The Sun and The Moon

A Comparative Study
Saint Ramalinga and Swami
As Men of Renaissance

K. Subramanian

Aáthirai Publications
Coimbatore - 45.
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DEDICATION

DEDICATED

TO THOSE TWO INNOCENT SOULS
KRISHNA AND KALIAMMAL
MY PARENTS
WHO GAVE ME THIS BIRTH
TO PONDER OVER
THE LORD ALMIGHTY.
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EPILOGUE

Prof. SELWIN CECIL ROSE,
English Department,
Government Arts College,
COIMBATORE.

I was fortunate to go through this book. As a colleague in our college, I know the author personally for so many years. This long acquaintance does not prevent me from making these comments.

Dr. K. Subramanian has plunged deep into the study of the lives of two great personalities, Saint Ramalinga and Sri Ramakrishna, who exemplified saintly and austere life for the generations to emulate.

The comparative and contrasting elements on both are typical. The society at large, torn by narrow religious fanaticism and volatile views on castes and creeds have a clear message from the two great souls. The universal, philosophical and life-oriented out-look contribute to a healthy life of the society at large.

It is no wonder to know that Dr. K. Subramanian’s contribution to the reading public will open their eyes to see the silverline in the horizon of our generation.

If one reads the book carefully, he can understand the hardwork and effort of the author to write this one. It is not only useful but also serves as a guide to the younger generations. I hope that the author will give more books of this kind.

Coimbatore, Prof. Selwin Cecil Rose.

10.05.02.
PREFACE

The 19th century produced a new awareness in the lives of the Indian people. The language, civilisation and cultural interaction of the British people brought many changes in Indian outlook. Indians began to gain new knowledge and spiritual and religious thoughts were analysed through new channels. This quest for new knowledge and spiritual awakening brought a renaissance in all walks of life and the historians call this period a period of renaissance.

This renaissance happened all over India from the north to the south, from the east to the west. India, which was in a deep sleep of ignorance and inactiveness, found herself again in her rich and time-tested old values. The traditional arts and literature came under a new type of critical approach. Scientific analysis was the motto of the learned and a new culture attracted the people. Printing press came into existence and education began to be popularised. Old literatures were printed in large numbers and were made available for the masses. There was a far reaching change in religion too. A new vitality, a new strength and a new awakening cherished the minds of the people.

These changes produced a ray of hope amidst the people that there would be political freedom along with spiritual awareness. There arose some movements of renaissance. They produced some activities in society, religion and literature. The Christian missionaries, on one side, with the support of the rulers, converted hundreds of poor people to Christianity. This was a big challenge to Hinduism. The religious heads felt the compulsion of the situation and the need of the change in religious life.

These changes could not be termed as new. They were new trends, no doubt, but they were the part of the changing old tradition. There was confusion and there was friction between the old and the new. These trends produced tremors in society. The period was full of activities of one kind or the other.

The reason for renaissance movements was politico-social environment. Yet there were a few people who carried the torch forward to spread the message of the new awakening to the people all over India. Sri Ramakrishna in the east and Dayananda Saraswathi in the west were well-known figures. It is a pity that historians forgot to name still a few more who were equally active and equally great. Such one was St.Ramalinga in the south. There were the Radhaosami movement in the north and Swami Narayan movement in the west, which were not noted seriously.
THIS BOOK AIMS TO BRING THE CONTRIBUTION OF St. RAMALINGA ALONG WITH THAT OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA to the movement of renaissance in a comparative study. The two saints did much to society as they did to religion. But people do not know them in detail. When slavery, famine, poverty and diseases were the rule of the day, the saints felt in their hearts the need of the service to the poor. They showed to the world that humanism was an essential part of renaissance. Shedding off dead and useless customs and adopting new and useful ways were stressed by the saints in a rational way. This book tries to bring out their services to society in this new approach.

The saints were the children of the age they lived. The situation, social and political, religious and cultural, was the background of their services. One can hear the echo of the contemporary problems in their teachings. To analyse one's teachings is a needy approach to reveal some new thoughts. An attempt is made in this book to bring out the salient features of their teachings in the background of the situation.

The historians in India give much and more importance to Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Dayananda, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda for their contributions to the renaissance movement. They really deserve it and deserve more. But it is strange to know why saints like Ramalinga were not given the same importance at the national level. Their contributions are not less.

Romain Rolland has noted in his book on Ramakrishna that there were no such movements in the south till Narayana Guru came in Kerala. He was not aware that St. Ramalinga was senior to even Ramakrishna in doing such yeoman services.

Another scholar noted, "we find in the best Bengali types a supreme and burning love for fellowmen, deep spirit of humanity, to which we can find few parallels outside Bengal or even India". (Chaitanya to Vivekananda, P. iii). And the author goes on giving eloquent attributes to the contribution of Bengal to Bhakti and the spiritual world. He is of the view that there were no such movements anywhere in India or in the world.

A Christian convert, by name Mishra, commented in the presence of M.: “There are four gate keepers of God in this country: Tukaram in Bombay, Robert Michel in Kashmir, Sri Ramakrishna in this part of the country and another person in East Bengal”. (M. 922) The pity was that the gentleman was not aware of one more gate in the south and its keeper was Ramalinga though the period was the same.
The contribution of Bengal was really great, but to ignore the contribution of others does not serve historical approach. Prof. K.K. Pillay, the famous Indologist lamented that "for some reason known only to them, the historians have neglected the services of Ramalinga till this day. He did many revolutionary changes in society and religion". (History of Tamilnad, P.10) If Indian historians neglect or are ignorant of the contribution of Ramalinga what to speak of the foreign scholars? Sri Narayan Guru, whom Romain Rolland hails as one of the great men, was on record of saying that he considered Ramalinga as his predecessor in service.

This book aims to compare the teachings and services of Ramalinga with those of Sri Ramakrishna in this backround. The sole motto is to introduce Ramalinga to the north in broader vistas. Humanism, being the basis of the teachings of both the saints, their views are compared in this view to point out the striking similarity.

The service of men of renaissance is two fold; they imbibe the traditional and ancient thoughts and wisdom and apply them for the period they live. Through these absorption and application they pave the way for a better life in future. The foresightedness is seen in the lives of the two saints right from their childhood. This aspect is pointed out in this book.

Teachings of Ramakrishna and songs of Ramalinga were the cries of the compassionate souls. Bhakthi was their prime root; compassion was the trunk and mysticism was the tree of blossoms full of spiritual fragrance. Compassion in their lives evolved from bhakti to culminate in mysticism. These three in one way or the other form the essentials of the very lives of the saints. The bridal mysticism, madura bhava, was the cry of their loving souls towards the Lord. They were perhaps the last, at least for the time being, in that rich traditional line of mysticism. These features are analysed in this book to show how they revived them.

The two saints were as prominent in social reformation as they were in religious service. In this project their religion and philosophy are not analysed but their services to religion and society are given to inform the people of their unknown contribution. In this way this book differs from other kinds of such research works.

There is meaning in identifying the saints as men of renaissance. Simplicity, culture, devotion, humanism, spiritualism and compassion were not new to Indian life. From the north to the south, and from the east to the west these virtues have cemented the people for ages. There were times when they faced dangers. Great
men came to rescue them. They were the embodiments of the same virtues and they lived to sustain strength in the minds of people and to resuscitate life in their spirits. Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were such two great souls and their teachings are relevent even this day. It is the aim of this book to bring them out.

As far as the author of this book knows, no such attempt has been made to do a comparative study on the teachings of Ramalinga and Ramakrishna. There is a booklet in Tamil, written by B.Sri.Acharya, which tries to give a comparative approach. But it is too elementary and introductory in nature. With humility, it can be said that this book is the first attempt of comparing two great sons of Mother India.

As primary sources, Ramalinga's poetical and prose works have been taken. The collection of this poems has been named 'Thiru Arutpa' (Songs of Divine Grace). Though there are so many editions, the one published by Ooran Adigal has been used for this book for convenience because it has given a running number for the songs and an index at the end. The prose works published by the same author has been taken.

For Ramakrishna, the magnum opus of M.(the world famous Mahendranath Gupta) 'THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA' and Romain Rolland's 'Life of Ramakrishna' have been taken into account. Besides, 'SAYINGS OF RAMAKRISHNA' published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai has also been used.

As secondary sources, many books in Tamil and English have been cited then and there. The references from them are supplementary in nature and they do not indicate any concluding evidences.

Throughout the book, in most of the chapters the thoughts and teachings of Ramalinga are given first, whenever comparison is made, since he was born earlier than Ramakrishna. This chronological order is maintained as far as possible.

The songs of Ramalinga and other Tamil verses given as references, have been translated into English by this author, and the responsibility lies with him unless and otherwise quoted.

The use of 'tense' in the passages is not uniform. Whenever a universal truth or idea is stressed 'present tense' is used, though the saints lived hundred years ago. Otherwise past tense is used.

RENAISSANCE

The word has to be understood before going into the project, for it has a broader and far-reaching meaning. The World Book iv
Encyclopedia says the word means 'rebirth'. (68) Rebirth virtually suggests new life in society, religion, culture and life itself. New life implies that some old ideas, which are anachronic in nature, are to be dropped or modified and new ideas are to be included. The Oxford dictionary means the word 'to be born again - to revive the arts and letters under the influence of classical models. (1702) The revival of old ideas thus forms the basis of renaissance. What is the use of the revival, if it is not used for and by the people? Therefore Encyclopedia Brittanica says that the word means 'the resuscication of simply intellectual activities, stimulated by the revival of antique learning and the application to the arts and literatures of modern people'. (122) To sum up, it is very clear that revival or giving rebirth to old values and arts and applying them to modern world, is renaissance. These two factors-revival and application - should be born in mind.

The renaissance movement had its origin in Europe. In the medieval period there was such resurgence there. First it occurred in religion and later the reformation movement spread to other fields of art, literature etc., and in due course this brought many changes in the lives of the people.

A.K. Majumdar considers this aspect and says that renaissance carries arts and religion from one society to another and it is new in its origin. (Bhakti Renaissance, P.V) It is a good interpretation, but only a part of it is true. It is not new though it carries religion and arts. It contains the elements of newness, no doubt, but its root is anchored in old values. 'Resuscitation' of the old values is its essence. Renaissance is an effort to bring back a society to its old form, when it is susceptible to decay from its greatness. Re-birth of old values, applying them in arts and literature, founding new forms and culminating these to achieve humanism all these are the various facets of renaissance.

Renaissance is of many types. Its influence is felt strongly in politics, society, economics, literature, bhakthi and in individual life patterns. The bests of the old thoughts will reappear in modern life. Virtually some of the modern thoughts were expressed by our ancestors long before. Some of their thoughts had changed in due course, some had disappeared completely and some of them still exist. The principle of 'survival of the fittest' applied to the evolution of living organisms, is equally applicable to social evolution also.

**RENAISSANCE, REVOLUTION AND REFORMATION:**

There are some differences in meaning among these words. 'Revolution', as term commonly used to designate a fundamental
change in government or in the political constitution of a country effected or sought to be effected by violence and force of arms. (Encyclopedia Americana, 449). Thus revolution involves violence, sudden change and bloodshed. In exceptional cases revolution sans violence is also seen and it is called as 'bloodless revolution'.

Reformation has no violence in its execution. Its aim is to restructure the old ideas and to weed out the out-dated and unwanted ones. It does not aim at reviving the old thoughts. Leaving some old thoughts and adding some new ones are the two aspects of reformation. Though it is not violent, still it has a vigour and speed to bring a change.

Renaissance differs from these two by bringing rebirth to old values and applying them to modern society. The world has been witnessing all these three types from very old time. 'To find a change in the existing values' is a common factor among these. By bringing back the best of old thoughts, restructuring them or forming new ideas whatever may be, there will be salient changes in society and life of the people. It is unavoidable. But humanity does not lose some of the fundamental traits for ever. They are time tested; best of human tought; and survive for ages. New world or new society is not created suddenly from nothing. As in science nothing comes out of nothing. The old thoughts adapt themselves to the needs of the people of their time traditionally. Thus it is evident reformation is a part of renaissance. It is a revolution for the conservatives and a reformation for the neo-intellectuals.

Ramalinga and Ramakrishna should be understood in this background as men of renaissance in its true essence and meaning.

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M/s. Sivasalapathy Printers, Coimbatore deserves all praise for bringing out this book in an attractive manner.

COIMBATORE

10 - 05 - 2002

K. SUBRAMANIAN
1. INDIA IN NINETEENTH CENTURY

In 19th century the whole of India was slowly coming under the supreme rule of the British government. The first part of the century saw the rule of the East India company and the second part that of the British government directly. It is better to know the situation that prevailed in India, before going to study the lives and teachings of St. Ramalinga and Sri Ramakrishna. The socio-politico-religious and cultural environment of that period was so confusing and was like 'a boiling pot'. It was not conducive for the welfare of the natives.

It was the critical period when India was politically crushed by the might of Britain. There was complete breakdown in political framework. India's age-old cultural fabric was being torn to pieces and her faith was shaken. The Indian society was in the middle of the junction road, losing the old track (where the forefathers walked safely) and standing in front of an attractive, glittering life.

Among the people there were two groups. The first group consisted of the conservative type. They were too conservative to know and understand the sweeping changes that were happening all over the world. They were aware of the boiling situation. It was an onslaught. They could not stop it. A whirlwind was blowing and sweeping everything. But they refused even to think of remodelling the ethical and religious codes which had been inherited for hundreds of years. They thought that these codes were everlasting and never changing. This conviction, so strong and so deep, made them more rigid and fanatic in their religious faith. But they were neither many in number nor were they influential. The evil practices of casteism and untouchability and irrational superstitions were hailed by these people as the laws given by God Himself. These anachronistic practices were handy for the people at the opposite end to attack and to do all kinds of actions that would destabilise the foundations of the Hindu society and religion.
The second type consisted of people who were neo-enthusiasts and neo-intellectuals. They were Indian, but English education and western civilisation made them think otherwise. Being English in all tastes, they wanted to change the Indian outlook completely to suit the need of the hour. They were under the spell of the Anglo culture. They wanted to bring the western culture and civilisation into India within a short period. Indian custom, literature and mode of life were attacked by them as unnatural and objure. The Hindu laws, ethical institutions and the basic tenets of religion were laughed at by them. They worked against their own mother India and acted as the agents of the British government. They fell a prey to the evil designs of a few Englishmen who declared a silent war on India in all fields.

The native village industries should be destroyed; Indians should be completely brainwashed and should be made western - like; local native governments should be unseated; the religious fervour should be sublimated, in such a way that there would be only one religion in India, and that was christianity. B. D. Basu has beautifully described all these designs in his book. It is to be accepted with sadness that they succeeded to some extent.

Besides these two groups, as an offshoot of these two conflicting tendencies, a tidal wave of athiesm began to rise its head. The English language brought modern rationalistic thinking from Europe. The English literature was full of explosive thoughts of rank atheists and materialistic findings of the 19th century scientists. These nihilistic waves produced a tremor in Hindu faith. Hundreds of intellectuals readily surrendered and succumbed to these and "they openly vowed the vassalage of materialistic realism. They commenced to glorify and revel in athiestic thoughts and ways of life. The shock was too severe for the Hindu society to bear. Eventually it tottered and began to crumble".
In society, the people were suffering to the maximum. There was no rain. The 19th century was called by historians as the century of famines. There occurred 31 famines in 100 years. Millions of people died of starvation. This fact was accepted by the government itself.  

The condition of the poor people was very pitiable. Food was scarce. They were able to get food in the form of gruel once in two or three days. Many of them wandered in drought-hit forests to gather dried leaves and tubers, if available. Starvation drove them to such an extent, at times, they killed stray animals and ate their raw flesh.  

In spite of all these sufferings people were compelled to pay taxes, which were levied without any consideration and even the barber's razor was not spared from taxation. Those who went to collect the tax were cruel and merciless. They used all types of violence and ill-treated the people. People were beaten; their properties were auctioned and they were disgraced in public. A commission by the government to enquire into these cruelties confirmed them by its report submitted in 1854. John Bright, a honest member of the British parliament declared that the British history before 1862 in India was nothing but the cruelty of the century.  

Indians were deprived of all their wealth and rights. The village industries were slowly being destroyed. Food was scarce. There was famine, sickness and death everywhere. Millions of people were in darkness. They were not aware of their condition. Their life was worse than that of animals. Ignorance, slavery, fear and poverty ruled them.

It was true that Vellore uprising in the south, near Chennai, that took place in 1807, was considered as the forerunner of Plassey uprising in 1857. It was true that the uprising of Pulitheva and Kattabomma, the two chieftains in the far south beyond Madurai, against the British government was time ahead of
other such happenings somewhere in the North. Yet there were not much political tremors in Tamilnadu in the 19th century. The petty chieftains, who were called 'poligars' in history, were agents of the British government. They were given rights to rule a region for a particular period. They won this bidding in an auction. Once they got the territory, they became ruthless. They treated the people not only as slaves but more than that. St. Ramalinga who lived in this period had mentioned in one of the songs.

"Let this merciless government vanish so quickly,
So that, the people of sanmargha come to power".9

The religious condition of the 19th century India was not better than those of political and social ones. The long Muslim rule had almost shattered the hope of the people. Everyone knows what happened to Hinduism and Hindu temples in that period. But even that rule could not wipe out Indian religion, though they were unable to stall the might of the rule. Therefore when the British came to India, people thought that they were the saviours and they would help them in protecting their religion and culture. In the earlier stages, the British rule did not intervene much on religious side.

This impasse produced a contrary effect. People began to forget the religion completely. They lost their simplicity. To them religion was a bundle of rituals. The common folk thought that their 'fall' was due to God's curse. To them the heads of the mutts were the incarnations of God. Superstitions and blind followings were the daily routine of the people.

There was no real contact between religious belief and life. Rituals were materialistic and sometimes were against the basic tenets of religion. The high ideals of true Godhood and religious sentiments were not new to the Hindus. These ideals have been in vogue since time immemorial. But as they were not protected with rational outlook, they became more superstitious and ritualistic and were susceptible to the attack of others.
A.L. Basham writes; "On the one hand we have a stagnating traditional culture and society at a very low ebb. On the other hand we have a still traditional society in the throes and the creative excitement of modernising itself of emerging as a new nation, remaining thoroughly its own contemporary world. The 19th century brought about an enormous transformation in the religious, social, economic, political and cultural spheres". 9(a)

No wonder that in these circumstances there occurred many changes all over India in the social and the religious life of the people. The christian missionaries made use of the situation. They went to every nook and corner of the nation, mingled with the people, preached their religion and attacked the old one. They had the support of the government and their works began to have their impact. People's faith in their life and customs was shattered. A christian missionary was so elated to call this a miracle. He was so proud to see the victory of a few thousand Englishmen achieved on the millions of Indians.10

As in the society the neo-intellectuals wanted to bring violent changes in religion also. The western outlook, critical approach, scientific solution to the problems and new awareness in everything opened them new vistas. The institutionalised religion was brought under critical analysis. The age old codes were discussed in minute ways. They thought that rationalism was better than religion, the true faith in God and the conscience of an individual was greater than political right.11

These neo-intellectuals wanted to rationalise Hinduism. The simplest way for doing it, was (as they thought) to simplify the religion; that meant shedding off some rituals and beliefs and changing some of them. They called themselves as social reformers.

These socio-religious reformation movements were not so active in Tamilnadu as they were in North India. There were
branches of Brahma Samraj in south also, but they did not gain any root. The brahmans were called here as the English-educated followers of some best principles in christianity.\textsuperscript{12}

Many of this newly awakened group joined christian missionaries to preach against idol worship and pantheism. They told the rural people in their own native languages that ithikasas and puranas were low in taste and would pave way for immorality. They hoped that it was not distant to see the cross on the towers of Hindu temples.\textsuperscript{13} They declared that they were the saviours of an uncivilized and downtrodden people. Abbe Dubois publicly denounced that the idols in the temples were terrific, awe inspiring, gigantic and ugly and people made them uglier by decorating them.\textsuperscript{14}

The christian educational institutions with the help of the government mesmerised the young people to their way. It was stressed day in and day out that there was only one God and it was Jesus.\textsuperscript{15}

These efforts were not in vain. In Tamilnadu thousands of people were converted to christianity. B.D.Basu, with anguish in his heart, commented that this conversion took place more in number in Tamilnadu than in any state.\textsuperscript{16} The Englishmen gave food, dress, medicine and education to the poor and ignorant people to convert them. More over they mingled freely with people. One of the English missionaries wore dress, sacred thread across his chest, sandal paste on his forehead and looked like a typical Hindu brahmin. It was a sad story that the new converts attacked Hinduism more severely than the Englishmen did.

But the situation was not as conducive as they thought it to be. It was not easy to convince and convert as they calculated. Many converts, after a short spell of time, came back to the Hindu fold. Those who remained in the new religion did not change their manner of living. The gods were changed but not the rituals and customs. The missionaries were upset to see these.
Their confidence was shattered but the reasons for this failure were many. The foremost one, which they did not expect, was the renaissance of Hindu religious movements, given momentum by great men like St.Ramalinga, Sri Ramakrishna and Dayananda Saraswathi.

But the work of the missionaries was in one way beneficial. The religious sentiment of the people, which was in slumber for ages woke up and the people who were in darkness found their heritage and treasure. They woke up as one man. There was such a crisis in the Moghul period also. Then arose the bhakti movements. The same situation prevailed in 19th century also. Some Englishmen, who were honest in their hearts and considerate in their thinking reminded and brought to the notice of the natives their rich cultural and religious heritage. Some parliamentarians in England supported India in England and spoke against the British government very severely.

When it seemed that India would be no more India in the stricter sense, and a new India of European ideals and ideas would be emerging soon, it did not happen. To quote:

"But this was not to be. India escaped the impending crash almost by a miracle. Something happened beneath the surface of things and India began to show unmistakable signs of a spiritual awakening. Towards the second quarter of the 19th century, suddenly India found her feet and wanted seriously to assert herself. The vitality that had been lying dormant deep in the heart of the nation under a spell of enchantment was braced up and marshalled against the heavy odds that had been out to crush its cultural existence. This revolt of the instinct for self-preservation had the desired effect. The hypnotic spell of foreign civilization began to recede slowly but steadily, before a rising wave of self-consciousness of Hindus. Mighty movements of socio-religious reforms sprang up one after another, to resuscitate the ancient culture of India".
"Each of these strove to bear up the sinking faith and tried to make these immune from the dual criticism of western dogmatists and rationalists".

"Thus in and through these movements the self-consciousness of Hindus asserted itself, made its way up through the opposing forces and endorsed Hindu culture with a fresh lease of life.... The christian missionary propaganda had in this way to undergo a serious setback. and this achievement alone endowed these timely movements, with a unique value."\textsuperscript{20}

The orthodox society had not to wait long when a phenomenon of paramount importance took place to infuse enormous strength into the entire range of Hindu convictions, and thus to bring about a complete renaissance of Hindu religion.

The life and message of saints like St.Ramalinga and Sri Ramakrishna did have such a phenomenon. They "awakened slumbering masses by their new spiritual message and inspired them to attain the highest truth through simple devotional path. They were indeed spiritual light and sacred truth incarnate."\textsuperscript{21}

Thus was the background. Both were men of religion. "The stories of their lives are the stories of religion in practice."\textsuperscript{22} The period was the same; the situation was the same; the confusion and turmoil were the same in political and religious arena; but the regions they illumined were different. Though they were not in politics, though they were not social reformers in the true sense, they were distinct in their own way. They did many things to the society more than a social reformer would have done. In the same span of life, they were in harmony with the Absolute and Reality. They were the lodestars in the south and the north of India in the last century to show the real path to the suffering masses.

Rightly observed Romain Rolland: "Fiery personalities throughout this century have sprung from her sacred earth, a veritable Ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same; human unity through God."\textsuperscript{23}
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2. LIFE SKETCHES

St. RAMALINGA

St. Ramalinga was born on 5.10.1823 in a village, called Marudhur, near Chidambaram, the world famous abode of Lord Nataraja, in Tamilnadu. He came from a saivite non-brahmin family. His father, Ramaiahpillai was a village accountant and teacher. His mother, Chinnammal was a housewife.

It was told that one day a mystic monk came to their house and blessed the mother, with a boon that a son would be born to her and he would be wise to show a new spiritual path that would be followed by all. The prophecy came true when Ramalinga was born as their fifth child.

The child Ramalinga was brought up with extreme care. When the child was five months old, the family went to Chidambaram to worship Lord Nataraja. The Almighty is being worshipped there as a Formless Deity. (Akasa swarupa). When the priest lifted the curtain, the child laughed as if he also had dharsan. He sang later thus;

"Oh! my Lord, Nataraja of Jothi,  
When I worshipped You in my childhood,  
With my mother and other,  
The screen was lifted, I had the dharsan:-  
You showed all to me as Empty Space".1

After some time a calamity struck the family. His father died unexpectedly and his mother shifted the family to Chennai. Ramalinga's eldest brother, Sabapathampillai, took the burden of the family. He earned some money by way of giving lectures to selected gatherings.

Ramalinga was admitted in a school, when he was five. But he was in no mood of attending such conventional schools. His mind was always bent on higher things. He was visiting the
nearby temples in those days with a good company of boys of equal age. He was always thinking of God and Divinity. His brother did not understand the true state of Ramalinga. He was worried about the carelessness of his brother in study. He was in the hope of getting Ramalinga trained in his profession so that he would also share the burden of the family. When his hopes were shattered, he ordered his wife, in the presence of Ramalinga, that she should not give him shelter and food thereafter. Ramalinga's sister-in-law was more upset. She had brought him up as her own son and she was more than a mother to him. But she had to obey her husband's order. It was followed to some extent. Ramalinga once or two times entered the house through the back door and had his food. His sister-in-law did not like this. It made her sorrowful. To come like a thief, and to eat like a beggar in one's own house was unacceptable to her. In those days their house was always full of people. With tears in her eyes, she asked Ramalinga to do as his brother wished. Ramalinga agreed but with a condition. He should be given a room in the upstairs and he would read books on his own. His brother readily accepted the condition. He was happy to know that at least Ramalinga agreed to study. For his part Ramalinga spent the whole time reading various books. But it was not clear which the books were. One thing is certain: he should have studied all the available books in Tamil because he has given quotations from many sources when he wrote commentaries on some works. Any way he was his own master.

His brother, in those days, was giving discourses on bhakti and allied subjects. One day he was struck with fever. He asked Ramalinga to go and inform the audience about his inability. When Ramalinga went there to do so, he was compelled by the people who assembled there to give a lecture himself. He could not refuse and gave a scholarly talk. His eloquence was such that the learned circle asked him to continue the talks till his brother resumed. His brother heard of this. He did not believe words of others. One day he himself went to the meeting. Standing in a corner, unnoticed by others, he listened to the discourse. He was
utterly surprised to know the talents of Ramalinga. He felt both happy and sad, happy to know the reality and sad for his ill-treatment shown by him to his brother. Thereafter Ramalinga became famous in Chennai and it was a turning point.

Ramalinga continued his worship. There was a temple for Lord Muruga (Karthikeya) nearby. He daily visited this place. This temple took an important place in his life and songs. At home, seated in front of the image of Muruga, he did his upacana. It seems that this 'meditation' taught him all the knowledge. He thankfully remembers it in one of his songs:

"My Lord: through Your Grace
I learnt All, and I received All".

His was a self-learnt education by the blessing of God. From childhood he was having this 'inner light' which shaped him later. He sings:

"It is He, my Father, who as a Mother
Whose lullaby gives peace and joy,
Heard my songs and blessed me
with happiness".

His first song (decades of ten verses), supposedly composed in his twelfth year is a beautiful one, even now most popular in the whole of Tamilnadu. In this he has expressed his wishes one by one. It is worth to be noted.

"Oh my God, Muruga who has abode in Chennai,
I want the company of those good men, who always
Think of Your lotus feet with concentration:
I want not the company of those who talk one thing
but think another inside:
I want to speak Your Greatness always and
I want not to speak falsehood:
I want to follow the true path of holy saints:
I want not to be distracted by the devil of
religious fanaticism;
I want to forget the deadly desire of woman:
I want not to forget You at any cost;
I want good sense and wealth of Your Grace;
And I want a disease-free life".4

These lines clearly show his vision. Whatever he wanted to have, he achieved in his later life. It is nothing but a prophecy, which he perceived within, even in his young age.

During this period, once he went out of home to become a sanyasin, but he returned soon. Nobody knows what had inspired him to leave or what had discouraged him not to do so.

