Bhakti in one and the same person is as unique an occurrence as the phenomenon referred to above."

Whenever Sri Ramakrishna saw visions of a particular deity, immediately followers of that faith came to him in large numbers. This happened again after his vision of Sri Chaitanya's wonderful Sankirtan party. He went to Kamarpukur shortly thereafter and visited the nearby village of Syambazar at the invitation of Natavar Goswami. There Sri Ramakrishna manifested himself in a wonderful manner as Sri Chaitanya.

Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Natavar Goswami's house for seven days and enjoyed the bliss of Sankirtan with the Vaishnavas of Syambazar. People heard about the
wonderful ecstasies of Thakur then and news spread fast that a man died and came to life several times in a day! People then forgot food and sleep and in their anxiety to see Sri Ramakrishna, climbed up trees and got on rooftops of houses! They became mad with celestial bliss and rushed to see Sri Ramakrishna and touch his feet, as if he were Sri Chaitanya himself! Thakur had no time even to take his bath and meal. Secretly he returned to Sihar with Hriday, when that mart of bliss came to an end.⁶

The mad scenes of divine bliss that took place when Sri Ramakrishna was at Syambazar were virtual replays of the wonderful Sankirtan of Sri Chaitanya that he had just witnessed in a vision at Dakshineswar. Later Sri Ramakrishna said that at Syambazar he experienced the Yogamaya, the mysterious divine power of the Lord that attracts vast numbers of people to Him when He incarnates Himself on earth as Avatars like Sri Chaitanya.

In the year 1870 A.D., Sri Ramakrishna visited the Harisabha of Kolutola in Calcutta, to hear the reading of the Bhagavata, the foremost Vaishnava scripture. The members of that Harisabha regarded themselves as having taken absolute refuge at Sri Chaitanya’s holy feet. A separate seat called ‘Sri Chaitanya’s seat’ was kept there, decorated with flowers. The devotees sincerely believed that Sri Chaitanya was present in spirit in that seat while the Bhagavata was read. Therefore nobody was allowed to occupy that holy seat.

Sri Ramakrishna was welcomed with great joy at the Harisabha of Kolutola on his arrival there. He lost himself in ecstasy while the Bhagavata was read. Suddenly he ran towards the seat of Sri Chaitanya, stood on it with
uplifted hands and was lost in profound ecstasy. The devotees felt as if Sri Chaitanya himself was standing there before them in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. They also became ecstatic and began singing devotional songs. They all sang and danced for a long time. Sri Ramakrishna then returned to Dakshineswar.  

While Sri Ramakrishna occupied the seat of Sri Chaitanya, nobody objected, as everyone was overwhelmed with an indescribable awe and remained calm, thoroughly charmed. But the incident was afterwards reported to the great saint Bhagavan Das Babaji of Kalna, the undisputed spiritual teacher of Bengali Vaishnavas then. Bhagavan Das became infuriated to hear that some person had committed sacrilege by occupying the holy seat of Sri Chaitanya at the Harisabha of Kolutola and ordered that such incidents should never be allowed to take place in future. Shortly after these events, Sri Ramakrishna went to Kalna with Mathur Babu and Hriday to meet the same saint Bhagavan Das of whom he had heard much.

Sri Ramakrishna felt nervous like a child about meeting the great Babaji and covered himself from head to foot with a piece of cloth. Hriday went first to inform the coming of his uncle and heard Bhagavan Das saying, "Some great soul, it seems, has come to the hermitage." When Sri Ramakrishna came and saluted the Babaji, the latter was rebuking a Vaishnava Sadhu for some misdeed and threatening to expel him from the community. Then Hriday opened the conversation with the Babaji saying, "Sir, why do you count your beads even now? You have become perfect, you have no necessity for that." Bhagavan Das at first professed humility and then replied that he was doing so only to teach others by example. Thakur then got annoyed with the words of the Babaji and
rebuked him saying, "What, are you so egoistic even now? Will you teach people? Will you expel him? Who are you to teach people? Will you teach them, if to whom the world belongs, does not do that?"

The covering of Sri Ramakrishna's body had then fallen and his face shone with a divine effulgence. Bhagavan Das was taken aback by Thakur's sudden outburst, but he instinctively realised the truth behind it. Sri Chaitanya teaches that a Vaishnava must be 'humbler than a blade of grass and patient like a tree.' But egotism and pride had gradually crept into Bhagavan Das Babaji's mind because of the respect that he received from all the Vaishnavas as a renowned teacher. It was as if Sri Chaitanya himself corrected that shortcoming of Bhagavan Das by appearing before him in the person of Sri Ramakrishna! Bhagavan Das was profoundly impressed to witness the divine ecstasy of Sri Ramakrishna during the conversation on the Lord that followed. Later the Babaji came to know that it was Sri Ramakrishna who had occupied the seat of Sri Chaitanya in the Harisabha of Kolutola in a state of ecstasy. Bhagavan Das then repented having called such a great soul names earlier.

Traditionally Sri Chaitanya has been projected only as a great teacher of Bhakti; no one before Sri Ramakrishna has asserted that he was also a Jnani who inwardly experienced the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. To illustrate Sri Chaitanya's spiritual mood, Sri Ramakrishna has given the analogy of the elephant which has two sets of teeth, the tusks outside and the grinders inside. The elephant's tusks are readily seen by others but the grinders are not; Similarly Sri Chaitanya manifested Bhakti outside, though inwardly he was a great Jnani.
According to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Chaitanya also acknowledged Sakti, the Divine Mother. This again is a new piece of information regarding Sri Chaitanya! Sri Ramakrishna spoke from direct spiritual experience; he was none other than Sri Chaitanya reborn and so he could recollect exactly the spiritual moods of the latter and speak about them authoritatively. Like Sri Gauranga, Thakur was also all Bhakti outside and all Jnana within. He was cast in the same spiritual mould of Sri Chaitanya with the difference that his devotion was not confined to Krishna.

If Sri Chaitanya renewed the Krishna ideal, Sri Ramakrishna has renewed all spiritual ideals, including the Chaitanya ideal! Sri Ramakrishna’s practice of Sri Chaitanya’s path of Madhura Bhava and his spiritual experiences concerning the latter have opened new channels and fresh pastures for the spread of Sri Chaitanya’s gospel of love. Perhaps this is the significance of Sri Chaitanya’s second coming in Bengal in this age in the divine person of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

17. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS NITYANANDA

Sri Nityananda was a constant companion and follower of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In Bengali Vaishnavism, Chaitanya and Nityananda are revered as the incarnations of Krishna and Balarama respectively. Sri Chaitanya stayed at Puri in the last eighteen years of his life and was always absorbed in Krishna consciousness. It was left to his spiritual twin Sri Nityananda to travel to different places and spread Sri Chaitanya’s gospel of divine
love. His wife Jahnavi and son Veerabhadra also became leaders in Bengali Vaishnavism later.

Sri Ramakrishna highly appreciated the vigorous efforts of Nityananda in spreading the glory of the name of God by adopting innovative methods and travelling from place to place. He has said, "Worldly people will never listen to you if you ask them to renounce everything and devote themselves whole-heartedly to God. Therefore Chaitanya and Nitai (Nityananda), after some deliberation made an arrangement to attract the worldly. They would say to such persons, 'Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have a delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman.' Many people, attracted by the fish and the woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God’s hallowed name, they would realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth. The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of divine love. Nitai would employ any means to make people repeat Hari’s name".¹

Chaitanya and Nityananda wiped out all caste inequalities among Hindus in a most natural manner and cemented the Hindu society together by their wonderful message of divine love. Thakur has observed in this connection, "The caste system can be removed by one means only and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body and the soul of a man become purified by divine love. Chaitanya and Nityananda scattered the name of Hari to everyone including the pariah and embraced them all. A brahmin without this love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti an untouchable becomes pure and elevated."²
One of the highlights of Sri Nityananda’s career as a spiritual teacher is the redemption of two ruffians called Jagai and Madhai. These two came to disturb the sankirtan party of Chaitanya and Nityananda and hit the latter with a piece of broken pottery. They were transformed by the divine touch and causeless mercy of Nitai and became ardent followers of Sri Chaitanya. In the drama ‘Chaitanya Lila’ staged by Girish Chandra Ghosh at the Star theatre, there was one scene in which Nitai’s confrontation with Jagai and Madhai was enacted. Sri Ramakrishna witnessed this drama on Friday, September 19, 1884.¹

Sri Chaitanya was a vast reservoir of divine love and Sri Nityananda was the main channel through which that love flowed to humanity. Many places in Bengal have become sanctified by the touch of the divine feet of the two blessed brothers Chaitanya and Nityananda. Sri Ramakrishna visited some of these holy places like Navadvip, Kalna and Panihati, associated with the Chaitanya-Nityananda Incarnation. Of these, Panihati on the banks of the Ganges is only a few miles away from Dakshineswar. An important annual festival is celebrated by Bengali Vaishnavas at Panihati to commemorate the meeting of Sri Nityananda Prabhu there with Raghunath Das Goswami, a direct disciple of Sri Chaitanya.

When the rich and devout Raghunath wanted to embrace monastic life, Sri Chaitanya asked him to wait for sometime. Raghunath later met Sri Nityananda, the spiritual twin of Sri Chaitanya, at Panihati on the Ganga, a few miles north of Calcutta. Sri Nityananda asked Raghunath to feed devotees with flattened rice, curd, milk, sugar, plantain etc., mixed into a paste after offering
it first to the deity Radhakanta at Panihati. Thereafter Sri Nityananda asked Raghunath to renounce the world and join Sri Chaitanya at Puri. In the footsteps of Raghunath Das Goswami, the annual fair of Panihati is still celebrated by Bengali Vaishnavas to obtain the grace of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Nityananda. Sri Ramakrishna participated in the Panihati festival several times. In the year 1885, he attended the festival for the last time along with a number of devotees, despite suffering from throat trouble, and was seen by thousands as a manifestation of Sri Nityananda himself.

When Sri Ramakrishna reached Panihati, he was welcomed by Mani Sen who was then in charge of the Radhakanta temple. When Thakur was saluting the images of Radha and Krishna, a sankirtan party entered the temple and started singing. Soon a hypocrite of a Vaishnava joined them and with the view to make some money by playing on the faith of devotees, he began to roar, dance and gesticulate as if he were in spiritual ecstasy. Sri Ramakrishna had been warned by devotees not to participate in sankirtan as it would aggravate his throat trouble. Seeing the Goswami feigning ecstasy, Thakur exclaimed to Narendra and others in a low voice, "Mark the hypocrisy."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna went in one bound to the middle of the kirtan party and entered into ecstasy. Now and then he danced wonderfully with the strength of a lion. While dancing in Bhava Samadhi, proceeding and receding with rapid steps to the timing of the music, Thakur seemed like a fish swimming about in great delight in a sea of bliss. People marvelled at the happysynthesis of divine power, beauty and perfect balance in his dance. It contrasted sharply with the
false and crude gestures of the hypocritical Goswami. Under divine emotions, Sri Ramakrishna’s body appeared taller, lighter and brighter. His face beamed with glory, peace, bliss and compassion and spread a wonderful light which illumined all sides. Bewitched, as it were, by the wonderful sight, the vast congregation forgot everything else and followed him.

Sri Ramakrishna and his party then came out of the Radhakanta temple and entered the cottage of Raghava. Inspired by Sri Ramakrishna’s divinely bright beauty, charming dance and repeated spiritual ecstasy, the kirtan party, with its zeal worked up to the highest pitch, began singing:

"Who takes the name of Hari on the bank of the Ganga? It seems Nitai, the bestower of divine of love has come. Who takes the name of Hari And sings victory to Radha? It seems Nitai, the bestower of divine love, has come. Our Nitai, the giver of love, has come. How can our hearts be soothed without him? Here comes our Nitai, the bestower of love."

The people pointed their fingers at Sri Ramakrishna and danced with great delight repeating the line, "Here comes our Nitai, the bestower of love.!” Then another hypocrite came and put some sweets into Sri Ramakrishna’s mouth. As soon as the man touched Thakur, he winced, spat out the food and washed his mouth. Thakur then touched one Navachaitanya Mitra of Konnagar in a divine mood, when the latter fell at his feet wept and prayed, “Please bestow your grace of me”. Thakur’s touch had a wonderful effect on Navachaitanya, who danced and entered into ecstasy. He sang the glory
of Sri Ramakrishna in various hymns and bowed down to him again and again. Thakur then soothed him by passing his hand on his back and gave him various instructions Sri Ramakrishna was verily a Navachaitanya (new Chaitanya) on this holy occasion!

Sri Ramakrishna had no sleep that night after returning to Dakshineswar on account of a burning sensation all over his body. All sorts of people had touched his divine person at Panihati and got themselves purified and blessed. It was as if Sri Nityananda himself had appeared as Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna during the Panihati festival and blessed innumerable Vaishnavas.

Sri Ramakrishna told his chief disciple Narendranath many times, "In me alone are embodied Advaita, Chaitanya and Nityananda. I am all these three." Thakur has said that if one merges 'chaitanya' (consciousness) into 'nityananda' (bliss of God), one realises the truth of 'advaita' (non-dualism). He has also said that the elephant has two sets of teeth, the tusks outside and the grinders inside; similarly Sri Chaitanya was seen externally as enjoying Nityananda (bliss of God) but internally he realised Advaita (the truth of non-dualism). Thakur spoke thus from direct experience as he was none other than the trinity of Chaitanya, Nityananda and Advaita, literally and figuratively!
18. SRI SARADA DEVI AS UMA

Uma is a famous name of the Divine Mother which has been explained variously: "It has been held that the vowel 'U' means Siva and 'Ma' means to measure; the goddess who measures Siva, that is, the Sakti of Siva is called Uma. Kalidasa says in his Kumara-Sambhava that Parvati (the Divine Mother born as the daughter of the Himalayan mountains) was dissuaded by Her mother Mena from resorting to austere penance for obtaining Siva as Her husband with the words, 'U, Ma' (Oh, don't) and hence is the name Uma for Parvati. The view that 'Uma' represents a variant of the mystic syllable 'Aum' composed of the letters a, u, m and as such stands as the first symbol for the manifestation of the unmanifest, seems to be a later esoteric interpretation. The Babylonian Ummu or Umma, the Accadian Ummi and the Dravidian Umma can be connected with each other and with the Sanskrit word 'Uma' — all meaning the Mother-Goddess."

In the Kena Upanishad, there is reference to Uma-Haimavati (Uma of golden hue) who dazzled the gods with Her divine splendour and explained to Indra that it was Brahman, the great Incomprehensible One who gave victory to the gods over the Asuras (demons). This implies that the Goddess Uma-Haimavati is the supreme, personal manifestation of the Impersonal Brahman. 'Haimavati' is interpreted by some people to refer to the Himalayas or Himavat whose daughter was Uma. 'Uma-Haimavati' of Kenopanishad later became famous as the 'Uma-Parvati' of the Puranas.

According to the Puranas, the Divine Mother incarnated Herself as Uma or Parvati, the daughter of Mena and Himavan. She wanted to marry only Siva, the great ascetic.
Siva had earlier burnt Kama, the god of love, to ashes and therefore Mena considered that it would be impossible for Uma to succeed in getting Lord Sive as Her husband. Uma felt that Her youthful beauty was useless in winning the hand of Siva. Therefore She performed severe austerities, pleased Siva with Her devotion and succeeded in getting Siva as Her husband. This Puranic story illustrates the truth that the Jiva (symbolised by Uma) can reach the Paramatman (Siva) only by spiritual practices and not by worldly riches or embellishments.