There were some distinct characters of his boyhood. He was always in seclusion. Though number of boys were with him, he did not mingle freely with them nor did he spend his time in playing. He was not much fond of food. He ate less and that too without any relish. In one of his songs he says:

"How I'll praise Your Divine Grace, my Lord;
You made me even in that boyhood stage
Not to waste time in playing, not to like eatables,
Not to do mischiefs, Not to weep for petty things,
Instead,
You made me to be in seclusion
To eat and to wear without desire,
To pray and to do penance,
To worship and to sing Your Grace,
To be grief-stricken over others' sufferings".5

This song reveals his mental level. Material things did not attract him. He was not aware of the external splendour and luxury. Whenever some of his rich disciples offered money, he threw them into wells and tanks. It was his firm view that money would darken one's character and he was upset to see money being given more importance by people. He avoided rich people. When, once a poor devotee approached him for a letter of recommendation to some rich people to get some help, he bluntly refused. He advised others to be careful about the rich.
An anecdote is being told till today. There was a naked sanyasin in Thiruvorriyur (a suburb of modern Chennai and saivite holy place). Seating on a pial of a house, he was calling by names whenever a man went that way. He would say, 'Here goes a donkey' or 'Here goes a dog' etc. One day it so happened that Ramalinga (still a boy) went by that road. Immediately the ascetic shouted 'Here, at last, a man of higher order goes!". A man of jnana recognised another!

Ramalinga was 27 and his brother and others wanted him to become a family man. But he was not in that stage. Yet much against his wish he was compelled to marry the daughter of his sister. He was above all this earthly life. They did not understand him properly. He spent the first night by reading 'Tiruvacaka' (the sacred verses of St. Manickavasaka, the summum bonum of Tamil Bhakti literature). One might feel pity for the girl he married and her later life nobody knew. But it was the mistake of the elders who had to be blamed. Ramalinga sings:

"I don't know, my Father, whether
The karma of previous birth or Thy Grace
which made me marry a girl,
But you know my Lord, that I touched her
On that day, not had any contact thereafter".

Chennai was a centre of learning. Great scholars lived there. It was a great prestige to have discussion with learned men. Ramalinga was one of the scholars respected in that period. He was surrounded by many disciples. The scholarly discussion was always going on under his supervision. Many scholars considered it a privilege to have their songs or writings endorsed by Ramalinga.

In 1851, when he was 28, he first published a small book on Saiva philosophy (Olivilodukkam). His commentary on the first stanza of the book clearly shows his spectrum of knowledge. He has given many parallel quotations from various sources to prove his point.
In 1854, his prose work, 'Manumuraikandavacakam' was published. It means 'the justice as delivered by a king'. It is a story about a Cola king, Manu. The king had a son, good and compassionate in nature. One day when the prince was driving his chariot a calf was accidentally killed under the wheels. The mother-cow straightaway went to the court and rang the bell of justice, which was in the courtyard. The king came out and understood the matter. Inspite of stiff opposition from the ministers and others he punished his son by killing him under the wheels of the chariot.

This prose work is sublime in diction: supreme in thought: beautiful in its form and full of pathos in its essence. His eloquence reveals itself in this piece. His logical approach adds beauty to reading.

He published another book (Thondamandala catakam) in 1855. His article on the controversy of the title shows his knowledge in inscriptions also. In 1857 another book 'Chinmaya Deepika' was published.

He was 35. He had spent 23 long years in Chennai. Going to the temples, meditating in seclusion, going to nearby places on pilgrimage, giving lectures or having discussions with others and publishing his and others' writings were his activities during this period. By now the city of Chennai has changed. Due to western type of civilisation the serenity had been lost. The people were slowly eroded by luxury and splendour. He thought that this could not be conducive to his peaceful mission; He has noted:

"My Father! You Yourself know,
If I was in Chennai which has lost its serenity and which has become luxurious,
My mind would be spoiled,
I wandered in the country-sides and rural area,
I walked in dry and arid fields of pebbles
And thus I became tired and worn-out in my physique, Can one describe all these in writing?"

Therefore he made up his mind to leave Chennai for ever. He took this firm decision in 1858. With some friends he travelled southwards. After visiting many places on his way, he reached Chidambaram. He lived there for a shorter period. Afterwards, on the request of a devotee, by name Venkatareddi, he went to a nearby village Karunguzhi. He was there for nine years, during which period the hosts were blessed by God to nurture the holy saint. He visited Chidambaram and other places from there.

One thing is to be noted here. Ramalinga was born in a village near Chidambaram. He lived more than half of his life in Chennai. Later he spent his days in Karunguzhi, Vadalur and Mettukkuppam. His devotion to Lord Nataraja was such, that he called himself as 'Chidambaram Ramalingam' till his end. He was an intoxicated soul on Nataraja.

His songs on Nataraja, the Mahadeva, are classic and have an equal place of importance with those of other Tamil bhakti literature, like Thevaram and Tiruvacaka. They are his greatest contribution to bhakti movement. They should be translated in all languages and should be made available for all. Particularly the 'Mahadeva Mala' (Garland of songs of Mahadeva) is highly mystical in its essence.

His biography tells us that many miracles took place when he was in and around Chidambaram. The veracity of them has to be examined in detail. It is not the scope of this study. But one spiritual attainment has to be mentioned here. Ramalinga was blessed by Lord Nataraja to hear the 'divine sound' of the Lord's anklet, when He performed the Cosmic Dance. It is considered to be the greatest boon one can have at the end of yoga and jnana states. He has mentioned this in a verse:
"Your Mind knows, how I was thrilled
When I was blessed with the boon
To hear anklet sound of Cosmic Dance!
All my sufferings vanished on that day,
All the delusions of the Maya, disappeared:
I melt to think of Your mercy."  

It was the period of self-introspection also. He attained all the six states of spiritual experience, one could attain through tapas, prayer, exercise, dhyana and divine blessing. They were Kalanta, Natanta, Yoganta, Bodanta, Vedanta and Siddhanta. These six final states are combined in his concept 'Shadanta' Samarasa Sanmarga'. It means 'Ever Pure Path of Six Antas'.

In 1865, he founded a satsangh with his friends and followers. It was named 'Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangh'. The aim of the sangh was to spread the spiritual message to all. It would be interesting to note that the president of the sangh was none other than 'God'. Ramalinga thought that no human being should be given importance or prominence in such matters. All the members were equal in status and they did yeomen services to the society; all their services have to be mentioned particularly here. The members compiled and published all the songs written by Ramalinga, under the title 'THIRU ARUTPA' (meaning Songs of Divine Grace). They founded Sathyya Dharma Sala, for poor-feeding. They founded Sathyya Jnana Sabha, considered to be a temple for universal Light worship. Of course, Ramalinga was the interacting force in mooting and materialising these. He continued to stay in Karunguzhi, surrounded by a group of devotees. He took much interest in the welfare of the people around him. He gave advice whenever it was solicited. He carefully attended the sick, as a doctor should do because he was practising country medicines too. He used to visit nearby villages and took part in some social functions. Because of these, he had less sleep. Restlessness and overwork had a telling effect on his health. He became ill for some time. In one of his letters written
to a friend in Chennai, he noted 'Due to the problems of others, I am not keeping good health'.

In 1867 Ramalinga met a brahmosamajin, Sridhara Naicker, and had a debate with him on idol worship. Though Ramalinga was above this in his spiritual level, he stressed in that debate on the necessity of idol worship for a layman. This brahmo belonged to Keshab Chandra Sen's branch of Brahma Samaj. In the same year, his collection of songs was published. The songs were classified into 6 cantos and with his permission the first four were published in one volume. He got the privilege to see his writings published in his lifetime, which for most authors, is a distant reality. His first disciple, Professor Velayutham, who was himself a multilingual scholar, was the publisher. He wrote an epilogue for the volume and he was the first man to call Ramalinga as 'Thiru Arutprakaca vallalar', meaning 'The benevolent One who received the Grace and Light'. The book got its name Thiru Arutpa; ironically the shortened - form of the name 'Vallalar' remains prominent to this day all over Tamilnadu, leaving the real name behind.

23rd May 1867 was an important day in the life of Ramalinga. It was on this date he, with the assistance of other devotees, founded the Sathya Dharma Sala, at Vadalur. It was a poor-feeding centre and even today continues to be so. The most essential principle of Ramalinga was Ahimsa, the compassion. He was the very embodiment of compassion itself. Hunger and starvation are found all over the world. They are not new to mankind. But great men like Ramalinga had fought against them during the course of time. Poor-feeding has been considered as the noblest of all charities. The 19th century, as already stated, was a century of famines. Ramalinga was conscious of the suffering masses around him. In all the possible ways he tried to alleviate hunger and starvation. It was on this ideal the Dharma Sala was founded.
Forty people of all faith, of all castes from brahmin to pariah came forward to take part in this people's cause. 40 acres of land was donated by the people. More than 3000 people gathered on that day. Three cartloads of paddy and vegetables were used. It had a big origin and is still continued though not in such a large scale. Food was served there for those who were in need of it irrespective of caste or religion. After the start of the Sala, in 1870 Ramalinga moved to Vadalur from Karunguzhi. He was there till he shifted his residence to Mettukuppam, a nearby village. He spent the rest of his life there.

In 1872 he founded the Sathya Jnana Sabha at Vadalur. The structure and the blue print of the sabha were conceived by himself. He gave instructions how and what to be done then and there. It is just like a temple with a difference. There light worship is followed. There is no idol inside the sanctum sanctorum; no music, no coconut breaking; no camphor burning; nor is there given prasada. It shows a simple way of worship. The light inside is called 'Arutperunjothi' (meaning Great Light of Compassion). The government gazetteer published in 1906 states,"About 1872 the curious octagon shaped sabha with the domed roof....... was erected by him with subscriptions. It is said that the spot was chosen because from it are visible the four great towers of Nataraja's shrine at Chidambaram. It is not an ordinary temple, the details of worship in it being unusual."10 His last days were full of mysteries. Nobody knew clearly what had happened to him. Here is an extract from the statement of his disciple; T.Velayutham:

"When he had attained his 51st year (1873) he began to prepare his disciples for his departure from the world. He announced his intention of going into Samadhi. During the first half of 1873 he preached most forcibly his views upon Human Brotherhood. But, during the last quarter of the year he gave up lecturing entirely, and maintained an almost unbroken silence..... He resumed speech in the last days of January 1874. On the 30th
of that month, at Mettukuppam, we saw our master for the last time. Selecting a small building he entered its solitary room after taking an affectionate farewell of his chelas, stretched himself on the carpet, and then by his orders, the door was locked and the only opening walled up. But when a year later, the place was opened and examined, there was nothing to be seen but a vacant room".11

And now an extract from the above quoted gazetteer:

"In 1874 he locked himself in a room (still in existence) in Mettukuppam, which he used for samadhi or mystic meditation, and instructed his disciples not to open it for some time. He has never been seen since, and the room is still locked. It is held by those who still believe in him that he miraculously made one with his God".12

Many things are being told thus about his last days. But it is suffice to tell that he was the most revered saint in those days and 'His story is worth noting as an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take'.13

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1. Arutpa, 4133
2. Ibid., 3044
3. Ibid., 1965
4. Ibid., 8
5. Prose, p. 451
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7. Ibid., 3467
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9. Prose, p. 396
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SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Sri Ramakrishna was born on 18.02.1836 in a brahmin family, in the village of Kamarpukur in West Bengal. His parents were Sri Khudiram and Smt. Chandramani. The village was situated in the western extremity of Hooghly district and was on the road leading to Puri, the holy pilgrimage centre in Orissa. It was highly prosperous and noted for its arts and crafts. The family was not rich, but it was a source of great solace to many an aching heart.

Khudiram in 1824 had toured Tamilnadu and particularly had visited Rameshwaram, the famous temple city in the south. It may be noted here that it was one year after Ramalinga was born and the presiding deity of Rameshwaram was Sri Ramalingaswami.

Later during a visit to Gaya in 1835, Khudiram had a vision that Lord Vishnu would be born to him as his son. Similar vision, his wife also had. The visions came true when Gadahar took his birth.

The child grew and he cast a spell of fascination over everyone. He learnt in his childhood the hymns on Gods and other tales from ancient epics. He was sent to a village school. He showed some interest at first but he did not like mathematics at all. The lives and characters of spiritual saints attracted him more. Religious subjects and beautiful scenery put him in trances. A well-known instance has been cited by the biographers to illustrate this point. One day when he was six or seven years old, he was walking along the narrow path through the paddy fields. There was a beautiful sombre thunder cloud over the sky. It was rapidly enveloping the whole horizon. A flock of snow-white cranes flew in front of it. This contrast made his mind wander to far-off regions and he fell unconscious. This was the mystical ecstasy, the complete identity, which he maintained to have with the Mother till his last.
In 1843, when he was seven, he lost his father. The loss was a great blow. His eldest brother took charge of the family. As a boy, Ramakrishna would listen to his mother and he tried every means to lessen her grief. In between he spent his time in a mango-grove or in the cremation ground absorbed in serious thoughts. Sometimes he would join the wandering monks and would pass his time with them. These experiences kindled within him an urge which lighted the whole earth as an illuminated lamp.

When he was nine years old, the upanayana (wearing of the holy thread) ceremony was celebrated in his house. As per the convention, he should accept his first alms from a brahmin. Instead, he received it from a blacksmith woman, much against the wishes of the relatives. She was a sudra but Ramakrishna had promised her earlier that he would do so. To keep his words he broke away the custom and showed to the world what type of a man he was. It also revealed that he respected true love and devotion more than social restrictions.

Some months passed. His aversion to school increased. He collected number of boys and spent the time in mango-groves in enacting small plays from epics, usually from the life of Lord Krishna. Ramakrishna was always the main actor and he was Krishna. Once he assumed the role, he would fall into a trance and only after some time would he recover to continue his acting.

From the words of Ramakrishna himself, his childhood life can be understood.

"During my younger days the men and women of Khamarpukur were equally fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate other people's gesture and conversation. The women put aside things for me to eat. No one distrusted me. Everyone took me in as one of the family.

But I was like a happy pigeon. I used to frequent only happy families. I would run away from a place when I saw misery and suffering."
One or two young boys of the village were my close friends... while I was at school, arithmetic would throw me into confusion, but I could paint very well and could also model small images of the deities.

I liked to visit the free eating places maintained for the holymen and the poor and would watch them for hours.¹

Later the family moved to Calcutta. His brother was able to get a job for Ramakrishna. He joined as a priest in a temple. He liked this to his heart. There was no sweeter thing for him than to worship and if it came as a permanent thing why should he refuse? But another wish of his brother that he should continue his studies also, did not materialise. Unbearable to see his neglect, his brother one day admonished him. Pat came the reply: "What should I do with a mere bread-winning education?" "I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart". His brother was stunned by this reply but he could not do anything nor had he any alternative. He left everything in the hands of God. It would be useful to recall here how he proved his scholarship by giving a suggestion to an animated discussion. The scholars were amazed at such mental maturity in one so young.²

Ramakrishna and his brother joined the Kali temple at Dakshineshwar in Calcutta, as priests. The temple was built by Rani Rasmani, a widow. Her son-in-law Mathur Babu was the first affectionate disciple of Ramakrishna and was his host till Mathur's death. There was a beautiful garden and a large banyan tree in the temple complex. This was the tree, under which many memorable incidents and discussions took place in Ramakrishna's life. Ramakrishna was joined by Hridhay, his nephew later. Ramakrishna was left in charge of decorating Kali with flowers and jewels and he was assisted by Hridhay. The temple complex was reverberating with melodious songs of Ramakrishna.

He was initiated to the worship rites by one brahmin named Kenaran Bhattacharya. In one way he was the first guru of Ramakrishna. After some time, Ramakrishna lost his brother, who
was more than a father to him. It was a great shock indeed, but he bore the grunt with his spiritual awakening. To Ramakrishna the image of Kali was not a stone but The Mother Herself. She was terrible and sweet in her appearance as the repository of all blessedness and power. He appealed to Her more than once to reveal Her true self to him. He was full of agony till he had not been blessed by that vision. This fervour made him forget his daily worship. After many days of fervent appeal and penance he was blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother. Before he got that blessing, he was at the verge of even killing himself. He said:

"The blessed Mother revealed herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. There was a steady flow of undiluted bliss......I felt the presence of the Divine Mother."

From that day he had that vision again and again and he was like a child who enjoyed the mother's love to the brim.

His earnest devotion to The Mother made him deviate from the usual and customary form of worship. The manner of his puja was very strange. He would adore himself with the flowers first and then only offer them to the Goddess. One may recall the life of Sri ANTAL (the celebrated woman saint of Vaishnavism in Tamilnadu and one of the twelve Alwars), wherein she adored her first with the garland and then offered to Lord Vishnu, and by that devotion she got the name Cutikkotuthha Nacciar.

Behaviour like this made others think that Ramakrishna went mad. Mathur Babu even arranged a physician for his treatment but it is of no use. His mother took him to Khamarpukur and a few months stay there brought his mind to a somewhat normal state. The ecstasy and spiritual vision, unconscious state and a type of delirium were controlled. At this stage when he was 23, he got married to Sarada Devi, who was then only 5 years and a few months old.
Ramakrishna returned to Calcutta. His physical ordeals and spiritual experiences continued further. He has described his condition thus:

"For six years these eyes remained wide open, not a wink of sleep visited them.....I had no idea of time nor of the body..."\(^3\)

It was in 1861, when Ramakrishna was 25 years old, he first met his real guru, Yogeshwari, a Bhairavi sannyasini. Through her guidance, he learnt sixty four principal Tantra books. Most of them were difficult sadhanas. Then, he was in Mahabhava state and attained these within a short time.

Ramakrishna had now practised all different paths of bhakti: shatha, dasya, sakhy, vatsalya and madhura. But he wanted to reach that final state of mind-nirvikalpa samadhi. In nirvikalpa samadhi, one comes into his final stage of his spiritual journey. There is no more birth, no more death, nor any further identification with the changes of the body. One who attained this state, leaves behind all like a cast-off garment. St.Manickavacaka sings:

"Oh! my God Siva!
I don't want my relatives, nor my place of birth
I don't want any name or fame;
I don't want the company of so called 'Learned',
I want to begin my real study hereafter,
Bless me to be so"\(^4\)

At that time there came Totapuri, his second guru. He was a wonderful monk from Punjab. His monastery was on the banks of river Narmada. He was on his pilgrimage, when he was met by Ramakrishna. Romain Rolland was of the opinion that it was Totapuri who gave to the son of Khudiram, the famous name of Ramakrishna when he initiated him as a Sanyasin. From him Ramakrishna learnt Vedanta. He attained the much coveted Nirvikalpa samadhi, under the instructions from Totapuri in a
single day, for which his guru had spent 40 years of penance. Ramakrishna was in that samadhi for three continuous days and after that Totapuri brought him to normal state. Totapuri was astonished to see this achievement of his disciple and he began to become the disciple of Ramakrishna. The tables were turned.

Ramakrishna was continuing his efforts to learn the truth in other religions too. In 1866, he met a Sufi mystic by name Govinda Ray, who embraced Islam. With his help Ramakrishna learned the fundamental principles of Islam. Thereafter he understood the Christian way of living also. In his room at Dakshineshwar, there were a small statue of Tirthankara Mahavira and a portrait of Jesus Christ. Thus he came to a conclusion that practically all religions preached the one Reality.

Later he worshipped his wife Sarada Devi (Later the holy Mother) in the seat of Goddess and by doing so he drove out all the discriminations of sex and religion, if he had any. He could not find any difference between his mother and his wife. To him all was one. The Mother he worshipped inside the temple, the mother who gave birth to his physique and the Holy mother who lived with him were one and the same to him.

In 1868 he went on a pilgrimage with Mathur Babu. It was the year of so many famines all over India and it was the period when Ramalinga founded the Sathya Dharma Sala for feeding poor. On their way they came across poverty-stricken people who were suffering to an indescribable extent. Ramakrishna asked Mathur to arrange food and cloth for all those and when he expressed his inability to provide them with such an extent, Ramakrishna sat down and wept saying that he would not move from there unless it was done. His wish was carried out. This incident is a noteworthy one as it reveals his compassionate state.

They continued their journey to Varanasi, Allahabad, Brindavan and Mathura. It made him realise the physical presence of Lord Krishna and Vishwanath. They returned to Calcutta later.
From 1875 onwards for a few years he used to have meetings with intellectuals like Keshab Chandra Sen of Brahmoo movement. The brahmoss were then an influenced group. They were fond of western education and culture. To them anything western was so attractive. But the simplicity and sincerity of Ramakrishna in his spiritual pursuit won their hearts. Those who came there to see him, spread the true state of Ramakrishna to others. Slowly the intellectuals began their journey towards Dakshineshwar.

Soon Dakshineshwar became a centre of pilgrimage. Men of all walks of life flocked there to see him, to hear him, to be blessed by him and to forget their petty worries by doing so. There came his later disciples like Ramachandra Dutt, Surendra Nath Mitra, Balaram Bose, not to mention M.N.Gupta (the world famous M.who compiled Kathamrita - The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna).

The closing years of Ramakrishna's life was full of pathos and sublimity. Dakshineshwar, once a silent and solitary place now became a holy to the visited. He satiated the needs of the thronging masses by religious discourses and mystical experiences. Restlessness, continuous talking, extreme austerity and worries for others' sufferings made him tired and these had their telling effect on his health. His poor health could not cope with the situation. His throat became sore and he developed unbearable pain. He was shifted to Shyampukur, where he was attended to by Dr.Sarkar. No improvement was noticed. He breathed his last on 16.8.1886. At his death bed he transferred all his spiritual powers to Narendra.

To quote and to conclude: "Ramakrishna's life is something out of the ordinary. It lacks the wealth of events and striking achievements that are commonly associated with the lives of great men... Ramakrishna never came into the limelight as a public man. He was neither an orator, nor a writer. He never figured as a political leader.
nor did he even appear in the role of a social reformer. .....Nor arisoracy of birth, nor wealth, nor academic distinction, nor power and prestige in the temporal sense had anything to do with his career. His life conspicuously lacked the glitter of those very things that attract the admiring gaze of the general public".5

These words correctly describe the life of Ramalinga with some differences. Unlike Ramakrishna, Ramalinga was an orator, a writer, a poet and self-earned and self-learned scholar. Other things being similar, these two great saints of Mother India lived and died for the service of the poor.

"Let me be condemned to be born over and over again even in the form of a dog. If by doing so, I can be of help to a single soul, I would give up such 20,000 bodies to help one man".6

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3. PERSONALITY
St. RAMALINGA

A brief life history of both the saints, given above will show many similarities in their lives even to a casual reader. Both were born in ordinary families. Their parents were of lower middle class sector and the followers of traditional values. They had a rural background and their births were predicted earlier. Both of them did not have any formal education. They lost their fathers at earlier stages. They were looked after by their elder brothers. Both were married but did not lead family lives. They moved to metropolitan cities from the villages of their birth and they came to the lime-light there. Both of them had spent their lives for others and had a group of disciples.

Yet there are differences. Ramalinga moved out of Chennai, unable to adjust with the splendour and luxury. The disciples of Ramakrishna did much to spread the message of their master whereas those of Ramalinga, after his death, did not do anything on that line.

The reason for this was unknown. But the personality of Ramalinga would have been one reason. It would be useful to understand the true traits which made Ramalinga and likewise Ramakrishna, the men of wisdom.

Ramalinga's disciple, Prof. Velayutham joined theosophy movement after his master's death. At that time he gave an authentic statement about the life and teachings of Ramalinga. The following is taken from it.

"In personal appearance, Ramalingam was a moderately tall, spare man, so spare, indeed, as to virtually appear a skeleton; yet withal a strong man, erect in stature, and walking very rapidly: with a face of a clear brown complexion a straight thin nose, very large fiery eyes, and with a look of constant
sorrow on his face. Towards the end of his life, he left his hair grow long; and what is rather unusual with Yogis, he wore shoes. His garments consisted of two pieces of white cloth. His habits were excessively abstemious. He was known to hardly ever take any rest. A strict vegetarian, he ate but once in two or three days, and was then satisfied with a few mouthfuls of rice. But when fasting for a period of two or three months at a time, he literally ate nothing, living merely of warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it..... People of all castes gathered in large numbers around him....."!

For most of the points mentioned here, there are evidences in Ramalinga's songs. He has expressed himself more than once in the following words:

"How lean am I in my physique?
How weak am I in my mind?
Yet, if You, my Lord of the crescent
and the Ganges over the head,
do not show pity, then who will do?"

In dress, his attitude was very simple. He wore only white clothes. He did not like ochre ones worn by other ascetics. According to him whiteness symbolises purity and victory over the senses. The long-cloth, a special type was his favourite. His devotees and friends supplied the cloth whenever he wanted to have one. One of his devotees refused to accept money given by Ramalinga for the cost of the cloth. It shows how much respect he enjoyed with the people. There is evidence in one of his letters about the purchase of the cloth. He did not wear any shirt. He used one piece as loin cloth and covered the upper portion of the body including the head with another.

An interesting incident has to be noted here. Once Ramalinga was invited to attend a marriage function in a rich man's house. He went there in his usual dress. At the entrance the
watchman allowed only those who wore shirts and turbans, to go in. The man who invited Ramalinga was not found at the entrance. He waited for sometime and sat himself on the pial of an opposite house. He sang the following verse:

"Oh! my mind, How dare you approach places like this?  
You have no shoes: nor a white shirt:  
You have no money; nor a well-built body:  
You have no house of your own: nor a proud appearance,  
Then what made you come here?"

Ramalinga was not fond of delicious foods. From his childhood he had controlled his palate. He sings:

"I want the nectar of Grace,  
As you know even from my childhood,  
I hated to have rich food:  
A few days I ate, much in fear of  
seeing my mother's sorrow:  
A few days I took my meals in fear  
of wounding my friends:  
But You know, how much I shuddered  
for the circumstance to have a delicious food?"

For many days he ate nothing and his stomach was empty. Whenever he happened to take part in dinner he was worried what could be the after-effect of such rich food. This personal experience of hunger and its effects would have made him sing and write about later the agony of starvation.

His latter period was not better. He had food only once in a day, rarely twice. Later it was once in two or three days. Even then it was not a full meal, but a few mouthfuls. For months together he did not take anything except sugar water. He sings:

"Even today I take my food with hatred  
And I like to become leaner and leaner".
And again:

"Dear friend, they persistently call me to have my food. What to say? I took my amrita (nectar) with my Lord, in the moonlight in the upstairs hall. Shall I have any hunger thereafter? Should I eat these foods? Go and ask them to eat themselves and leave me undisturbed".⁶

This is a beautiful song in the bridal mysticism theme. The lady in love with the Lord thinks that the nectar of His Grace is sweeter than the foods eaten in life.

It was his firm view that desire for food was one of the evils man should avoid. If one succumbed to this desire, his penance would become futile like mixing tamarind in running river.⁷

He was a strict vegetarian. When he had one meal it was in the mid-day: when he had two it was in the mid-day and late evening. He took greens with his meals and drank hot water only.

He rarely slept. He advised his disciples to have only two and a half hours of sleep in a day. He slept 3 hours a day when he was young and 2 hours a day when he was in the middle age and slept for only an hour at the end. He was keeping awake for the coming of his beloved Lord. He kept open his inner and outer gates of senses for that Holy thing. Why should he have sleep?

He had a moustache. It was not sure whether he had a beard or not. But he let his hair grow long. A small handkerchief was always tucked in his waist cloth.

He was so slender and shy that he even avoided walking in the street waving his hands. He put his arms across his chest
as Vivekananda did later. Ramalinga was simple and simple to its meaning. He sings:

"Oh, my King Nataraja, Who dances in the divine hall,
Is it Your wish or the action of Maya
to have drawn me into the street?
I was in loneliness unknown to others;
My mind anguishes like sugarcane in the crusher."

Once his disciples covered him with a shawl of golden colour. Immediately his body gave a tremor. Seeing that, the disciples also shuddered. He was beyond all such adorations. He did not allow them to cover him with an umbrella. His mind was poised to a higher level of humility and simplicity. He did not sit on a raised platform; he could not put one of his legs over another; he could not sleep on a mattress and he did not like to let his leg hang from pial of a house.

In Thiru Arutpa there is a collection of 133 verses under the title 'Pillaipperu vinnappam' which means Great request of a son. It is, in ts essence, a personal statement of Ramalinga expressing his likes and dislikes, his inner mind, his views on some of the social problems and especially his quest for spiritual attainment.

Ramalinga was very much averse to money. Whenever he was offered money for his discourses in his brother's place or whenever his disciples brought costly things as offerings, he was perturbed. He became restless to accept money. He threw them into wells or tanks. He sings:

"My Father: You know,
How much anguish I felt whenever I received
the coins thrust into me,
I felt very humble, I shuddered of the thought
that this money will make everything dark".

and, again,
"The world is in the clutches of money and
If I go to one man so often, he may think that
I am approaching for want of money. Therefore
I avoided even visiting rich". 12

Ramalinga was soft in nature and bore the grunts of the attack done by people who did not like his outright ideas. He expressed no hatred on them; instead, he felt sorry for their ignorance. He was opposed to his teachings, some of which were revolutionary in those days. He antagonised both atheists and conservatives diametrically. The neo-religionists called him an orthodox following outdated principles whereas the conservativists looked on him as a rationalist. He faced them boldly and was hopeful that one day they would know the reality and they would come to his fold. His biography tells us that some of them actually did so. And he readily accepted them without any discrimination.

Ramalinga, as told earlier, did not have any formal education. It was told when he attended a local school, he was writing something on the paper. When the teacher became wild and took away the paper, he did not tear it. He went through the contents. There was a beautiful song on the Lord. The teacher was spell-bound and informed the elder brother of Ramalinga that the boy was his guru-like. He received all the true knowledge one should have directly from the Lord. He sings:

"You are the Great Light of Compassion,
And You gave me the inner light through which
I can get all the knowledge without going to
a human teacher, and thus
You taught me all thirty six philosophies" 13

Ramalinga was having some extra-ordinary powers. His disciple Prof. Velayutham says:

"He had a strange faculty about him, witnessed very often,
of changing a carnivorous person into a vegetarian; a mere glance from him seemed enough to destroy the desire for animal food. He had also the wonderful faculty of reading other men's minds".14
Ramalinga was compassionate. The most vital principle of all his teachings is compassion. In all possible ways, both in verses and prose works, he stressed this principle. He showed pity on the suffering masses; not only on living beings but also on non-living things. There is a small anecdote in connection with this. One day when he was talking to some of his disciples, he asked them how great was the jivakarunya and he himself gave an instance. Two great men were walking along the street. By mistake one's leg stamped on an earth-crust and it was shambled. Seeing this the other fell unconscious. This was the true limit of compassion.

He was a man of religion and had high regard for Hinduism. He was in all praise for the vedas and other sastrhas. He says:

"All kinds of mystic achievements (siddhis), one can find in Hinduism alone. In no other religion have these things like jnana siddhi, emasddhi, or deathlessness been told. If, perhaps any religion has such philosophy, it is only because of an impact of Hinduism".\(^{16}\)

Prof. Velayutham endorses this:

"Ramalingam is certified by eye witnesses to have been able to recite the contents of the works of Agastia and other Munis equally respected by Dravidians and Aryans.....His whole occupation was the preaching of the sublime moral doctrines contained in the Hindu sastras and then instilling into the masses the principles of Universal Brotherhood, benevolence and charity".

Tamilnadu was rich in spiritual and bhakti movement. A long line of holy galaxy of saints can be shown in its background. It is suffice to say that in this line came Ramalinga in the 19th century. He says;

"Am I not one in that great lineage which comes from ancient times like a plantain tree in its series?"\(^{18}\)
Ramakrishna spoke of a class of beings whom he called Eswarakotis. He defined them as,

"An incarnation of God or one born with some of the characteristics of an incarnation is called an Easwarakoti. An ordinary man is called a jiva or jivakoti. By dint of sadhana a jivakoti one can realise God: but after samadhi he cannot come back to the plane of relative consciousness. The Easwarakoti is like the king's son. He has the keys to all the seven floors and can come down at will".19

Ramalinga, born as a man on this earth was really an Easwakoti in the above sense. His services, as shown hereafter will prove this and it seemed that Ramakrishna's words were not only prophetic but ascertaining one also. (though he was born later)

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36
SRI RAMAKRISHNA

M. has vividly given many descriptions which speak about the personal traits of Ramakrishna. His masterpiece "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" is, in that way, different from other ordinary biographies.

Ramakrishna was a fair complexioned man of ordinary height. M. notes "that his golden complexion blending with his yellow cloth enchanted the eyes of the devotees".¹

Ramakrishna had a short beard. He was an unusual person. He wore a red-borded cloth and polished slippers. "His physical frame was very tender as a result of the austerities he had undergone during the long years of his spiritual discipline. It would be appropriate to quote Romain Rolland here;

"Ramakrishna was a small brown man with a short beard and beautiful eyes, long dark eyes of light obliquely set and slightly veiled, never very wide open, but seeing half closed a great distance both outwardly and inwardly. His mouth was half-open over his white teeth in a bewitching smile at once affectionate and mischievous. Of medium height, he was thin to emaciation and extremely delicate. His temperament was supersensitive to all the winds of joys and sorrows, both moral and physical".²

Ramakrishna thus described, was a little boy full of fun and life in his childhood days. He was mischievous and charming with a feminine grace, which he preserved to the end of his life.

Ramakrishna always wore red-borded white cloth. He had no faith in the ochre cloth (usually worn by ascetics). Once at the sight of a monk, he remarked, "why this gerrua? Should one put on such a thing for a mere fancy?"³

37
This quotation shows his apathy for ochre robes. It is to be remembered that Ramalinga also wore only white cloth and even now his followers use the same. As in the case of Ramalinga, for Ramakrishna usually his disciple bought the cloth. Once Ramakrishna said to M. "Bring two pieces of cheap cloth for me. I shall wear them while taking my bath". M. had brought them. They were two unbleached and washed two pieces. This does not mean that Ramakrishna accepted cloth from everyone. He was selective and said to M. "Please give me a couple of linen shirts. As you know, I cannot use everybody's things".5

Two things are interesting to note here. Once Ramakrishna was to visit the house of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. He was wearing a shirt and asked M."My shirt is unbuttoned. Will that offend Vidyasagar?". To this innocent question M. Replied "Oh, No. Do not be anxious about it".6

Another day Ramakrishna was invited to attend a brahmo festival, organised by Debendra Nath Tagore, (father of Rabindra Nath Tagore). Ramakrishna was getting to ready for the visit. Then, Debendra sent a word that Ramakrishna should cover his body with a shawl before coming there. It was the period when Ramakrishna had lost interest in his personal matters. Therefore, he did not like the condition and refused to attend the festival. It was the period "when with a simple cloth about his loins and across his chest he would sit cross-legged and with folded hands before the little group of earnest souls".7

These two instances show a striking similarity with Ramalinga's one as already stated. They were not indifferent to their needs, but they did not give much importance to them. Though both of them were offered by their rich disciples many worldly things, they were bold enough to refuse them.

As for the food habits, there are many differences between the two great souls. While Ramalinga was a strict vegetarian, it cannot be said so about Ramakrishna. He cannot be
termed as a sumptuous eater. He took simple food for the most part of his life. When a sadhu offered him dal and bread, he did not accept them saying, "I take only a few morsels of rice". But, when invited, he took part in dinners arranged by rich men. He says,

"I ate a great deal of ice cream.... That is why I have sore-throat." and again "why I eat a variety of dishes? In order not to become monotonous. Otherwise I should have to renounce the devotees".  

When, once, he visited Devendra Nath Gupta's house he was given a nice dinner. After it was over, Ramakrishna said, "I have eaten a good deal of ice-cream." But these instances show one thing to us. It was only for the satisfaction of his devotees, he took those dishes.

Ramakrishna took non-vegetarian diet also. He says;

"I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature. I feel myself at home with every dish-fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder, pickled fish....."

I shall eat fish curry cooked with egg plant".

He was also taking meat. Though be did not advocate animal sacrifice, he did not oppose it either. When one of the devotees asked him whether it was good to sacrifice animals before the deity and that certainly involved killing, Ramakrishna replied that the Sasthra prescribed sacrifice on special occasions. Such sacrifice was not harmful. He gave an instance of sacrificing a goat on the eighth day of the full or new moon. When, one day a sheep was offered to Kali, he was there witnessing the ceremonies, but after attending the puja and consecration, he went away. He could not bear the sight of it being slaughtered.
These were all in his earlier days. Later he was in no mood of all these things. He says;

"In my present state of mind, I can eat a little fish soup, if it has been offered to the Divine Mother beforehand. I cannot eat any meat, even if it is offered to the Divine Mother: but I taste it with the end of my finger lest she should be angry"  

In the last days he completely gave up all these and lived on liquid diet alone, due to illness in his throat. He had the food, only after it was offered to the Mother and it was a prasada to him. It was this reason why he could not refuse fish or meat.

"More than once, Ramakrishna was angry when he was offered meals or edibles from 'immoral' people. Somehow or other he had that premonition. He became furious during such times end even threw the dishes".

"The Marwari devotees generally brought offerings of fruits, candy and other sweets for the master. But Ramakrishna could hardly eat them. He could say 'They earn their money by falsehood. I cannot eat their offerings".  

For him the simple food offered by a kind, pure and honest devotee, was hundred times holier than the rich and delicious dishes offered by the dishonest rich.

There were many days, when Ramakrishna passed without any food. It was in his ecstatic mood; he forgot all his personal needs. He was unconscious of his physical presence. Then how would he think of his body?

Only for sustaining the body, he took whatever offered. He had complete control over his palate and did not succumb to tastes or dishes when offered by unholy persons.

Ramakrishna was having little sleep, like Ramalinga. Usually he went to sleep in the late night and even then did not have deep sleep, For most of the time he would be keeping vigil over his divine pursuit. M. has recorded many such sleepless
nights of the master. One of the bhakti saints in Tamilnadu Pathragiriyaar sings;

"After controlling inside my anger, and
After burning my five senses to ashes,
When I am going to have that sleepless sleep,
When I would lose my natural sleep?"17

It seems that those who aspire for Divinity should not have the normal, physical sleep, which the world adores much;

Ramakrishna hated money. As revealed throughout his life, he advised everyone to shun money and gold. According to him these were the main obstacles in soliciting the Grace of God. Many times he threw away the coins and other valuables. At times he threw the coins over those, who gave them to him. While Ramalinga threw them into wells and tanks, Ramakrishna did the same in the Ganges.

But both of them suffered from want of money also. Ramakrishna had to request some of his disciples to pay the coachmen for travelling from Dhakshineshwar to Calcutta. One day he told a devotee," I shall go to Burrabazaar, tomorrow. Meet me there."18 But the devotee replied, "The train fare will be one anna. Where shall I get it?". Ramakrishna felt wounded.

Another day, he went to a theatre with some devotees. He was welcomed and given a seat in the box. He was filled with joy. He said to M.,"Ah, it is very nice?". I am glad to have come... How much will they charge us here?".19 Inspite of the joy he had, he was worried about the charges he had to pay. But the theatre owner was too happy with the presence of Ramakrishna to charge anything.

Another day a devotee hailed him saying,"You are free from love and hatred". Ramakrishna replied, "How so? I engaged a carriage to bring me to Calcutta and advanced three annas. But it did not turn up. I became very angry with him. He is a very wicked man. He made me suffer a lot".20

41
These instances show how much he was worried in finding money to meet the expenses. Once he saw a beggar woman with a baby in her arm, standing for alms in the street. He asked one of his disciples to give her some money.

Ramakrishna was a man of various moods. M. told Ramakrishna one day, "Sometimes you are like a child; sometimes like a mad man; sometimes like an inert thing and sometimes like a ghoul. And now and then you are a natural person".

Ramakrishna replied; "Yes, like a child. But I also experience the moods of a boy and a young man".21

One day Ramakrishna was coming out of his room, a six year old daughter of a devotee saluted him.... He did not notice it. She was visibly upset. When he came to understand it he expressed his apology. Thereafter she asked him to sit down and saluted again. He returned the greeting by bowing and touching the ground with his forehead.22

Thus Ramakrishna was simple so as to fulfill the wishes of even a small child. When one day Keshab asked him not to hide himself, Ramakrishna replied, "I am the dust of the dust of everybody's feet. I am the most insignificant of the insignificant, the lowliest of the lowly".23 But inspite of his simplicity, he was inwardly very deep. M. expressed it thus, "You are simple and at the same time deep. It is extremely difficult to understand you".24 Ramakrishna laughed at this as if he accepted the comment of M.

According to Ramakrishna, a man "is but an insignificant creature. It is only a man's vanity that makes him think of preaching".25 And again when a devotee told him one day that to see him was to see God, Ramakrishna replied, "Don't even say that again. The waves belong to the Ganges; but not the Ganges to the waves".26
The great asset that Ramakrishna had in his personality was this simplicity of a child and it even reflected in his day-to-day activities. Romain Rolland wrote; "He was like a child, so pure and innocent, so joyful and carefree. He laughed as only he know how to laugh with the gaiety of a child".27

Ramalinga was a self-educated man; so was Ramakrishna. He did not attend any school for getting knowledge. But he was gifted with love for poetry and arts. But he was a teacher for all and was affectionately called by all "the Master". Learned people thronged his place to listen to him and to learn from him. Those who came to teach him, often learnt the truth from him. The brahmanani was taught the value of supreme renunciation and Totapuri the secret of love of the personal god. From his early days the spirit of the teacher was present in him.

Ramakrishna was of the view that everything could be achieved through Bhakti. "weeping I prayed to the Mother. She has taught me everything". He was not ashamed of being an 'un-educated' man. He said to Narendra, "Let me tell this really and truly I don't feel sorry in the least that I haven't read vedanta or other scriptures". There he differs from Ramalinga, who was a repute scholar in both vedanta and other scriptures, particulary in saiva siddhanta.

It is well-known that Ramakrishna was a married man but not a family man. When his mother and his elder brother searched for a bride, so that he would become a "natural" man he himself suggested Saradamani as his wife and even told her place. After the marriage when he expressed his ideas and ideals and when she understood what type of a man was her husband, she fortunately agreed to follow his foot steps. She became the most respectable woman later to be called as the Holy Mother and she became the woman of his worship also.

Ramakrishna was the very embodiment of love. He could not hate anybody, rather he loved even those who hated him.
Hriday, one of his relations served him as a dasa should do, but later tormented him to the maximum. Ramakrishna says;

"Hriday did so much for me. He served me wholeheartedly and nursed me when I was ill. But he tormented me also. The torment became so unbearable that once I was about to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganges."\(^{30}\)

Fortunately Hriday was driven out by others. Later he suffered much with complicated personal problems. When Ramakrishna came to know them, he shed tears for him and wished somebody should help him. M. commented "For such a man he shed tears!"\(^{31}\)

Another incident is also worthy to be noted. One day Ramakrishna was lying on the ground in a state of samadhi. A man kicked him with boots. Ramakrishna recalls,

"The man thought that I was feigning to win Mathur's favour. He kicked me several times. It left black marks on my body. Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it. But I forbade it".\(^{32}\)

Forgiving others, even an enemy was the noblest virtue found in him.

Ramakrishna gave much importance to one's words. He expected that one should keep his words of promise. Once Shivnath, a respected gentleman of Calcutta, said to Ramakrishna that he would come to see him. Ramakrishna was waiting. But he neither came nor sent a word. Ramakrishna commented thus; "He has one defect....he does not keep his word. Truthfulness also constitutes the spiritual discipline".\(^{33}\)

Ramakrishna's presence produced visible changes in one's personality. Nobody could think of petty desires and fruitless worldly tasks in his presence. Rather godward thoughts and spiritual awakening would make them forget other worldly matters.
Ramalinga was having such a personality as revealed earlier. The bodies of both saints would have been of flesh and blood but the vibrations they produced were beyond physical limits.

Ramakrishna was thin to emaciation and extremely delicate. His temperament was exceptionally highly stung for he was supersensitive to all the winds of joys and sorrows both moral and physical. G.Vanmikanathan called Ramalinga as a 'Living Seismograph'. Seismograph is an instrument which registers the tremors of the earth, wherever they occur. A living seismograph registers the 'tremors' of the living things. A beautiful simile and it is apt for Ramakrishna too.

These are the traits of the personalities of these two great souls. One may definitely see striking similarities in their physical and mental level. Their way of living was almost alike, simple and compassionate. Yet there are differences. One should not conclude that these points alone would show their real character. They have been given to enhance and enumerate their spiritual outlook. The points given above are to introduce them as men of the ordinary fabric of the society. These were like the foundation stones for their spiritual grandeur later. To tell about what they ate and how they slept is not only unimportant but also not relevant. Eating and sleeping are meaningless to sages. Their physical needs were minimum. For them the physical bodies were an 'extra' load to carry in their spiritual journey. The famous saint of Tamilnadu, Thiruvalluvar wrote,

"Why is this extra heavy burden?
For those who are in the pursuit of
snapping the bondage of birth
Even this body is too much".34

The above points should be thought of in this line and they have been given here to help the readers understand their background from where they rose and how they soared in the spiritual horizon, different from others.
The coming pages would reveal their services in various fields, through which they enhanced the virtue of humanity and added to the meaning of the very life on this earth. In Purananuru, an ancient Sangam Literature in Tamil, more than 2000 years old, a poet underlines the importance of great souls thus;

"Why this world has not still disappeared?
Why this earth is still surviving?
It is because of their presence; they
Who would not eat lonely even if they have
    that 'amirta' which makes one deathless,
Who have no anger, who have lost their sleep
    for others' welfare,
Who fear for those one should really fear,
Who are ready even to give up their lives for doing good to others,
Who are bold enough to shun the whole world,
    if it is offered for some immoral thing,
Who have no rest and strive for higher things,
Who do not do anything for their personal gains
But do the same for others' welfare.....
Only by such people the world is sustained".35

One need not repeat the meanings of the above words. The sentiments expressed in the song, echoed again after 2000 years in the 19th century in the lives of St. Ramalinga and Sri Ramakrishna.
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SOCIAL SERVICES
1. Against Casteism

The situation in the 19th century was given clearly in the earlier pages. Mathur wrote;

"The breakdown of the political and economic structure had disastrous effects on the socio-religious life. Tagore described the then India as 'slumbering in a death-like sleep'. Social life dried up and expressed itself in the revival of customs, superstitions, prejudices, ignorance, fear feuds, bitterness and parochialism'.

Social injustice was so prevalent among the people to make good men think of doing something to produce social awareness among the masses. Pramatha Nath Bose is of the opinion that in this stage casteism began to shatter. It did not happen so exactly but somewhat of a rethinking began to come up in the minds of the people in that line. There were many people who were actually responsible for creating this awareness. St.Ramalinga and Sri Ramakrishna were pioneers in this field. This chapter tries to bring out their attempts to eradicate casteism and untouchability.

Ramalinga considered caste as unnatural and artificially created one by the people. Before hundred years there were no castes in India. There were divisions of people based on their occupations. It was so arranged to run the society without any difficulty. It was only later these divisions were institutionalised. The castes therefore, were unacceptable to Ramalinga. He thought of them as anchronic. The evils of untouchability then were more than they are found now. He could not see low caste people suffer. The caste Hindus who founded dharmasalas where the poor were fed, did not allow the untouchables to enter there. Ramalinga clearly stated that unless the man-made divisions of castes and clans go away and the anchronic dead rituals disappeared, there would be no universal outlook. And unless one had this outlook, there would be no spiritual enlightenment. He called this universal outlook as 'suddha siva sanmargha sathya jnana acara'. He wrote;
"Unless mercy(jivakarunya) is there, you cannot have the grace of God. Unless you leave the casteism, you cannot have that mercy."³

His vital principle was sanmargha, which means the True Path (sat margha). The main goal of sanmargha, as per his explanation, was the identification one makes with others and integration of one's soul with those of all and by that way to have the blessings and grace of God. When the darkness of casteism envelopes one's mind, "Where is the way to see the light of Truth?", he asked.⁴

Poor-feeding is considered as the most benevolent virtue from time immemorial. All over the country there are such feeding centres. They were there in the last century also. When people went there to assuage their hunger, they were allowed inside only after their castes were enquired. This was nothing but a cruelty. Ramalinga could not imagine that caste was a barrier to have one's hunger satiated. To him, giving food to the poor was nothing but worshipping God. If casteism prevented feeding the poor, it meant then, preventing the puja also. Therefore he instructed his disciples when he founded the dharma sala, that nobody would ask one's caste when he came for food.

In one of his notings, Ramalinga has described four kinds of morality one should follow. They are morality of sense organs, morality of senses, morality of soul and morality of jiva. He has defined jiva morality as thus:

"It is treating all people as equals without showing any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sect, clan, country etc., whether they are of higher or lower birth"⁵

Ramalinga has written much about the evil of casteism. Many verses in Thiru Arutpa and many essays in prose works contain his views on castes and untouchability. In one of his verses he asks,
"Alas, alas, the God of Cosmic Dance came to me,  
And gave the Light of Grace to me, so that  
All the differences and discriminations of  
Caste, religion and sect disappeared from my mind."

God is nothing but the embodiment of mercy. He is great and limitless. One cannot see the Great light of Compassion, if he is confined in the darkness of caste. It is truth which lets one live; it is satya which shows the right path to be followed. But caste is asatyā, not true and it is falsehood. It degrades man, drives him into wrong ways and thus brings unending sorrows.

He made a vow that he had come to this world to fight against such evils. He sings;

"God has made me come into this world, and  
Thereof I had my birth on this earth  
To reform and transform the people,  
Who are dark in their hearts but  
Who outwardly seem to be learned,  
into sanmargha and by that, to help  
them attain bliss of the heaven  
in this earth itself".  

His principle, sanmargha is the only way, the right path to eradicate all the problems. In it casteism goes off; quarrelsomeness vanishes and the false knowledge of the 'educated' disappears. He prayed to God to give him strength to achieve the goal. Here is his song:

"Come my Lord, and embrace me,  
Oh! my Lord, you have no caste or religion,  
You have no origin or end,  
This is the correct time, Come  
and embrace me to make me strong".  

He wrote many songs like these. And also he preached them in his teachings. He was not theoretical. He did not stop
with preaching alone. He practised what he told other people. He lived in a remote village, among the poor people. People of all walks of life thronged to him inspite of his secluded life. They were from all castes, from brahmin to the untouchable. Among them were a christian and a muslim. If one keeps in his mind the boiling situation of the last century, this gathering of all castes and all religions, was nothing but revolutionary.

Social reformation movements took place in this century. There were some in Tamilnadu also. The greatest social reformer of Tamilnadu was E.V.Ramasamy Naicker, affectionately called as Periar, by the loving Tamils. The word means 'Great Man'. He, though an athiest to the core, was in all praise for Ramalinga. Scholars doing research on Periar, consider Ramalinga as one of the forerunners of his movement. No doubt in it. For that matter he did not isolate himself from people. He lived among the poor and shared their sorrows and joys. One of the christian missionarises was jealous of his influence and called him by names. His anger had a reason. In one way or the other he was a great obstacle in their missionary work of converting the poor into christianity.

There are two freedoms one should have. One is political and the other social. Political freedom can be achieved by people, but the time and their efforts may differ. But social freedom demands a long struggle. No time limit can be drawn for that. Those who are in the front line of social struggle, should be bolder and purer than the political freedom fighters. Such one was Ramalinga. He was bold enough to deviate from the path of conservativists to include the poor and the untouchables in his endeavour. The institutions founded by him did some pioneer work in eradicating casteism and social inequility. He might not have got more success and might not have produced a series of such movements in Tamil nadu. But the reasons for these were many. It is sufficient to point out that he was the first man to open the gates of social equality in the south, which others followed later.
The siddha cult is still in vogue in Tamilnadu. Those enlightened ones attacked casteism and discrimination on the basis of castes in no uncertain terms. Ramalinga is considered to be the last in the line. Therefore, there is no surprise for his revolutionary ideas.

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RAMAKRISHNA

Casteism is everywhere. It is prevalent in India from the north to the south. Ramakrishna's Bengal also witnessed the same. He, being born in a brahmin family, was orthodox. It was but natural to be so. He was brought up accordingly. On many matters his views were too conservative. In spite of all these, Ramakrishna was against casteism.

Ramakrishna did not accept casteism in toto. His assumption was that castes were made to maintain some social order. Therefore they should not divide man from man. Though he did not express his views as vehemently as Ramalinga did, he did not fail in his duty to condemn the same at appropriate times.

Even a casual reader of his biography cannot miss one incident in Ramakrishna's early life. When he was at his native place, Kamarpukur, it was the day of upanayana, the ceremony wearing the holy thread. Against the custom and wishes of the elders he went and received his first food from a low-caste woman.\(^1\) M. has recorded in the 'Gospel' that Ramakrishna used to eat cooked greens prepared by a low caste woman.\(^2\) These are but two examples which clearly show his commitment to give no importance to casteism. At least Ramalinga was a non-brahmin and for that matter to fight against casteism may seem to be natural. But Ramakrishna, being an orthodox brahmin opposed casteism; this is really revolutionary.

Vivekananda gives another anecdote in this connection

"Ramakrishna set the example of the most humble service. He, a brahmin, went to a pariah's house and asked permission to clean it. He refused. So Ramakrishna went there at night when all were asleep and wiped the floor with his long hair."\(^3\)

Where is the vanity of casteism or for that matter where is the vanity of brahminism? How simple was Ramakrishna! Many a time had he declared, "I am the humblest of the humble... I am
the dust of the bhaktas of God". These were not mere words. These were not theoretical. He proved them by practically living as he preached. A brahmin taking his meal from an untouchable is unimaginable even in this day. But the wonderful man Ramakrishna, did it.

Another incident which was given earlier, also deserves to he mentioned here. When Ramakrishna was on a tour with Mathur Babu, at one place, he saw low-caste people, the santals, almost naked, emaciated and dying of hunger. When Mathur refused to help them as was requested by Ramakrishna, the latter sat down among the poor creatures and wept for their sufferings. Mathur thereupon yielded. Ramakrishna said to him, "They are the Mother's tenants. Jiva is Siva. Who then, dare talk of showing mercy to them? Not mercy, but service, service for man must be regarded as God".5

Divine services do not give room to sectarian views. Ramakrishna puts this in a beautiful passage:

"In the sight of the worldly man there are differences of rank and position - one is a king and another is a cobbler; one is a father and another is a son and so on. But when the divine vision is opened all appear equal; and there remains no distinction of good and bad or high and low".6

Tej singh wrote on Guru Nanak and comments;

"Those who love the Lord, love everybody. There can be no love of God without active service".

Ravidas, the north Indian mystic was a cobbler by birth. But his religious life was as exalted and pure as it was deep. There were more such great souls throughout the cultural history of India. In the south, bhakti movement had in its fold people from all strata of society. Ramanuja, one of the three greatest spirits in the religious revival of India, was a pioneer in this field. Ramananda perceived that their is only one God; He is the origin

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of all. All the distinctions of caste and creed vanished from Ramananda and he saw all humanity as one large family and all men as his brothers. No man is higher than another through his birth, nor through his status. Only through love and sympathy does man raise himself higher than others.⁸

At later stage, Ramakrishna gave up his beads and other holy marks on his forehead. One of the pundits asked him what the reason was; another pundit replied, "They have dropped from him as the dry branch from a coconut tree". Hearing this M. commented, "When one attains knowledge the upadhis and limitations drop". Therefore it is evident that true knowledge does not enthrall casteism or creed. This echoes the words of Ramalinga.

Ramakrishna, was against the greed of other brahmins. He did not blame all, but only those who were not sincere in their duties. He said to M."I have seen brahmin priests reciting the chandi while performing the rites....They turn half the pages without reciting them". Mere repetition of words, calling them mantras was not good. There should be real involvement. One who is in the path of doing rites should not be greedy. These were his ideas. Another day Ramakrishna advised M. thus;

"Never listen to what the brahmins say. If a man doesn't give them money they will call him bad; on the other hand, if a man is generous to them, they will call him good".⁹

These words show his apathy for insincerity of high caste people. A brahmin criticising another was nothing but revolutionary in those days. He would have anticipated social boycott. But it was his position in society and religion that made others keep quiet.

He used to visit some of his devotees' houses. There were some low caste devotees too. When he went to their houses some caste Hindus opposed his action. But he paid no attention to their words. At such times they did not accompany him. He took no care of it.
Vivekananda says the following as the qualities of his master;

"He lived to root out all distinction between man and woman, the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, the brahmana and the chandala."\(^{12}\)

The brahmana and the chandala were one and the same to Ramakrishna, as long as they followed the path of God. The famous Tamil saint Thirunavukkarasu sings:

"Even if their limbs are shortening due to leprosy, the dreaded disease which disintegrates one's physique,

Even if they kill and eat the flesh of sacred cows, They are my relatives, I bow to their holy feet,
If they worship my Lord Siva, who adores His head with Ganges and crescent".\(^ {13}\)

Ramakrishna was conscious of a caste-ridden society. Though he is not on record of doing anything to eradicate casteism and untouchability, the idea was in his mind. One day he told M.