The divine marriage of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi with Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna also contains all the essential features of the story of Uma-Maheswara. When the Holy Mother was married to Thakur, she was but a mere child of five years. As Uma, the Mother had performed enough austerities in her previous birth to get the Lord as her husband; therefore this time she didn't have to perform any penance for that purpose! At the time of her marriage, the child Sarada had no comprehension whatsoever of the implications of marriage. It was only a betrothal in effect. When the Holy Mother grew up and attained the age of eighteen, she heard from one and all at Jayrambati that her husband Sri Ramakrishna had renounced 'Kamini Kanchana' (lust and lucre) like Siva, that he was a mad ascetic who resorted to cremation-grounds for spiritual practices like Siva and so on. The young girl Sarada was given to understand that her hopes of a married life with Sri Ramakrishna were finished just as Uma was given to understand by Mena that her hopes of a married life with Siva were futile.

Only the pure-hearted aunt Bhanu consoled and encouraged the bewildered Sarada and her mother Shyamasundari Devi. Aunt Bhanu was pure and therefore
had a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna's divinity. She recognised even in those early days and in her own way, Thakur and the Holy Mother as Siva and His consort Uma.  

Sri Sarada Devi set out for Dakshineswar in 1872 A.D., to verify the truth regarding Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur welcomed her very kindly. He tested her by asking, "Have you come to drag me down to a worldly life?" He was very glad to find that the Holy Mother's mind was as free from worldly desires as his own was. The Holy Mother, like Uma, instinctively knew that youth and physical beauty were of no avail in winning the favour of the Lord. She led a life given to intense austerities and sadhana, recalling the penance of Uma. Her whole life was a saga of selfless service to suffering humanity. Thereby Sri Sarada Devi truly became 'the better-half' of Sri Ramakrishna, just like Uma, who literally succeeded in becoming 'the better-half' of Siva in His Ardhanareeswara (half Uma, half Maheswara) aspect. The ideal spiritual marriage of Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna is thus a modern version of the ancient ideal of Uma-Maheswara, which according to Swami Vivekananda constitutes "a junction of the two great streams of thought, Monasticism and mother-worship."

In the year 1891 A.D. Swami Saradananda went to Jayrambati with certain devotees to attend the worship of the deity Jagaddhatri there. At that time the grandmother Shyamasundari Devi recounted many incidents of Thakur’s life to her ‘grandchildren’ like Kalikrishna and others. One day Haridas Vairagi, a roving minstrel of Desra, came and sang to the tune of his violin:

"What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter). (Dear me) ! I hear from people—say if that is true, O Siva's wife —
That you’ve got the name Annapurna at Benares.
O Aparna (Uma), when I married you (to Siva),
Siva went about begging for morsels.
Today what delightful news I hear, O giver of fortune!
Are you the Goddess seated at the left of the God of the Universe?
Mad and eccentric they called my naked one (Siva),
Abuses galore have I endured thereafter in houses innumerable;
Now sit door-keepers at the naked one’s door, they say;
And Indra, Chandra and Yama get no interview.
Siva had the Himalayas as his abode;
Days there were when begging brought his daily food;
Now he rolls in Kubera’s wealth.
Has fortune smiled on him by your good luck?
There’s indeed more affluence now, methinks,
Else how is Gauri (Uma) so proud?
She opens not her eyes at her own son,
And turns her face at Radhika’s (poet’s) name.”

The song was, so to say, an exact replica of the Holy Mother’s life; and so every one heard it with rapt attention. After the Vairagi was gone with some presents, Shyamasundari Devi, the mother of Sri Sarada Devi, commented, “Forsooth, my dears, in those days all called my son-in-law (Thakur) as mad, cursed my Sarada’s fortune, and flung many a hard word at me; so I felt like dying. And see today, what a number of boys and girls of good families are worshipping at Sarada’s feet thinking her to be a goddess!” Thus the grandmother Shyamasundari Devi compared herself to Mena, her daughter Sri Sarada Devi to Uma, and her son-in-law Sri Ramakrishna to Siva.
The Himalayas are eternally associated with Uma-Maheswara. In the year 1898 A. D. Swami Vivekananda was in Kashmir, in the midst of the Himalayas, along with his western disciples. His mind then was preoccupied with the thought of Uma-Maheswara. To his disciples he would speak of the Pauranic conception of the oneness of Siva and His consort Uma, under the guise of half-man and half-woman (Ardhanarishwara) representing the junction of two great streams of thought, monasticism and mother-worship, or the vision of truth inseparable from renunciation and love supreme.

Swamiji in Kashmir was inspired by the ideal of the great ascetic, Siva. He had an overwhelming vision of Siva at the holy cave, Amarnath. Thereafter his devotion concentrated itself on the Mother. It was sweet and touching for all to see how he would worship as Uma, the little, four-year old daughter of his Mohammedan boatman. He also went to the famous shrine of Kshir-Bhavani and worshipped the deity like any humble pilgrim. And as a special sadhana, he worshipped every morning a Brahmin Pundit’s little daughter as Uma-Kumari, the Divine Virgin. Thus Swami Vivekananda himself was a junction of the monasticism of Siva and the mother-worship centred on Uma.

The Ramakrishna Trinity has brought the ancient Uma-Maheswara ideal from the heights of the Himalayas to the plains of India. Monasticism and mother-worship, as it were, are the two pillars of the Ramakrishna Order of monks, established by Swami Vivekananda. The lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda demonstrate how these twin ideals could be practised together to perfection. Sri Ramakrishna has taught that it is difficult to practice
monasticism and renunciation, unless one practises Mother-worship too, looking upon all women as the embodiments of Uma, the Divine Mother. Like Uma and Maheswara, Sarada and Ramakrishna stand for Mother-worship and monasticism. Thus the divine pair of Sarada-Ramakrishna has rejuvenated the ancient ideal of Uma-Maheswara and demonstrated its importance and utility in this modern, materialistic age.

19. SRI SARADA DEVI AS PARVATI

'Parvati' literally means 'the daughter of the mountains'. According to the Puranas, the Divine Mother incarnated Herself as Parvati, the daughter of Mena and Himavan. She practised severe austerities like the 'Pancha tapa' and obtained Siva, the Lord of the Himalayas, as her husband. Therefore the Himalayas (especially the peak Kailâs) are considered the eternal abode of Siva and Parvati.

It is customary for many Sakta and Saivite scriptures to present religious ideas in the form of conversation between Siva and Parvati. This confers authenticity to the scriptures, as Siva is the eternal Guru of the universe. Even the 'Ram Charit Manas,' the famous Hindi Ramayana written by Tulsidas, follows this pattern. Such spiritual dialogues also took place in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi thus making them the Parvati and Parameswara of this age!

When the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi first arrived at the Dakshineswar temple sometime during the year
1872, Sri Ramakrishna took upon himself the task of teaching her in all secular and spiritual matters. He taught her how to conduct herself according to time, place and circumstances. He gave instructions to her so that she can recognise all his spiritual moods and bring his mind from samadhi by uttering the appropriate mantras. Thakur initiated her into various Siddha Mantras of great potency. He even drew for her on paper a diagram of the six plexuses or centres of consciousness in the human body to illustrate the lessons he was giving her on Yoga. Sri Ramakrishna was as efficient a teacher as Siva and the Holy Mother was as proficient a disciple as Parvati.

After the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, the Holy Mother suffered extreme anguish. Her dislike for life became very acute and she performed her duties mechanically. The devotees then took her on a pilgrimage in order to assuage her grief. At Benares, a nun who was well-versed in esoteric practices suggested to Sri Sarada Devi that she should undertake the ‘Panchatapa’ (penance in the midst of five fires). The Divine Mother Parvati had performed such a fiery penance.

The Holy Mother also saw spiritual visions urging her to undertake the ‘Pancha-tapa’ penance. At Kamarpukur she often saw an ochre-coloured girl aged about twelve with a necklace of ‘rudraksha’ beads on her person with hair unkempt. The Mother also saw another vision: a monk, with clean-shaven face and head suggested to her to undertake the same penance. The Holy Mother at first ignored these visions. However the desire for performing the ‘Pancha-tapa’ became active in her mind during her stay at Belur. Her companion Yogin-Ma encouraged her, saying that she would also undertake it. Then arrangements were made for the ‘Pancha-tapa’ penance of the
Holy Mother at Nilambar Mukherji's garden-house at Belur in the year 1893 A.D.

The roof of the one storeyed portion of Nilambar Babu's garden house was covered with earth and over this at intervals of about seven and a half feet (five cubits) four big fires were set ablaze in a square with cow-dung cakes, and overhead was the fiery summer sun. The Holy Mother bathed in the Gangas and then came to the fires, the sight of which filled her with dismay. But Yogin-Ma cheered saying, "‘Get in Mother, why are you afraid?’" So with a silent prayer to Thakur she got in, and Yogin-Ma sat by her. Once she was there, it seemed as though the fire had lost its heat! It is said that the yogic fire generated by penance burns even the gods; even Agni, the god of fire, is afraid of it. So it is no wonder that when the Holy Mother sat down for penance, even fire appeared to lose heat.

Sri Sarada Devi and Yogin-Ma then meditated and practised japa within the circle of fires, from sunrise in sunset. This fiery penance went on for seven days till the scorched skin of the Mother's body looked quite black. Before the Pancha-tapa, Sri Sarada Devi had a fair complexion like that of Gauri (literally, golden-hued Divine Mother, in Sanskrit); after the penance, she became black like Kali! The mental fire and grief that afflicted the Holy Mother abated a little; and the ochre-clothed girl she used to see in visions vanished for ever. It was as if the Divine Mother Parvati Herself had urged the Holy Mother to undertake the Pancha-tapa in the form of the orche-clothed girl and vanished after that purpose was served.

The Holy Mother thus withstood the fiery ordeal which mitigated to some extent her internal grief due to
the passing-away of Thakur. When a devotee asked her later, “What is the need of austerity?” the Mother replied, “Penance is necessary...... Even Parvati did it for Siva...... These are undertaken for the good of the people. Otherwise they will say, ‘Why, she eats, drinks and lives just like any other person.’...... Thakur undertook all kinds of practices. He used to say, I have made the die; You now shape your metal on it.’” An intimate devotee asked the same question and the Holy Mother replied, “For the sake of you all, my son. How can the boys do so much? Hence I have to.”

Sri Ramakrishna used to observe, “One person lights up the fire and many others warm themselves before it.” The Holy Mother lighted up the Pancha-tapa fire, true to Thakur’s words and innumerable devotees have benefited from the spiritual glow generated by it!

Sri Sarada Devi actually manifested herself as Parvati at Bangalore, during her South Indian tour in the year 1911. There is a small hillock within the compound of the Ramakrishna Ashrama there. One day a short while before dark, the Holy Mother climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard of this, he said in amazement, “Indeed! The Mother has become a dweller of the mountain, Parvatavasini,” and hurried towards the place. He was stout, and began to pant as he climbed that low hillock; but undaunted he went up straight to the Mother, prostrated himself there and laying his head on her feet chanted the three well-known verses from the ‘Chandi’ beginning with ‘Sarva mangala mangalye,’ which are recited every day during the evening prayers at the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. And he prayed “Grace!”
The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son, till the Swami felt himself fully blessed.

The great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa begins his celebrated epic ‘Raghuvsamsa’ (The dynasty of Raghu) with this famous prayer to Parvati and Parameswara:

“Vagharthaviva sampruktau vagherthapretipataye
Jagatah pitarau vande Parvati-Parameswarau,”

which means, “I salute Parvati and Parameswara, the Parents of the Universe who are ever united like word and its meaning, for the attainment of the correct knowledge of word and its meaning.”

Due to such devout prayers from the hearts of the people of India, Parvati and Parameswara came down from the Mount Kailas to be with their children in this age in the forms of Sarada and Ramakrishna. Incidentally, Kshudiram’s family is also the ‘Raghuvsamsa’ of this age: almost all its male members were named after Rama and the whole dynasty was very much devoted to its tutelary deity Rama or Raghuvir! Besides, Raghuvir took birth in this modern ‘Raghuvsamsa’ as Sri Rama-krishna and manifested Himself literally as a ‘Kalidasa’ (a servant or devotee of Kali)!

Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi are ever united like Siva and Sakti, Brahman and Its Power, fire and its burning power, or word and its meaning. They are the veritable embodiments of Parvati and Parameswara in this age!
20. SRI SARADA DEVI AS SAKTI

Sakti literally means energy, power or force. Creation is nothing but the manifestation of Sakti in the physical, mental and spiritual planes. The divine power of God that creates, protects and destroys the world is worshipped variously in Hinduism as Adi Para Sakti, the primal power of Brahman; as Sakti, the consort of Siva, the Absolute; as Sri, the consort of Vishnu; as Mahamaya, the power that is Devi; as Kundalini, the dormant serpent power in Jivas and so on. In general, the terms Sakti, Mahamaya and Kundalini refer only to Kali or Devi, the consort of Siva. Hinduism regards all women as visible embodiments of Sakti, the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the Incarnation of God as a special manifestation of Sakti. He has said, "With the help of Adyasakti (Primal Power) God sports as an Incarnation. God, through His Sakti, incarnates Himself as man. Then alone does it become possible for the Incarnation to carry on His work. Everything is due to the Sakti of the Divine Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as his Sakti. The divine power or Sakti manifested by the Holy Mother has far exceeded that of any previous Incarnation of the Divine Mother such as Sati, Sita and Radha. Sita and Radha played only passive roles in the missions of Rama and Krishna. But the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi played a very active and crucial role in the Ramakrishna Incarnation and directly imparted Jnana and Bhakti to innumerable devotees.

Swami Vivekananda alone properly understood the infinite divine stature of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Swamiji speaks of the Holy Mother as Sakti born to revive
India and the world: "You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life — none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Sakti, there is no regeneration in the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries? Because Sakti is held in dishonour here. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Sakti of India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born in the world......Without the grace of Sakti nothing is to be accomplished...... Hence we must first build a Math for the Mother. First Mother and her daughters, then Father and his sons—can you understand this?.......... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessing are all paramount to me......".

It is said that Maya, the Lord's Sakti, is more powerful than the Lord Himself. In the very first verse of 'Soundarya Lahari' Acharya Sankara says, "United with Sakti, Siva is endowed with the power to create the universe. Otherwise, He is incapable even of movement." Sri Ramakrishna himself expressed the same idea to the Holy Mother when he told her during his last days at Cossipore, "What after all has this one done? You'll have to do much more.''

And the Mother did much more than Thakur himself, as testified by Swami Premananda who once exclaimed with wonder: "Who has understood the Holy Mother? Who can understand her? You have heard about Sita, Savitri, Vishnupriya and Radharani. The Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. Not even the slightest trace of divine powers is noticeable in her. Sri Ramakrishna, however, had the Vidya powers. Many were the occasions when we witnessed his trances and ecstacies. But in the
Holy Mother even the Vidya powers were concealed. What a supreme power that!...Don’t you see how many people are rushing on! The poison that we cannot digest, we just pass on to the Mother. And she gives refuge to everyone. Infinite is her power! Unbounded her mercy! Victory unto the Mother! What to speak of us—we have not found even Sri Ramakrishna doing this. Even he used to accept people after a lot of testing and screening. And what do you find here, in the case of the Mother? Astonishing! Amazing! She is giving refuge to all and digesting the sins of all. Mother! Mother! Victory unto the Mother!"

Sri Ramakrishna has said, “That which is Brahman is also Kali, the Mother, the Primal Energy. When inactive It is called Brahman. Again when creating, preserving and destroying It is called Sakti. Still water is an illustration of Brahman. The same water, moving in waves, may be compared to Sakti or Kali.” Sakti activates both external and internal natures. The divine power that lies dormant in every Jiva is called Kundalini Sakti.

Swami Vivekananda once said, “The Divine Mother is the Kundalini sleeping in us; without worshipping Her we can never know ourselves. All merciful, all powerful, omnipresent — are attributes of the Divine Mother. Every manifestation of power in the universe is Mother. She is Life. She is Intelligence. She is Love. She is in the universe, yet separate from it. She is a person and can be seen and known (as Sri Ramakrishna saw and knew Her). Established in the idea of the Mother, we can do anything. She quickly answers prayer.”

Swamiji’s description of the Divine Mother as Brahma-Kundalini is applicable word for word the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The Holy Mother is Kundalini
Incarnate: She is Life. She is Intelligence. She is Love. She is in the universe yet separate from it. She is a person who was seen and known, as Sri Ramakrishna, his disciples and devotees saw and knew her. Established in the idea of Mother, Swami Vivekananda and others were able to do great things. She quickly answers prayer.” The Holy Mother is the Avatar-form of Brahma-Kundalini Sakti; the Kundalini that is sleeping in us is the Antaryamin (Immanent) form of the Mother.

If Sri Ramakrishna is Avatar-Varishta, the greatest among Incarnations of God, it follows automatically that the Holy Mother is Sakti-Varishta, the greatest among Incarnations of the Divine Mother. Swami Vivekananda is then Acharaya-Varishta, the greatest among religious teachers, who has awakened the Brahma-Kundalini with his clarion call, “Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached!” Swamiji’s call means: “O Sarada, Brahma-Kundalini Incarnate! Awaken from the Muladhara Chakra of my disciples, arise and pass through their Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Visuddha and Ajna Chakras rapidly and stop not anywhere on the way till the goal, reunion with Thakur, who is sporting in the Sahasrara Chakra as Siva, is achieved.” This is one interpretation of the great message of Swamiji, from the point of view of Kundalini Yoga.

By his unprecedented Tantric and other sadhanas, Sri Ramakrishna accumulated immense spiritual power which treasure he handed over to Sri Sarada Devi when he worshipped her as Shodasi. The Holy Mother was Brahma-Kundalini Incarnate, the repository of infinite spiritual power. Thus after the twin manifestation of Para Sakti as Sarada-Ramakrishna, the Brahma-Kundalini of the world has become especially awake. This fact is
proved by the unprecedented progress that mankind has achieved in the last one hundred years, since Ramakrishna. Nature has opened the door to all its secrets in this age, more freely than in any other.

The progress made in the field of religion is also considerable though not to the same extent as in the physical sciences. This is because sufficient effort has not been made by the people in this direction. Science has overreached itself by inventing terrible means of mass destruction through advances such as the ability to release the coiled 'kundalini' power of the atom. Therefore humanity is now turning to real religion, the Vedanta, for a lasting solution to its problems.

The immense Brahma-Kundalini Sakti that descended to the world at the time of Sri Ramakrishna's birth got itself stored in the person Sri Sarada Devi. Through the tireless and undying inspiration of Swami Vivekananda, this spiritual reservoir will release immense spiritual power in the coming centuries and liberate millions all over the world. India which has slept long as if locked up in the Muladhara Chakra, will arise, awake and stop not till it reaches the Sahasrara, the pinnacle of glory, as vividly foreseen and forecast by Swamiji. This is the significance of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's manifestation this time as the fullest embodiment of Brahma-Kundalini, Mahamaya or Adi Para Sakti, the primal power of Brahman.
21. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS SIVA

Siva is one of the three major deities of Hinduism, the other two being Vishnu and Sakti. 'Siva' literally means 'auspicious'. The Vedic deity Rudra became popular in the Puranic age as the great god Mahadeva (Siva). The cult of Siva is perhaps the most ancient monotheistic religion in the world. Saivism was once spread throughout the world.

Siva is the great ideal of Jnana Yoga in Hinduism. He is the Lord of Yogis, who is ever in meditation for the good for the world. Siva is conceived as wearing matted locks and tiger’s skin. He rides a bull called Nandi and carries a trident. Siva is worshipped always through stone-emblems called Sivalinga. In the Puranas, we find instances when Siva manifested Himself out of the Sivalinga before His devotees.

Kshudiram and Chandramani, the noble parents of Sri Ramakrishna, were equally devoted to Siva and Vishnu, though they were Vaishnavas. Kshudiram went on pilgrimages to Kasi and Rameswaram by foot. From Rameswaram, he bought a Sivalinga and worshipped it daily with vilva leaves.

In the months of February and March vilva trees shed their leaves, making the worship of Siva difficult. During that season, Kshudiram once went to Medinipur on foot to meet his nephew Ramchandra. He got up early in the morning and walked for five hours towards Medinipur when he saw that vilva trees on the way were already in leaf. He was so delighted that he gathered vilva leaves in a basket and walked back all the way to Kamarpukur. He reached home at about three in the afternoon, bathed, worshipped the Sivalinga with the vilva leaves and
then only took his meal. He went to Medinipur the next
day only. Chandramani Devi was amazed to learn that
Kshudiram had come back all that distance solely on
account of his eagerness to worship Siva with the vilva
leaves.¹ Such was the devotion of Kshudiram to Siva
that the Great God Himself chose to be born as his son.

According to one famous story in the Siva Purana,
Brahma and Vishnu once quarrelled, each claiming that He
was the greatest deity. Then Siva appeared before them
as a huge column of light. Brahma and Vishnu were not
able to find the top or bottom of this light of Siva and
realised that Siva was the greatest God. This manifesta-
tion of Siva in the form of divine light out of a Sivalinga
is called ‘Lingodbhava Murthy’.

Remarkably, Sri Ramakrishna manifested himself in
the world in exactly the same way as Lingodbhava Siva.
A flood of divine light emerged out of a Sivalinga at
Kamarpukur and entered the body of Chandramani Devi,
who thereafter fell unconscious when she was on the point
of telling the black-smith woman Dhani about it. Dhani
helped Chandramani to recover and was surprised to hear
about her wonderful experience. Chandramani had the
feeling that the light of Siva was in her womb and that she
was pregnant.² Thus the divine being Sri Ramakrishna
was conceived and born as the Jyoti or Light of Siva.
Sri Ramakrishna’s birth is the Lingodbhava manifesta-
tion of Siva in this age.

The same blacks-smith woman Dhani Kamarini
assisted Chandramani Devi as mid-wife at the time of the
birth of Sri Ramakrishna. The divine child was born at
about 5-00 a.m., a few minutes before sunrise on
February 18, 1836, three days after the Mahasivaratri, the
night sacred to Siva. After doing the needful to Chandra-
mani Devi, Dhani turned her attention to the new-born
baby only to find that it had disappeared from the place where she had kept it! In alarm Dhani took the lamp to look for the child and found that it had rolled down the ground covered with blood and slime into the nearby hollow fire place. The divine child was lying there without crying, with its little body covered with ashes like Siva! Based on the sign of the zodiac under which the child was born, Kshudiram afterwards named it Sambhuchandra, which is one of the names of Siva.⁵

Therefore it is no wonder that Dhani looked upon the child Gadadhar ever afterwards as a divine being. She used to give sweets to Gadadhar often. One day Dhani told boy that she would consider herself blessed if at the time of his investiture with the sacred thread (Upanayana), he would accept alms from her and call her ‘Mother’. Gadadhar was so touched by her affection that he promised to fulfil Dhani’s desire to become his ‘bhiksha-mata’ (God-mother).

Ramkumar arranged for the sacred-thread ceremony of Gadadhar in his ninth year. When Gadadhar told Ramkumar of his earlier promise to Dhani, the latter objected saying that it was not proper for a Brahmin boy like Gadadhar to accept alms from a black-smith woman like Dhani Kamarini. But Gadadhar insisted on fulfilling his promise and Ramkumar had to yield. Putting trust in the boy’s promise, the poor woman Dhani had collected and accumulated money and other things as best as she could and had been eagerly awaiting for that happy event. Gadadhar put on the sacred-thread in accordance with scriptural injunctions and accepted ‘bhiksha’ or alms from Dhani with a cheerful heart.⁶

Lord Siva once dressed Himself up like a mendicant and begged alms from the wives of the sages of Tarukavana.
Siva also received alms from the Divine Mother Annapurna at Kasi. Siva in this medicant aspect is called ‘Bhikshadana.’ Sri Ramakrishna at the time of his sacred-thread ceremony was like Bhikshadana-Siva and therefore it is no wonder that Dhani considered it a great blessing to become his Bhiksha-mata!

Gadadhar was once called upon to act as Siva on a Sivaratri night in a dramatic performance at the house of Sitanath Pyre. The boy who was to act as Siva had fallen ill. Gadadhar’s friends dressed him up as Siva, smearing his body with ashes, hanging Rudraksha beads around his neck, adorning his head with matted locks and a crescent moon, giving a trident for him to hold in his hand and so on. The young boy’s mind soared into divine consciousness and he entered the stage with slow and measured steps.

Gadadhar then stood motionless on the stage and the audience felt that Siva Himself was standing before them. The young boy was totally lost in the great sublimity of Siva. The audience went into raptures. Some cried out the names of Hari, the women uttered the auspicious sound of ‘ulu’ and some blew conch shells. It was as if everyone had been transported to Kailasa, the celestial abode of Siva!

Gadadhar stood in the same posture for a long time with tears flowing down his cheeks; he neither spoke nor moved. Two or three elderly people went to the boy and saw that his hands and feet were insensitive and that he had no external consciousness. After some commotion, the play was stopped and Gadadhar was taken home by his friends. His divine ecstasy didn’t come to an end that Sivaratri night, inspite of all efforts by others such as uttering the name of Siva into his ears. It is said that
Gadadhar regained normal consciousness the next day after sunrise. Some say that he was in that ecstatic state continuously for three days.

The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls on the second lunar day, three days after the Sivaratri. If it was true that the young boy Gadadhar was continuously in samadhi for three days from that Sivaratri night, it means that he regained normal consciousness only on his own birthday, which is now celebrated by the devotees as Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti. Thus Sri Ramakrishna’s impersonation of Siva and his absorption for three days in Siva-consciousness at the age of nine directly links the holy Sivaratri with Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti. Thus Sri Ramakrishna was none other than Siva Incarnate, which fact was palpably felt by all the pious souls who were fortunate to witness his dramatic impersonation of Siva on that holy Sivaratri night.

Sri Ramakrishna does not appear to have engaged himself in any special sadhana with a view to realise Siva, though he performed sadhana to realise deities like Kali, Rama and Krishna. He seems to have realised Siva without any effort on his part at the age of nine on the Sivaratri day; like many other spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, his absorption in the mood of Siva also lasted for three days then.

Sri Ramakrishna also realised Siva as a corollary to his realisation of the Divine Mother Kali, since Siva and Sakti are inseparable; in fact, the deity Dakshineswar Kali worshipped by him stands on the prostrate image of Siva. Thakur’s devotion to Siva and his knowledge that Siva resides in all beings seem natural and spontaneous like the manifestation of the ‘Swayambhu Linga’ of Siva, which is
a self-sprung emblem of Siva with its roots going as far as Benares.

In the whole of India, there are twelve most holy Sivalingas known as Jyotir-Lingas, the manifestations of Siva in the form of emblems representing light. In the Dakshineswar temple also, twelve temples of Siva have been constructed in a row by Rani Rasmani, who perhaps had in mind the twelve Jyotirlingas. Sri Ramakrishna himself was a living Jyotirlinga of Siva as he was the embodiment of divine light which arose out of the Jugis’ Siva Temple of Kamarpukur. Thus it is no wonder that Thakur was much devoted to the twelve ‘Jyotir Lingas’ of Siva installed at Dakshineswar.

The ‘Siva-Mahimna Stotra’ composed by Pushpadanta is the most popular hymn on Siva in North India. Sri Ramakrishna certainly knew it by heart. One day he was reciting this hymn in one of the twelve Siva temples at Dakshineswar when he came to the following verse:

“Asitagirisamam syat kajjalam sindhupatre
Surataruvarasakha lekhani patramurvi;
Likhati yadi grihitva Sarada sarvakalam
Tadapi tava gunanamisa param na yati.”

which means: “Oh Lord, if the blue mountain be the ink, the ocean the ink-pot, the biggest branch of the heavenly tree be the pen, the earth the writing leaf and taking these, if Sarada, the goddess of learning, writes for eternity, even then the limit of Your virtues will not be reached.”

Reciting the aforesaid verse, Sri Ramakrishna entered into an ecstatic mood and cried out again and again, “O Great God, how I can I express your great glory?” All came running towards that spot hearing the cries of
Thakur. Mathur Babu was in the temple at that time. Hearing the uproar, he also came and prevented others from removing Sri Ramakrishna forcibly from the Siva temple. Mathur had already formed a high opinion about Sri Ramakrishna by that time. When Thakur came down to normal consciousness and saw the crowd, he asked Mathur whether he had done anything wrong. Mathur saluted him and said, “No, Baba (father), you were reciting a hymn: I stood here lest some one should disturb you unthinkingly.”

Thus Mathur Babu protected and served Thakur in all possible ways for fourteen years like Nandi who eternally serves Lord Siva. Truly Mathur Babu and Hriday were to Sri Ramakrishna, what Nandi and Bhringi are to Siva. At another time, Mathur Babu actually saw Sri Ramakrishna as Siva and Kali alternately, as Thakur was pacing up and down.

The verse from the Siva Mahimna Stotra which was recited again and again by Sri Ramakrishna is eminently applicable to his own life. Sri Ramakrishna himself is the Siva of this age, whose glories so many writers and poets are finding it difficult to express in words! The words ‘Sarada sarvakalam’ in the aforesaid hymn are very apt. The Goddess Sarada Herself was actually born as the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and was tirelessly repeating the glories of Ramakrishna-Siva ‘sarvakalam’ (at all times); still the limit of his virtues could not be reached.

Sri Ramakrishna could not worship for long the twelve Sivalingas in the Dakshineswar temple which are called Yogeswar, Jatneswar, Jatileswar, Nakuleswar, Nakeswar, Nirjareswar, Nareswar, Nandiswar, Nageswar, Jagadiswar, Jaleswar and Yajneswar. Among these twelve Sivas, Jagadiswar (literally, Lord of the world) seems to be
especially important, as the real name of the Kali at the Dakshineswar temple is ‘Sri Sri Jegadiswari Mahakali.’ Sri Ramakrishna himself was Jagadiswar-Siva who actually realised that the Jagad (world) itself is Iswara (Siva). He said, “One day while worshipping Siva I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virat, this Universe, itself is Siva. After that my worship of Siva through the image came to an end.” But he used to send his young disciples to the twelve Siva temples for meditation.

Siva is said to be in Bhava Samadhi during the day time and in Nirvikalpa Samadhi at night. Sri Ramakrishna’s time was also spent in various types of Samadhi. He ever dwelt in the state of Bhavamukha, which is the threshold state between samadhi and normal consciousness. Swami Sivananda has stated that whenever songs on Siva were sung in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, he entered into ecstasies close to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Once songs on Siva were continuously sung and Thakur entered deep into Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Thereafter he gave instructions that songs on Siva should be followed by songs on the Divine Mother so that his mind could come down easily from Nirvikalpa Samadhi.’ During his Sadhana period, Sri Ramakrishna dwelt continuously in the non-dual plane of Nirvikalpa Samadhi for six months which is possible only for Avatars. Like Siva, Thakur was a past master of all types of Samadhi. Sri Ramakrishna was indeed the living image of Siva.

In the Aratrika hymn composed by Swami Vivekananda on Sri Ramakrishna, Thakur is hailed as Siva and Hara and not as Vishnu. Hitherto it has been believed by Hindus that only Vishnu takes Avatars. Siva has been generally identified with the Absolute Brahman and
thought to be birthless. But sages like Durvasa were regarded as parts of Siva in the Puranic age. Acharya Sankara is considered an incarnation of Dakshinamurti-Siva. But he is not worshipped as an Avatara of Siva. The manifestation of Siva as Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna has thus added a new dimension to the Hindu concept of Avatar.

22. SRI SARADA AS BHAVATARINI

The presiding deity officially called ‘Sri Sri Jagadiswar Mahakali’ at the Dakshineswar temple is popularly known as ‘Bhavatarni’ which means ‘Saviour who helps one to cross the transmigratory ocean of birth and death.’ This deity was adored by Sri Ramakrishna for years and so the name Bhavatarni is very dear to his devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna himself directly identified the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi with the deity Bhavatarni at Dakshineswar. One day when the Holy Mother was massaging his feet, she asked Thakur, “How do you look upon me?” Thakur replied, “The Mother who is in the temple (Bhavatarni), the mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the Nahavat, the same Mother is now massaging my feet. Truly, I always look upon you as a form of the blissful divine Mother.”