"The caste-system can be removed by one means only and it is love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste.... 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".\(^ {14}\)

This is a simple way to eradicate casteism. A real love has to be developed between man and man first. For propagating the love towards God, this is necessary and that is the foundation. From this love comes, what Ramalinga called, the jiva morality. It emphasizes one to treat all, his equals. That would be the real victory for mankind. The words and deeds of these two great saints were towards that victory. They showed the path. It is left to the progeny to follow. It is, with that alone mankind will survive, because theirs were the voices of mankind.

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2. AGAINST SUPERSTITIONS AND RITUALS

People were so ignorant in those days when Ramalinga and Ramakrishna lived. People were like slaves to the age old customs. Supernatural power and superhuman power were respected with awe and wonder. To them religion was a bundle of rituals. Those who performed the rituals with pomp and splendour, were considered as true religious men. A historian writes:

"A deep-rooted belief in a number of Gods and Goddesses, a rigid caste system.... religion means to them only an unending series of rituals and ceremonies performed in strict accordance with the scriptural rules.... There was undoubtedly a general deterioration in Hindu Society".

Myths and legends which were beyond the scope of rational thinking, were believed to have really existed. Human rights were subjugated. Men had no proper education and they did not know what all this meant to them. They were in the dark and time and again great men showed them the real path and rational outlook. Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were not exceptions to this. This chapter deals with their social services against superstitions and rituals.

RAMALINGA

Social differences are predominant in Hindu religion. Therefore by its nature, Hinduism gives room for all types of worship. P.N.Bose calls it, hence, a bundle of many religions. But in the last century, when English education spread among the people a new awareness began to emerge. This awareness was dead against the dead customs. It was in its outlook good as it tried to change the society into a rational one. The way it followed was violent. And there was fear among some that it would pave the way for atheism. It would be worse than superstition.
Tradition, as a whole should not be opposed. The way of living handed over from generation to generation should be analysed in a sensitive way.

"The refusal to recognise the same and wise solutions and visions of the thinkers of the past combined with the craze of beginning a new order, is responsible for the fear of crumbling down of the social order and total disintegration of society".3

To preserve the age old religious culture, the intermingled dead customs had to be weeded out. But in that process the fabric should not be torn. Reformation is different from destruction. The need of the hour was a rational approach to religion. Vivekananda said:

"Religion is primacy. I claim that no destruction is necessary to improve the Hindu society and this state of society exists not on account of religion but because religion has not been applied to society as it should have been".4

If religion is valued in a rational way, definitely there should be changes in customary practices. Some ancient traditions would be shattered. But there was no other go. Religion was greater than rituals; but human life and morality were greater than religion itself. The dead rituals simultaneously destroyed the human life and religion. Hence, the saints stood against the superstitions and rituals more powerful than those who stood for pure rationalism.

People in Ramalinga's time, were extravagant and spent much money on marriage, ear-boring ceremony etc. There were dances, orchestra and procession, colourful and attractive. Ramalinga saw them and he was not happy. He advised the people not to waste money in such ways and instead he asked them to feed the poor.5 The marriage is a holy institution and it needs an understanding between the boy and the girl, which could not be bought by money.
It is usual and customary in this part of the country to wail over one's death loudly. Ramalinga, who was conscious of others' sufferings, advised them:

"Death is an ultimate reality even for Gods".5(a)

"Nobody should weep nor feel sorry".6

"Even if one loses his children, he should not be dejected".

Even now people spend more money in doing ceremonies for those who are dead. People gather in large numbers and take part in some traditional rituals, which differ from caste to caste. Ramalinga was against all these. Not only with the point of view that they were wasteful, but also in the view they were meaningless.

He strongly advocated that the dead should be buried, not burnt. Emphasizing this point he wrote a decad of verses. He was so compassionate even to shed tears for a withered plant. Therefore, burning a body was not acceptable to him. Even after death, it was a body still, which once had life. To burn it, according to him, was nothing but killing. He had his own way of explaining the real sense of it.

Likewise Ramalinga was not for doing the final rites for the dead on 12th or 16th day. He believed that those who were dead, had been blessed by God. Once they had that Divine Grace, nobody should invoke mantras to disturb the peace they had.

These were all new ones. Some followed him and many could not do so. But there was meaning when he talked about these things. Everything should be approached rationally. One should not follow the rites with blind eyes.

Ramalinga gave new explanations to old notions. They show how far he was scientific in his outlook. Thunder, lightning, rain etc. are natural events. They take place due to the changes in the climate and variation in the pressure of air. Modern science
explains these. But to the laymen, these are the actions of Gods. Ramalinga explained that "The liquid particles which condense in the atmosphere, due to hot air and sun's heat, get compressed by the same heat and produce lightning, thunder and rain". More than hundred years ago Ramalinga gave this scientific description... It is to be pointed our here, that his verse 'Arutperunjothi Akaval' (which means A long song of Great Light of Compassion) contains many advanced scientific points. They have to be deeply analysed.

Ramalinga had no belief in extra-terrestrial heaven or hell, though the scriptures speak of them in many ways. "My mind, to me a kingdom" is a famous line in an English poem. Ramalinga said, "The heaven is inside this human body. It is the joy of heaven to see a hungry man assuaged from his misery by feeding him. And it is the suffering of the hell, if he is not satiated with food". Heaven or hell nobody knows about them. Instead of talking about the things that cannot be perceived, everyone should come forward to help the suffering mass. That was the idea of Ramalinga.

Due to famine and starvation people died in large numbers in those days. Epidemics were caused by poor hygiene and ignorance. But people thought otherwise. To them they were due to the anger of the Gods and they were punitive in nature. Therefore they built many temples for every God they thought punitive. 'Plaque' is an English word and denotes a disease. Poor people built a temple for 'Plaque Mariamman', the Goddess worshipped for bringing rain. Ramalinga felt sorry for these poor people. He wrote: "These untimed deaths are due to lack or excess of food, defects in moral life. Cholera, heart attack etc. happen in these ways". Therefore he opposed building temples for these 'Gods', which he called as 'minor Gods'. When people went to sacrifice animals to these Gods, he was extremely angry. He called the Gods as "torturing minor Gods". His whole frame trembled whenever he happened to see such temples.
He was against man worshipping man. Some called him as an avatar-incarnation. He was pained at his heart for their ignorance. He said, "Alas! These people don't know the real God. They consider me as God". It is the practice of the people to call one as an incarnation or so, if he has some extra-ordinary powers. It is against the norms to do so. It is to be recalled here, that Vivekananda refused to accept Ramakrishna an avatar, though he was to his guru's heart, the most beloved disciple. As long as one is in his physical body made of flesh and blood, he is susceptible to the physiological changes, and one day the body has to go. To consider such a fragile one as an incarnation is against nature. But Ramalinga's disciples revered him as one carrying the message of the Lord.

Myths and legends are the age-old treasures of India. They are found in other parts of the world also. They speak of some external truths and virtues. The ideals they convey are real and everlasting, but not the stories they are made of. Ramalinga was of the opinion that those myths were symbolic in nature. People thought otherwise and believed that the incidents described in them were real ones. In course of time they lost the significance of the virtues. Ramalinga clearly told that Gods in human form or Gods with many other forms were false. It was a bold statement. God was Love and Love was God. Anything, which was an obstacle in the path of love was against the concept of reality. The rituals or the rites found in them were nothing but blind faiths and they should vanish at the earliest. He said;

"One may do penance or yoga,
may follow jnana or meditation,
may do jeba or austerities,
But let him lack in jivakarunya, the compassion,
He will not get even a little of God's grace."

But the sasthas, scriptures and other so called sacred texts are full of rituals and legendary incidents. They are imaginary and sometimes against rational knowledge. Hence, Ramalinga more than once fought against them. He said;

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"Without compassion, these rituals are mere showy extravagances. Nobody could see the Lord with these falsehoods. One should have 'atma jnanna' soul knowledge to receive the Grace of the Lord. God is both knowledge and Love, Chit and Grace. Without these, how can one get the dharsan?"²⁹

God is the ultimate reality and the rituals are false and man-made. It is a paradox that religions which have to show the correct path to be followed, tend to nurture these rituals. They are so deep and entangled in one's life that one has lost one's identity and individuality. He is so conditioned that to him these empty rituals are more important than his life, his individuality or even the society wherein he lives. The main reason for the poverty of the people is this blind following. Man is ready to sell his valuables to do some rites for his ancestors who were dead long ago. Hence Ramalinga says;

"Let these dead and blind beliefs, which presume all the imaginary things found in the scripts as permanent and real, Vanish at the earliest: and in their places Let the true path of Sanmargha blossom To lead mankind towards the real world".²⁰

Ramalinga's fight against social evils and rituals, formed a basis for renaissance in society. A man should be more courageous to tell the people the things which they not like, and which are far-reaching in their content and truth. Whoever visualises a society beyond his contemporary things is a great man indeed. That vision, he expresses in clear and bold tone whether anyone liked it or not. Ramalinga was such a man in the 19th century. To Ramalinga, religion and God were like his body and soul. When one gets sick he tries to eradicate the disease to save the life. Ramalinga's attempts in the field of society and religion were of such nature.
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RAMAKRISHNA

Ramakrishna, to a superficial reader, would seem to be a man of orthodox and conservative of rituals. To some extent it is true. He was very particular in following some rituals and ceremonies, in the way given in scriptures. But, like Ramalinga, Ramakrishna had also fought against some anachronic practices.

Once Ramakrishna's disciple and relative, Rakhal was sick. He 'had vowed to offer green coconut and sugar to Siddheshwari, the Divine Mother'.¹ This is the fine example of kamia worship, where in one offers something to the deity expressing his wish to be fulfilled by the Goddess.

Another day when M.and Balaram went to meet Ramakrishna he was standing in front of a shelf to take some sweets. Then a lizard jumped on his body. He removed his hand and said, "One should observe all these things".² He had also a belief that the first face seen in the morning indicated whether the day would be good or evil.³

At Dakshineshwar, the yatra performance was carried on auspicious days. One day due to some reason it was not done. Ramakrishna was annoyed to know about this. He advised those in charge to adhere to the rules. "The traditions of the temple should be properly observed", was his comment.⁴

He had a strong belief in births. "One must admit the existence of tendencies inherited from previous births", and again, " A man who kills himself must return again and again to this world and suffer its agony. Suicide is a heinous crime."⁵ These are but two of his utterances about his belief in the cycle of births.

Ramakrishna was a man of austerities,. He stressed the importance of fasting on auspicious days. He said, "One should fast on the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight. That purifies the mind and helps one develop love of God".⁶
When Manmohan, one of his disciples, was on his way to Calcutta he visited Ramakrishna with his family. To them he said, "Today is the first day of the Bengali month, an inauspicious day for undertaking a journey. I hope everything will be well with you".7

These were some of his advices and beliefs about the rituals and religious customs. Outwardly they would suggest that Ramakrishna was a strict religious disciplinarian, whereas inwardly he was not so. In reality he was beyond all these. He stressed these as necessary ones for the common people. In the lower rung of spiritual pursuit one has to follow some rules and regulations. Ramakrishna said,

"Rituals are to be observed. But when one advances in spirituality it is not necessary to observe them long".8

It is true that Ramakrishna did not speak so vehemently against the unwanted and meaningless rituals, as Ramalinga did. But Ramalinga was of the same view that these were necessary for the beginners. Ramakrishna's life was a bhakta's life. He was always surrounded by people of all grades. He had to be selective in his preachings. He had to discriminate between what should be told and to whom. He preached accordingly. Therefore the quotations, given above need not reflect his whole concept about rituals.

He said very boldly: "The ancient rules and commandments of our scriptures must be pruned of all their accretions to make them suit modern time".9 And again, "Do not trouble yourself with doctrines. It is the essence of Existence in each man counts".10 Ramalinga, told in clear terms that God could not be seen by mere rituals. Ramakrishna also said, "God cannot be won by a system of rituals but by love and sincerity".11

That love and that sincerity made him visit the houses of low caste people.
Ramakrishna was a staunch supporter of idol worship, God with forms. But that doesn't mean that he was a sectarian. He told,

"Idol worship is necessary at the beginning, but it is not required afterwards. Various forms used for worship have been provided to suit the needs of different stages of spiritual evolution".12

Ramakrishna argued for idol worship with the brahmo samajins like Keshab more than once. Yet, he was beyond all these forms. As long as one remains a bhakta, one needs forms; but when he reaches the state of jnana, Ramakrishna declared, "forming sects becomes meaningless false as a dream".13 As long as he was the Master, he followed the rituals, but when he was his own 'self' they left him spontaneously.

On pilgrimage, Ramakrishna had such an opinion. "What is the use of making pilgrimages if you can attain love of God remaining where you are?" he asked. "Pilgrimage becomes futile if it does not enable you to attain the love of God".14

His was a universal outlook. He did not confine himself within the four walls. His body would have been at a place; but his mind was broad and visionary. He said on another occasion, "Be not like the frog in the well. The frog in the well knows nothing bigger than its well. So are all bigots. They do not see anything better than their own creed."15

Like Ramalinga, Ramakrishna was also of the same opinion that the real and inner meaning of the myths and legends should be understood by the people. The puranas convey a message, a virtue or a moral. They are more important than the stories they contain. M.gives an anecdote. One day Ramakrishna was listening to a story from Bhaktamala, a book on vaishnavava saints. In it, it was told that Lord Krishna was riding on a horse and the people saw Him and worshipped Him. After hearing the
story Ramakrishna asked M. whether the latter believed all that, and whether Krishna rode on that horse. M. replied that Krishna might have come there but he did not know whether they really saw Him. Ramakrishna said, "The book contains nice stories about devotees. But it is one-sided". His question and his comment clearly show that the devotees didn't grasp the inner content. He thought them as 'nice stories', which mean not real.

He did not give much importance to other beliefs like dying in a holy place gives one, liberation. As he considered pure love towards God was more than any ritual, he advised his people to cultivate the same. One day a devotee asked him,

"Is a man liberated only when he dies on the banks of the Ganges?".

Ramakrishna replied,

"It is the knowledge of God alone that gives liberation wherever he may die. But the banks of the Ganges is described as a place for a bound soul".!

A jnani has no dogmas nor has any binding. He is neither short minded. It was revolutionary in those days to talk against the rituals and dogmas. People were surprised to hear them from Ramakrishna. Once he said;

"Do not care for doctrine, do not care for dogmas or sects or churches or temples. They count for a little compared with the essence of existence in each man which is spirituality".!

It is no wonder a writer commented on these words thus; "He told people to give up their passion for ceremonials and to aspire for knowledge about the truth of things". His religion thus was quite different from other Hindu ascetics. Outward worshipping or proficiency in scriptures did not count in his religion. Even a temple, in one of which he spent his life receiving the blessings of the Mother Kali, did not matter much to him. His strong words
against rituals and superstitions are not much known to the world. He was rational in his outlook and universal in his spiritualism.

Like Ramalinga, Ramakrishna considered death as an unavoidable necessity in life. One of his devotees lost his son and was grief-stricken. Ramakrishna consoled him thus;

"Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed at the time of dissolution. Nothing will remain. What can you do? Be ready for death."

Ramakrishna had this concept on death. But he was aware of the grief of the people. The following incident clearly shows his mind both of a jnani and of a worldly man.

Akshay, one of Ramakrishna's nephew, was in his death bed. Ramakrishna was standing in front of him, seeing his state of liberation. He says;

"Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched how a man died. It was like a sword taken out from the scabbard. The sword remained as it was, only the scabbard was left behind. I enjoyed the scene and laughed and danced and sang over it. They removed the body and cremated. But next day as I stood there, I felt a rocking pain for the loss of Akshay as if somebody was squeezing my heart like a wet towel. I wondered and thought that Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned with the body—even much less with a nephew. But if such was my pain at his bereavement how much more must be the grief of the householders."

This incident is an indication of his mental level. It does not show any fall in his state. But he personally experienced the grief of a bereaved person.
The views given in these pages clearly show how far these two saints were rational and advanced in their thinking. They were of the same opinion that the sasthras and scriptures should be modernised to the changes of the society; but they warned that this modernisation should not destroy the original. That is actually called renaissance. To give something new from the old one is traditional and every generation does it. They also did their part in the last century, but the time they lived was not conducive. Therefore their true service were not recognised.

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3. INDIVIDUAL MORALITY

Religion was founded by society, which in turn was shaped by individuals. Hence both the society and religion in one way or other are affected by the individuals. The morality, culture, activity and interaction of the individuals play an important part in society. If the individuals are lacking in morality, if they are too selfish or if they are lacking in vision, the society to which they belong will certainly perish. But on the other hand, if they are moral, cultured, active and unselfish and if they are matured enough to know their duties, then that society will thrive and cherish.

The 19th century society in India was almost a spent up force. Social life had dried up. The people could not be blamed for that condition. The political atmosphere and the fall in the standard of life with the droughts and famines - all these made them forgot the real living. Existence itself was a question, then speaking of other things was a luxury.

Ramalinga and Ramakrishna happened to live in that period. They were aware of the situation. Until the individuals were tamed, no morality would be found; until the higher qualities of virtue and truth were replanted there would be no revival in the spiritual arena also. Their concern, then was of the individuals. They spoke many things in that line and did yeomen service in that fileld. This part deals with them.

RAMALINGA

Ramalinga wrote hundreds of verses. His views on personal matters cannot be found in those verses. Instead they are available in plenty in his prose works, which include his letters, pamphlets, commentaries and notings. These works show his concern for the individuals and society.
Ramalinga was respected by all sorts of people. He also respected their sentiments. He loved his friends and devotees with his heart. Once he wrote to one of his friends, "The relation between you and me is pure and time-tested. You and I are not different; I am you, you are myself." In a letter, he advised his friend to look after his health with care, care in the sense of optimum diet and optimum conjugal affair. He explained further that one should not eat more because of the dishes being tasty and delicious; nor should one eat less because of the food being less delicious. He further advised that one should not eat food in urgency, or when he was in a mood of anger or worry. He gave further advice like this in dietary matters. Personal health is an important aspect for one's peaceful living. These words of Ramalinga show his idea about it.

When one of his friends fell sick, he wrote a letter to him emphasising three points. He said; 1) Powerful drugs should be avoided. 2) Excessive and over physical work should be avoided. 3) One can even resign his job if it is found not suitable for his health and he can get loan for his living.

Modern doctors accept that powerful drugs will produce side-effects and sometimes will bring complications. This warning was given by Ramalinga more than 100 years ago. Hard and excessive physical work requires nutritious diet. Without that intake, hard work will tell upon the body. Therefore one should avoid overwork or one should plan his diet accordingly. It is a family man's duty to earn his living for him and his family. But Ramalinga advised even to leave off that, if it marred one's health. Occupational hazard is one of the reasons for modern diseases. It is a surprise that Ramalinga thought of it in this line also.

In a materialistic world, leading one's life and making both ends meet are very difficult. A false prestige and social status make many people get loans from others. Ramalinga called this life 'a life dressed in falsehood'. Many times he advised the people to avoid extravagance in their spending and to live within
the limit of their income. The real reason for suffering of a family man is his over-expense. If one plans one's account properly one can avoid much wastage. This was the idea of Ramalinga's advice.

Even one is an ascetic, he needs money for some other purposes. Though his disciples provide him with food or dress other activities are also to be done. Ramalinga and his friends experienced more difficulties in founding and running the sanmargha institutions. But even then he did not go for receiving money from all the persons. He organised these institutions within the limits of the sources of his devotees. Begging makes one humble. Thirukkural says, "Don't beg even for satiating the thirst of a cow. It makes one's tongue disgraced". Ramalinga asked his disciples to live accordingly with their income.

As Ramalinga respected his friends. he was conscious of his duty to his neighbours. Having love for neighbours is the first step towards a good society. After leaving Chennai, he could not return there. The reasons for this were many. The situation in his neighbourhood was one of them. As a native physician he used to treat poor patients with medicines, he himself had prepared with herbs. Once one such medicine was spoiled. He was much worried about it and felt guilty for his carelessness. It made him prepare the same again. Another time he was to be in the village, as it was very hot then and people suffered a lot due to drought.

Ramalinga gave three important rules to be followed. One should maintain 1) a healthy body; 2) a pure mind; and 3) morality. He calls them, a body without injury, a mind without blemishes and a virtue not spoiled by falsehood. He stressed these three things for every one. 'A sound mind in a sound body' is a modern concept. But Ramalinga included the moral virtue also as one of the bases. It is the most vital part in his teachings.

Ramalinga had written elaborately on morality. He classified it into four as 1) the morality of sense organs (inthriya),
2) the morality of senses (karana), 3) the morality of jiva and 4) the morality of atma.

The morality of sense organs deals with physique, cleanliness, diet, personal hygiene, friendship, environment and other subjects like these. The morality of karana speaks of mental virtues like not speaking ill of others, being simple and free from pride etc. The morality of jiva deals with the relationship of one with another, and how to treat others without showing discrimination on the basis of religion, society or creed or sex. The last one, the morality of atma is identifying oneself with God in each and everything. In his own words that identification should be 'from huge elephant to tiny ant'.

In the evolution of spiritual development the last stage, morality of atma, is the final process. A simple man cannot understand it. But he can understand the identification with others, which is the essence of all religions. If one reaches that stage whether through bhakti or jnana, he becomes the supreme or Mahatma. Then there is no wonder both Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were called 'Mahatmas'.

Ramalinga wrote a separate treatise by name 'Nithya Karma Rules', in which his essential views on personal hygiene, food etc. can be found. As he lived among the poor, the grief-stricken poor society made him think that way. He showed pity for the poor, but he did not stop with that. In all possible ways he showed them the right ways of living.

He advised the people to eat food when they felt hungry. That food should be according to the magnitude of one's hunger, not more not less. They should eat neither slowly not fast. He had already written about the suffering, one would undergo due to hunger. To him hunger was one form of fire, agni. One should try to put out this fire with food. If not, it would burn the internal organs and there upon the external organs also to an unexpected limit, where one would lose one's basic
sense and one's soul would melt. His anxiety about this very idea later came through him in the form of 'Jivakarunyam', which will be dealt with later.

Likewise he spoke many things on sleep, bath, exercise etc. On marriage, he was not against it, if one keeps his mind on God. After marriage, one should lead the family life with sincerity and care. He advised that one should not fail in doing one's duties towards his parents, friends and the society. He did not advocate a man leaving his parents or close relatives in his pursuit of spiritual aspiration.

His views may be summed up as:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Indulgence in eating and sleeping is bad.}\footnote{16}
  \item \textit{Love should be shown to all living beings.}\footnote{17}
  \item \textit{No time should be wasted in idle talking.}\footnote{18}
  \item \textit{One should not yield to flattery.}\footnote{19}
  \item \textit{The path shown by the ancestors to be followed.}\footnote{20}
  \item \textit{Elders should be obeyed.}\footnote{21}
\end{itemize}

Ramalinga was thinking of writing three separate chapters on 'Man, Woman and Society'. They would have been a part of the book he had in his mind. For some unknown reason he could not do so. But one could not but think what would have been his ideas in the broader sense! But his very idea of writing such chapters indicates his deep concern for man and society.

To be among the people was a boon to him. He sings;

\begin{quote}
"My Mother, It is my wish to be among these loving ones who are goldlike in their virtues, And to found a temple to worship You, with the same loving ones".\footnote{22}
\end{quote}

He cherished in the thought of helping the poor and showing the sanmargha path to them. And for their part, the people responded it with boundless love.
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RAMAKRISHNA

The life of Ramakrishna, was in two parts, his individual one and the other with his disciples. But to him they were one and the same. There was no limit for his love for his devotees. After the passing away of Ramakrishna, M. and Narendra were talking about their master. Narendra said to M. "He tamed us by his love. Don't you think, so?". M. replied. "There is not the slightest doubt about it. His love was utterly unselfish".¹ The following pages try to reveal that love as a model for individual morality.

The social condition in Calcutta, during the period of Ramakrishna, was not better than that of Ramalinga's Chennai. It was materialistic. The people were running after their sensual needs. They were slaves to their senses. Ramakrishna once said; "At present time people lived the life of slaves".² He said further, "The other day, I went to Calcutta. As I drove along the streets in the carriage, I observed that everyone's attention was fixed on low things. Everyone was brooding over his stomach and running after nothing but food. Everyone's mind was turned to woman and gold. I saw only one or two with their attention fixed on higher things, with their minds tuned to God".³

Ramalinga echoed these sentiments;

"You, the people of mad world, Pity for you,  
You boast that you live with all luxury and  
majesty, yet  
You think not God with your mind, and  
Try not to see Him with your eyes;  
You roam in the street with all your silken  
dress and with your servants, yet  
You refuse to see those hungry poor;  
You go on in procession with all kinds of  
pomp and gaiety, yet  
You are doomed; what will you do with all these  
without the grace of God?".⁴
Ramakrishnan was a man of understanding. M. has written that by mere sight of those who approached him, he could read their souls." He had the power of divining, seizing and keeping those spirits foreordained for his mission and it would appear that the hawk eye of the paramahamsa was never mistaken". 

Once he had selected his disciples in that manner, he took extreme care on them. He adjusted himself according to the age and maturity of the devotees. He moved as easily with elders like Keshab as with the younger ones like Narendra and Atul. "He put himself on a level with his young disciples. He was their companion, their brother, he talked familiarly with them and without any trace of superiority". 

Ramakrishna had a sway over his disciples, because of his simplicity. Personal pride was not at all found in him. One day Ramakrishna advised M. not to go to Keshab's house. "Don't go hither and thither. Come here alone. Those who belong to the inner circle of my devotees will come only here". The reason for this advice could be traced back to an incident.

One day Ramakrishna and others visited Keshab. Ramakrishna narrated what happened to M.;

"I visited him at his house (with Hriday). We were shown into the room where Keshab was working. After a long time, when he finished his writing, he put aside his pen, got off his chair and sat on the floor with us. But he didn't salute us or show us respect in any other way". 

Same Keshab later turned to be one of Ramakrishna's friends, in spite of his opposite views on some matters. This incident reveals that nobody should feel proud on any account. Ramakrishna was simple and dead against pride. He advised. "Rain water never stands on high ground but runs down to the lowest level. So also the mercy of God remains within the hearts of the lowly but drains off from those of the vain and the proud".

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Ramakrishna was an ascetic, pure to its core. But he did not want everyone to become so. "Instead of slighting the appearance of the world like a traditional jnani, (i.e., as maya), he was all love and devotion towards it, perceiving in its mysterious and majestic expression of Divinity".  

Therefore he took interest in each and everything around him. He told the people that they should fulfil their duties in the world as well as think about God. "I do not ask them to renounce all. If you live in a house you have duties to perform. Family life is a fortress for you", were his words. It would be a surprise to the readers to understand the meaning. Family life was not considered by him as a hindrance, rather a 'fortress' in one's life. One could have spiritual development ensuing a family life. Those who deserted their houses in pursuit of spiritual experience were, according to the saint, not men at all. He spared no words to condemn them thus;

"We owe a debt to the God, we owe a debt to the parents, we owe a debt to our wives. No work can be satisfactorily concluded until the debt to parents, at least, paid. Not even a deprived mother ought to be deserted. You should bring up your children, provide for your wife, and put by what is necessary for her to live upon after your death. If you do not do so, you are heartless and a man without compassion is unworthy of the name of a man".

None could forget Ramakrishna's sorrows on hearing the family condition of Narendra and other disciples. At some times he even approached others to ask for help. He was not for complete renunciation. He taught them to follow the path of karmayoga, to practise detachment in the midst of worldly responsibilities yet to keep their mind on God.

An individual has to discharge his duties with devotion. Nobody should shirk them. To attain the love of God, family life was not an obstacle. For that matter no man should become
materialistic. Without being involved in excessive attachment, one can think of God always. These are some of the points to be understood from the above.

Ramakrishna had a frail body. He was in trance many times. Then he would forget his body for days together. In spite of all these, he was conscious of a healthy body. He had spoken many things in health point of view.