In fact, Bhavatarni Kali’s image-form at Dakshineswar and Avatar-form in the person of Sri Sarada Devi both manifested themselves on earth at about the same time. As commanded by Kali in a dream, Rani Rasmani constructed the Kali temple at Dakshineswar over a period of seven or eight years and installed the image of Bhavatarni in the new temple on Thursday, May 31, 1855.
During this period, Sri Sarada Devi was also born on a Thursday, December 22, 1853. Curiously, Sri Ramakrishna was also born on a Thursday.

Indeed the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was literally looked upon by thousands of devotees as Bhavatarini, the Redeemer of suffering humanity from the miserable cycle of transmigration. Since Sri Ramakrishna invoked the Kali known as Bhavatarini and thereby awakened this aspect of the Divine Mother through his sadhana and and spiritual realisations, this redeeming quality of Kali became fully manifest in the person of the Holy Mother, much more so than in previous Avatars of the Divine Mother.

In one instance, a disciple perceived the Holy Mother directly as Bhavatarini and felt no need to worship Her in the image. The Holy Mother pointed out Sri Ramakrishna’s picture and said to that disciple, “This is your guru.” The disciple responded, “Yes, Mother, he is the guru of the universe.” And when she said pointing to the image of Bhavatarini, “This is your chosen deity,” the disciple asserted, “Mother, why should I go for an unseen entity, when I have one before my very eyes?” In other words, when it was possible to worship the Universal Mother Bhavatarini in Her living form as the Holy Mother, there was no need for him to take the help of an image. The disciple’s insight and sincerity pleased the Holy Mother, who said, “Very well, my boy, let it be so.” She laid a little emphasis on the word ‘so’.

There is a very interesting episode in the life of the Holy Mother which shows her as Bhavatarini or Tara, the Redeemer of the fallen. Binodbehari Som, nicknamed Padmabinode, was a student of the school where Mahenda
Nath Gupta, the writer of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* taught. 'M' introduced him to Sri Ramakrishna. He was very much influenced by Thakur but later he became an actor and took to drinking. Padmabinode was a good friend of Swami Saradananda, whom he called 'dost' (friend). On his way home from the theatre, Padmabinode used to pass by the Mother's house at Udbodhan lane and disturb all under the influence of liquor late at night. Therefore Swami Saradananda instructed everyone neither to respond to the call of his 'dost' nor open the door, lest the Holy Mother should be disturbed. One night, Padmabinode found no answer from the Mother's house: he was drunk and started singing, addressing the Holy Mother as Tara (Redeemer). The Bengali song that he sang means:

"Get up, Mother gracious, and open the door;
Nothing is visible in the dark; and my heart ever throbs.
How often do I call on you, O Tara, at the pitch of my voice!
And yet, though kind you are forsooth, how you behave today!
Leaving your child outside, you sleep inside;
While crying 'Mother, mother,' am I reduced to skin and bone!
With proper pitch, tune, modulation
(and cadence in all the three gamuts
I call on you so often; and still you wake not!
May be, you have turned your face because of my engrossment in play.

Do you look at me with unperturbed face,
And I shan't go for play again.
Who but a Mother can bear the burden of such a wretched son?"
The Holy Mother was very much moved to hear this beautiful song of her wayward ‘son’ and opened the window of her room upstairs. Padmabinode was delighted at this response from the Holy Mother and rolled on the street, saying that he was saluting her. He then sprinkled the dust from the street and went away, singing another song, “Keep Mother Shyama (Kali) carefully concealed in your heart; O mind, may you and I only see Her and none else.” And he repeated with some gusto, “May I see Her, and not my dost.”

Next day the Holy Mother inquired about Padmabinode and learning everything, remarked, “See, how firm is his conviction!” The same story was repeated at least once again. When her attendants asked her not to bother about Padmabinode anymore, she replied, “I can’t contain myself at his call.”

Padmabinode was admitted to the hospital shortly thereafter and died of dropsy. During his last moments, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali was read out to him at his request. He listened to it with tears in his eyes and passed away uttering the name of Sri Rama-krishna, which is the redeeming ‘Taraka Mantra’ of this age. When the Holy Mother heard about his glorious death, she said with evident satisfaction, “Why should this not be so? Was he not Thakur’s son? He was wallowing in the mud and has now returned to the lap to which he belonged.”

Thus the moving song sung by the drunken Padmabinode addressing the Holy Mother as Tara (redeemer) was not mere praise; she was indeed Bhavatarini or Tara in letter and spirit. Who but the Mother can bear the burden of such a wretched son as Padmabinode?
The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi accepted one and all who called upon her as Mother and initiated thousands into holy Siddha Mantras of proven efficacy left in her custody by Sri Ramakrishna. Besides she always performed japa for the welfare of her disciples. She was the living Bhavatarini who enabled thousands to achieve liberation.

The Holy Mother has given this assurance to all her devotees: "Whoever has come here, whoever is my son, is already redeemed. Destiny dare not throw my children in hell. Free yourself from all anxiety by entrusting your future to me. And remember this always, that there's one behind you who will come to you at the right moment and lead you to the everlasting domain."* This is a more categorical, motherly assurance than even Krishna's celebrated teaching in the Gita, "Surrendering all Dharma, take refuge in Me alone; I shall release you from all sins." (Gita, 18.66)

The Bhavatarini or Tara aspect of the Holy Mother is hailed by Swami Abhedananda in one of his hymns as "Taranim bhava-sagara parakari." The Mother is indeed a veritable ship ferrying her children across the ocean of Samsara. To the devotees of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, crossing the ocean of transmigration is like stepping across a mud puddle caused by the hoof of a cow!
23. SRI SARADA DEVI AS PHALAHARINI

'Phalaharini' literally means 'fruit-eater'. The Divine Mother Kali in her aspect of Phalaharini is worshipped by Saktas in the Bengali month of Jyaistha (May-June) on a newmoon night with special offerings of all kinds of fruits, which symbolise the fruits of their past Karmas. Therefore Phalaharini Kali is One who destroys the effects of the past deeds of worshippers, thus conferring on them liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. On the Phalaharini Kali Puja day, devotees of Kali literally carry out the great teaching of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: "Surrendering all Dharma (duties and fruits of actions) to Me, seek refuge in Me alone. I shall absolve you of all sins; grieve not." (Gita, 18.66)

The Phalaharini Kali Puja day is of special importance to devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and therefore the Puja is every year performed at the Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres on this auspicious day. It was on the Phalaharini Kali Puja day on the newmoon night of 5th June, 1872 that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as Shodasi. Thakur then surrendered at the feet of the Holy Mother the fruits of all his spiritual sadhana lasting over twelve years. The worship was also accepted by the Holy Mother who was then in a deep state of samadhi. Sri Sarada Devi thereby showed that she was none other than Phalaharini Kali.

Kali is worshipped in Her aspect of Phalaharini once in a year; but the Holy Mother played the role of Phalaharini everyday of her life. When Sri Ramakrishna surrendered to the Holy Mother all the fruits of his sadhana, the Phalaharini aspect in her became fully
awake. She became the main conduit for the immense spiritual treasures accumulated by Thakur. Later when ordinary people who had committed all sorts of sins worshipped her in thousands, the Holy Mother as Phalaharini absorbed all their sins and thereby redeemed them. When no devotees came to her on rare occasions, the Holy Mother became worried on that day. Such was her eagerness to redeem suffering Jivas as the Divine Mother Phalaharini. During his days of intense sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna wept and prayed to Kali, “Yet another day has passed, but I haven’t seen you, Mother!” This was also the daily prayer of the Holy Mother as Phalaharini, with the difference that it was not addressed to the Divine Mother but to her devotees: “Yet another day has passed, and I haven’t seen you, my children!”

Once the Holy Mother at Jayrambati complained in her prayer that no devotees had visited her thus making that day useless for her. The next morning three devotees came to Jayrambati with a letter of introduction from Swami Brahmananda. These three fortunate people who sought spiritual initiation from the Holy Mother must have accumulated very bad karmas in the past. For the Mother remarked, “So, at last Rakhal sent me these!” She refused to initiate them and asked them to go Belur Math. The three worthies were greatly disappointed and approached her again for the second time. The Mother was inflexible and spoke to Sri Ramakrishna, “Thakur, I prayed to you yesterday that the day might not pass uselessly. And at long last you too bring these!” But Sri Sarada Devi relented at last for the Mother in her could not refuse any of her children, however bad they might be. The Holy Mother yielded saying, “Thakur, let me carry on your work so long as the body lasts.” The initiation was duly finished.
When the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math such as Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Sivananda and Saradananda heard that the Holy Mother had accepted these persons as her disciples and initiated them, they were stunned and speechless at the infinite mercy of the Mother. Swami Premananda at long last said, "We can’t express in words the poison that she has accepted. If we had done so, we would have been reduced to ashes." ¹ The Swami also said once, "A poison that we can’t assimilate we pass on to the Mother. She draws everyone to her lap. An infinite power—an incomparable grace! Glory to the Mother! Not to speak of us, we haven’t seen Thakur himself doing this! Wonderful! She grants shelter to everyone, eats food from the hands of almost anyone, and all is digested! Victory to the Mother!" ² Such was the glory of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Phalaharini Kali Incarnate, who ate food (that is, accepted the poison or bad karmas) from the hands of almost anyone and digested all.

The people of Bengal have propitiated the Divine Mother as Phalaharini Kali for centuries and so She was born among them as Sri Sarada Devi. Once a devotee suggested to the Holy Mother, "Since the touch of devotees makes you suffer, 'tis better to avoid it." But the Mother replied, "No, my son, it is for this purpose that we (Thakur and the Mother) came. If we don’t take over the sins and sufferings and don’t digest them, who else will? Who else will bear the burden of the sinners?" She said however, "A pure man's touch brings joy."

The human body itself is the fruit (phala) of past karmas. The Divine Mother Phalaharini Kali absorbs all the effects of karmas at the time of death of Her devotees and confers on them immortal bliss. Such a glorious
death actually came to pass in the case of M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), that too at the close of the Phalajaranini Kali Puja night itself! The five Bengali volumes of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna were brought out one after another by M. till 1932. During the midnight of 3rd June 1932, the Phalajaranini Kali Puja day that year, he finished reading the proof of the last book of the Gospel. He had now finished his mission in life, and lo! his neuralgic pain suddenly became severe that night; and in the early hours of 4th June, 1932, he left his mortal coil, chanting the prayer: "O Gurudeva! O Ma! Take me in Your arms!" M. had earlier sent other devotees to attend the Phalajaranini Kali Puja at Belur Math. Thus M. passed away with the name of 'Ma' on his lips; of course, by 'Ma' M. meant the Holy Mother, who was worshipped that night by thousands as Phalajaranini Kali.

Swami Abhedananda, in his hymn to Sri Sarada Devi, lauds the 'Phalajaranini' qualities of the Holy Mother as follows:

"Sneheha badhnasi manosmatiyam  
Dosan asesan saguni karosi  
Ahetuna no dayase sadosan  
Svanke grhitva yadidam vicitram"

which means:

"Binding our minds to you with the bonds of your love, you do transmute our vices into virtues. Compassionate as you are without any consideration of merit, you do, lo! take even unworthy ones into your lap."
24. SRI SARADA DEVI AS SHODASI

Shodasi (literally She who is sixteen) is the Divine Mother of the Universe in Her most beautiful form, exquisitely attired and seated on a throne. Shodasi is the eternal Virgin ever sixteen years old. She is also known as Tripura-sundari (the beautiful Queen of the three worlds) and Sri Vidya, the embodiment of all knowledge. The number sixteen represents completeness in Hindu tradition and hence Shodasi is the highest among the numerous forms of the Divine Mother. Shodasi is worshipped in rituals with sixteen kinds of articles through symbols such as pictures, earthen images, yantras (ritualistic drawings) etc. The worship of the Divine Mother in human form is also sanctioned by the scriptures.

By the year 1872 A.D., Sri Ramakrishna had already practised all the 64 Tantric sadhanas under the guidance of Bhairavi Brahmani and attained to innumerable visions of various aspects of the Divine Mother. He saw all women, good and bad, as veritable embodiments of the Divine Mother. He had completed all the sixteen parts in the realm of sadhana, so to say, and attained unprecedented perfection in Sakti worship. It is common for Saktas of Bengal to worship young virgin girls as embodiments of the Divine Mother. It is also not uncommon for ardent male sadhakas following the path of Tantras to worship their own wives as Sakti. Gauri Pandit, a great sadhaka and a disciple of Bhairavi Brahmani, used to worship his own wife as the Divine Mother regularly. Therefore it was natural that a keen desire arose in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna also to worship his own wife, the extremely pure Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, as a living manifestation of Mother Kali, his Ishta.
Sri Sarada Devi first visited Dakshineswar in the year 1872 A.D., probably in March. On the auspicious day of the worship of Phalaharini Kali, Sri Ramakrishna worshipped her as Shodasi. This wonderful event took place on the 5th June, 1872 according to Swami Gambhirananda, on the new moon day in the month of May, 1872 according to the Life of Sri Ramakrishna and on May 25, 1873 according to Swami Saradananda. Most probably, Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Sri Sarada Devi as Shodasi on the 5th June, 1872.

It was the day of a special festival at the Dakshineswar Kali temple. Sri Ramakrishna had made special preparations on that day with a view to worship the Mother of the Universe in his own room. A wooden seat painted with Alimpana, the pigment of rice powder, for the Devi to sit on at the time of worship, had been placed to the right of the worshipper. It was new-moon night. Dinanath, a priest in the Radhakanta temple came to help Thakur. At 9 p.m., when everything was ready, Sri Ramakrishna sent word to the Holy Mother to be present during the worship. When she came, the ritualistic worship was started by Thakur.

The articles of worship were purified by the Mantras and all the preliminary rites before the worship were finished. Sri Ramakrishna then beckoned to the Holy Mother to sit on the wooden sit decorated with Alimpana. While witnessing the worship, Sri Sarada Devi had already entered into a divine, semi-conscious state. In that divine state, she sat on the special seat of worship, facing north to the right of Sri Ramakrishna, who was seated with his face to the east. According to scriptural injunctions, Thakur sprinkled the consecrated water purified by Mantras from the pitcher before him repeatedly. Then
Thakur uttered the Mantra in her hearing and recited the prayer: “Oh' Mother Tripurasundari, who are the controller of all powers, open the door to perfection; purify her (Sri Sarada Devi’s) body and mind, manifest yourself in her and be beneficial.”

Sri Ramakrishna then performed the Nyasa of the Mantras in the Holy Mother’s person according to the injunctions of the Sastras, assigning different syllables of the Mantra to the various parts of her divine body with gesticulations. Then he performed the ‘Shodasa upachara’ or worship with sixteen articles looking upon the Holy Mother as the Devi Herself. He offered food and put a part of it into her mouth with his own hand. The Holy Mother went into samadhi. The worshipper Sri Ramakrishna also became perfectly identified and united with the Devi in samadhi.

A long time after the second quarter of the night had passed, Sri Ramakrishna regained normal consciousness partially. Returning to the semi-conscious state again, he offered himself to the Devi, the Phalaharini Kali. He gave away forever at the lotus feet of the Great Goddess his all — the results of his sadhanas, his rosary etc. along with his self and saluted her uttering the Mantras beginning with ‘Sarva mangala mangalye’ from the Chandi.¹

The worship of Shodasi by Sri Ramakrishna thus came to an end. Thakur’s sadhana reached its culmination with the worship of the Ruler of the Universe, the Divine Mother in the person of Sri Sarada Devi, the the embodiment of spiritual knowledge itself. His sadhana became complete in all respects: he had done ‘all the sixteen parts’ of sadhana. In the realm of spiritual sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna himself thus became Shodasi, the complete One in all respects.'
Some interesting details of this Shodasi Puja were later gathered by curious women devotees of the Holy Mother. When the Mother said that at the commencement of the Shodasi Puja, Thakur painted her feet with liquid lac-dye, put vermilion on her forehead, clad her with a new piece of cloth and put betel and sweets into her mouth, Lakshmi Devi asked with an amused smile, "You are so shy, my dear, how did he put clothes on you?" The Mother simply replied, "I was not quite myself then."

On that auspicious occasion, there were only two persons who sat facing each other—Thakur and the Mother. Towards the end, Hriday came in. After the adoration, Sri Sarada Devi was faced with a problem—what was she to do with the conch bangles, cloth etc., which she had received as offerings. She referred the matter to Thakur, who after a little reflection said, "Well, you can give them to your mother; but mind you, when making them over, do not think of her as a mortal, but rather as the Universal Mother." The Holy Mother did accordingly. The Mother thus learnt to look upon all beings as manifestations of the Universal Mother. After the Shodasi Puja Sri Ramakrishna also felt that he had discharged the highest duty to his partner in life.

At the time of the Shodasi Puja, Sri Sarada Devi was in her nineteenth year, but she often said, "I had then commenced my sixteenth year." During the Shodasi Puja, perhaps the Holy Mother became identified with the sixteen-year old Goddess Shodasi so much that she felt that her age then was also sweet sixteen!

The number sixteen which represents fullness is associated with the moon and the Indian rupee of those days. Sixteen are the digits (kalas) of the moon; and during the British days the Indian rupee was subdivided
into sixteen Annas. Curiously, the moon and the rupee are also associated with the Holy Mother, who is Shodasi Incarnate. The Mother prayed, “Even the moon has stains; let me be purer than even the moon.” Sri Sarada Devi indeed was purer than the full moon with all its sixteen digits. When Sri Ramakrishna desired to eat the food begged by his direct disciples, Narendra and others decided that the first person to be approached should be the Holy Mother. And when they begged her, the Mother who was none other than the sixteen-year old Shodasi, dropped a whole rupee, that is, full sixteen Annas into their begging pot. Whenever the Holy Mother initiated a person into spiritual life, she gave him or her all her blessings in full; she didn’t withhold anything. Thus the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was always the sixteen-year old Shodasi in spirit, the goddess of fullness and superabundance.

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the Holy Mother as Saraswati; Swami Vivekananda said that she was the living Durga; and the Mother herself admitted that she was Kali. Swami Hiranmayananda reconciles all these statements by pointing out the identity of the Holy Mother with the Goddess Shodasi who is Saraswati, Durga and Kali, all three-in-one. The Swami has given an interesting account of the Shodasi worship of Sri Ramakrishna, explaining the esoteric significance of the event: Sankaracharya, the staunch advocate of Advaita, accepts Shakti......This Shodasi is the chosen deity of the Sannyasins of the Puri sect. Sri Sankaracharya himself worshipped Shodasi in some diagram called ‘Sri Yantra’. This diagram is a symbolic representation of the Goddess Shodasi. When Sri Ramakrishna had become a Sannyasin of Puri school, he also had to accept Shodasi as the deity to be worshipped and that is why he did so...... In accordance with the Southern
School of the Tantras, Shodasi or Sri Vidya is the highest manifestation of Divinity.... In Tantra, each deity has a Mantra i.e. a mystic formula which represents her real nature. In the case of Shodasi there is one Mantra called 'Trikuta Mantra'. This Mantra has three parts - (i) Vagbhavakuta (ii) Shaktikuta (iii) Kamarajakuta. In this Mantra, the 'Vagbhavakuta' represents knowledge and hence Saraswati. Kamarajakuta represents Kali as She is the Goddess who represents the will in man. Shaktikuta represents Durga who is the manifestation of the energy of all Gods as elaborated in Saptashati Chandi. So Shodasi is 'Jnanechakriyamayi' — She represents knowledge, will and action. Hence by thinking of the Holy Mother's essence of Being as Shodasi, we can harmonize the different appellations given to her by Sri Ramakrishna, herself, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda.'

The Shodasi Puja event is an important landmark in the Sarada-Ramakrishna Incarnation. It marked the completion of Thakur's sadhana lasting over twelve years. It also awakened the Universal Mother in the Holy Mother. She thereby became a treasure-house of spirituality, the veritable Sakti of the Ramakrishna Incarnation. Shodasi is the deity of the Puri school of monks to which the Ramakrishna Order of Monks also belongs, since Tota Puri was the Sannyasa-Guru of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna himself has installed the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as the Shodasi of the Ramakrishna Sangha by performing the Shodasi Puja.

Of all the forms of the Divine Mother that Sri Ramakrishna saw, Shodasi was the most beautiful. Thakur said, "I saw in a vision the beauty of the person of Shodasi which melted and spread all around illuminating the quarters". Sri Ramakrishna also said that the
Holy Mother had incarnated herself this time concealing all her celestial beauty, lest unregenerate persons should come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is thus Shodasi in disguise. As seen by Sri Ramakrishna in a vision, "the spiritual beauty of the person of this modern Shodasi is gradually melting and spreading all around illuminining the quarters".

25. SRI SARADA DEVI AS SIMHAVAHINI

The Divine Mother who has the lion as Her vehicle is called Simhavahini. The Mother rides a lion which is often portrayed as the conqueror of an elephant. The devotee of the Divine Mother Simhavahini is himself a lion who carries the Mother in his own heart. He gradually controls the mind, which is restless like a mad elephant and thus realise the Mother. This is the esoteric message hidden behind the gross image of the deity Simhavahini.

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was born in a family devoted to the deity Simhavahini for centuries. The Mukherjjis first came to Jayrambati probably in the Seventeenth Century and became the family priests of the Hindus of that locality. Owing to their influence, Simhavahini became the presiding goddess of Jayrambati. On the southern side of Jayrambati is the shrine of Simhavahini, along with two of her female companions, Chandi and Mahamaya. Therefore it is no wonder that the Holy Mother was devoted to Simhavahini throughout her life. Sri Sarada Devi herself has now become the new Simhavahini, the presiding goddess of holy Jayrambati, which is now renowned throughout the world as the place of her birth.
By the lifelong and incomparable devotion of the Holy Mother to Simhavahini, the deity became especially ‘awake’ and famous. It began to respond readily to the prayers of afflicted humanity. This is the main reason why Avatars like Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother practise devotion and pray to deities at various places and go on pilgrimages. Thus the divine power of Avatars get accumulated in the deities which thereafter become sources of blessing to humanity for ages. If a deity becomes propitious by the supplication of rare souls, weaker humanity can share in the good fortune. As Sri Ramakrishna put it, “Once a person lights a fire (Dhuni), many other share its warmth.”

In the year 1875, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi suffered severely from dysentery during the rainy season at Dakshineswar. She suffered for a full year and did not recover from the disorder, even though Sambhu Mallick arranged for her treatment. When she was a little better, the Mother left for Jayrambati, sometime in September-October, 1875. There the dysentery recurred and took a virulent turn. The Holy Mother became bed-ridden and her life itself was in danger. Even Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar worried a lot, when he got the news of her sad plight at Jayrambati.

The Holy Mother’s body became very weak and emaciated by the repeated attacks of dysentery. Her frame was reduced to skin and bones. The whole body became swollen and liquid matter flowed down from her nose and ears. She could not see because of the continuous flow of tears. Then Umesh, a brother of the Holy Mother, said to her, ‘Sister, there is Simhavahini here; will you make a vow of fasting before Her?’ Since all human efforts to cure her disease had failed, the Holy Mother agreed to seek divine intervention.
Sri Sarada Devi then went and laid down on the basement of the shrine of Simhavahini. Three or four times she had to crawl on all fours to go out. A shortwhile thereafter, the deity Simhavahini appeared to Shyamasundari Devi, the mother of Sri Sarada Devi, in the form of a blacksmith girl aged about twelve and said, “Go quick and bring her here. Give her this medicine.” Besides, the Divine Mother Simhavahini said to the Holy Mother, “Apply to the eyes drops of the juice of the gourd flower made into a paste with salt; that will relieve you.”

The Holy Mother did so and all foul matter fell off from her eyes. Her eyes were cured that very day and the swellings in the body subsided. She recovered. To every enquirer of her health the Holy Mother said, “Mother (Simhavahini) gave the medicine.” From that time onwards, the fame of the deity Simhavahini of Jayrambati spread around. With full faith Sri Sarada Devi took some earth from the basement of the shrine of Simhavahini, kept it in a case and put some of it in her mouth now and then. She related the legend of Simhavahini to others. Encouraged by the Holy Mother’s success, others too offered vows to that deity and got their wishes fulfilled thereby. This, as also the efficacy of that earth in curing diseases, has firmly established the fame of Simhavahini all around Jayrambati, drawing even to this day many pilgrims to Her shrine.¹

The deity Simhavahini rescued the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi from sickness several times during her lifetime. Once after the Holy Mother’s recovery from illness, some villagers wanted to sacrifice a goat before Simhavahini. But Sri Sarada Devi offered some Rasa-gollas (sweets) instead to that deity.
In turn, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi herself played the role of Simhavahini, rescuing her devotees from sickness and crisis. A dramatic event may be cited in this regard as proof, from the life of the well-known Bengali dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh. In his youth, Girish was once in the grip of cholera without any hope of recovery. Suddenly he had a glimpse of a radiant motherly figure which put some prasada into his mouth and asked him to eat. The divine figure wore a cloth with broad red borders; her whole being was effulgent with a heavenly light and the face looked wonderfully lit up by a benign smile. Girish recovered from cholera dramatically! The vivid dream remained ever fresh in his mind.

Decades later, Girish Chandra Ghosh went to Jayrambati in the year 1891, for some consolation after the death of his son aged three years. He spent a few months at Jayrambati on the advice of Swami Niranjanananda who accompanied him as his friend, philosopher and guide. The outspoken Swami accepted the Holy Mother as divine even in those early years and preached her divinity among the devotees without any reserve. On reaching Jayrambati, Girish took his bath in the village pond and went to salute the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in his wet clothes. His frame quivered with emotion. As Girish looked up after touching the Holy Mother’s feet with his head, he saw her face for the first time in his life. It was, perhaps, the most dramatic surprise of that dramatist’s life! He immediately recognised it as that dream-face of the divine, motherly figure who had saved his life from cholera in his youth. He knew that it was this divine mother who had protected him all along. Yet, to make assurance doubly sure, Girish inquired through another, for the Holy Mother would not speak directly to him,
whether she had revealed herself to him in this way on any previous occasion. The Holy Mother admitted of having done so. Girish thereafter became as fervent an advocate of the divine powers of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as the Mother herself had been of Simhavahini!

Once a monk, who had just returned from famine relief activities in the Bankura district, was describing to the Holy Mother at Jayrambati the relief work done by the Ramakrishna Mission. Sri Sarada Devi then moved her hand in a circle around and said, "Mind you, my son, by the grace of Mother Simhavahini, there's nothing of all this (distress) within this area (around Jayrambati). The monk said, "I know nothing of Simhavahini. It is because of your presence that there is nothing of that here." The Holy Mother kept silent. Truly for her devotees, Sri Sarada Devi is the embodiment of Simhavahini, the presiding deity of Jayrambati!

26. SRI SARADA DEVI AS JAGADDHATRI

'Jagaddhatri' means 'bearer of the universe'. In this form, the Divine Mother Kali is represented as riding a lion in the act of subduing an elephant. Sri Ramakrishna once explained the Jagaddhatri concept to his disciples as follows: "One must accept the forms of God. Do you know the meaning of the image of Jagaddhatri? She is the bearer of the universe. Without Her support and protection, the universe would fall from its place and be destroyed. The Divine Mother Jagaddhatri reveals Herself in the heart of one who can control the mind, which may be compared to an elephant."
Rakhal: "The mind is a mad elephant."

Master: Mother, "Therefore the lion, the carrier of the Divine Mother, keeps it under control."

The devotee of the Divine Mother Jagaddhatri is thus the lion, the carrier of the Mother in his own heart. He gradually controls the mind, the mad elephant, and obtains the vision of the Divine Mother by cutting asunder all bonds of Maya. The devotee of the Divine Mother thus becomes 'a Vedanta Kesari', a lion of Vedanta.

The deity Jagaddhatri is especially associated with the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Once the gifts of rice and other things offered by Shyamasundari Devi, the Holy Mother's mother, as her contribution to the annual worship of Kali at Jayrambat, were rejected by Nava Mukherji due to some village feud. The grandmother Shyamasundari Devi was in a fix, as no one else could use the rice earmarked for the goddess. Then a deity appeared to her in a dream and awakened her by patting her body. Opening her eyes, Shyamasundari Devi saw a deity red in colour, sitting near the door with one leg placed over the other. The deity said, "Why do you weep? I shall eat Kali's rice." When the grandmother asked who she was, the deity replied, "I am the Mother of the universe: I shall accept your worship as Jagaddhatri."

Next morning the Holy Mother confirmed that the deity with red hue, sitting with one leg placed over the other, seen by her mother was indeed Jagaddhatri. The grandmother Shyamasundari Devi then secured 400 pounds of paddy and got the clay image of Jagaddhatri painted. When Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar was invited for the worship by Prasānta; the Holy Mother's uncle, he said, "The Mother (Jagaddhatri) will come. That's
excellent. But weren’t you in straitened circumstances? I am as good as already there. Go and have the worship. It will do you good.” The worship was duly performed and many people were fed. At the time of the immersion of the clay image of Jagaddhatri, Shyamasundari Devi whispered in the ears of the Goddess, “My dear Jagai, do come next year. I shall be making arrangements for you all the year round.” As predicted by Sri Ramakrishna, there was some improvement in the fortunes of the poor family of Shyamasundari Devi at Jayrambati due to her successful worship of Jagaddhatri.

Next year, the Holy Mother was reluctant to contribute to the worship of Jagaddhatri, saying that one pear’s worship was enough. Then she saw three figures in a dream at night — Jagaddhatri, with her maids Jaya and Vijaya — who said, “Well, shall we go then?” When the Holy Mother asked who they were, the deity said that she was Jagaddhatri. Then the Mother asked the deity to stay on. Thereafter, the annual worship of Jagaddhatri at Jayrambati was performed without interruption for twelve years.

Once again the Holy Mother felt that twelve years’ worship of Jagaddhatri performed four times each in the names of Shyamasundari Devi, herself and her uncle Nilmadhav was sufficient. Jagaddhatri again appeared in the dream of the Mother and asked three times, “Shall I go then?” The Holy Mother realized that Jagaddhatri wanted to leave her after getting her affirmation; and so she caught hold of the feet of Jagaddhatri and said eagerly, “I won’t let you go and more, I shall worship you every year.”

Later on the Holy Mother secured three and a half acres of paddy land and established a trust in the year 1916
for the continued worship of Jagaddhatri at Jayrambati. With income from this trust and contributions from devotees, the Ramakrishna Math at Belur performs the worship of Jagaddhatri every year with due pomp at the Holy Mother’s temple at Jayrambati. The image worship of Jagaddhatri along with Her companions Jaya and Vijaya lasts for three days. The devotees of the Holy Mother believe that the Holy Mother was none other than Jagaddhatri Herself; when the later is worshipped the Holy Mother too is adored as a matter of course. —

The Jagaddhatri episode in the life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi clearly shows how Avatars establish true religion by rejuvenating forgotten pathways to God. By their worship and devotion, a deity becomes spiritually ‘awake’, that is, the deity starts manifesting power to respond to the prayers of worshippers. Following their footsteps, devotees develop true love of God by worshipping such awakened deities, have their minds purified from all base desires and attain to everlasting bliss. The Jagaddhatri worship was performed by the Holy Mother’s family at Jayrambati not with any worldly motive, but purely out of love of God: the improvement in the financial conditions of the family was incidental. By performing the Jagaddhatri worship at Jayrambati in the footsteps of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and the grandmother Sri Shyamasundari Devi, the devotees become lions who carry the Divine Mother Jagaddhatri in their own hearts and thereby control their unruly minds which are like mad elephants.