"Eat to your satisfaction in the day but let your meal at night be light and small in quantity".\textsuperscript{13}

was one of his advice. Ramalinga wrote that to keep good health, one should have one's stomach filled half with food, quarter with water and another quarter with air.\textsuperscript{14} Both the saints underlined the need of less food to maintain good health.

Prescribing the food practices Ramalinga wrote many things. Likewise Ramakrishna said;

"The food, which does not heat the system or unsettle the mind, alone should be had".\textsuperscript{15}

The food one consumes makes changes in his system and thereby in one's mind. The sattva diet was a rule for the ascetics and it was strictly imposed on them.

For a saint who is on his way to divinity, the human body is the temple, where God takes His abode. The famous saivite siddha, Thirumoolar sings;

"The mind itself is the temple.  
The body itself is its structure,  
The mouth itself is its entrance tower for the God Benevolent and  
All the five deluding senses are its  
Eternal lamps".\textsuperscript{16}

Ramakrishna was also of the same view. He said; "The pious soul cannot help taking care of the body, because God
dwells in it. All our bodies form the treasure house of the Deity".17

Ramalinga, who was in the spiritual lineage of Thirumoolar, said; "This body is the gift of God. It is necessary to meditate upon His lotus feet".18

Ramakrishna said; "This shrine of the body should not be left dark: one should illuminate it with the lamp of wisdom".19 He compared this lighting with lighting the lamps in a rich man's house. This concept echoes in the words of Ramalinga thus;

"If you lit the lamp in the house, there will be light everywhere. The darkness will converge in the light. This is for external world. Likewise this body is also a house. The darkness of ignorance has enveloped it. One should lit the lamp of compassion to drive it away".20

The same idea, almost same words with a slight difference. The distance between living places of two great souls did not stop their thinking vibrations, which had the same pulsation.

Once heightened to the higher state of temple, the body must be protected in personal hygiene. Ramakrishna took his bath everyday in the Ganges. He kept his needs to the minimum. With all his ecstasy and divine intoxication, he was the master in giving attention to minute details of life. Personal cleanliness and orderliness of things inside the house were particularly looked after by him.

During his life time he visited the houses of various devotees. At such times, he was very sensitive to the situations of the hosts. He extremely adjusted with the surroundings. M. had recorded many such incidents. Once a host could not attend Ramakrishna properly and he had to sit one among the crowd, with so much discomfort, to have his food.21 He felt delicate in

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those situations. He said; "Never go to a place at a time or in a manner calculated to cause inconveniences to the host".22

One may keep all one's personal hygiene, food habits etc. to the required level. But the human body has its own limitations. Nobody could avoid falling sick. Ramakrishna was not an exception. He was always preaching. Throughout the day he was talking to his disciples. His concern for others was also much. These had a telling effect on his health. One day while going towards the pine grove he had fallen down and dislocated a bone in his left arm. He was very much upset. Like a child, he asked everybody whether it would be alright. All consoled him. He realised that it happened so to destroy his ego.23 He commented there upon; "Disease is the tax which the soul pays for the use of the body".24 But his worry was not personal. M. rightly wrote;

"But this worry about his arm was not due to his love on his body; but because it was an impediment to enjoy the love of God".25

Later when Ramakrishna was suffering from that 'throat ailment' which killed him, he refused to appeal to Mother Kali to cure his illness. He patiently endured all the pain and discomforts. These did not stop him from attending to his daily routine of preaching, or helping others. M. wrote;

"Though ill and suffering, he constantly devoted himself to the welfare of his devotees. His love was like that of a mother for her children".26

Thus saying M. gives an example. One day M.had to come next day after attending to some personal work. Ramakrishna advised him, "Come early in the morning tomorrow. The hot sun and the rainy season are bad for health".27 He was not keeping good health but he was concerned with the health of the others.

This care and this love shown by him to the devotees returned with greater magnitude. There are no words to describe
how much they loved him. He was worried about their individuality being eroded. He advised them, "Let the bees suck your heart. Be careful that the beauty of your heart does not keep one of them captive." M. gave this comment on these words; 'His dread of enslaving it went so far that he was afraid of being loved too dearly'.

On money and women, Ramakrishna had spoken much. These were two evils, according to him, a man should avoid. He said, "Money is an upadhi (a deceptive influence) of a very strong nature. As soon as a man becomes rich, he is thoroughly changed". But on more than one occasion, he experienced the need of it. He also appreciated the money properly earned. Once M. asked him whether he could make an effort to earn more money. Ramakrishna replied. "It is permissible to maintain a religious family. You may try to increase your income but in an honest way".

On another occasion Ramakrishna himself asked M. whether the latter felt attracted to money and treasure. M. replied,

"No sir. But I think of earning money in order to be free from anxiety to be able to think of God without worry". Ramakrishna readily accepted this and said, "Oh! That is perfectly normal".

So, money which is an upadhi in normal course, if used properly, and if it helps to think of God without worry, it is not bad. There is an instance of it. Once one of the devotees was in need of money. Ramakrishna asked M. if he could give a rupee. When M. replied in the positive, Ramakrishna said, "That's fine. It is good to help those who yearn for God. Thus one makes good use of his money".

Gandhiji later advocated the trusteeship way of keeping money. In it the rich should think that they are rich by the grace of God and they are really the custodians of money they have and they should use the money for the uplift of the society.
Ramakrishna spoke the same thing earlier than Gandhiji did. He said, "He is truly a man to whom money is only a servant, but on the other hand those who do not know how to make proper use of it hardly deserve to be called men".\textsuperscript{34} What a beautiful definition for a real man! He further said, "Mere possession of money does not make a noble man".\textsuperscript{35} Only when it is spent in a proper way for the poor in pursuit of the knowledge of God it gets its value and the man who possesses really gets his prestige. Money should be earned; should be a means to one's ideal and not the master of him.

But the need of money was more to run the 'mission'. Ramakrishna became very ill and was shifted to Calcutta for treatment. There was not enough money to spend for his medical treatment. Romain Rolland vividly describes what had happened;

"A small house was rented. The most faithful disciples watched during the night. The majority of them were poor, and they mortgaged, borrowed or pawned their effects in order to pay the expenses of the Master's illness- an effort that cemented their union".\textsuperscript{36}

A great saint suffered so much for want of money. It is not a new thing. Poverty or for that matter non-possession of money and saintliness go hand in hand. Ramalinga also suffered so much troubles. He founded three institutions. But running them in a proper manner was difficult. Most of his disciples were poor people. They borrowed, mortgaged or pawned their effects to get money. Some dealings were done without the knowledge of Ramalinga.\textsuperscript{37} This interaction made them united till the last. They suffered much to continue their aspirations; but much did they gain in the way of grace and love.

One more similarity between the saints has to be noted here. Some of the disciples of Ramakrishna, were not to the expected level. They misbehaved in their own way. Ramakrishna did not like this. He said, "Why is he (a devotee) so abusive? Why does he use such vulgar language? In my present state of
mind I cannot bear such rudeness. I cannot bear roughness. A man living on the plane of sattva cannot bear noise and uproar".\textsuperscript{38}

Ramalinga's experience also was such. The jnana sabha was run for sometimes according to the guidelines given by him. Then the orderliness was changed by some of his disciples. There were many external rituals against his rules. There were noise and drum beating. He was upset and he gave the warning; "Those who obey the rules should be here; others must leave the place immediately".\textsuperscript{39}

Only a few of the devotees did all these unwanted things. The rest of them were so loving and considerate. Ramakrishna was aware of this. "From the depth of his heart had gone up the prayer, 'O, Mother, let me remain in contact with men. Do not make me a dry ascetic".\textsuperscript{40}

Many of his disciples considered Ramakrishna as an incarnation. "He disliked it. He could not bear it, to be mentioned in front of him... He was much more prone to refuse in public all spiritual privileges... His conviction lay in an inward act, a secret light which he never paraded".\textsuperscript{41} For such a man of simplicity, name or fame was not an important thing. His whole life was spent for welfare of others. Therefore when Keshab wrote about his greatness in his magazine, Ramakrishna chided him for that. Why? Romain Rolland gave an answer in the following words "His whole doctrine of love working for others to the limits of personal sacrifice is in essence the doctrine of service".\textsuperscript{42}

Ramalinga's disciples also called him as an incarnation, mahan, mahatma and God Himself.\textsuperscript{43} These all gave him so much pain. They were ignorant, he thought, of what a real God is. He was beyond all these praises. His motto was simple and straight. He prayed;

"Father, heed me for what I ask from You,
I should serve all things that live, with my love,"
I should go to all the four corners of the earth
To spread and to praise Your Fame of Grace."

To both the saints loving their devotees was their real asset. They looked after them with care and attention whenever possible. They stressed individual virtue to be followed and they themselves helped them in all possible ways. The devotees for their part loved the saints to such an extent to think of them as God, which they refused to accept.

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42. Ibid., P.197
43. Prose, P.475, 472, 350
44. Arutpa, 4079
4. ON EDUCATION

The turbulent changes that took place in all the fields in the 19th century India, affected the education sector also. The advent of the British rule and English education eroded the age-old system of 'guru-kula'. New schools were founded in the British model. Macaulay and Bentinck made it known to all that their aim was to anglicise the people of India. Macaulay's idea was, as he himself wrote to his father, to remove idol worship within 30 years.¹ To that much, in anglicising the education, he succeeded but in removing of idol worship he could not. His education system still continues and English occupies a predominant place in the Indian society.

The English education spread fast. The rich people went for it with much hope that they might get higher Government posts and social prestige. The traditional Indian languages were neglected and their classical literatures were set aside. The neo-intellectualism was there for more than a century and in one way it produced an awakening in the learned circle and historians like R. C. Majumdar call it as 'Renaissance period in Indian intellectual world'.² Then lived Ramalinga and Ramakrishna and this chapter deals with their ideas on education.

RAMALINGA

Ramalinga was a born scholar. He had his early education from his elder brother and later from Mahavidwan Sabapathy Mudaliar of Kanjeeipuram. He could not continue his formal education. He was not in a state to do so. He self-learnt many scriptures and most of the hymns in bhakti literature. Particularly the 12 sacred books of the saivites, called 'Panniru thirumurai', attracted him most. In them too Thiruvacaka of Manickavacakar and Thevaram of the three saints, Thirugnanasambanda, Thirunavukkarasu and Sundara melted his heart to the maximum. They had their visible impact in his songs, Thiru Arutpa.
In one of his treatises, called rightly as 'Blind Game' Ramalinga has described the condition of education of his period.\textsuperscript{2(a)} Uninterested students, a dead system of education and teachers who lacked morality, character and intelligence—these were the order of the day. This piece is satirical and makes fun of the situation prevalent in his period. But it may not be inferred that all the teachers or all the students were such. There would have been some people of that kind.

On real education he was having some ideas. He was himself a good teacher. He taught both the children and the great pandits. Scholars like Prof. Velayutham of Presidency College, came to him to have their doubts cleared. He was a philanthropist in the sense that he arranged money for others to go to Chennai to receive their education. In one of his letters he asked his friend at Chennai, to help and to do all the needful for those who would be coming there for getting education.\textsuperscript{3}

One of Ramalinga's friends, Irukkam Rathna Mudaliar, was so close to him as was M. to Ramakrishna. He was working as a teacher in an English school. Ramalinga would address him usually as 'English school master'. When Ramalinga moved to Vadalur, he also wanted to shift his residence there from Chennai. He wrote to Ramalinga to get him a job in Chidambaram. Ramalinga refused to do so. Because at that time, the school was run by a private trust. He did not like that. He wrote, "Education should be in the Government control".\textsuperscript{4} The words and his view are clear. Nationalisation of education is a distant call even now. When privitisation was the order of the day, Ramalinga expressed this strong idea. This was nothing but revolutionary.

Ramalinga's aim was to found some institutions to spread his spiritual message. When Sathya Dharma Sala was opened it was publicly announced that there was a proposal to open a 'school of sastras', a school of upacana and a school of yoga.\textsuperscript{5} This idea did not materialise for some unknown reason. But his eagerness in spreading the sastras and yoga is evident.
There was also a proposal to found another school by name 'Sanmargha Bodhini'. In its notification, the scope of the school was given as, 1) Both young boys and elders could join, 2) Tamil, Sanskrit and English would be taught and 3) Scholars like Prof. Velayutham would be the teachers.

The above points suggest that Ramalinga was not a linguistic fanatic. He respected all other languages. Apart from Tamil, he was a scholar in Sanskrit. The treatises he wrote on philosophical matter and his spiritual experiences clearly indicate his knowledge in Sanskrit. Particularly one treatise on 'Various Worlds' is completely in Sanskrit, except the letters being in Tamil. One can see his logical and intellectual spectra in this part.

Nothing could be told of his knowledge in English. But the spread of that language was visibly fast and none could avoid it. He perhaps would have known that all the knowledge of science was in English. Unless the people learnt that language new vista would not be achieved. In this idea, he would have included English in the curriculum.

The school was meant for not only boys but for adults as well. It was very strange and revolutionary to think of adult education in those days. He gave another point as a striking one. He mentioned the names of the teachers who would be in charge of teaching. It was a nice idea to make it publicly known who would be what. But the school could not be founded. Yet his concern for propagating good education is evident from this notification.

When he was in the village of Mettukkuppam, in his later part of life, he arranged for conducting Thirukkural classes, the world famous Tamil book on ethics. Besides, he was thinking of starting a school by name, 'The school of Samarasa Veda'. The constitution of the school was given as,
1) Those who are above 15 years will only be admitted

2) They should be fit to be the members of Suddha Sanmargha i.e., having zeal for knowledge, virtue and devotion to God.

3) After a period of instruction and training, those students trained in such ways, would be given some money according to their training and family situation.

4) They should study for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening.8

This school was meant for young ones only. Just like Ramakrishna was particular to pick up younger boys to train them in his spiritual line, Ramalinga also thought of doing the same. 'The school of samarassa Veda' - the name itself suggests that his aim was to impart knowledge and training in ancient scriptures. He even thought of giving scholarship to those who would be in need of it. It would have been like the stipend given in modern time. His opinion was that money should not be an obstacle in attracting good and intelligent ones. This is a noble concept. The most talked point in our period is 'brain drain', which makes one go to the foreign countries to see fortunes, after receiving the education here. It is a national waste. The children born to a mother should be helpful to her. Likewise the intelligent ones should not be neglected for want of money. And it would be a great loss to the society.

The above constitution shows that Ramalinga had a big and ambitious plan. Selecting and training young and energetic boys and sending them to various parts of Tamilnadu to disseminate the ideals of Sanmargha among the people would have been his expectation. But he was ahead of his time in his concept and his followers were not so matured to understand his principles. It was in 1872 he had this idea. He would have seen a 'Ramalinga Mission' in his lifetime itself. But there were not M.s
and Vivekanandas, in this part of the land to walk on the footpath of their guru.

Later he thought of bringing out a journal. It was named as 'Sanmargha Viveha Vilruddhi'. In its pre-publication notice it was stated that the aim of the journal was to help a man to get knowledge on the four virtues of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Mosha. It was to be run by the cooperation of all members of sanmargha sangh. They put their signatures mentioning their contributions to it. The journal was published for some time and later stopped.

All these points, his attempts to found schools and to publish a journal, show his eagerness to spread education at a mass level. 'Mass level propagation of education' is one of the traits of renaissance movement. Knowledge is boundless; susceptible to change according to the changes in the world; and it is multi-faceted. All should get enlightened themselves with the new knowledge. Tradition also should not be given up, and noble ideas of the past should be preserved. Those which are useful and conducive to man's development should be accepted. Education should enhance one's mind and spirit. And education should not make one feel proud. These thoughts one may understand from Ramalinga's philosophy on education.

Apart from these, in his verses, particularly in 'Arut perunjothi Akaval' (meaning long poem of Great Light of Compassion) he has expressed his ideas on what real knowledge is. Mere book-knowledge, he did not advocate. He spoke of jnana, the wisdom one could get from the Grace of God alone. His concept 'Arutperunjothi' itself was of pure wisdom. He explained it as 'the great knowledge, incomparable, and with great compassion'. To him it was the bliss. His analysis of knowledge into wisdom, grace and bliss is very minute. "The Lord is of Great Light of Compassion; one can know Him only through True Wisdom" This Arutperunjothi concept, according to him, was beyond all philosophies; it exists in the space of jnana. To him

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this supreme knowledge is all, one can get. He further explained, "That knowledge is the body; it is itself the jnana; it is the senses; it is the mind and it is itself the experience."\textsuperscript{13} He sings beautifully in the following lines the virtues of that jnana;

\begin{quote}
If one gets that jnana, it will bestow on him all that he wants;\textsuperscript{14}
It will give him stable and peaceful mind;\textsuperscript{15}
It will make him a sivajnanai;\textsuperscript{16}
It is nothing but the same sat chit ananda;\textsuperscript{17}
It is the jothi of the inner mind;\textsuperscript{18}
In bringing both jnana and beauty (soudarya) it makes him fulfilled;\textsuperscript{19}
It knows all but is beyond of all knowledges;\textsuperscript{20}
It is the nectar which is the essence of all vedas;\textsuperscript{21}
It is the light of grace and destroys the darkness of the mind;\textsuperscript{22}
It drives out all sorrows and brings bliss;\textsuperscript{23}
And above all it is the Holy Flame of Pure knowledge.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

These are some of his explanations about pure knowledge. He thought much and wrote much on it. His life and teachings were based on 'daya', the supreme mercy which involves both knowledge and compassion. The learned man, in the real sense should have that compassion. If not they are as good as dead trees. Thirukkural speaks of this jnana in a decad.\textsuperscript{25} What Thiruvalluvar wrote 2000 years ago, Ramalinga echoed in the 19th century.

If a living man is with kindness and love alone without knowledge, it is equally bad. Then it is an instinct as found in animals. It is short-mindedness to be so. Man is neither an animal nor a dead tree. He is fortunate to have this birth and the true symbol for being a man, is 'karunya', love with wisdom. Ramalinga sings;

\begin{quote}
"My Lord Siva. You taught me that
Wisdom with compassion alone is Pure Knowledge,
All others are knowledge of falsehood and ignorance".\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}
To get knowledge through books and scriptures; to develop love and compassion through that towards all living things; to be with the sat, chit and ananda; to serve the world with that pure knowledge are some inner linings that glitter through these pages. And they were real dreams of Ramalinga. Time alone would judge the relevance of his concept on education.

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RAMAKRISHNA

Ramakrishna was a man of simplicity. He was neither a scholar nor a poet like Ramalinga. Yet he had abundant wisdom which was revealed in his parables and teachings. His discussions and conversations with scholars like Keshab inform us his real knowledge.

Ramakrishna had his formal education in his native place. But it was not to an expected level. He did not altogether hate school or book knowledge. Sometimes he advised his younger disciples to have some formal education. M., a school master attended on Ramakrishna for the most part of the day. But Ramakrishna would remind M. that it was time to go to school. And yet he did not give more respect to book knowledge. He said,

"One cannot get true feeling about God from the study of books. This feeling is something different from book learning. Books, scriptures and science appear as mere dirt and straw after the realisation of God".

But one should not assume that he condemned and did not value scriptures or science. His point of view was that, these should show one the real path for the realisation of God. The sacred Thirukkural asks, "What is the use of study of all these scriptures, if one does not pray to the Lotus Feet of the Lord, who is the embodiment of Pure Knowledge?"

Once Ramakrishna asked Narendra, who came to see him
"Won't you continue your studies?". Narendra replied, "I shall feel greatly relieved if I find a medicine that will make me forget all I have studied".

How anguished was Narendra in his heart, to have that 'worldly' education! His soul yearned for the reality.

With regard to mere book knowledge, Ramakrishna was thus unspiring in condemnation. He ridiculed with all types of
comments the idea of trying to attain salvation through the study of scriptures. But the irony was, the number of people who thronged to see him were such 'learned' people. They came there to receive from a man of 'less' knowledge!

*Romain Rolland warned his readers thus;*

"Listen ... but listen with your eyes
Let books be silent; They talk too much".5

These condemnations and warnings have some meaning. It is but natural for a man to be proud for many reasons. A man of scholarship is prone to be more so than others. But it gives him nothing in return. What is the use of reasoning and criticising each and everything? "Intellect does not solve any problems; it only creates them and in the attempt at their solution always ends in a circle".6

*Ramakrishna once said, "Mere dry reasoning, I spit on it. (He actually spat on the ground). Why should I make myself dry through mere reasoning?"."*

Knowledge and reasoning without compassion make one dry and dogmatic. The man who pursues thus loses all beauty and simplicity of nature. Pure knowledge is more than that. Ramakrishna called it as "paravidya". He said, "Paravidya, higher knowledge, is that by which we know God. All these mere scriptures, philosophy, logic or grammar as such only burden and puzzle the mind". He made a fun of words thus; The granthis (scriptures) are sometimes granthis (knots)".8 This is a beautiful and apt allusion. Unless properly understood and used, education instead of freeing one from falsehood, would enslave him in its knots. Therefore Ramakrishna declared,

"That knowledge which purifies the mind and heart alone is true knowledge; all else is only a negation of knowledge".9

This pure knowledge was called by Ramakrishna as sathya jnana. In its essence it has all knowledge, love, wisdom and truth. Until the development of character is not achieved one's
education is wasteful. To Ramakrishna 'the development of character was superior to knowledge'.

In this world it is more difficult to be a man of character than to be a man of learning. It needs courage to be so. Therefore when somebody addressed Ramakrishna as 'guru', he said to him. "Go away, fool. How can I be a teacher? ... It is very difficult to act as an acharya. It harms the acharya himself". Perhaps he would have meant that to be a man of real knowledge was so difficult.

To Ramakrishna God was the Great teacher, the paramacharya. Every activity of ours is being carried on only by His will and power. A man has nothing to boast. He said: "O, Mother! Thou art the operator and I am the machine. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak".

In a beautiful verse, Ramalinga appeals to the Lord;

"My Master! If You make me sing I do so;
If You make me bow down, I bow down;
If You make me merge with you, I am blessed to do so;
If You melt me with Thy fire of Grace, I enjoy that bliss;
If You ask me to eat particular food, I do take it;
If You make me sleep, I am blessed to have it; Or
If You make me sleepless, restless and wander I become so and do as said;
Then, what else this low and humble man can do
If everything is done by Your will."

This is true knowledge. If one understands this reality, then comes the awareness of which is true and which is not. Both the saints were blessed by the Almighty to have it in their nature. It gives one the power to discriminate what is what. Ramakrishna explained it; "The attributes of spirit are super-imposed on spirit and the attributes of spirit are super-imposed on matter. Therefore when the body is ill, a man says 'I am ill' ". He gave another example to prove his point. "When hot water scalds the hand, a
man says that the water has scalded; but the truth is that it is the heat in water that has scalded".\textsuperscript{15} This reasoning and this discrimination one could have only through pure knowledge.

Learning has no end. It goes on till one's last breath. It may not be in the ordinary sense of formal learning. Ramakrishna said, "As long as I live, so long I learn".\textsuperscript{16} Therefore he advised others also in the same line. He advised, "Learn every day of the mysteries of love and devotion".\textsuperscript{17} A man of religion was a student of the Mother Nature till his last. Such was the greatness of Ramakrishna. In spite of all his wisdom he was simple like as 'learned' man. Why? Ramakrishna was aware that learning has no end and wisdom has no limit. The more one learns, the more one knows his ignorance. There is a Thirukkural, which says, "When a man gets knowledge, it means that until then he was ignorant of it. Therefore knowing one thing shows really the ignorance he had till then".\textsuperscript{18} Ramakrishna gives an anecdote to prove this point.

"The glow worm may think that it illumines the world.
Imagine this to be the glow worm's feeling someone said to it, 'O glow worm, how can you bring light to the world? You only reveal the intensity of darkness' ".\textsuperscript{19}

Really a beautiful allusion to show one's knowledge and ignorance. Ramalinga sings:

"I crossed the forests and reached the place
   I shed my worries and I have joy now:
I entered the golden gates of That House, and
   I ate the nectar there,
I understood now all the essence of vedas and agamas:
   I had the dharsan of my Dancing Father, And
I read now that song, read it yesterday
   and will do so more tomorrow
As I was instructed by my Lord".\textsuperscript{20}

Ramakrishna did not do or try to do multifaceted services in education as Ramalinga did. His life and situation were different
from those of Ramalinga. But his thoughts were as true, deep and great as those of Ramalinga. Both the saints underlined the importance of real education. As real jnaris, they lived as beacon lights of wisdom to show the real path of loving and devotion.

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5. ON WOMEN

Ramalinga has written many verses despising women and money. "Women and Gold" were two things, Ramakrishna advised his disciples to shun altogether. For a casual reader, it would seem that they were dead against women and gold as a whole. It would be a disgrace to think so. Ramakrishna, a known worshipper of Mother Kali, could not denounce a woman, the very embodiment of Kali. Ramalinga, likewise, who sang so many songs on bridal mysticism thinking himself as the lady in love and the God as the lord she loved, could not have hated women. Then what were their real opinions on women? This chapter attempts to answer this question.

In Thiru Arutpa, the divine songs of Ramalinga, there are almost 130 songs which despise women. The number is small when the total of his songs (6818) is considered. All these songs were written in his earlier period, when he was at Chennai and was young. It seems that he had been influenced by some saints like Pattinattar and Arunagirinathar who composed songs in that line. He himself wrote later that some of his earlier thoughts were not acceptable. During his spiritual evolution he had to shed this hatred.

It is but natural that those who are aspiring for spiritual enlightenment should not have any attachments, whatever may me. For that reason they have to drop the attachment of their mothers too. Therefore, it is not strange when such-saints sang against women and money. There are hundreds of such songs in Tamil bhakti literature. To them, like other all attachments, these two were also to be abandoned. The reason for stressing again and again this one point, is the magnitude of infatuation these two make with a man, whosoever he may be. But once they reached a level of reality, they could not discriminate between gold and mere earth, mother and ordinary woman. All become one.

In his later years Ramallinga's state of spiritual mood was completely changed. He became too tender and too soft to be
affected by any discrimination. There are more than 600 verses in his work, which are in the line of bridal mysticism. The number is sizable. Simple and devoted as he was, it was not surprising to consider himself as a virgin pining for the love of her love.

Ramalinga considered women as equal with men. In his definition of ‘jiva morality, he made it very clear that there would be no difference between man and woman. Woman should be treated equally as one treats others. If there were no discriminations over castes, creed, religion etc., then there should not be any on the basis of sex also.

One of the sins man has committed, is denying education to woman. The ignorance and backwardness of women are the real reasons for the social evils. If the world has to be peaceful and if a man wants to lead a care-free family life, women should be educated.

In those days the status of woman in the society was low. No education was allowed to her. Even for boys, no proper schools were available. They had to go to the teachers. In that situation allowing a girl to go outside, was not acceptable. It was considered a sin, particularly for girls of higher birth, to have education. Only after the advent of European missionary did woman's education begin to spread. This should have been a stimulus to Ramalinga. Therefore Ramlinaga said that education should be common to both man and woman.²

Education did not mean book knowledge alone. Ramalinga thought of training women in yoga and basic tenets of philosophy. He was of the view that only then would the women be good companions and life-partners of men.³ These thoughts would have been revolutionary for a conservative society, he lived in. Ramalinga was thinking of writing a small book on family life. In one of his notings, it was stated that the book would contain chapters on women, men and world. But unfortunately it was not written. His views on the above three would have been made
clear, particularly his approach to the status of woman. Yet the very idea shows his concern about woman and society.

On widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage Ramalinga did not express any view. He advised the men who lost their wives, not to marry again. If his idea was that even for a man, then there was no question of allowing a widow to remarry. Widow remarriage was unthinkable in those days. The condition of the widows was pitiable. Hard and social inhibitions degraded them to a lower level. Once a husband died, the widow was treated as a lifeless object. She was almost tortured mentally and some time physically also.

There is a custom in Tamilnadu, that on the marriage day the bridegroom would tie an yellow thread (mangala sutra), with a pendant, in the neck of the bride. The small golden pendant is called 'tali'. It is considered so sacred that a wife will shudder to think of separating it even for a while. It is the symbol of a living husband, and once it is removed it means the husband is dead. Widows do not wear it after the death of their husbands. For young widows this condition brings all troubles from immoral men.

Ramalinga boldly advised the women not to part with their tali, the mangala sutra. Even in this period, to say so, is inviting wrath from the conservatives. What would have been the repurcussion more than 100 years ago? But he was bold enough to utter these words. His mind was thinking how to reduce the sufferings of woman. He did not give much importance to the oppositon. For doing such social revolutions, men of such stature and boldness are required.