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is indeed Jagaddhatri, the Bearer of the World, to millions of her children all over the world. She literally took upon herself the sins of her innumerable devotees in her own lifetime and
liberated them through her own prayers. Just as a mother takes upon herself the responsibility for all the good and mischievous acts of her little children and protects them at all times, the Holy Mother, the eternal Mother Jagaddhati of her past, present and future devotees, takes upon herself all the burdens of her children and sees to it that they reach the highest goal of human life. This is the significance of the worship of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi at Jayrambati in one of her aspects as Jagaddhati.

27. SRI SARADA DEVI AS KALI

There is no Satan in Hinduism as the ancient Hindu sages saw everything as Brahman. It is perhaps naive and unfair to give credit for all good things in the world to God and shift all the blame for evil on poor Satan! Sri Ramakrishna compares evil to the snake's poison which does not affect the snake (God). The Sakta concept of Kali therefore projects the Divine Mother as benign and terrible at once, like nature itself.

'Kali' literally means Mother Time, which destroys all; She is the form of Death. Therefore She wears garlands of severed human heads and Her dress is composed of severed human arms. The four-armed Kali holds a bleeding human head in Her lower left-hand and a sword in the upper. Thus the left-hand side of Kali represents the terrible side of God. Those who worship God in the left-handed way (Vamachara) seeking worldly enjoyments only, suffer terribly, for all enjoyments lead only to suffering ultimately. The upper right hand of Kali shows
protection (Abhaya Hasta), conferring fearlessness (Abhaya) to Her devotees. With Her lower right-hand the Mother offers boons to Her devotees (Varada Hasta). Thus the right-hand side of Kali symbolises the benign nature of God. Those who worship God in the righthanded way (Dakshinachara), praying for dispassion, devotion, spiritual knowledge etc., attain to the everlasting bliss of Brahman, by the grace of Kali. This then is the Blissful Mother seen and adored by great devotees like Ramprasad and Sri Ramakrishna.

For a full appreciation of the rationale for worshipping Kali in this terrible form, one has to go to Swami Vivekananda. In Kashmir in 1898, Swamiji’s attention centred “on the dark, the painful and the inscrutable in the world, with the determination to reach, by this particular road, the One behind phenomena.” He then experienced an intense vision of Kali and wrote the poem Kali, the Mother in a state of Bhava-Samadhi. In his talks to disciples, he would quote the great Psalmist, “Though Thou slay me, yet I will trust in Thee.”

Swamiji then said, “It is a mistake to hold that with all men pleasure is the motive. Quite as many are born to seek pain. There can be bliss in torture, too! Let us worship the Terror for its own sake..... Learn to recognise the Mother as instinctively in evil, terror, sorrow and annihilation as in that which makes for sweetness and joy !...... Only by the worship of the Terrible, can the Terrible itself be overcome and immortality gained. Meditate on death! Worship the Terrible! And the Mother Herself is Brahman! Even Her curse is a blessing. The heart must become a cremation-ground, pride, selfishness and desire all burnt to ashes. Then and then alone, will the Mother come!” After this experience of
Kali, the Terrible, Swamiji would exclaim in moments of severe illness and pain, "She is the organ! She is the pain! And she is the giver of pain! Kali! Kali! Kali!"

Sister Nivedita writes, "And as he spoke, the underlying egoism of worship that is devoted to the kind God, to providence, that consoling Divinity, without a heart for God in the earthquake, or God in the volcano overwhelmed the listener. One saw that such worship was at bottom, as the Hindu calls it, merely 'shopkeeping' and one realised the infinitely greater boldness and truth in the teaching that God manifests through evil as well as through good."1

Kali, the Terrible, stands on the prostrate form of Her husband Siva (who symbolises Kala or Time) thereby showing that she controls time, space and causation as Mahamaya. She symbolises all the forces of nature. Kali's tongue lolls out of Her mouth as if to create awe and wonder in the minds of devotees at the sight of the wonderful, varied powers of nature which She symbolises graphically. Thus Kali is a marvellous conception of Godhead in its entirety. These details are all incorporated in the image of Mother Bhavatarini Kali at Dakshineswar which was worshipped and realised by Sri Ramakrishna as the Blissful Mother (Ananda Mayi).

Sri Ramakrishna directly identified the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi with the Goddess Kali worshipped in the Dakshineswar temple. The Mother, while massaging his feet one night asked, "How do you regard me?" Thakur said in reply "The same Mother that is in the temple, gave birth to this body and now resides in the Nahabat, she again is massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a form of the Blissful Mother."2
Sri Sarada Devi also confirmed on rare occasions that she was indeed the Divine Mother Kali. During Christmas holidays in 1910, a devotee heard from another, "The Mother is Kali Herself, the Primal Energy, the Deity." He wanted a direct confirmation from the Holy Mother herself. The Gita (X.13) speaks of such a self-avowal by an Avatar as the proof of his (or her) divinity. Hence this devotee, like the doubting Thomas, said to the Holy Mother, "I believe what I have heard of you. Yet if you yourself tell me so, I can be free from any lingering doubt. I want to learn from your own words, whether that is true." The Mother said, "Yes, it is so."

Once Shivaram, who was then very young, was following the Holy Mother with a bundle of clothes as she was walking from Kamarpukur to Jayrambati. Suddenly the Mother noticed that Shivaram was not following her but standing still some distance behind. Some idea was crossing his mind. Shivaram insisted that he would move further only if the Holy Mother told him who she really was. The sun was setting and the Mother was anxious to reach Jayrambati before dark. She told Shivaram that she was her aunt. But he was not happy with the reply and refused to budge. At last the Holy Mother said, "People say, I am Kali." To be doubly sure Shivaram asked, "Kali? Truly so?" The Mother said, "Yes". Shivaram was delighted with the Mother’s self-avowal and followed her to Jayrambati.

On another occasion, Shivaram heard that the Holy Mother would be leaving Jayrambati for Calcutta in February, 1920. He came and cried, placing his head on the Mother’s feet. The Mother consoled him touching his head and chin but he cried all the more, saying, "Assure me whether you have accepted all my burden..."
and whether you are Mother Kali Herself.” Shivaram’s yearning produced such a wonderful manifestation of divinity in the Holy Mother’s personality that it struck Brahmachari Varada, who was standing nearby, that she was at that moment not a mere human being. In that divine mood, the Mother laid her hand on Shivaram’s head and said, “Yes, that’s so.” Shivaram then saluted the Mother with folded hands, reciting the hymn, “Sarva mangala mangalye,” etc. He then started for Kamarpukur with the blessings of the Holy Mother and said happily to Varada, “Brother, Mother is Kali Herself. She is the wielder of people’s destiny; through her grace comes freedom. Do you understand?”

Once Swami Tanmayananda worshipped the Mother’s feet at Jayrambati and placed them over his head. The Mother remonstrated, saying that Thakur, God Himself, sits in the Sahasrara in the head. The Swami at once asked her, “If Thakur is God Himself, who are you then?” Without the least hesitation the Holy Mother replied, “Who else should I be? I, too, am the Divine Mother.”

The Divine Mother Kali is said to have eight female attendants called ‘Nayikas’. Jaya and Vijaya are said to be the inseparable companions of the Divine Mother. If the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was the Divine Mother Kali Herself, one would expect her companions to be Nayikas. A supernatural event took place in the Holy Mother’s life when she was thirteen which indeed projects her as the Divine Mother attended by eight Nayikas. She was then at Kamarpukur where women used to go to a big tank called Haldarpukur for bathing and for fetching water. The Holy Mother was hesitant to go alone to Haldarpukur thinking, “I am a married young
woman; how can I go alone for a bath?" Then she saw eight girls approach her. So she stepped on the road. Four of those girls walked in front of her and four behind. Thus the divine company went to the tank and had their dip; and then they returned in the same manner. This happened every day at Kamarpukur. Though Sri Sarada Devi wondered who these eight girls were, she could not make out anything, nor did she ever ask them who they were. 

However it can be seen from the Holy Mother's life that eight outstanding women were intimately connected with her. Four of them preceded the Holy Mother and were born before her; four were born after her. The four who were born before the Holy Mother are: Rani Rasmani (1793-1861), Yogeswari Bhairavi Brahmani (sometime between 1800-1880), Aghoremani Devi (or Gopaler Ma, 1822-1906), and Yogin-Ma (1851-1942). The four who were born after the Holy Mother are: Gauri-Ma (1857-1938), Lakshmi Devi (1864-1926), Golap-Ma (1864-1924) and Sister Nivedita (1867-1911). Sri Ramakrishna himself spoke of Rani Rasmani as a Nayika of Kali. The Holy Mother herself spoke of Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma as her 'Jaya and Vijaya.' It is anybody's guess whether the others were 'Nayikas' or not; but it can't be denied that they were all close associates of the Holy Mother.

Only the benign aspect of the Divine Mother Kali was manifest in the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The deluding Avidya power, the 'terrible' aspect of Kali, was not seen in her. She used her deluding power only to hide her infinite spiritual stature, so that her children would not be overawed and would feel free to approach her as Mother. Sri Ramakrishna gave a hint of the
'terrible' side of the Holy Mother when he warned Hriday not to offend her and said, "If the Being that is in her is offended, not even Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara can save you." There is an incident too in the life of Sri Sarada Devi which gives a hint of the heroic side of Mother Kali in her.

Harish was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna who frequented the Baranagore Math. Afraid that he might become a monk, his wife secretly applied drugs and charms on him. His mind then became deranged. Under the influence of drugs, Harish visited Kamarpukur. The Holy Mother saw his condition and wrote to Belur Math to take him away. Before Swamis Saradananda and Niranjanananda could come to Kamarpukur, Harish started acting like a lunatic and the Holy Mother had to apply her own remedy on him.

One day Harish began to chase the Mother as she was returning from a neighbour's house. There was nobody around to check Harish. In a hurry, the Mother ran around a barn of paddy seven times, followed by Harish in hot pursuit. Then there was a sudden transformation in the Holy Mother; she assumed the heroic mood of Vagala, one of the forms of the Divine Mother. The Holy Mother herself later described what she did under that divine mood: "Then I stood firm working myself up to my full stature (literally, assuming my own form). And then placing my knee on his chest and taking hold of his tongue, I slapped him on the cheeks so hard that he began to gasp for breath. My fingers became red." The Mother's summary treatment cured Harish of his madness. He fled to Vrindaban on the arrival of Swami Niranjanananda and became fully normal after some time.

Sri Sarada Devi's punishment in a heroic mood of the mad Harish was in the very manner in which the spirited
Goddess Vagala, one of the ten Mahavidyas, killed a demon. Devotees believe that the Holy Mother could assume all kinds of divine forms and moods at will and on this occasion she assumed the forms of Goddess Vagala which suited the occasion. Swami Gambhirananda writes in this connection; "There is no reason why a devotee should not believe this; but a matter-of-fact man will be surprised to see how the Mother who was noted all along for her modesty, meekness and mercy, could at a critical moment be on her mettle. When we look more closely into such incidents of her life, it strikes us that the poet who penned the line in the Chandi, 'Of all the beings in the three worlds (heaven, earth and hell), in you alone, O Goddess, is seen a kindness of heart combined with heroism in fight' was truly a seer."8

In the 'Vagala' incident, the Holy Mother was "cruel only to be kind." Her rough treatment cured Harish of his madness. The episode shows Sri Sarada Devi as benign and 'terrible' at once, like Mother Kali Herself! There is also an earlier event in the Holy Mother which reveals her capacity to assume a heroic mood in times of crisis.

It was the Holy Mother’s third visit to Dakshineswar on foot from Jayrambati, a distance of about 70 miles. In January 1877 the Mother started from Jayrambati with her nephew Shivaram, niece Lakshmi Devi and some other villagers. They had to pass through a stretch of uninhabited fields called 'Thelo-Bhelo' which was infested by murderous thieves, called 'Bagdis'. There used to stand a terrible image of Goddess Kali at Thelo-Bhelo whom the Bagdi robbers used to invoke before pouncing upon wayfarers. Everyone was therefore anxious to cross Thelo-Bhelo before sunset. But the Holy Mother could not keep
pacc with others as she was tired. She found herself right in the middle of Thelo-Bhelo when darkness set in.

The Mother then saw a tall robber approaching, dark in colour and carrying a stout staff on his shoulders, followed by his wife. She accosted them lovingly, addressing the couple as ‘father’ and ‘mother’ and sought their help and protection. There was something in the spontaneous affection of the Holy Mother which moved the hearts of the Bagdi couple profoundly, They protected the Holy Mother just as if she was their own daughter. The Bagdi robber brought some fried rice for her to eat and his wife improvised a bed with her clothes and other things in a nearby shop. At dawn, the Bagdi couple took their ‘daughter’ upto Tarakeswar, where the Holy Mother’s companions, who were looking for her, found her. The Mother and the Bagdi couple had become so attached to each other during that single night that all three shed profuse tears at the thought of separation.

Later the Bagdi couple visited their ‘daughter’ at Dakshineswar more than once with various presents. When the Holy Mother asked them once why they were so attached to her, they replied, “You are not, in fact, an ordinary mortal, for we saw you as Kali.” When the Mother doubted whether it was so, the Bagdi ‘parents’ said in an aggrieved voice, “No, Mother, there was no mistake about what we saw. You want to hide this because we are sinners.” The Bagdi couple had, perhaps, worshipped the terrible image of their patron deity Kali at Thelo-Bhelo with great devotion. As a result they were blessed with the vision of Goddess Kali in the person of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi at Thelo-Bhelo itself! The Holy Mother who was none other than Kali thus manifested herself in this incident as ‘Patita Pavana’, the redeemer of the fallen.
The Mother and Child aspects of God are said to be especially responsive to prayers in this Kali Yuga. There is a saying, “Mother Kali awake in the Kali Yuga Gopala is awake in the Kali Yuga.” This truth is also intuitively recognised and put into practice by Christians who worship the Virgin Mary and Child Jesus as ‘Madonna and Bambino’ (Mother and Child). This saying has been proved in Bengal by the Ramakrishna Incarnation. Mother Kali and Child Gopala proved that they are really ‘awake’ in the Kali Yuga by manifesting themselves in Bengal as Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna respectively.

28. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS KALI

Bengal is the holy land which is foremost in its devotion to the Divine Mother. For centuries, the Bengalis have worshipped the Mother Goddess Kali. The devotional songs of great mystics like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta have immensely popularised the cult of Kali among the Bengali masses. It may be said that the Mother Kali wanted to enjoy the devotional fervour of Bengali mystics like Ramprasad and therefore incarnated Herself as Sri Ramakrishna in Bengal, for Thakur is the culmination of the cult of Kali in Bengal. Wherever Kali is worshipped, a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna may also be found.

Before the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, his mother Chandramani Devi saw Sakti or Divine Power in the form of light emanate from a Sivalinga and enter into her body, due to which she felt that she had become pregnant. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna could be considered an Incarnation of Sive-Sakti or Kali.
Ramkumar took his youngest brother Gadadhar to Calcutta in the year 1853 A.D. Calcutta is only the corrupt, anglicised form of the Bengali name ‘Kalighat,’ which is considered one of the 51 principal seats of Sakti worship in India. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna came to the holy city of Kalighat or Calcutta, he was profoundly drawn towards the Mother Goddess Kali. Like so many Bengalis, Gadadhar also derived great inspiration from the devotional songs on Kali sung by mystics like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta. Just at this time when Gadadhar’s mind turned towards the Goddess Kali, the Mother also incarnated Herself as Sri Sarada Devi in the year 1853 A.D.

After the death of Ramkumar in 1856 A.D., his youngest brother Gadadhar was appointed as the priest of Kali at the Dakshineswar Kali temple. Very soon the ritualistic devotion (Vaidhi bhakti) of the junior priest Gadadhar turned into ardent devotion (Raga bhakti) and further into Prema, pure love of God. Due to the wonderful devotion of Sri Ramakrishna, people felt a thrill as soon as they entered the Kali temple. Other Brahmins seeing his worship and body shining with a resplendent lustre said to one another, “It is as if Vishnu Himself has assumed a human body and has sat down to worship.”

Rani Rasmani, the proprietrix of the Dakshineswar temple, became fond of hearing the devotional songs on Kali sung by the young priest Gadadhar. One day when she was listening to his songs, her mind dwelled on the lawsuits she was waging. The young priest then slapped the Rani’s face and admonished her for thinking about worldly matters in the temple. Everybody was upset by the audacious behaviour of the young priest, but the
Rani herself took it calmly in the belief that the Mother Kali Herself was correcting her thus, though the person of the priest. Thus Rani Rasmani felt in her heart of hearts that Thakur was none other than Kali Incarnate.

Soon the 'mad priest of Kali' became unable to conduct the ritualistic worship of Kali because of his devotional absorption. Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, himself came to see the condition of the 'mad priest' and was profoundly moved by his wonderful devotion. Mathur said with great delight to Rani Rasmani, "We have got an extraordinary worshipper; the Goddess will be awakened very soon." With tears in his eyes and heart purified by devotion, Mathur saluted the deity Kali and Her extraordinary worshipper from a distance, saying, "The installation of the Devi has answered its purpose at long last. It may be said that the Devi has truly been installed now and the real worship of the Mother has been performed."

Sri Ramakrishna's yearning for the Divine Mother became intense and unbearable. In sheer agony, he decided to end his life one day and seized the sword that was in the shrine, for cutting off his head. He then had a wonderful vision of the Divine Mother and fell down unconscious. Everything vanished before his eyes and he saw only a boundless, infinite, conscious sea of light! Just as Shakti in the form of divine light from a Sivalinga engulfed Chandramani Devi, the Divine Mother manifested Herself to Sri Ramakrishna at first in the form of divine light. Thakur thus realised the grand Vedantic utterance "Prajnanam Brahma" (Consciousness is Brahman). Thereafter he saw and moved with the living, 'divine form of the deity Bhavatarini Kali, who became awake' as foreseen by Mathur Babu.
One day, the devout Mathur Babu was sitting and observing Sri Ramakrishna from a distance when he saw a wonderful vision. Sri Ramakrishna was pacing to and fro; when he was coming towards Mathur he appeared like Kali and when he turned about, Mathur saw him as Siva! Mathur thought that it was an optical illusion, but it happened repeatedly. He then ran, clasped the feet of Thakur and began weeping. Mathur also saw many other visions about Thakur.

It was in fact written in Mathur's horoscope that his chosen Ideal, the Divine Mother Kali, would be so very compassionate on him that She would assume a body, accompany and protect him wherever he went. Mathur thus became convinced that Mother Kali present in the stone image in the Dakshineswar temple had assumed the body of Sri Ramakrishna and was accompanying him wherever he went.  

Sri Ramakrishna's body and mind got themselves so much identified with all deities that on days auspicious to any deity, particular characteristics of that deity manifested themselves spontaneously in his divine person. On days auspicious to Kali, Sri Ramakrishna himself became Kali, for example. His hands then would assume gestures like those of Kali, offering boons and protection from all fears. A most remarkable manifestation of Mother Kali in the divine person of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna took place at Shyampukur on November 6, 1885.

Sri Ramakrishna was seriously ill with throat cancer in November, 1885. A day prior to the annual Kali Puja, Thakur said to a few devotees, "Collect all the ingredients for a brief worship; Mother Kali must be worshipped tomorrow." It was 7 P.M. after sunset on the Kali Puja day. The devotees had collected all the articles for the
worship near Thakur’s bed and were waiting for the commencement of Kali Puja. But Sri Ramakrishna was sitting quiet without conducting the worship himself or asking any one present to do it. Suddenly it struck Girish Chandra Ghosh that Thakur had no need to worship Kali for his own sake: perhaps it was for the devotees to make themselves blessed by worshipping the Divine Mother in the person of Sri Ramakrishna, the living image of Kali! Thinking so, Girish was beside himself with joy and devotional fervour and offered the flowers and the sandalpaste that were meant for Kali at the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna uttering, “Victory to Mother!” Immediately a wonderful transformation came about in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. All the hairs of his body stood on end and he entered into profound ecstasy. His face radiating effulgence, his lips adorned with a divine smile and his hands assuming the attitudes of granting boons and freedom from fear — all indicated the manifestation of the Divine Mother Kali in Sri Ramakrishna. It seemed to all that the luminous image of the Devi suddenly appeared before them in the body of Thakur.

There was no limit then to the joy of the devotees present. Each of them managed to take flowers, sandalpaste etc., from the tray and uttering a mantra of his own liking, worshipped the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna and filled the room with repeated shouts of ‘Jai’ (Victory). Sri Ramakrishna then regained partial consciousness and ate a little of the fruits, roots, sweets, etc., collected for the worship of Kali and blessed devotees that their knowledge and devotion might increase. Afterwards they took his Prasada and sang the glory of Kali till a late hour in the night. Thus on that holy day, Sri Ramakrishna revealed to his devotees that he was none other than the all-powerful Maha-Kali, the Mother of the Universe.
The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had premonition of the impending Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna through many incidents. One day Thakur asked the Mother, "Do you have any dream?" The Holy Mother had seen in a dream the Divine Mother Kali with Her neck turned aside and asked Her, "Mother, why are you in this posture?" Mother Kali then replied, "Because of his that thing there (pointing to Sri Ramakrishna's sore due to cancer in the throat), I too have it." The Holy Mother at once realised that if Mother Kali could not or would not cure Sri Ramakrishna in spite of Her suffering equally with him, then what could mere humans do? To what extent the Holy Mother identified Sri Ramakrishna with the Divine Mother Kali is revealed not only by this incident, but also by her poignant reaction to the passing away of Thakur.

Though Mother Sarada Devi was so very shy that she never entered Thakur's room when any gentleman or even a devotee was there, when Thakur passed away at the Cossipore garden house, she could contain herself no longer, but rushed to Thakur's room and cried out, "Mother Kali, dear, for what fault of mine have you left me?" Thus to the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna was Kali Herself.

Though Sri Ramakrishna worshipped all deities and Avatars, his Ishta was Kali. He saw all deities and Avatars, even the absolute Brahman Itself, as different manifestations of Mother Kali. Kali was the very breath of his life and he breathed his last with Her name on his lips. Sri Ramakrishna used to sing frequently the song, "Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi or Prabhas, so long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my lips?" And he passed away in
exactly the same manner. At 1:02 a.m. on the 16th August, 1886, Sri Ramakrishna gathered all the strength in his frail body ravaged by cancer, uttered the sweet name of Kali thrice in a clear voice and entered into Maha Samadhi.

The number 51 is considered holy in our Santana Dharma as it has profound associations with the Mother Goddess, the human body in which the Mother Kali sports and Sanskrit, the language of gods and goddesses. 51 are the principal seats of the Devi (Sakti Pitas) in our holy land. 51 are the letters in the holy language Sanskrit, each of which is associated with one lotus-petal in the seven yogic-centres in the human body. There are seven yogic centres (Chakras) in the human body which contain 51 ‘lotus petals’ as follows: 4 in the Muladhara, 6 in the Swadhishthana, 10 in the Manipura, 12 in the Anahata, 16 in the Visuddha, 2 in the Ajna and 1 (1000 actually, but the zeroes have no value) in the Sahasrara.

If Sri Ramakrishna was truly an Avatar of Kali, one would then expect the number 51 also to be associated with him in a significant way: and indeed it is so! Thakur passed away in his 51st year. Ramkumar (1805-1856 A.D.), the eldest brother of Sri Ramakrishna and the first priest of Dakshineswar Kali, also passed away probably at the age of 51. In the English translation of M’s book, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, there are 51 chapters which contain the discourses of Thakur. Thus Sri Ramakrishna is none other than Kali Herself, the Eternal Mother-Goddess of India, who sports in Kalighat, the most popular of the 51 seats of Kali in modern India. A few of these Saktipitas are now out of the borders of India. To compensate for these inaccessible Saktipitas, the Divine Mother seems to have incarnated Herself in the
twin forms of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi and created new Saktipitas like Kamarpukur, Jayrambati, Dakshineswar and Belur Math in Bengal, the land of Sakti worship.

29. SRI SARADA DEVI AS DURGA

Goddess Durga is an ancient deity hymned even in the Rig Veda thus: "I take refuge in Her, the Goddess Durga, of the colour of fire blazing with tapa (austerity), who when pleased bestows the fruits of Karma. O Saviour, take us beyond all difficulties. Salutations to Thee."\(^1\) In ‘Taittiriya Aranyaka’, we find the famous ‘Durga Suktam’. A Vedic sage prays to Durga, the Divine Mother thus: "I take refuge in Her, the Goddess Durga, who is fiery in lustre and radiant in ardency, who is the Power belonging to the Supreme who manifests Himself manifoldly, who is the Power residing in actions and their fruits, rendering them efficacious. O you Goddess skilled in saving, you take us across difficulties very well. Our salutations to you".\(^2\)

Durga literally means ‘the Incomprehensible One’. She is a ten-handed martial deity, fully armed with celestial weapons. Durga is Vijaya, the Goddess of Victory who destroys evil forces! In the Chandi, the Goddess says: "Whenever there arises any obstacle from the demons, I shall come down in this way to destroy the enemy".\(^3\)

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is the Avatar of the Divine Mother Sri Durga in Her sattvika aspect who is now engaged in fighting all obstacles to the spiritual
regeneration of mankind in this materialistic age. Why did the martial deity Durga appear without her celestial weapons as the benign Sarada? As answer might be found in the comments of Swami Gambhirananda, regarding the birth of the Holy Mother: "The conflict on the psychological plane in the modern age is even more devastating than the old mythological war between the gods and the demons. Above everything else, the present-day world needs moral progress and spiritual enlightenment. The incarnate Divine Power is therefore engaged in fighting internal enemies of mankind (like lust, greed, jealousy, fanaticism and so on)."*

It is very appropriate that the Divine Mother Durga appeared in Bengal in the form of the Holy Mother. The people of Bengal have been worshipping the Divine Mother Durga with unsurpassed devotion for centuries, with the firm belief that She visits Bengal every year from Mount Kailas in the Himalayas without fail and manifests Herself in a special manner in Her images during the Durga Puja days. They pour their devotion to Mother Durga in their 'Agamani' welcome hymns and through songs composed by great devotees like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta. The Vijayadasami is the day of universal rejoicing in Bengal when Hindus transcend all caste and social differences and embrace each other as brothers. The Incarnation of the Divine Mother in the twin personalities of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi has been brought about in Bengal by such devout prayers and worship of Bengalis for centuries.

A wonderful event prior to the birth of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi shows her as the Divine Mother Durga Incarnate. Mother Durga is said to dwell in the Vilva tree,
which is a symbol of the Sushumna canal, the path of Kundalini. Once Shyamasundari Devi, the mother of Sri Sarada Devi, was sitting in the dark beside a potter’s oven under a Vilva tree in the village Shihar. “There suddenly issued a jingling sound from the direction of the oven, and a little girl came down from the branches of the tree. She laid her soft hands round Shyamasundari’s neck, whereupon she fell down unconscious. She had no idea how long she lay there thus. Her relatives came searching for her and carried her home. On regaining consciousness she felt as though the little girl had entered her womb.”

This confirms that Sri Sarada Devi is Durga descended from Her Vilva tree.

Swami Vivekananda also confirmed it later by identifying the Holy Mother with Durga. Swamiji wrote to a brother-disciple, “Brother, I shall demonstrate the worship of the living Durga, and then shall my name be true.........Brother, I tell you, I am a fanatic in this matter. Of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, you may assert that he was God, man, or whatever you like, but fie on him who is not devoted to the Mother.”

In 1901, Swami Vivekananda saw in a vision that Mother Durga was worshipped at Belur Math. A few days before the Durga Puja in 1901, Swami Brahmanandanda was sitting on the bank of the Ganges at Belur Math. Suddenly he saw the ten-armed form of Mother Durga walking on the surface of the Ganges towards the monastery arounds. Thus Mother Durga Herself chose to make Her ‘Agamana’ (visit) to Belur Math! A moment later Swamiji arrived by boat, came to Maharaj (Swami Brahmanandanda) and said, “Raja, make arrangements at once for the worship of Mother Durga.” Then they learnt of each other’s vision of Durga. Since then the Durga Puja is performed every year at Belur Math.
Durga destroys all evil tendencies and bad feelings. The grand celebration of Durga Puja in 1901 at Belur Math removed all unfair animosity of bigoted people of neighbouring villages who used to criticise Swamiji and other monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna for their novel ideas and non-observance of restrictions of caste, custom and food. The Holy Mother was present throughout the festival, which was conducted according to scriptural injunctions. The Mother was very pleased with the way the Puja was conducted and returned to her residence at Baghbazar after blessing the monks.

Regarding the first Durga Puja at Belur Math in 1901, Sri Sarada Devi reminisced later: "'Naren took me to the Belur Math at the time of the first Durga Puja festival and through me gave twenty-five rupees to the priest as his fee. They spent fourteen thousand rupees on that occasion. The place became crowded with people. The monks worked hard. Naren came to me and said, 'Mother, please make me lie down with fever.' No sooner had he said this than he was down with a severe attack of fever. I thought, 'Goodness gracious! What is this? How will he be cured?' 'Don't be anxious, Mother,' said Naren, 'I have myself begged for this fever. My reason is this. These boys are working hard. But if I see the slightest mistake, I shall fly into a rage and accuse them. I may even give them slaps. It will be painful to them as well as to me. Therefore I thought it would be better to lie down with ever for some time.' When the day's function was over, I came to him and said, 'Dear child, the work is over now. Please get up. Naren said that he was alright and got up from bed.'" Thus Swamiji made good his words, "Brother, I shall demonstrate the worship of the living Durga." It is said that the worship of Durga must be performed meticulously, lest one should
incur the wrath of the spirited deity. Hence Swamiji's concern for perfection in the worship of Mother Durga.

Sri Sarada Devi attended the Durga Puja at Belur Math for the second time in October, 1912. No sooner was the ceremonial awakening of the Deity finished on the sixth lunar day than was seen the Mother's carriage at the gate of Belur Math. The monks and devotees led by Swami Premananda ran up at once, unharnessed the horses and drew the carriage into the courtyard. The Mother then looked around with beaming eyes and said, "Everything is ready tip-top. It is as though we ourselves have come attired like the Goddess Durga." This again is a rare self-avowal by the Mother that she was Durga Incarnate.

The Holy Mother had special love and regard for Belur. The monks considered that the Belur Math came into existence by the blessings of the Mother and not just by the efforts of Swami Vivekananda. They were also aware that the Divine Mother had taken the human form of Sri Sarada Devi. Hence they couldn't consider the Durga Puja at the Math a success unless the Divine Mother in Her human form came to the monastery to accept their adoration personally. At the beginning of the Durga Puja, Sri Sarada Devi's name was ceremonially announced by the priest as the beneficiary of the celebrations and even to this day, that custom is being followed. When the Holy Mother came to the place of worship, the monks offered at her feet handfuls of flowers as they did before the deity, and they didn't consider their worship complete without such an offering. And during the celebration they kept their eyes fixed on her face; if she smiled, they thought that the Goddess Durga had accepted their worship.
The Bengali Ramayana of Krittivasa recounts how Sri Rama worshipped the Divine Mother Durga with one hundred and eight blue lotuses. When one lotus was found short of the number, Sri Rama was ready to pluck out his own lotus-eye to complete the worship which pleased the Mother Durga. Swami Brahmananda was not to be outdone by Sri Rama in this regard! He worshipped the feet of the Mother Sarada, the living Durga, with one hundred and eight full-blown lotuses on the second day of the worship. By the grace of the Holy Mother, Swami Brahmananda didn’t have to resort to the drastic measure adopted by Sri Rama!