Ramalinga was against all the cruelties inflicted on women. He received abundant love from his woman disciples. Some of them were living in Dharmasala, doing devotional services. There are references in his personal letters about them. He lost his father in his childhood and his mother, when he was
young. His elder brother's wife brought him up as a mother should do. Bioghraphers are of the view that it was she who shaped him as a man of God. She arranged all facilities for his study and meditation. He found his true self and realisation only with her help. She even wept and shed tears when he was not allowed inside the house by her husband. These tears made him refine and the transformation was complete.

Then again, when he was at the village of Karunguzhi, he was fortunate to have the services of a simple woman. It was here that he wrote most of his works. The landlady of the house treated him with so much reverence providing him food and shelter. In one of his letters he has recognised this selfless service.

In his evolutionary process, Ramalinga eulogized the womanhood. Particularly his verses on bridal mysticism are extremely graceful and appealing. Bridal mysticism is nothing but the expression of ecstatic thoughts of 'the soul' in the form of a loving woman, for union with God, who is eulogised as the Lord. Suffering and sorrow are two qualities which a woman is able to bear more than a man does. Loving and pardoning are the two qualities that a mother shows to her children. The woman is the embodiment of love itself. These aspects are revealed in Ramalinga's verses throughout.

Then the question arises, why he wrote many verses despising women. He did so, as was stated earlier, because of his lineage in the line of Pattinattar and Arunagirinathar. For one who reads Ramalinga's works completely, this will be clear. Ramalinga did not hate woman as such, but he did hate that desire, all destroying evil of lust. As long as a man thinks of a woman, his wife here, as his partner, part and parcel of himself and his companion in his life journey, it is alright. But once he begins to treat her as a sex object, the trouble starts. The craving for flesh destroys all virtues a man possesses. It does so in a single moment. The virtues a man earns after doing penance for many
years, after much learning and hardship, are wiped out in a short time, like cotton by fire. It was this reason that all sages of all times advised and warned against this animal instinct.

Ramalinga too sang in the same line. He wrote,

"My God of Arutperunjothi, I swear by You,
I don't consider money or coins or virgins
Or possessing an ownership of land
greater than Your Grace".10

"Oh, the base and low of Lust!
You try to spoil me by your
  evil designs, so that I would lose my virtues,
But what gain you are going to have?
  It is a sin to do so.11"

Like these Ramalinga gave so many attributes, as he personified lust, lust like a hunter so merciless and so cruel,12 lust a sinner,13 lust a deserter,14, etc.

In most of these songs, it is to be noted, that he appeals to the God and the Goddess to give him strength to fight that evil. In one of his cantos, there is one collection of 100 verses, entitled by him as 'Vadivudai manicka malai' (meaning garland on the Goddess Vadivudai manickam). In one of the verses he sings;

"My Goddess, the sweetest nectar are You,
The stored golden wealth You are,
Those who are spoiled by the mind full of lust,
Cannot have Your dharsan".15

Ramalinga worships in this song the Goddess, the Absolute Embodiment of womanhood; yet he makes it clear that Her grace cannot be won by men of lust. He eulogized the womanhood. But he was against that worst fire of lust. This should be borne in mind when one begins to judge his view.
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RAMAKRISHNA

Ramakrishna called woman and gold as 'kama and kanchana'. He warned his disciples many times to be extremely careful on these two. He used strong, very strong words to describe the evils these would bring to one. Throughout the life of Ramakrishna there are numerous such references. In spite of all these, Ramakrishna respected woman to a very great extent and for him a woman is a miniature form of Mother Goddess.

Ramakrishna loved his mother to a great measure. When he was at Khamarpukur, he was a pet child of many women. He himself accorded his recognition to a low-caste woman, who was another mother to him. When he was at Dakshineshwar, later, women devotees also visited him quite often. He did not hesitate to pay visits to his friends' houses, where he was fed by women inmates. Particularly two sisters respected him very much and they were blessed by him many a time. Above all these the Holy Mother, Saradamani, was with him.

These are a few instances to indicate clearly, his respect for woman. In no way did he denounce them or refuse to see them or refuse to accept their offerings. Therefore there is no doubt that there is a paradox in his preaching against woman.

Ramakrishna never advocated renouncing the world by leaving the members of the family at a hitch. When he was in Brindavan he was compelled to settle there. He was also in a mood of accepting it. At that time he thought of his mother. It seemed cruel to leave her so. Therefore he changed his mind and returned to his village.\(^1\)

This incident, described by M. shows clearly that Ramakrishna, though an ascetic, could not renounce his mother. He advised his devotees to be so. One day a devotee asked him, "Sir, we are householders. How long should we perform our worldly duties." Ramakrishna replied, "Surely you have duties to perform. You must bring up your children, support your wife and provide for her in the case of your death."\(^2\)
This advice illustrates Ramakrishna's idea. He did not ask man to denounce his wife to become a sanyasin, rather he condemned those who did so. He went to that extent to stress that one should support his wife till his life and even after that he should arrange for her livelihood. If anybody did not do so, Ramakrishna called him 'not a man at all'.

Sex urge is an instinct like any other instinct. It is to be satisfied by an individual as long as he has a moral channel. Like satiating hunger with food and thirst with water sexual impulse also should be satiated. Then only an individual could be healthy and ethical and the society would be safe. This point was indirectly referred by Ramakrishna. During one of his discourses, he said;

"It is not so harmful for a householder who follows the path of knowledge to enjoy conjugal happiness with his own wife now and then. He may satisfy his sexual impulse like any other natural impulse".4

These were the words from Ramakrishna, a man who was beyond all those impulses. He has underlined in it the very essence of morality itself.

The faultless love of Ramakrishna shown to his devotees was beyond any limit. In showering that grace, he did not discriminate whether the devotee was a male or a female. M. has given a vivid description in his gospel to prove this point. The following one has to be noted particularly.

As usual, one day, many devotees thronged to see Ramakrishna. Among them were two women devotees. They came to Dakshineshwar to see him, after fasting for two days; they thought of that visit as a pilgrimage. They were weak and tired.
Ramakrishna understood their physical state and was very much worried. He admonished them harshly for their behaviour. He said;

"Why have you fasted? You should take your meals before you come here. Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer. You are all images of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten and you will feel happy".5

He did not stop with this admonishment. Immediately he asked an attendant to give some food to them. They were given some fruits, sweets, drinks and other things from the temple. They had the refreshments and felt relieved. Seeing them again, Ramakrishna said, "You have eaten something. Now my mind is at peace. I cannot bear to see women fast".6

From this incident, some points make themselves clear. Ramakrishna did not like women suffer or fast. They were to him the images of the Divine Mother. He lost peace to see women suffer and he felt relieved after their suffering was over. Ramakrishna had such extreme compassion. He was a holy man to its full sense. But according to him, if a man loses compassion he falls down from that higher birth. Then it is no wonder that his compassion, the immense love, was showered on women too.

Ramakrishna saw in every woman his own worshipping deity. One day he told Narendra,

"Let me tell you this. I regard woman as my mother, I regard myself as her son. This is the very attitude. There is no danger in it."

To be away from danger one has to think of a woman as his mother. It was a simple way of advice. So a man, who thinks in that way cannot hate a woman. Then Ramakrishna, who eulogized woman to that level could not have hated her. He worshipped his wife too. Therefore there should be other meaning when he denounced woman and gold. That inner idea alone should be his real approach to this matter.
He said one day;

"Woman and gold is the cause of bondage. Woman and gold constitute samsara, the world. It is woman and gold that keeps one from seeing God... He who has renounced the pleasure of a wife, has verily renounced the pleasure of the world. God is very near to such a person".8

The meaning is clear. One should not renounce one's wife but one should do so 'the pleasure of one's wife'; because that pleasure is the bondage which clings to one and brings a downfall on one's spiritual pursuit.

It would seem contrary to hail a woman as Divine Mother and at the same time condemn her as the source of bondage. Ramakrishna himself has explained this attitude thus;

"A woman is, no doubt, a part of the Divine Mother. But as far as a man is concerned, especially a sanyasin or a devotee of God, she is to be shunned".9

His real concept of woman is crystal clear. Thinking of a woman as the image of the Divine Mother brings happiness: but thinking of her as a sex object brings misery. One should be careful in choosing this. He warned, "You should keep away from woman; then you may realize God. Only by being extremely careful about woman can one preserve one's love of God".10

These two diametrically opposite view points of the same thing were beautifully explained by Ramakrishna in his own way through parables and similes. He said,

"While practising sadhana, a man should regard a woman as a raging forest fire or a black cobra. But in the state of perfection, after realisation, she appears as the Blissful Mother".11

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This passage needs some explanation. Forest fire and black cobra are deadlier things. Nothing can escape from that fire nor can one survive after the bite of a black cobra. A beautiful woman can seduce a man so easily and can destroy his virtues. A woman can enhance a man's prestige and add meaning to his life. These two qualities of a woman are quite opposite to each other.

As long as a man looks at a woman as his sex object to satisfy his carnal pleasure, he looks at a black cobra and is susceptible to danger. The forest fire will leave nobody spared from complete destruction. Lust leaves none peaceful or healthy. It will destroy the man to the last. From time immemorial great men alike have compared lust with fire. In an ancient Tamil scripture, called Nalatiyar. (meaning verse of four lines), there is a reference to that effect;

"This fire, the fire of lust
will burn one, even if he hides
himself inside a mountain, or
Even if he submerges himself beneath
The water".12

Such a devastating fire is the fire of carnal flesh!

But to one, who is in the state of perfection, after realisation of God, the fire becomes 'Blissful Mother'. The tempest becomes breeze; ravaging fire becomes spring. This is nothing but sublimation of senses. Conjugal love is alright for a householder with his wife now and then, but a sanyasin should not mix with a woman at any cost. "It is extremely harmful for a sannyasin... He must not look even at the portrait of a woman".13

Thus a line is drawn between lust and love. The fire of lust should be transformed into the breeze of love. For that conversion, one needs concentration, morality, company with good and great men and self-control. Ramakrishna concludes his advice;
"The darkness of the mind is destroyed only when a man stands apart a little from 'woman and gold' and this standing apart practise a little austerity and spiritual discipline. Then only the cloud of his ego and ignorance vanish".14

From these passages one may conclude that the saints respected women and advised others to do so. They were against the desire for woman not against woman. Both of them did not advise their disciples to renounce woman and to become sanyasin. They understood more than others the need of womanhood.

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7. M...... P.572
8. M...... P.438,39
9. M...... P.593
10. M...... P.603
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12. Nalatiyar, - 90
13. Sayings, P.38
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6. FEEDING THE POOR

As referred to earlier, people in the 19th century were poor and extremely suffering due to starvation and famine. Their condition was pitiful and beyond any description. Ramalinga and Ramakrishna lived in that critical period. There would have been chances for them to meet those poverty-stricken people. The basic tenet of both the saints being bhakti, it was natural to speak about the suffering people, who were really the representatives of God. This chapter tries to reveal their thoughts on hunger and starvation and how they tried to help those deserving people.

RAMALINGA

Ramalinga happened to see the skeletal, skinny and sunken-eyed poor brethren among whom he was living. There are so many references about them in his prose works and verses. Many days he had shed tears for their suffering.

The saints who lived earlier had described poverty to be more cruel than fire, in giving suffering and pain. Starvation was described as the fire of stomach. It is one of the obstacles of a man to get knowledge. Ramalinga said;

"Hunger is like a fire. When food is not given to the stomach, it melts the whole soul within and outside after burning the senses and organs, thus weakening the consciousness and knowledge".1

An apt description of hunger and its effects is given here. Hunger makes a man immoral. He stoops to any level forgetting his family dignity to get his hunger alleviated. When one is hungry, he forgets himself; his knowledge fails; even if he is of higher birth, talks bad words and becomes small in his character. Hunger has no difference of man or woman, young or old. Ramalinga clearly understood the cruelties inflicted on a person by poverty and starvation. He was the first saint to write elaborately and decisively on hunger and its effects. In Purananuru, (meaning
An Anthology of 400 verses on worldly matters) an ancient book of Sangam Tamil, hunger has been described as a disease and those who attended on it, by giving food and other edibles, are told as 'Doctors of Hunger Disease'. This is a very fine definition of hunger. In the same line Ramalinga, said; "Hunger is an agony of three fold dimensions of suffering in hell, pangs of labour, and fear of death".

Nobody knows what or where hell is. But our puranas speak much of it and the cruelties there one suffers. The agony of a mother in getting a child during labour pain, is known to the world. And nobody wants to die voluntarily, for the fear of death hangs over the minds of all. But it was Ramalinga who said that all these three combine in hunger to make one suffer. Therefore to him the most important virtue, the dharma, was to feed the poor first. There is more meaning in it beyond the limits of religion. It has a sociological value.

Feeding the poor is the highest virtue for both men and angels. A man does not die immediately for want of food. But prolonged starvation makes him lose morality. Individual morality is the essence of a good society. If an individual is thus spoiled, it will have its telling effect on society. Therefore he stressed that all should come forward to stall the degradation.

Hunger is a thing not acquired willingly by anyone. Like all other accidents, it is also to be considered an accident. It is an unexpected infliction on a man. It torments all and everyone. A king, a true soldier, a jnani, yogi, siddhar, ascetic, a monk and a guru- nobody is left or spared by its clutches. Hunger makes one to wander everywhere to beg for his food. Begging is cruel, that too at the doorsteps of a miser. A beggar has to shower many unfit attributes on a man to have his hunger satiated. He loses all his virtues and he adds all these virtues to those who do not really have them. The misery and suffering, the falsehood and self-abnegation of a beggar are more pathetic than one can imagine. Thiruvalluvar, the celebrated ethic poet of Tamilnadu, went to that
extent to curse God, for creating such a world of beggars. He wished that God become a beggar and wander in the streets for food, begging from house to house. Then only he would understand the sufferings of a beggar.  

Ramalinga thought that it would be the highest virute to alleviate one’s hunger. No one should see another starve. Those who do this charity will get both the liberation and bliss.  

He further said:

"It is but natural that worldly men worship the sages: bow to the mystics: and rever the yogis and angels. But all these great souls would herald the charity of those who feed the hungry."  

It is a simple form of worship; the worshipper being worshipped. There are many people on this earth who do not know this happiness of feeding the poor. They are misers. It is a paradox that misers have money whereas the benevolent ones do not have. In no uncertain terms Ramalinga denounced merciless people. He used all kinds of harsh words like wicked, base, unscrupulous, low, ignorant and devil like. A man of compassion as he was, it was strange to see he lost control in condemning those people. He could not bear to see a man begging in the street; it was more cruel to see people who hid food from the beggars. Ramalinga was pained to see these two. In his personal life, he was not fond of food at all. He spent many a day without food. He knew personally what hunger was. His views on poor-feeding came from this experience, not verbal.

It is not possible to eradicate poverty and hunger from the world altogether. Even in this modern world, in spite of all its achievement in science and technology there are thousands, who die of starvation every day. At least there is an awakening that something should be done to stop this misery.
In one way the poor are necessary to the world. Then only dharma will exist. Ramalinga said, "Hunger is a source, given by God to cultivate dharma". Thiruvalluvar also echoed this sentiment earlier; "If there are no beggars, then this world encircled by seas, will be a puppet like dead matter".

Ramalinga long thought of founding of a feeding centre for the poor. It materialised in 1867 at Vadalur when the Sathyam Dharma Sala was founded. It means a place of Truth and Charity. In an appeal released on that day, he invited all the people to join in that cause. An individual, however great he may be, cannot do such an act with a single hand. He called the rich and the pious to patronise the noble cause with cash or other means.

On the inauguration day thousands of people were fed. Cartloads of rice and vegetables were used for the purpose. To this day, for the last 126 years that charity has been continuing. It would not have been an easy task in that famine infested period to feed people in thousands, that too without showing any discrimination on caste or creed, religion or sex. To a holy man this noble service seemed to be the greatest dharma and he heralded it as "Its greatness cannot be described in words". The same saint hoped that, that service would even eradicate casteism and untouchability which had been in vogue for ages. It is thus evident that this feeding service in one way or the other had its sociological impact also. It was one of the means to eradicate inequality among people.

Feeding the poor was not a new thing. Thousands of people were converted to other religions only for the simple reason that they were given food to alleviate their hunger. The christian missionaries were very vigorous in that period to convert people through all possible means. When Ramalinga started the centre, many people instead of going to the missionaries, thronged at Vadalur. This was a setback for the missionaries. Therefore they were naturally upset and even went to an extent condemning Ramalinga in harsh words. One can understand the influence that Ramalinga had with people then.
Feeding the poor is one of the charities people practised in every religion. The saivites call it as 'Maheshwara puja'; the vaishnavites call it 'Koshti viniyoga'; the buddhists named it as 'Dayamula Tattuva'. To Ramakrishna it was Dharithra Narayana Seva. But in these centres people of one religion alone were fed; others were refused food. It was Ramalinga who crossed the barrier of religion and caste in doing that charity.

In spite of his appeal, no rich man came to his help in this service. All the services sought by him, did come in the form of money and material from the poor alone. He had neither the support of the then Government nor any from officials. His was an individual attempt with the help of the poor and downtrodden. He was a binding force among them. It was one kind of spiritual integration. As Ramalinga had identified himself with everyone and everything, he could not but do that service.

The symbol for the progressive society and human achievement is that nobody should die of starvation. In an advanced humanity, civilisation cannot exist when a man dies of hunger. A society full of beggars reflects the baser level of its members. It is not good for any society to see the poor suffer for want of a single meal, while the rich throw away the same in extravagance. Ramakrishna and Ramalinga lived in that society of luxury and splendour. Ramalinga made it clear, "If the rich indulge in luxury, when the poor suffer from hunger, then mercy itself will be destroyed".15

Yet he was clear in two things. Feeding the poor is the noblest charity. No doubt; but if a householder attempts to feed the poor, when the members of his family are suffering from want of food, that action will bring the wrath of God on him.16 This was the firm view of Ramalinga. In the same way, one who has means to help, should not be idle without doing it. And also, if a man who can bear hunger, begs he should not be helped by one who is weaker and who cannot bear that hunger. In such cases the weaker one should show the other the place where he could get his food.17
One of the prose works of Ramalinga, has been given the title 'Jivakarunya Olukkam'. It means morality of compassion. It is considered the finest piece on the subject of compassion. Ramalinga has written much about hunger, its evil effects and the ways of alleviating it, in that work. His scientific ways of approach to the after-effects of hunger, the physiological implications it produces in the body and the sufferings thereon are all given vividly.

Ramalinga, a man of compassion, considered starvation as the worst of all sufferings. He himself suffered from that voluntarily. He sublimated his experiences towards society in the forms of charity. It would not be an exaggeration to presume that his social renaissance movement had its origin in hunger. There was no difference between a dried plant and a starving man, as far as he was concerned. Ramalinga, who came in the spiritual line of Thirumular and other enlightened mystics (siddhars), followed the same and gave a renaissance to it. Thirumular, in his Thirumantiram, sings:

"My men of this world! understand this;
There are two different temples,
One that walks on this earth and Another
Which is in the form of a picture.
If you give something to the God
in the picture inside a temple,
It will not reach those who walk in the streets,
But, on the other hand, if you give something to
the poor, who are the walking temples,
It will reach the God in the picture-temple".

This is a noble idea. Walking towards God by doing service to the poor. The very same idea echoed in the life and teachings of Ramalinga.
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RAMAKRISHNA

One cannot find many references concerning hunger or poor-feeding in the teachings of Ramakrishna. He did not speak much about these. Yet there are instances in his life to denote his concern for the poor.

Among them one, which is often quoted, is his visit to a holy place with his mentor Mathur Babu. It has already been mentioned in this project also. His adamance not to move from one place, Deoghar, where the people were starving of famine, unless Mathur Babu did do something to alleviate their suffering clearly showed his true nature. Mathur Babu yielded at last. But Ramakrishna advised Mathur, that he should not think of any superiority. He said;

"You are only the steward of the Master. They are the Mother's tenants. Jiva is Shiva. Who then dare talk of showing mercy to them? Not mercy, but service, service for man must be regarded as God".²

To Ramakrishna the word 'mercy', jivakarunya, itself was an anathema. Showing mercy to one, makes one that he is doing a favour for somebody. This naturally will bring some form of superiority complex. Who is great? or Who is low? When we render some help, we should not think that we are showing mercy. What we do is serving God through them.

In Thirumanthiram the poor have been described as the living Gods or 'walking Gods'. It is a surprise to note the same thought echoes on the banks of The Ganges, in the words of Narendra. He said: "You may invent an image through which you worship God, but a better image already exists, the living man".³ The words are simple and the meaning is very clear. God lives in the lives of the poor and one should be able to 'see' and 'perceive' that holy 'presence'.

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Ramalinga heralded the world to come and join him in founding a new world devoid of all discriminations. The essence of that idea was to serve the poor. One need not go to the temple searching for God. He is already among us, the pity is we are ignorant of His presence. Ramakrishna said "The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body". And again "Are you seeking God? Then seek Him in man. The divinity is manifest in man more than in any other subject".

Both the saints showed to the world by their simple way of living and their sincere anxiety about the men and women, the real way of life, a man should follow. They did not seek their Gods in some worlds than this earth. Bharatia, the famous national poet of Tamilnadu, later sang, 'Oh! there seems the heaven on this very earth. Will not I apprehend it?". It is futile to forget man and to search for God. The saints found Him among the common and simple folks and it was enough for them.

Ramalinga like his predecessors had compared hunger with burning fire. To give food to a hungry man is to put out the fire. In that way one saves the life of a dying soul. It is nothing but the greater service to God. Ramakrishna told: "Is't not feeding people a kind of service to God? God exists in all beings as fire. To feed people is to offer oblations to the indwelling spirit."

This is another form of explaining the fire concept. The idea is same. When one gives food, the man who eats it gets satiated. The fire inside him is thus for the time being gets slowed down. Thus a sacrifice-like charity is performed. Ramakrishna asked M one day. "Why is it that people are fed at a religious feast? Do you think that it is the same as offering a sacrifice to God, who is the Fire of Life in all creatures?" Ramakrishna equates poor feeding with sacrifice-yaga and indirectly refers that the fire within is not only the same as the fire in the yaga but is more important than the latter.

But why is this poverty? Why is the suffering? Why should people do all these things? Ramalinga held the opinion that
hunger itself is an instrument of help to use and understand the divinity in man.9 The poor are necessary, as they are the ways and means to achieve the kingdom of God. One of the devotees asked, "Why has God created wicked people?" Ramakrishna immediately replied, "That's His will; His play. Darkness is needed too".10

Darkness is necessary to understand the gleams of light. Suffering, likewise, is necessary to make one enjoy pleasure. Darkness and light, suffering and joy combine to form this world of humanity. Light needs darkness to show its greatness and the rich need the poor to reveal their magnanimity.

Ramakrishna therefore advised the rich to give feast to the devotees and other people. He admonished those who did not do so. In his view such people are worthless. Though he did not have any on his own, he had asked others to give alms. Whenever a beggar stretched his hands, he would have refused to give him anything or would have admonished the beggar. But instead, as his heart was so pitiful, he asked those who were nearby to help the stretched hand. He was a man of understanding. He felt the humility of begging. He said;

"Man becomes small by begging. Even the Lord Himself had to assume the form of dwarf (vamana), when He went to Bali for begging".11

A beautiful simile he had made. To go for begging means to degrading oneself to a level of unspeakable limit. Even Lord Krishna became small, leaving His Visvarupa to beg those 'three steps' from Bali. Then what to speak of man's suffering or his sorrow? It is the duty of a man to see a man not begging in the street. But Ramakrishna's words are still a far cry. It is a shame to see the beggars in the street, the shame not to the beggars but to all of us.

In spite of stressing this form of charity equally, Ramalinga and Ramakrishna differ in one thing. Ramalinga told that food should be given to all without showing any
discrimination on the basis of caste, religion etc. But he said that those who could bear the suffering of hunger could find means to earn it. A weak man should not help a strong man. That was his motto.

Ramakrishna was still more clear in this matter. He said, "One should not feed the wicked, I mean, people who are entangled in gross worldliness or who have committed heinous crimes like adultery". He had no love or excuse for such people. He was specific that only those who deserve alone should be helped;

One day there was a feast in his native place. One of Ramakrishna's relatives was the host. Ramakrishna with his devotees had gone there. There he saw many persons whom he did not like. He felt uneasy and told the host, "Look here; if you feed such people, I shall leave your house at once". Nowadays this dharma, feeding the poor has become a fashion. The rich spend their money lavishly to show their wealth. There, the poor who are really have to be fed, are not allowed, instead pomp and gaiety prevail and all types of unwanted men share the feast. Who will heed to the words of Ramakrishna?

Both the saints, thus, were alike, as in many other things, in urging the people to do the charity of feeding the poor. It was not because of the compassion alone they did so, "but it was the necessity of the time they lived. They revived this very dharma of our ancients and showed the rich a new way of worship - feed the poor; and you will see God.
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RELIGIOUS SERVICES

The religious condition in the 19th century India has been described earlier. To recall, there was a three dimensional attack on Hinduism. There was at one side the age old conservatives still holding on to the rituals and superstitions. On another side was the neo-intellectual movement, so violent in their thought to bring the sudden changes. There were, on one more side, the chrisitian missionaries in their conversion work.

At this time, rose in the horizon of Indian society the men of renaissance to stall the efforts of those who were to destroy the religion. Ramalinga and Ramakrishna, Radhasoami and Dayananda were all in the forefront to achieve this goal. This chapter attempts to bring out the effective religious services of both the saints. A brief survey to identify the fields they acted is given first, followed by a detailed study on them.

RAMALINGA

With the advent of new knowledge and western civilisation, there was a trend in rational approach. Athiesm seemed to gain roots. The aim of the neo-intellectuals was to change the religious fabric violently. In that process, athiesm also began to rise. Ramalinga, who was a man of religion, was upset to see this trend. His real concern was about the common people who might succumb to the designs of the neo-intellectuals.

These neo-intellectuals preached that there was no God. Man was supreme; there were no angels. There were no good or evil, holiness or sin;¹ They appealed to the people not to lose earthly pleasure and wander after those who talked about extraterrestrial things.² They told that all the stories found in mythology, legends and puranas were false and empty, word-jingling waste sounds.³ They disgraced holy men who smeared the holy ashes on their bodies, as pumpinks.⁴ They called the religious orthodox people as 'blind men' with open eyes to fall into pits.⁵ In their view, rationalism alone was true and all others false.
Thoughts like these, were enough to arouse the sentiments of the saints like Ramalinga. The necessity came to save the religion and there was no vacillation to do so. He came forward to explain the real essence of religion and for that matter, of Hinduism. He declared that it was only in Hinduism all philosophies for the uplift of man, had been described. He told a gathering in 1873 (exactly some months before his disappearance) that no other religion spoke of siddhis as Hinduism did. He further explained that the sacred scriptures like Vedas and Upanishads, though speak of God and jnana, really are useful for humanity. He was very firm that the routine worldly affairs had been schemed accordingly. He praised the holy men as 'true men of higher order', who served the laymen as told in sasthras. "All of us should seek the grace of That True God, by worshiping Him as told in the Vedas and the agamas through bhakti".

He did not leave the atheists as such. He attacked them vehemently as much as they did the holy ones. He said, they were useless fools; they were the destroyers of dharma; they were false, low and cunning. He prayed to God:

"What we eat is the food; what we see is the thing;
Without understanding this, some people
Wander in the street saying there is sin, sanctity
cycle of births, hell and heaven; they are
people of ignorance don't follow "thus say,
The mischievous and bad ones. My Lord, give me
the strength to fight these wretched and bad
People of atheism"

If he used such words, it would be natural that he received brickbats from the opposite end. But he did not lose his heart. It was a noble cause, the life and death problem. There should not be any slackening in that endeavour.

It was a paradox that such a man of religion, like Ramalinga, who was so violently opposed by atheists, was equally
opposed by so called orthodox people. When Ramalinga gave new interpretations to the puranic thoughts and new thrusts to vedic concepts, he was considered a revolutionary. There was no truth in the blame of atheists when they branded him a 'conservative', and blind follower of dead customs. In the same way there was no truth in the conservatives of the attack branding him a revolutionary. But both were in opposite ways. It was nothing but a painful affair, being attacked diametrically for his true and sincere attempts.