The third Durga Puja attended by the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated at Belur Math between the Third and Sixth of October, 1916. Regarding this event, Swami Sivananda has written: “Owing to the presence of the blessed Holy Mother, it has altogether been a direct worship (and not merely the worship of the Goddess in an image). Although there was continuous rain and storm on all the three days, yet by the Mother’s grace, no part of the celebration suffered. And it even happened that just as the devotees sat for taking prasada, the rain stopped. All were surprised at this. Afterwards it was learnt from Yogin Ma that whenever the devotees sat for prasada and rain seemed to be imminent, the Mother sat down to make japa of Durga’s name and she prayed, ‘Dear me! How can so many people sit down to eat in this rain? Their leaf-plates and everything will certainly be washed away. Mother, save us!’ And Mother Durga indeed save. It happened likewise on all the three days.” After the Sandhi Puja (worship that is performed at the sacred moment of the junction of the eighth and ninth days of the moon) was over, Swami Saradananda said to a Brahmachari. “Go and offer this
guinea piece to the Mother and salute her.” The Brahma-
chari was not quite sure who was meant. He thought that
the offering was to be made to the Goddess Durga. All
the same he queried the Swami, who replied, “Mother
(Sri Sarada Devi) is there in that garden. Go and offer
the guinea piece at her feet and salute her. It is she who
has been worshipped here.”

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi manifested herself
as Durga by coming down the vilwa tree before her birth.
During her lifetime, she was literally worshipped as
Mother Durga by innumerable people. Therefore it is no
wonder that she manifested herself as the very image of
Durga even at the time of her Mahasamadhi. Swami
Tapasyananda describes the last moments of the Holy
Mother on earth as follows: “Just before her passing
away, her face and body became dark and shrivelled, but
to the astonishment of all, a great change took place after
life was extinct. Her shrivelled form was found to relax
and her face swelled up and assumed a radiant hue. Her
countenance seemed to resemble the face of the image of
the Goddess Durga used in worship—mellow and golden
in colour with the expression of calmness and serenity
writ large on it. This expression lingered on her face for
a long time.”

30. SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS DURGA

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal, where the most
popular deity is Kali and the most celebrated religious
festival is the Durga Puja. Therefore the Durga Puja
celebrations naturally figure very prominently in the life
of Sri Ramakrishna, the greatest votary of the Divine
Mother in the spiritual history of the world. Thakur’s life is full of remarkable incidents which took place during the Durga Puja.

Swami Saradananda writes that on days auspicious to a particular deity, the characteristics of that deity would naturally become manifest in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. On Durga Puja days, the characteristics of the Divine Mother would manifest spontaneously in Thakur, when he sat motionless in samadhi; sometimes his hands would assume the gestures of Kali, offering a boon and protection against all fears. On the occasion of Durga Puja, Sri Ramakrishna himself became transformed into Durga! Like Durga, he granted boons and showered his grace on devotees on the Durga Puja days. Three such instances in Thakur’s life are cited below.

In 1868 A.D., Sri Ramakrishna’s nephew Hriday wanted to celebrate the Durga Puja in his house and requested his uncle to be present. Thakur expressed his inability to attend Hriday’s worship but consoled him saying, “Why are you pained? In my subtle body I shall daily go to see your worship; nobody except you will see me.” Hriday conducted the Durga Puja as directed by Sri Ramakrishna. On the seventh and succeeding days of the ten-day Durga Puja festival, Hriday saw Sri Ramakrishna in a luminous body standing in ecstasy, beside the image during the adoration of the Devi during the waving of lights.

Afterwards Hriday described his experience to Thakur who said, “At the time of the Arati and the juncture-worship, I felt indeed a great yearning to see your worship and I went into ecstasy and felt that I went along a path of light and was present in your worship hall in a luminous body.” Mother Durga is supposed to visit
Bengali homes for three days during the Puja and it is certain that she does so in Her subtle body in the same manner as Sri Ramakrishna. Just like Durga on Her ‘Agamana’ (visit), Thakur visited the house of Hriday in a luminous body and manifested himself during the worship. Was Sri Ramakrishna any different from Mother Durga?

Mother Durga is worshipped in a temporary image during the Durga Puja, at the end of which the image is immersed in a river. Many devotees become so attached to the temporary image that its immersion causes them great anguish. This happened once to Mathuranath Biswas, the rich patron of Sri Ramakrishna, when he performed the Durga Puja at his Janbazar residence in the 1860s. The rationale behind the worship of the temporary image of Durga and Mathuranath’s dilemma have been beautifully described by Christopher Isherwood:

“The Durga Puja festival lasts five days, ending on the fifth with the immersion of the image which has been used in the worship. Two kinds of image are used in Hindu ritual, permanent and temporary. The permanent image made of marble or some other durable stone, is placed in a temple, dedicated and worshipped everyday thenceforward. The temporary image, made of clay, is used only for one particular religious festival; then it is consigned to the nearest river, lake or sea.

“The temporary image is just as sacred as the permanent image; but only during the period of the festival. Before it can be worshipped, the worshipper must evoke the Divine Presence from his own heart and transfer the Presence to the image. Before the image can be removed from the shrine and immersed, the Divine Presence must be withdrawn from it again, and reinstalled within the
worshipper’s heart. The reason for this procedure is obvious enough. But devotion is not reasonable. And it may happen that the worshipper suffers great pain in consequence. If he can truly believe that the Presence has entered the image, then there is the danger that his devotion may fasten upon the image itself. Image and Presence may become completely identified in his mind. The thought that they might be separated again will then naturally fill him with dismay......This is what happened to Mathur at the Durga festival.”

At that time, Sri Ramakrishna was practising ‘Sakhi Bhava’, dressing like a woman and regarding himself as a female companion of the Divine Mother. So natural and perfect was Thakur’s Sakhi Bhava, that the womenfolk of Mathur’s family at Janbazar felt that Sri Ramakrishna was indeed a woman and exactly treated him as one among themselves! Thakur’s dress, manners, smile, everything was like that of Jaya and Vijaya, the companions of the Divine Mother. Due to the divine presence and moods of Thakur, Mathur and his family felt as if the image of Durga appeared to be living and smiling, full of divine light. The worship hall was filled with an indescribable but palpable Divine Presence, felt even by the dullest minds. As a consequence Mathur Babu became so attached to the temporary Durga image that he bluntly refused to allow the priests to take it for immersion on the Vijaya Dasami, the final day of the Durga Puja celebrations. The ladies of Mathur Babu’s family then turned to ‘Baba’ (father, that is, Sri Ramakrishna) for bringing around the irate Mathur.

Sri Ramakrishna found Mathur in a foul mood. As soon as he saw Thakur, Mathur came up to him and said, “‘Let them say whatever they like, ‘father’, I cannot bid goodbye to Mother (the temporary image of Durga) before
Bengali homes for three days during the Puja and it is certain that she does so in Her subtle body in the same manner as Sri Ramakrishna. Just like Durga on Her 'Agamana' (visit), Thakur visited the house of Hriday in a luminous body and manifested himself during the worship. Was Sri Ramakrishna any different from Mother Durga?

Mother Durga is worshipped in a temporary image during the Durga Puja, at the end of which the image is immersed in a river. Many devotees become so attached to the temporary image that its immersion causes them great anguish. This happened once to Mathuranath Biswas, the rich patron of Sri Ramakrishna, when he performed the Durga Puja at his Janbazar residence in the 1860s. The rationale behind the worship of the temporary image of Durga and Mathuranath's dilemma have been beautifully described by Christopher Isherwood:

"The Durga Puja festival lasts five days, ending on the fifth with the immersion of the image which has been used in the worship. Two kinds of image are used in Hindu ritual, permanent and temporary. The permanent image made of marble or some other durable stone, is placed in a temple, dedicated and worshipped everyday thenceforward. The temporary image, made of clay, is used only for one particular religious festival; then it is consigned to the nearest river, lake or sea.

"The temporary image is just as sacred as the permanent image; but only during the period of the festival. Before it can be worshipped, the worshipper must evoke the Divine Presence from his own heart and transfer the Presence to the image. Before the image can be removed from the shrine and immersed, the Divine Presence must be withdrawn from it again, and reinstalled within the
worshipper's heart. The reason for this procedure is obvious enough. But devotion is not reasonable. And it may happen that the worshipper suffers great pain in consequence. If he can truly believe that the Presence has entered the image, then there is the danger that his devotion may fasten upon the image itself. Image and Presence may become completely identified in his mind. The thought that they might be separated again will then naturally fill him with dismay....This is what happened to Mathur at the Durga festival."

At that time, Sri Ramakrishna was practising 'Sakhi Bhava', dressing like a woman and regarding himself as a female companion of the Divine Mother. So natural and perfect was Thakur's Sakhi Bhava, that the womenfolk of Mathur's family at Janbazar felt that Sri Ramakrishna was indeed a woman and exactly treated him as one among themselves! Thakur's dress, manners, smile, everything was like that of Jaya and Vijaya, the companions of the Divine Mother. Due to the divine presence and moods of Thakur, Mathur and his family felt as if the image of Durga appeared to be living and smiling, full of divine light. The worship hall was filled with an indescribable but palpable Divine Presence, felt even by the dullest minds. As a consequence Mathur Babu became so attached to the temporary Durga image that he bluntly refused to allow the priests to take it for immersion on the Vijaya Dasami, the final day of the Durga Puja celebrations. The ladies of Mathur Babu's family then turned to 'Baba' (father, that is, Sri Ramakrishna) for bringing around the irate Mathur.

Sri Ramakrishna found Mathur in a foul mood. As soon as he saw Thakur, Mathur came up to him and said, "Let them say whatever they like, 'father', I cannot bid goodbye to Mother (the temporary image of Durga) before
I breathe my last. I have told them I shall perform Her daily worship. How can I do without Mother?"

Sri Ramakrishna then passed his hand over Mathur's heart which act invariably brought about a wonderful spiritual transformation in the fortunate person concerned. Thakur then said, "Oh! Is this your fear? But who says that you will have to be without Mother? Moreover, where will She go even if the ceremony of immersion be gone through? Can a mother afford to be away from her child? Sitting in the outer hall She accepted your worship these three days; She will now be nearer to you, sit in your heart and accept your worship."

Due to the wonderful touch of Sri Ramakrishna, Mathur Babu's mind underwent a transformation. Swami Saradananda opines that Mathur probably "saw the form of the Divine Mother existing in the core of his heart illuminining it with an effulgence never known before, as a result of which his keen eagerness to retain the image diminished. A true spiritual teacher thus draws the attention of the disciple to the splendour of the higher ideal."

"External worship, material worship," Swami Vivekananda quotes from the scriptures, "is the lowest stage; struggling to rish high, mental worship is the next stage; but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realised." Here we find Sri Ramakrishna leading his devotee Mathuranath Biswas from the lowest stage of worship of Mother Durga in the image to mental worship and further to the highest stage of realisation in his own heart. This is the real 'Agamana', the home-coming of the Divine Mother Durga!
On another occasion, Surendranath Mitra, a great householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, was celebrating Durga Puja in his residence, despite strong opposition from his family members. The Durga Puja had earlier been discontinued at Surenda’s house after a mishap had happened. But Surenda ventured to perform the worship with the blessing of Thakur. On the auspicious eighth day of Durgashtami, Sri Ramakrishna who was in the company of his devotees, suddenly entered into samadhi at the time of the Sandhi Puja (juncture worship). After half an hour Thakur’s samadhi came to an end and he told the devotees, “I saw that there opened a luminous path from here to Surendra’s house. I saw further that attracted by Surendra’s devotion, the Mother had appeared in the image and that a ray of light was coming out of Her third eye. I also saw that rows of lamps were lighted in the front verandah and Surendra was sitting and weeping piteously in the courtyard in front of the Mother. Go you all together to his house now. He will feel much comforted to see you.” All devotees including Narendra then went to Surendra’s house and found out from him that Sri Ramakrishna’s vision was true in every detail.

This incident again shows the efficacy of Durga Puja and confirms the traditional belief of Bengalis that Mother Durga visits the houses of Her sincere devotees in a subtle form through Her image. It again portrays Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of Mother Durga. Just as Mother Durga appeared in the image at Surendra’s house, Thakur also appeared there in his subtle body. If a ray of light came out of Her third eye in Surendra’s house, a flood of divine light travelled from Sri Ramakrishna’s third eye to the same place.

Wherever Mother Durga appears and bestows Her grace, there is ‘Jaya and Vijaya’, victory. Durga is the
spiritual Queen Victoria, the Goddess of Victory. Her appearance in the twin forms of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother heralded India's victory in its freedom struggle from British Imperialism, which at its best was symbolised by Queen Victoria, a contemporary of the Ramakrishna Incarnation. Swami Sivananda made this clear when he said, "The Hindus will prosper in every way because Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have appeared among them." However dark and depressing the political, economic and moral chaos may seem to us in the present period of transition, India will surely emerge gloriously like the moon coming out of clouds, as clearly seen by Swami Vivekananda in his meditation on the rock off Kanyakumari.

The great sage Vyasa concludes the Bhagavad Gita on an auspicious note with the benedictory verse: "Yatra yogeswarah Krishna yatra Partho dhanurdharah, tatra srirvijayo bhutidhruvo nitirmatirmama — Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of yoga and wherever is Partha, the wielder of the bow, certainly there will be prosperity, victory, glory and righteousness; this is my conviction."

For this age Sri Ramakrishna, the Yugavatara (the Incarnation of the Age) is the Yogeswara and Swami Vivekananda is Vijaya, the conquering spiritual hero who wielded the bow of Vedanta. Since they have appeared in India, certainly there will be Sri or Lakshmi (Prosperity), Jaya or Vijaya (Victory), Bhuti (glory) and Niti (righteousness or justice), which are all manifestations of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Durga Incarnate. This is the significance of the manifestation of Mother Durga in the twin forms of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in this age in India. This is our conviction, Vyasa style!

HARI OM TAT SAT
SRI RAMAKRISHNARUPANAM ASTU
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, 16, Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Madras-600 004:

1. Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, by Swami Saradananda (Translated into English by Swami Jagadananda), Sixth Revised Edition, October 1983 (R)
3. The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, by M. 1987. (CG)
10. The Vedanta Kesari, Monthly Magazine. (VK)

Books published by Advaita Ashrama, 5, Dehi Entally, Calcutta-700 014:

11. Life of Sri Ramakrishna, Eleventh Impression, April 1983. (L)
12. Ramakrishna and His Disciples, by Christopher Isherwood, Fifth Indian Impression, May 1986. (RD)
16. Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries, (in Six Volumes), by Marie Louise Burke, (SVND)

*Books published by others:*

20. The Bhagavad Gita, by Swami Chidbhavananda, Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, Tirupparaitturai P. O., Tamil Nadu,
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Author wishes to acknowledge with thanks the kind permission granted by the following publishers to quote material extensively from books published by them:

1. The President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 16, Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Madras 600 004.

REFERENCES

(For abbreviations, see details in Bibliography)


Chapter 3. (Brahma): 1. CG, p311.


About This Book:

Revered Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Vice President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, writes:

"His knowledge of the Hindu Puranas and the Itihasas on the one hand and of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna on the other, have helped Ramabadran to find parallelisms in the Puranic lore for most of the incidents and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. In a very ingenious way he has superimposed these two mutually and formed a nexus providing matter for deep thought. The book provides stimulating reading."

"Such a good book never fails to give pure joy and spiritual experience to readers"

- Prabuddha Bharata

Price: Rs. 20/-