Ramalinga formulated and propagated Light worship. He did not object to other Idol worship. In fact he had a long debate with one brahmosamajin advocating idol worship. But his new approach provoked opposition. Inside the jnana sabha, founded by him, there was no idol, no bell ringing, no perfumes, no offering of food, neither was there any bar on caste or creed. Rich or poor all were equal there. Only a light, the Great Light of Campassion, as he called it, was inside. Anybody could worship it without the help of priests.

Ramalinga was one of the best saivite saints Tamilnadu had produced. But his form of worship brought wrath and hatred from other saivites. And also his new explanations on the ancient concepts were not to their hearts. They thought that his activities would pave room for christian missionaries who were already vigorous in their effort on conversion. The saivite mutts, indirectly gave the fight. They used some of the learned people in their attempt to undermine the services of Ramalinga and on him personally. Some of his songs attacked the 'false devotion', the pseudo bhakti of the so called 'great men'. They were up in their arms. They were in sizable strength. They, by using all their might and money, misinterpreted his songs, issued pamphlets disgracing him, and used all kinds of tactics to prove that he was not a saivite and his songs were against saiva cult. His book of songs, Arutpa (meaning Song of Grace) was called by them as Marutpa (Song of deception).
To some extent Ramalinga was upset. From two opposite sides he was to face his 'enemies'. But he did not consider them as so. He was really not angry but felt pity for their ignorance. He appealed to them again and again to come and join in preserving the valuable treasure. He said;

"You, men of opposite views, Listen to me;
   It is high time you come and join
The sabha, where You can see the
   Cosmic Dance of Siva, The Lord
Will accept you, forgiving your evil deeds,
   I do not speak false, do good to you,
Are you not my brethren?".\(^\text{13}\)

In the same vein he appealed to God, why He had drawn him into the street, when his whole of mind was on jivakarunya and doing service to God.\(^\text{14}\) He sings:

"My Lord, I was in the mood of living in
   isolation without being known to anybody,
Always having dharsan of Your golden Body, But
   You drove me into the street. Is it Your
Action or the action of Maya?".\(^\text{14a}\)

Some of his opponents even went to the court and Ramalinga was in legal troubles. There are evidences in his songs and in his biography about this.\(^\text{15}\) But these and other such things could not deter his firmness. Neither was he to yield so easily. His zeal and sincerity had a telling effect. In course of time the world came to understand the reality. He was acknowledged publicly and his songs were sung in the temples along with other devotional hymns. Even some of his opponents came to his fold. Ramalinga sings;

"Those who went away from me,
   Came back and stood at the doorstep,
They begged me for asylum, and thus
   The people of Sanmargha got victory".\(^\text{16}\)
Ramalinga was fortunate to receive this characteristic achievements and acknowledgment, in his life time. That recognition still prevails.

SANMARGHA INSTITUTIONS

Ramalinga founded three institutions to spread his ideals of sanmargha. For anything to be permanent, there should be a concrete structure and form. It was on this line he would have founded them. Sanmargha Sangh came in to existence in 1867 and Sathya Jnana Sabha in 1872. It was long before Ramakrishna Mission was founded by the disciples of Ramakrishna in Calcutta, These institutions had their origin in Tamilnadu. Thus it may be said Ramalinga was the forerunner to organise institutionalised services. Sangh was used for the congregation of service-minded devotees; sala for feeding the poor and sabha for light worship.

Ramalinga appealed to God in one of his songs thus;

"My Father! It is my wish to found a
Samarasa Suddha Sanmargha Sangh,
With the real disciples gold-like in their
Character; and to found a temple;
It is also my wish that, that sangh should
continue to exist for ever and ever;
I should come there to sing Your glories and
To dance in Your presence with my
Whole body chilled by Your Grace."

According to Ramalinga, God Himself was the president of the sangh and whoever had compassion could join as a member. He was much elated to have such nice and good people around him. The members of the sangh were having same regard and love for him. Some of them shifted their residences to the village, where Ramalinga lived. The members did yeoman service in collecting and publishing the verses of Ramalinga, in conducting the affairs of the sangh and carrying the message of Ramalinga to posterity.
These institutions were secular in nature. Men of all sects, castes and religions congregated there. There was no restriction in becoming the members of the sangh, except only two conditions. 1) One should have religious tolerance and 2) One should be compassionate to all living things. These were not hard rules to refuse, and the institutions became the sanctuaries of peace and tranquility.

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RAMAKRISHNA

Narendra had set a goal before him. He said;

"I have a great mission to fulfil and I am in despair at the smallness of my capacity. I have an injunction from my Guru to carry out this mission. This is nothing less than the regeneration of my motherland. Spirituality has fallen to a low ebb and starvation stalks the land. India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her spirituality".¹

In Vivekananda's words, Ramakrishna's goal is referred indirectly. Ramakrishna's dream came true through the services of Narendra and others. Ramakrishna lived at a time when spirituality had fallen to a low ebb and actually he started the movement to regenerate India spiritually.

In those days, men of Bengal were with diverse views. There were neo-intellectuals and conservatives. Learned young ones began to follow the path of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. They wanted to bring a complete change in society and religion. To quote;

"They were those who advocated alternatives to the social customs on the basis of reasoned approaches to religion and morality which would necessitate breaks with traditionally accepted patterns of behaviour".²

And again;

"Three simple, though radical, ideas for the time provided the link between the enlightened few in Calcutta and the enlightened few in England and the United States. The first was liberal religion that meant the substitution faith for the prevailing popular religions of the world which were accused of curtailing the freedom of human beings by enslaving them to mechanical rituals, irrational myths,
meaningless superstitions and other worldly beliefs and values.

The second was the idea of social reform or emancipation in which all known penalised classes and groupings such as workers, peasants and women were to be elevated through education and the extension of civil rights to participate fully in the benefit of modern civilisation.

Finally there was the idea of theistic progress or the notion that the perfectability of mankind could best be achieved by joining social reform to rational religion".3

A very long quotation but these words give the exact position of the religious condition of Bengal during Ramakrishna's time. Hundreds of young and educated men joined this movement. The Brahmo Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohan had its impact in that part of India and left some characteristic marks on the soil of India. The most respected of the brahmos Keshab Chandra Sen lived then. K.C.Sen visited South India in 1864 in propagating his ideas. This was the period Ramalinga lived in the village of Karunguzhi, near Chidambaram. Sen's lectures became popular in Chennai. A short note on brahmo movement in Tamilnadu will help us to understand the picture more clearly.

"KC Sen's influence was to be profound. His lectures were popular. His talks on Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia inspired both Hindus and Christians in Chennai to rethink about religious ideas. A wealthy gentle man allowed one of his drawing rooms to be used as a meeting place for meetings and discussions. Every Wednesdays at 6.00 p.m. regular meetings were held. These friends were not prepared to oppose all Hindu customs; but they set their face against idolatory. The veda was accepted the sacred book and they formed a veda samaj".4

It was natural that any country which was in its process of intellectual development would have various influences and currents of thoughts. If Sen could evoke so much response in
Tamilnadu, far from his place, his influence on the soil of Bengal need not be told.

The whole of Bengal was in such a critical state. There was a need of a man, a man of greatness who should stall the oncoming avalanche. The traditional and cultural heritage should be preserved without losing the benefits of new knowledge. And that man was Ramakrishna. He came into being when every thing seemed to be in the dark, though there was much light in the newly awakened country.

Romain Rolland rightly expressed,

"The man, whose image I here evoke, was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of 300 million people ...His soul animates modern India".5

Ramakrishna, like Ramalinga, had to synchronise the old and the new. It was not sure whether he was conscious of that great service. Nor are there evidences to show his fight, if there was any, against conservatism and rationalism. He lived like any other man but his mind was always on higher things. His thoughts and feelings welled up from an intense love for God. What hundreds of the learned intellectuals did, was done by a single man - the awakening in religion.

He was traditional, and came in the line of ancient saints. The elements of his teachings were from the ancient sources. He, or his disciples never claimed that his views were new. They were the echoes of the ancient sires. But he changed the things according to the needs of his time.

His preachings and discourses beautified by parables and puranic incidents brought a new change automatically. They were revival in nature, moral in content and of immense value in philosophical and spiritual approach. He was able to assimilate all the creeds and was able to disseminate all the principles. He tried
to interact all conflicting sects and thereby to bring a marvellous harmony.

The idea of social reform or rational religion was not new to India nor were they the brain children of brahmos. Vivekananda declared,

"All work in India, social, economic and political must come through religion. The national ideal of ours is in danger and the power, that is Ramakrishna, has come to rectify it and save us from national danger".  

The brahmos thought that they were quite different from the men of conventional religion and other things. One day a devotee asked Ramakrishna, what difference there was between brahmos and others. He replied,

"Not very great one. In a concert of hautboys, one holds the same note, while the others weave variations beneath it. The brahmos always come back to the same note, the formless aspect of God. But the Hindus play His different aspects".

Romain Rolland had boldly written that the views on religion proclaimed by Keshab Chandra Sen as the 'New Dispensation are nothing but a partial representation of the truths which Ramakrishna taught for a long time." Thus it is clear, indirectly at least, his influence was so great even with people like Sen, the great intellectualist.

As he echoed all sentiments of the ancient and the new, all kinds of people went to Dhakshineshwar to see this wonderful man. Scores of brahmos also converged there to hear his preachings. It was no exaggeration that some of these brahmos later changed their views under his influence. Among them was Sen, the greatest only after Raja Ram Mohun. Max Muller, the celebrated German Indologist wrote;

"The Mahatman (Ramakrishna) exercised a great influence on Keshab and on larger number of highly educated men in
Calcutta... It was surprise to many of Keshab’s friends and admirers to observe the sudden change of the sober reformer into a mystic and ecstatic saint that took place towards the end of his life."8

The learned intellectual becoming a mystic saint! That was the work of Ramakrishna. By his simplicity and honesty he stalled the swelling waves of rationalism. The violent surge stopped. Those who brought it, themselves converted to the bhakti cult! He did not refute the lapses in the religion. Rather by preaching against dead rituals and cermonials, he tried to give new meaning to them. By airing such views he tried to purify the religion. A new impetus was given. He was doing the same service of purifying the religion, but in a way of non-violence and simplicity. He was not an atheist, but his views on some rituals should speak of such one. Even his disciples would have been puzzled over some of his utterances. But they were straight and simple. Many a man who opposed his views on God could not but respect and bow to him. Here are the words of a brahmo:

"A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of the Hindu religion, is this good and holy man. He has wholly controlled his flesh. It is full of soul, full of reality of religion, full of joy and full of purity. As a siddha Hindu ascetic, he is the witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world".9

Dr. Sarkar, the personal physician of Ramakrishna, was a rationalist. He did not share the views of Ramakrishna on religion. Yet he loved him much and took pains to visit him so often when he was ill. There are so many instances when Dr. Sarkar had argued with Ramakrishna on many matters. M. has recorded these instances. They speak the living nature of Ramakrishna in spite of his differences in ideals.

As in the life of Ramalinga, though not so violently, Ramakrishna also was ill-spoken by many. Some thought that he
was insane. To them Narendra replied, "Even if insane, the man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint and for that alone he deserves the reverent homage of mankind". Manytimes his simplicity brought difficulties for him. When he visited the houses of his disciples, he was not given due place because of his simplicity. 'Proximity breeds contempt'.

In spite of all these he was a force to reckon with. He did not found any institutions as Ramalinga did. But there was always a congregation of devotees and disciples at his place. It was almost like a sangh. After him, these men founded the mission.

Thus were the saints in the north and the south. The coming pages would reveal their ideas on some concepts.

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1. WORSHIP

RAMALINGA

Though the religious services of the two saints were many, three of them occupy prominent place in their lives. They contributed much to the religious revival in the form of worship, sanmargha and compassion. Of them this part deals with their views on devotion and worship.

Ramalinga revived the cult of Light worship in Tamilnadu in the last century. At that time it was revolutionary and new. Ramalinga had written and spoken about the light in various forms and ways. There was no difference between God and the Great Light of Compassion, which he called throughout as 'Arutpernjothi'.¹ That light had no end or beginning;² It is the sat, knowledge (chit) and ananda (bliss);³ it is the para natha, the primodial sound;⁴ it is the pure sivananda;⁵ it's beam would save one from all suffering;⁶ it is the purity of all purities and wisdom of knowledges.⁷ it is the jnana jothi;⁸ and it is the satananda jothi too.⁹

This Great Light Of Compassion has been hailed by him in multifaceted symbols and metaphors. They are beautiful to read. The language he used is very simple and understandable. The Light is feminine mind having masculine wisdom.¹⁰ It is the Mother, Father eternal; the companion of the soul; friend of friends; bliss of bliss; nectar of all joys; mantra of natha; mantra of holiness; mantra of sathya; and it is the greatest wealth which is medicine-like for all ailments.¹¹ Not only these attributes but things found in nature seem to him as the forms of this Light Grace. The mountain, the seas, groves, cool shadows, breeze, flower and its fragrance, music and song everything reflect the rays of the Great Light.¹² These and other such similes and metaphors, he uses, show his mystical mind. A mystic cannot but realise and identify himself with everything in Nature. To him Nature is an expression of the Absolute.
One can find that this Light may be classified into three forms, as per Ramalinga's concept. They are,

1) It is the symbol of the three flames in nature i.e., the sun, the moon and the fire.
2) It is the symbol of wisdom, the pure knowledge or jnana.
3) It symbolises the God of Cosmic Dance, Siva of Chidambaram.

From the first concept, it is very clear that this Light is the primodial one which lights even the sun, the moon and fire. Indirectly he refers that the primary source of all energies found on the earth, which receives them from the sun is the Great Light. It naturally eliminates darkness and symbolically drives out fear from one's mind.

As per the second concept, the one Light is the symbol of pure wisdom. If one is blessed with it, he will get siddhis and mystical experiences.\(^{13}\) It is the natural Light, which shines from the inner mind of the serene seers.\(^ {14}\) It is the holy flame dancing in the jnana sabha. It is the combination of knowledge supreme and beauty supreme.\(^ {15}\) It knows all but beyond all knowledge.\(^ {16}\) It is the nectar, the amrita beyond what was comprehended in Vedas and agamas.\(^ {17}\) And it is the Light within, which wards off all the evils and which showers joy.\(^ {18}\)

Ramalinga described this concept in his prose works also. Knowledge and Compassion combine to form this Light to give bliss.\(^ {18a}\) Knowledge in its pure term should arouse the basic quality of love in one's mind; this love develops into compassion and through these two comes finally, the bliss. Thus these are the three stages in the evolution of Light worship. To him the term knowledge meant more than the conventional thing. Jnana is all; it is the senses and sense organs. It is the mind and its experience also.\(^ {19}\) Knowledge thus is the thing which is achieved through the senses and experience impressed in mind.
He makes it clear that real knowledge gives love and this brings compassion. The purpose of one having knowledge is to understand the sufferings of others. Once he does so he would try and plan at least in one way or the other to eliminate those sufferings. This Light of Compassion symbolises this love which every man should try to have. It is evident from this concept how Ramalinga uses religion for humanism. This applicability of religion to humanity is one form of renaissance.

The third concept of Light is symbolising the Dancing God. From his birth till he disappeared in Mettukkupam, though he lived in Chennai and in other places, Ramalinga remained a true bhakta of Chidambaram to call him as “Chidambaram Ramalinga”. He had such deep devotion and identity with Siva. Therefore it was no surprise that this Divine Light seemed to him Siva Himself. Numerous and different references have been given to describe the form of 'Nataraja Jothi' in his songs.

This form of worship, Light Worship, was not a new one. From ancient Tamil literature to the modern period one can find so many references about this. Vedas and upanishads contain plenty of such hymns. Some consider that Light worship is older than vedas. When man began to worship the things of nature, the first appealed to him was the sun and then came the moon. Therefore the ancient people thought of these two as the forms of the Absolute. Through these visible forms they worshipped the invisible. The saivite hymns in Tamil bhakti literature hail Siva as 'Jothi' hundreds of times. Even now at Thiruvannamalai, a pilgrim town near Chennai, where Ramana Maharishi lived and graced the world, Siva is in the form of Jothi. Therefore it may be safely said that Ramalinga revived this type of worship in the last century.

But what form of worship is this? Idol worship or Formless one? Ramalinga supported both Form and Formless worships. He advised that in the beginning, one should have Form Worship and later when he acquired knowledge, the realisation, he
should try to worship the God as Absolute, the Formless. On this subject he had an argument with a brahmo, called Sridhar Naicker. The authenticity of this has to be verified. But biographers of Ramalinga tell that Sridhar Naicker lost his battle and to the happiness of every one crowded there, Ramalinga proved the necessity of Form worship.

Ramalinga was rational in many ways. Yet he was for idol worship. He said that laymen and bhaktas would worship God only through forms. He was of the view that spiritual experience would not materialise in the beginning without the worship of Form. They were not mere forms; they represented some divine attributes as much a human body represented the soul. One should develop his mind to identify himself with God through this form.

But he warned that one should not stop with Form worship alone. The real meaning of the Form should be understood. It is necessary for a common man, but not necessary for yogis and jnanis. There are anti-idolatry thoughts in the verses of Tamil Siddhars. For that matter they did not advocate athiesm; but were very firm in their faith on the Absolute.

Idol worship is necessary. A simple man, uneducated and spiritually not progressed, cannot visualise the Absolute within. To them the incarnated ones are real Gods. If one tries to shatter that faith, the whole concept of God itself will be lost. The historians warned that would lead to athiesm. When even men of knowledge go to the temples and churches to pray, to ask the common people to think of the Absoulte is useless.

K.C.Sen, supreme brahmo, in his later years advocated idol worship. Anti-idolatary was the main priniciple of brahmo movement. It was but an irony that one of its pillars, later turned on to idol worship. Sen said that total neglect of idol worship was bad; it represented parts of attributes of the Absolute. One could get a totality in combining all these attributes. People could not
comprehend that Absolute and therefore they created Gods of that attribute which they experienced. Thus in one way this idol worship was also divine. A single attribute was not God; nor a single form represented it. Yet the form or idol represented a part of the Absolute.25

Worshipping God in form or idols was not new to India alone. It was universal. It is still found all over the world. Anything which becomes universal, is susceptile to changes and reforms. It is unavoidable. According to the place and time these changes inflict the principle with untold abuses. Idol worship also became deplorable, infested by all sorts of evil practices.

The brahmo movement could not have its influence in Tamilnadu. The Veda Samaj, its offshoot, did some services in its initial stages but could not gain the expected momentum. Its initial grip was lost. Only a few individuals carried on the torch. The reasons for the failure were many. But the following words of the living historian deserve to be noted;

"It was only natural that Tamils should have been rediscovered and indigenous religious tradition based entirely on Tamil texts. The renaissance of the study of Saiva siddhantha gradually made for a reference for things in Tamil. Tamil worship came easily to the lower gentry and it became an academic pressure group of no small importance. Worship of Tamil religious texts led to revivalist sentiments to be nurtured... Tamil revival blossomed into exotic flowers".26

And one of the flowers was no doubt, Ramalinga. In his Ph.D thesis K. Subramanian has brought out the contribution of Ramalinga to that revival.
The views of Ramalinga are thus evident. He was a man of rationalism and yet satisfied the expectations of the neo-intellectuals too. He was an Idol worshipper in his early days. He was a devotee of Muruga, Siva and Mother. But when he reached his realisation at Vadalur, God seemed to him in the form of Light, ever radiating ever cooling, ever-enlightening and ever pleasing. He was in a highly elevated spiritual state not to worship any form but finding God in each and everything. K.R.S.Iyengar rightly observed;

"It was a particular kind of light, light-liberating, light-giving, love-radiating, that Vallalar Ramalinga swami invoked in our midst particularly at a time of hearty mist and darkness and over one hundred years after his passing that Light burns brighter than ever".27

It is almost 128 years since his passing away. His idea of Light worship has gained ground all over Tamilnadu. One can see many branches of sanmargha sanghs and there the Light being worshipped. The longest verse in Arutpa, is called 'Arutperunjothi Akaval'. It contains 1500 stanzas in two-line verse form. It is his summum bonum. One can find in it the spiritual attainment of Ramalinga. There, 875 stanzas absolutely speak of the Light as 'Jothi' alone and other 625 stanzas speak of it in various other forms.28 As per his experiences revealed in this poem, Ramalinga founded the Sathya Jnana Sabha.

In a stricter sense it is not a temple. It signifies the relation of human soul with God. The inside Light denotes the everlasting flame of soul. It is hidden in front by seven screens of seven colours. If these screens are lifted one by one in the order one can see the Everlasting Light, that 'ARUTPERUNJOTHI'. Ramalinga began his spiritual life, when he was a small child in his mother's arms at Chidambaram and when the priest lifted the screen in front. He culminated his spiritual pursuit in worshipping the Light, ironically lifting the seven screens.
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RAMAKRISHNA

Ramakrishna's views on worship are well-known. He was a sakthi worshipper and worshipped other forms too. From his early childhood, many Gods and Goddesses were attractive to his heart. When he acted in small plays with other boys, in his village, he always took the role of Divine forms. Till his last breath, he was worshipping all types of forms. M. said;

"Ramakrishna was very particular in Form worship. He had many pictures of God and Goddesses in his room and He bowed them every day".¹

It was his usual practice to do so. He was having faith in such action. He, like Ramalinga, stressed that it was necessary. He said;

"God is formless and God is possessed of form too. And He is also that which transcends both Form and Formlessness. He alone knows, what all He is".²

And again,

"Various forms used for worship have been provided to suit the needs of different men at different stages of spiritual evolution".³

From these words it is very clear, that Ramakrishna was for form worship. Both the saints, though themselves were beyond any form or idol worshipping state, thought of the common and simple folk and their spiritual state. To them they spoke, as they lived for them. A question quite often asked is, 'Why should God be in temple alone?'. Various saints had given the answer in course of time. Ramakrishna gave one, 100 years ago in his simple way. He said;

"God pervaded the universe everywhere, but you cannot see Him everywhere. He manifests Himself more readily in sacred temples which are full of spirit of devotion diffused by the lives of the devotees and spiritual practices of the saints of former times".⁴
From these words, Ramakrishna made it clear that the temples are not mere buildings; they are the seats of holy thoughts. There lived holymen in the past and their divine thoughts were consecrated. At least the structure itself produces divine thoughts in one's mind. Therefore temples are necessary.

Once K.C. Sen met Ramakrishna. There were many topics to be discussed. Among them was idolatry. Sen declared that he hated idolatry and said that the God he worshipped was a Formless one. To him Ramakrishna replied;

"God is with form and without form. Images and other symbols are just void as your attributes. And these attributes are not different from idolatry but are merely hard and petrified forms of it... Those who believe that God is without form attain Him just as well as those who believe He has form. The only two essentials are faith and self-surrender".  

Romain Rolland calls Sen as 'Indian Plato' and indirectly refers to this discussion with that of Plato had with Socrates. But what a difference! The 'Indian Socrates', with due regards to Ramakrishna, had no formal education, whereas the Indian Plato was an elite, English educated scholar. But later occurred a transformation in the views of Sen, which were described earlier.

It would be better to recall the meeting Ramalinga had with one brahmo, Sridhar Naicker. The same topic was discussed between them also. Both the saints stressed the necessity of idolatry, though themselves being beyond that state.

Idol worship is necessary for the beginners, if not they may become atheists or agnostics. The famous words of Narendra are to be compared here. He was a vedantin. He was against idolatry in the beginning. After blessed by the divine grace of Ramakrishna, there was total change in his attitude. He said;
"External worship is recognised in our scriptures, as the lowest form of worship. But by that it does not become false worship. "Where I would have been if I had not been blessed with the dust of the holy feet of that orthodox image-worshipping brahmana?"."

True words came from a sincere heart. Narendra, by these, acknowledge the importance of image worship. He received all the spiritual knowledge from Ramakrishna in spite of the latter's view on worship, form or formless that does not matter at all. If one has faith, that is enough. All other discussions and rituals are waste and useless.

Worship is an individual act. It should be left to the individual himself. He should be free to choose his own path. Nobody should convince others in this matter. One day a woman of a brahmo family came to Ramakrishna and sought his help to convert her son, who was an idol-worshipper, into a brahmo form of worship. Ramakrishna refused to intervene. He said, "Why should I say such a thing? And why should he listen to me even if I should say it?" And he continued, "A man can realize God following his own path if he is sincere in his prayer".

This incident brings out the real man that was Ramakrishna. Being so influential even with the educated ones, he refused to advise in personal matters. This shows his personality. And also he would have laughed inside to see such people, as that woman, in perceiving when All is One, then what is the necessity of the discrimination between form or formless? In this way worship is as much relative as it is individualistic.

Another day a devotee talked to Ramakrishna in the following way:

Dis: One may believe that God is with form but not the earthen image.

Rama: Why call it an earthen image? The divine image is made of spirit. The image is made of not clay, but of spirit.
To the disciple the image seemed to be mere earth. But to Ramakrishna, the earth disappeared and in its place a spirit appeared. He was able to see the genuineness of the man who made it. His effort and faith produced that form.

It should be worthful to read here a sacred verse from Thirumantram, the sacred saiva scripture in Tamil.

"An elephant image made of wood,
If you see that big elephant
it hides from you the wood;
But if you see the thing, that is wood
Then the big elephant is hidden in the wood.

If you see this universe as it is, then
The God will disappear in it. But, instead
if you perceive the God, then the
Universe vanishes".10

The five senses of a man play that havoc. They produce before one the forms through their perceptions. Though they are real, the reality is beyond all these. A true bhakta should know this.

Who is a paramahamsa? Ramakrishna, being a saint so, answered the question to M. "In the case of a paramahamsa, all karma, all puja, japa, tapa, sandhya and so forth drop away. In this state a man communes with God through the mind alone".11 Once a man reaches that state everything goes off, as a withered leaf falls from the tree. Till then one should follow some basic worship. That was the view of Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna did not found a new way of worship as Raja Ram Mohun Babu did; not did he revive Light worship as Ramalinga did. But there are a few references about Light Worship in Ramakrishna's preachings. Ramakrishna once told M. that "there are five kinds of light; the light of a lamp, the light of various kinds of fire, the light of the moon, the ligth of the sun
and lastly the combined light of the sun and the moon". If keenly analysed, these five lights merge into three, the sun the moon and the fire. Thus one may hear the echo of the song of Ramalinga, the 'Arutperunjiothi'. The primordial of all these lights is that jothi, the Great Light of Compassion. Like Ramalinga, who gave many attributes to the light, Ramakrishna though not elaborately, spoke thus;

"Bhakti is the light of the moon and the jnana the light of the sun. In an incarnation of God one sees at the same time, the sun of knowledge and the moon of love".

Beautiful words indeed! What Ramalinga called as Light of Compassion, Ramakrishna spoke of as the light of the moon(love). The jnana jothi of Ramalinga is the light of the sun, knowledge here. Earlier it has been shown, when Ramalinga sings about this Light, to him it seems all the things in nature. His mystical experiences make him sing it as siva, lord, guru, mother, father, companion, friend, sat, chit, bliss, nectar, gem, gold, treasure, mountain, sea, honey, cool orchard, pond, breeze, sweet milk, fruit, sugarcane juice, music, song, and love itself. Ramakrishna experienced the same sweetness and brilliance. He said, "The God of jnani is full of brilliance; and the God of bhakta, full of sweetness".

But this brilliance and that sweetness, this light and that love, this sun and that moon are not different. That one which gives one 'santha', the spiritual fulfilment, cannot harm him. So this light is not an ordinary light. It is the Great Light of Compassion. Ramakrishna said;

"The divine light does not burn and cause death. It is like the lustre of a gem, shining yet soft, Cool and soothing. It burns not, but illumines the heart with peace and joy".

The last line should be read and re-read. It burns not but illumines; what a type of flame it should be! It illumines the heart with not wicks of flame but with peace and joy! Ramalinga sings,
"Jyoti jyoti jyoti, the self
Jyoti jyoti jyoti, the compassion
Jyoti jyoti jyoti, the Absolute"!

The words of both the saints do not differ. Great men not only think alike, but speak alike. Thus the Light of knowledge brings Light of Compassion and reaches its perfection in the light of Bliss.

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2. SANMARGHA

Sanmargha was the foremost principle propagated by Ramalinga during the last century. It was the summum bonum of the concepts on God, evolved in Tamilnadu for many centuries.

Sanmargha, (Sat margha) which literally means True Path, is the fourth and final stage in the spiritual development. Ramalinga himself wrote, 'It is the fourth path of all scriptures common to all religions. Those four paths are Dasa margha, Satputhra margha, Saka margha and Sanmargha'.\(^1\) Thus it is evident, sanmargha is secular in nature.

Ramakrishna's life was an open book. He practised all religions and learnt many things from other religions too. He was virtually a man of secularism. He did more than any other saint to preserve peace and tranquility in religious field during the turbulent period.

This chapter tries to bring out the salient features of both the saints in propagating religious tolerance and secularism.

RAMALINGA

Though the word sanmargha is very clear in its meaning, many interpretations are given to explain its inner depth. It is the path of knowledge, which makes one understand the truth about life, world and God.\(^2\) Some hailed it as the path identifying the Absolute in every living being.\(^3\) Ramalinga called this as Samarasa Suddha Sanmargha.\(^4\) T.P.Meenakshisundaram, the noted multi-linguist described it as the fundamental thing found in all religions and all philosophies. It is the path of external truth.\(^5\) More views are expressed even now to enhance its meaning.

In one of his songs, Ramalinga has indicated that samarasa, the equality of religion, is the equality of vedantha and siddhantha.\(^6\) The rationalist E.V.Ramasamy, (Periar) gave a contrasting meaning. According to him sanmargha means shedding
of all differences and inequalities beyond the concepts of God, religion, caste, money and possession. But traditionally it is the path of pure knowledge, which helps one to mingle with divinity. There are no religious inequalities in it.

In this tradition came Ramalinga, in the last century. To him it was the be all and end all of marghas. Many of his songs bear his thoughts on sanmargha. Some of them are;

_Sanmargha is a way of living with love;_ it shuns hatred and it is the true path; it is ancient and age-old, natural and brings eternity; there is no contradiction and ambiguity in it. It is beyond all superstitions and rituals; it is alone real and great; it is the path followed by siddhas and bhaktas.

As stated earlier, the 19th century was a period of political turmoil, economic backwardness and religious intolerance. Ramalinga indirectly might have advised the people to follow the path of sanmargha to find the solution for their problems. In one of his songs he mentioned that God helped him to avoid the evil ways of religious intolerance and to follow the path of Divine Grace and Truth. He was extremely happy to achieve here itself on this earth, those things the angels are able to get in heaven.

Quarrelling on religion, as per his view, is Dunmargha. Those who do so are men of evil. All should avoid such people. He was happy that he was shown the real path. He appealed to the people to follow the same. He sang;

"It is high time to live in the life of truth;

Don't waste your time quarrelling over religion;

It is high time to understand that
Sanmargha alone is true".

In those days people were living a life of slaves. There was no peace in their life within and without. Likewise there was no peace in society or religion, politics or individual life. The
polical slavery was the primary cause of all these sufferings. Therefore Ramalinga declared boldly;

"Let the rule of these wicked men
disappear so fast,
Let the people of sanmargha come
to take power,
Let the immorality in all the fields
go away, and
Let a new life blossom for our people".!

The ideas were courageous in its meaning. But no one is sure if he meant the British rule by the words 'wicked people'. Rather it would have been the rule of petty chieftains who ruled the small areas ruthlessly.

There was a system in Tamilnadu in those days. Number of villages were grouped under one big village and they were auctioned for a certain period. Those who were successful in bidding the auction, were given full powers to do whatever they liked. It was enough if they paid the taxes fixed by the Government; thereafter they had no interference from the rulers. These chieftains, poligars as they were called, were so cruel to earn the wrath and hatred from all types of people. Ramalinga would have seen such cruelties and would have sung against these unorganised, temporary and ruthless rulers. In that rule neither religion was protected; nor people had peace.

In this background the philosophy of sanmargha has more meaning. Protecting one's religion is a virtue. Not disgracing another's is also a virtue. This is the basis of sanmargha. When people deviated from this line, it was the duty of the ruler to punish such people and uphold the sanctity of pure religious sentiment. In this way the real interpretation of sanmargha is - not beyond the concept of religion, but - secular to all religions without favour or hatred. This was the necessity of that time. This flexibility was the reason why the conservatives opposed him. He sings,
"It is the all, be all and end all,  
But it is beyond all these,  
It is beyond all religions, and  
It is beyond all experiences,  
It is sanmargha".18

And again:

"The differences and sects are mad and devilish,  
They are like the childish play of ignorance,  
They are cruel and bring wars only and by that they make many die;  
Sanmargha alone can prevent that disaster".19

And again:

"It is a sin to speak ill of other religions;  
It is a sin to speak of many religions and sects;  
They envelope the people in darkness of ignorance;  
Sanmargha alone can illuminate them showing the real path".20

These words are self-explanatory. They reveal the real nature of Ramalinga's religious mind. He was completely against religious intolerance and conflicts on them and sects. He said, 'Those who are in religious conflicts cannot understand the truth of God".21 He yearned for a world of peace and tranquility sans conflicts and violence.

It has been shown elsewhere that he was a social reformer. He condemned casteism in no uncertain terms. It was the main reason for the differences found between man and man. He considered it as the foremost impediment in the path of sanmargha. If one forgot, he advised, casteism and religious conflict, then he would get sanmargha automatically. Ramalinga was extremely happy to be such a man. He sings,
"I shed down, my lady friend,  
The impediments of caste and religion,  
Ah! what a blessing I had!  
The Great Light of Compassion was visible to me".22

Once he got that blessing, he wished others to have the same. He advised them to follow that path and to be fit enough to receive the blessings of the Lord.

Ramalinga sings;

"You, the people of world,  
wander and fight for your  
Castes, religions and sects;  
you fight for your scriptures  
And thus you waste your time and life;  
What gain you have by all these?  
It is not worth to do so.  
Come and mingle in the stream of  
Sanmargha, where all the paths converge".23

He laughed at those men who quarrelled or debated on religion. They were like those blind men who argued on what would be an elephant like, by touching its various organs alone.24

Even from his young age Ramalinga had that awareness that many religions and various forms of worship symbolised basically one and the same. The paths are different but the destination is the same. Therefore, he was of the view, instead of arguing and quarrelling on things one could not perceive, would it not be better to think on earthly life and how to make it meaningful? The famous historian, K.R.S.Iyengar wrote;

"Ramalinga preached too - in this anticipating  
Sri Aurobindao - that the summum bonum of life  
was not an escape into another world of felicity  
or Nirvana or Kailasa or Vaikunta but rather  
winning of an earthly paradise".25
He had a clear vision in understanding monotheism and he was sure that the path to it was sanmargha. In this context one thing should be mentioned. He was dead against the miracles as attributed to saints and mystics. People believed such miracle makers. In advanced countries also, they still have their own followers. A man of religion with power to do miracles is still considered an incarnation. The reality and sense of the religion are thus lost. Ramalinga was upset to see such people. Religion is more than these miracles. But to make simple folk to believe it, is not an easy task. Ramalinga spoke many things clearly about it.

The puranic stories, according to Ramalinga, were explanatory in nature to stress some basic philosophies or principles. The inner reality is more important than the outer explanations. Religious morality was the necessity of the time. Miracles are supernatural and beyond the comprehensive power of a poor man. Therefore Ramalinga did not like them.

It is true that he called Lord Nataraja, as the 'Dancing Lord of miracles'. It is also true that he wished to have the power to do those 'ashta siddhis'. One of his songs gives the following description.

"Oh! My God of Aurtperunjothi,
   You bestowed all philosophies and .
You gave me that boon of deathlessness,
   You raised me to a higher stage so that
The world praises me, and My God!
   You taught all the siddhis to me,
To express themselves through me
   To show your Sat and Chit".

These lines show that Ramalinga was given those powers, if any, to express themselves spontaneously to reveal the greatness of God, not of a man. But it is a pity, that as in the lives of other saints, people hail only those of the supernatural qualities of Ramalinga. Whenever a new edition comes on his biography, new miracles, as done by him are being added. One Thulsiram, in his
book 'ARUTPERUNJOTHI AND DEATHLESS BODY', has given a list of 64 miracles as done by Ramalinga. It was said that after the disappearance of Ramalinga, many pseudo saints called themselves as 'incarnation of Ramalinga Swamigal' and roamed all over Tamilnadu. All these are nothing but disgrace shown to the great saint. These are not only unwise but also wounding. Forgetting a saint and his valuable thoughts but hailing his supernatural powers only is common and found everywhere. It shows the ignorance of the people and in one way or other the real greatness of the saints is degraded.

Miracles are the phenomena which cannot be proved. No one is sure whether Ramalinga did miracles or not. But he himself did not believe them. He said,

"I have no desire to die, not to live like this;
I have no desire to be born again, not to be
praised as a great man;
I have no desire to do miracles". 29(a)

This is his self-explanatory statement. He had no such desires. But rather he was against acquiring such posers. He said:

"If one tries for eight or ten years, he can
get the siddhis he wished; but they are mean
and useless. If one gets devotion on God, he
will not try for these. Contrarily if one goes
for them, his devotion will vanish. Therefore
nobody should involve him in these matters."30

In his last days, some people who were having vested interest in his spiritual power, spread a message that a miracle was going to happen soon at Vadalur. People in large numbers gathered to see it. It seemed that they lost their money and material in that way. Mostly, poor people were exploited. When Ramalinga came to know the matter, he was pained and pitied those poor. He issued a warning telling them not to believe in those things, not to lose money and not to suffer. 31

Doing miracles is a phenomenon found in all religions. It is there in Christianity and Islam. It was Buddha alone who did
not accept it. Miracles may happen in the lives of the saints; but they are spontaneous and non-voluntary. They show one part of the spiritual achievements of the saints. To praise the miracles or to regard the saints only on such a power is absurd.

Ramalinga's sanmargha, received its due recognition. It was hailed in various ways as religious renaissance, religious reformation and a principle of secularism. Some even hailed it as universal religion, founded by Ramalinga for the first time. Dr.Sp.Annamalai, who did a pioneer study of Ramalinga and his works, called it a new religion.\textsuperscript{32}

K.R.S.Iyengar described it as Ramalinga's vision of the Eternal religion, that transcends all doctrinal disputations or the differences dictated by adherence to caste, religion or ritualism.\textsuperscript{33} The word 'eternal' contains a deep meaning. It includes all the essences of a real religion. Ramalinga postulated that principle.

P.Mutharasu, who wrote a biography on Ramalinga in English, said: "Ramalinga's sanmargha is an all-embracing religion which is acceptable to every one in the whole world. It indicates only the fundamental essence of Truth, found hidden in the different religions, paying no heed to anythig harmful or irritating to any of them".\textsuperscript{34} In the same line Subramania Bharathi, the celebrated national poet of Tamilnadu, identified Ramalinga as a man of secularism and religious tolerance.

These intrepretations make one thing clear. Ramalinga was conscious and conscientious of the then prevailing religious condition. He was a man of deep understanding and knowledge. He clearly understood the changing winds in the religious arena. There were needs to do some reformation in religion and rituals. As a man of renaissance he tried to infuse the age oid virtues, but in a new meaning. To him society and religion were inseparable. Leaving society, as it was, nothing could be done in religion. It is true vice versa also. He was bold enough to weed out the anachronic rituals in religion, and in the same vein he was bold enough to introduce new ways in them.
In a beautiful song, which is in the form of bridal mysticism, Ramalinga says,

"My damsel friend, you ask the name of my Lord, what I can say?
I say It is Nataraja, It is Buddha,
It is Vardhamana, Brahma or Hara
I say It is Narayana or Sadasiva
It is Sakthisiva or Parabrahma
But all these, my friend, are playful".35

After embracing the divinity, the lady in love with God, is in complete union with her Lord and sees Him everywere. She finds His name in all the names of other religions too. Ramalinga echoes through her, his matured state of sanmargha.

In Saiva cult, this secularism is traditional. The temple at Chidambaram, one of the holiest shrines in India, is secular in nature. Thayumanavar, the predecessor in the spiritual line of Ramalinga, said earlier that people of all religions would come and worship at Chidambaram.36 Ramalinga sings in the same note;

"Religions in thousands, and
    Gods they tell in thousands
All are one in this Dancing God".37

"Oh! You great men, tell me if you have any,
    Different from the God, I found in
Chidambaram, which the thousands of religions
    And their divisions of Chithantha, vedantha
Or for that matter Nathantha attribute as 'Siva' ".38

Ramalinga was the follower of many holy scriptures. The most prominent among them were Thirumanthiram and Tiruvacakam. He was almost in deep sombre whenever he spoke of these two. Thirumanthiram, the treatise of Saint Thirumular, a mystic by himself, stressed one virtue for all religious people. In its course, it speaks of the duties of a king. One of them is that he should see everyone follow his religion and if anybody does not do so he shall punish the man.39
This book was written hundreds of years ago. Everyone should abide by his religious faith. There is no harm in it. It is the virtue and it is enough. But during the last century, thousands of poor people were converted to christianity with the blessings and support of the government. Religious intolerance was prevailing everywhere. This boiling situation has been given elsewhere. Ramalinga happened to live and see these irreligious things. He was pained.

Ramalinga's principle of sanmargha has to be approached in this background. By propagating it, he waged a silent war on religious intolerance. Thousands of people gathered around him. The christian missionaries, who were able to collect so many people, by giving food or shelter or dress were perturbed to see the resurgence. Ramalinga's Jnana Sabha and Sathya Dharma Sala were the resorts for the deserving poor. The missionaries thought Ramalinga an obstacle, a great impediment in their conversion work.

The reason for this type of large congregation was of an expectation that Ramalinga would do some miracles. As told earlier some vested interests cheated the poor, by collecting money. Ramalinga had nothing to do with that and even he warned the people. In spite of all these, a christian missionary wrote thus; "At Vadalur a swindler is going around these days. He pretends to be able to raise the dead... People from far-off places are coming to see him... Recently his booty was stolen by thieves. Now he wants to make the lost money by deceiving people".⁴⁰

The hidden anger in these words is evident. It was true that people gathered there expecting some miracles. But to brand the greatest saint Tamilnadu produced in the last century, as a swindler, is nothing but a scandal. The above words do not show any concern for the suffering poor, but the wrath of the missionary. Ramalinga stopped to some extent the conversion efforts of the missionaries. The reformations and the new method of worship he introduced attracted the people to his side. His sanmargha in this essence,
explained the people that behind what they were to go, was found in their own religion.

It may be concluded that the above-showed verbal attack was really an award for his silent, tireless and pioneering work of religious tolerance. It is not an irony that some people from the same christianity hailed him for his bold views.

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RAMAKRISHNA

The religious condition of Bengal in that period was not better. One author notes;

"A deep-rooted belief in number of Gods and Goddesses, the universal practice of image-worship, a rigid caste system with its attendant restrictions about touch, food and marriage... religion meant only an unending series of rituals and ceremonies and rules... There was undoubtedly a general deterioration in Hindu society".¹

Another author notes;

"But miraculously enough, the Hindu society escaped the impending danger... The orthodox society had not to wait long, when a phenomenon of paramount importance took place to infuse enormous strength to the entire range of Hindu convictions and thus to bring about a complete renaissance of the Hindu religion".²

There was a necessity to do that renaissance. Instead of spending the time in useless talks on empty theories and arid dogmas, religion had to be shown to common people by way of living in realisation of great truths. To do this, a man of greater stature was necessary. People were weak in their religious sentiments and they had to be infused with religious courage to live in one's religion but at the same time not to show disrespect to others. Romain Rolland wrote;

"There were number of great personalities of genius who during the last century have sprung up in reawakened India, reviving the ancient energies of their country and bringing about a spring time of thought within her borders".³

One among them was Sri Ramakrishna, "From the quiet retreat of the Dakshineshwar temple, without beat of drums of flash of stump oratory, breathed life into Hinduism with all its kaleidoscopic phases and ushered in an era of Hindu renaissance".⁴
Ramakrishna was a Hindu to the core. He was a strong supporter of rituals. In the previous pages, it has been clearly shown how far he was orthodox. For being so, he had to face the severe criticism of the rationalists of Brahma order. They denounced image worship in no uncertain terms. But their criticisms did not deter him from his path of jnana. He was steady in his goal and pursuit. But later some brahmans, joined the holy course of renaissance in his way. They found in him an enlightenment, which a learned man could not give. Vivekananda rightly said;

"He life's work was just near a city which was full of western thought, a city which had run mad after these occidental ideas... There he lived without any book learning what so ever; this great intellectual never learnt even to write his name; but the most brilliant graduates of our university found in him an intellectual giant".5

Such was the religious reverence Ramakrishna had in those days. He did not express revolutionary ideas about conservatism. He did not oppose rituals or dogmas strongly. He did not approve of them in toto nor was there antagonism fully. So Ramakrishna was fortunate in not having vehement opposition from both the rationalists and conservatives, as Ramalinga faced.

The greatest contribution of Ramakrishna to the religious arena, was secularism, which was none other than the sanmargha of Ramalinga. Though he was a Hindu, Ramakrishna did not oppose other religions or sects. He was even eager to know and experiences the essence of other religions. He went through the experiences whenever there was chance to have them. After all these he said;

"I have practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and I have also followed the paths of different Hindu sects... I have found the same God... Water has many sources but the substance is one".6
It was the genuine and real realisation of Ramakrishna. Then why should be these differences and quarrels in the name of that one God? Ramakrishna was pained to see these petty things. He was a man of religion in its sense and content. "He made his own life a laboratory of experiments for the synthesis of different systems of religion, a wonderful synthesis of higher forms of spiritual discipline with rituals and ceremonies, of sakara (God with Form) with Nirakara (God without Form); of vdeanthap with devotion, of rationalism with emotion and intution, of asceticism with social and domestic life".7

Thus Ramakrishna was a rare combination of all virutes connected with spiritualism which qualities attracted both ordinary people and learned men to his fold. His teachings embedded with parables gave a new explanation to Hindu revivalism and renaissance. He was a tantric, a vedantin, the disciple of the brahman and the disciple of Totapuri. Yet his religion was beyond all these. His awareness in finding a common path to all the religious sects made him the greatest. His spiritual experience was real, deep and extensive. "He discovered the wonderful spirit of catholicism within the sealed bosom of Hinduism and released it through his own realisations to spread all over the globe and literalize all communal and sectarian views!"8

Though Ramakrishna initially followed some rituals, he was not dogmatic. He did not refuse to accept other ways of worship. His religion was quite different from those of other Indian sadhus. It was practical, appealing and down to earth. He gave a new emphasis to the old and sublime truth that religion is not of dogmas or sastras but of realisation. He brought secularism to the fold of Indian religion.

But this phenomenon, secularism, was not a new thing. Hinduism from time immemorial has been a religion, which gives room to all types of sects and principles. It has been a great ocean in which mingled other rivers of sects and even other religions. But it never lost the central core. Externally it appears to
be a 'hopeless jumble of innumerable and divergent creeds', but it never faltered in its centre. It withstood the onslaught of other religious invasions throughout its history, only by its inner strength. Ramakrishna gave an explanation to that strength not by words, but by living a spiritual life and that life as stated above was a laboratory for the synthesis of different systems.

Therefore, Ramakrishna advised the people to follow their own path. There is no difference in the essence of religion. He said,

"Everyone should follow his own religion. A christian should follow christianity, a mohammadan mohammadanism... A true religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths to the Truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions".10

Ramalinga sings;

"Oh, my God! the Almighty,
You are like an ocean of perfection
with boundless shores of completeness,
Into that ocean flow and mingle the various
streams of religions...
I bow to you".11

Like Ramalinga, Ramakrishna advised the people to be secular in the sense that everyone should abide by his religion; "let a man be a christian in the matter of mercy, a moslem in the matter of strict obeisance of external forms and a Hindu in the matter of universal charity, charity towards all living creatures".12

These words do not mean that other religions lack the merits not mentioned. The words express the wish of Ramakrishna and everyone's heart should have this synthesis. The inner meaning of the words was further explained by his beloved disciple, Vivekananda thus;
"This is the message of Ramakrishna to the modern world. 'Do not care for doctrines; do not care for dogmas or sects or churches or temples. They count each man, which is spirituality... show by your lives that religion does not mean words or names or sects but that it means spiritual realisation".13

Thus the real intrepretation of the master came from the disciple. Religious integration was the basis of Ramakrishna's motto. He did not explain it in many ways. But about the ideal of his master Vivekananda said;

"To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my master. He left every religion undisturbed because he realised in reality they are all part and parcel of the eternal religion".14

It has to be recalled here that K.R.S.Iyengar described the principle, sanmargha of Ramalinga as 'his vision of the eternal religion that transcends all doctrinal disputations'. The same word 'eternal' is used as the attribute of religion in the words of both the scholars.

Ramakrishna, thus, tried to harmonise all conflicting sects. His was a universal religion, as much as the sanmargha of Ramalinga. It included a phenomenon which had love for all and hatred for none. This is the 'eternal religion', the everliving and everlasting one. It includes all the religions but beyond all of them. It is beyond description. What man has achieved in the religious wisdom, is a part of it, a part so minute and so inconspicuous. Again Vivekananda said, by comparing the eternal religion with that of a great book; and the various religions as its pages;

"The bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all the sacred books of other religions are but so many pages of that great religion in which an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded".15

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The meaning is very clear. Reading a few pages of a great book, that too at random and arguing on that inept and inadequate knowledge is the main cause of all these sufferings. The whole book has to be read in its totality, but that nobody can do. Then why this useless clashes and quarrels on religion?

On performing miracles, Ramakrishna was always against the concept. He did not believe those things and advised the people to be vigilant against those who did such things. He said in clear tone;

"Visit not miracle mongers and those who exhibit occult powers. These men are stragglers from the path of truth. Their minds have become entangled in psychic powers, which are like veritable meshes in the way of pilgrimage to Brahman. Beware of these powers and desire them not".16

His sentiments have been expressed clearly thus. He was of the view that such powers are impediments in the pursuit of real knowledge, and they will entangle one where he is. Those who possess such powers feel proud of having them and thus they become egoistic. In this context Ramakrishna gave an anecdote;

"Krishna said to Arjuna, 'If you desire to attain Me, know that it would never be possible if you have even one of the eight occult powers, which increase man's egotism'".16(a)

Ramakrishna's quotation and its purpose are to stress the point that even the Lord was against such practice. To acquire the so called siddhis, the superhuman powers, is to increase one's vanity. Instead of following the path of sanmargha, a man with such power founds his own path and institutionalises it and then proclaims himself as an incarnation. This is nothing but absurd. If one goes into deep inquiry about the origin of sects and creeds, this would be the case. Lord Krishna's words are in nature of issuing a warning.

But that doesn't mean that they are false. They may come or not. In the pathway to God, through the spiritual pursuit one has to cross many steps, attractive or painstaking. Whatever it
may be, he should not stop there by losing himself either by that joy of attraction or by the pain of suffering. Ramakrishna said;

"They (the miracles) come by themselves by virtue of sadhanas or religious practices or control of the senses. But he who sets his mind on siddhis remains stuck there and he cannot rise higher!".

The siddhis, power of doing miracles, are thus not only unwanted but also real obstacles. Ramakrishna asks and wonders, "Will a devotee at the threshold of the king of kings beg for psychic powers neglecting the priceless gifts of true knowledge?".18 The true knowledge and the love of God are priceless gifts and the psychic powers make one neglect the gifts. A nice explanation indeed!

It is known to every reader the famous arecdote of Ramakrishna, in denouncing the miracles. A man attained the power of walking on water, after doing hard penance for 14 years. When he happily announced that to his guru, his guru admonished him saying, what he had achieved after 14 long years, could be done by an ordinary man by paying a few paise as transport charges to a boat man.19

But acutally Ramakrishna was having some 'extra' powers. He was able to predict some incidents. By reading the faces and features he would accurately describe the qualities of a man. A mere touch, or a look or his presence would raise many of his disciples to a state of ecstasy. He did not develop or cultivate or use these powers to exhibit his 'self'. Miracles, he did not think as impossible; but he thought that they were useless. More than once they were harmful.20

Who would, then, like to have powers? Ramakrishna answered; ' "Only the small minded seek them... I tremble with fear lest I should acquire these pwers".21 A man of miracles can astonish the people in the middle of the street by doing them. But those tricks are not going to give any gain either to the people or to that man. Therefore it has to be condemned in toto, as it
wastes one's energy and time. Ramakrishna said, "Psychic powers are to be avoided like filth".\textsuperscript{22} Stronger words indeed, but they express the agony of Ramakrishna in doing such things and cheating the people.

One has to recall the thoughts of Ramalinga, as given earlier, on miracles and on powers of doing such things. There are many similarities in their views on these matters.

Aurobindo wrote once;

"It has needed a constant stream of saints and religious thinkers and the teaching of illuminated sannyasins to keep the reality and resist the deadening weight of form and ceremony and ritual. But the fact remains that these messengers of the spirit have never been wanting".\textsuperscript{23}

Such messengers of God were Ramalinga and Ramakrishna. They brought into this world a spiritual aspiration where love alone was supreme and where all the barriers were lost. The principle of sanmargha, as postulated by Ramalinga, is the doctrine of universal brotherhood which implies equality to every individual. Once that equality blossoms, then there will be no war or calamity in the name of religion. Sp.Annamalai noted, "Suddha sanmarha is a triangle of devotion to God, service to fellow beings and entering into supra-consciousness which embodies in it the unending ideal of universal brotherhood".\textsuperscript{24}

That sanmargha or the secularism as postulated by Ramakrishna is badly needed today. Modern world is in danger of being 'broken into narrow walls of domestic' religious fundamentalism. Vivekananda was absolutely correct when he said; "Universalism practised by many of the so called world religions is only a sort of intolerant religious imperialism".\textsuperscript{25} Human history has many pages in it to prove this statement. It is fortunate that saints like Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were born in this land to condemn that 'imperialism'. They stood for that much needed secularism and tolerance, which alone can save the mankind from the threatening nemesis.
Ramalinga sings;

"Oh, there is dawn in the eastern sky!
There rises the Jothi, the Light of Grace,
There is no more quarrel, riot or mutiny;
These have faded;
The different sects and creeds on the basis of
caste, religion and scripts have vanished".26

Modern world, in spite of its stupendous achievement in science and technology, ails for a panacea which will cure all its diseases of religious fundamentalism, linguistic fanaticism and reginonal hatred. Each fanatic is like a frog in the well, which does not know anything bigger than that well. Likewise, the man does not know anything better than his own creed.27

The optimism of Ramalinga, given above, should be made materialised. The teachings of Ramalinga and Ramakrishna are still relevant, are still powerful to wipe out the tears of the suffering masses or to eradicate the cruelty inflicted on the mankind in the name of religion. Advancement in the pursuit of knowledge means, shedding off irrational and artificial thoughts. Man is now able to see the Mother Earth, from the soil of the moon. This earth, so big and vast to us here, seems to be a tiny dot, a small bob, a golden pendant, hanging and swirling over the boundless space. Whatever our forefathers saw in their spiritual vision, science is proving one by one. When one thinks of the vastness of the space and the smallness of the earth, it is laughable to fight here in the name of religion. Wars are not only meaningless but harmful to the whole of humanity.

Religion has an important place in one's life; no doubt of it. But it should not be at the cost of one's life itself. Peace and tranquility are greater than religion. Let God be Ram, Krishna, Siva or Muruga; Jesus or Allah. Nobody knows completely what the real God is. Then why should be all these irrational clashes?
Both Ramalinga and Ramakrishna stressed this point more than once. They lived a religious life of meaningful secularism. It will be a surprise to note that some christians attacked Ramalinga for his principles, whereas some of them branded him a true christian! But contrarily the saivites, among whom he was born and grew, discarded him. One muslim sect claimed that the principles propagated by Ramalinga, were Islamic ones. A Jain author wrote a booklet to prove that Ramalinga belonged to the religion of Jains. These points make one thing clear and that is Ramalinga belonged to none, but to all.

Likewise Ramakrishna practised Islam for months and lived like a muslim. He went to hear the preachings in a church and learnt the ideas in that religion. He was a saktha and a vedantin. Yet he belonged to none.

Both the saints saw the foot of the mountain from the top. Around the mountain all the radii were the same and having their origin from the same centre, and ending in the same circumference. Which radius is longer than which? To ask such question, is an ignorance. All are equal, no less no more. Everyone enjoys the Absolute, but only a part of it. The enjoyment is true, not false but not total. The message of the saints makes it clear.
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3. COMPASSION

Showing pity to other living beings including man, feeling sorry for their sufferings and praying God to alleviate those sorrows and finally doing service to all in all possible ways—all these comprise compassion. Empathy, the affinity with other living beings is the foremost principle in the life of Ramalinga. He has written many works both in verse and prose giving vivid description of this virtue and the necessity of it to the modern world. Likewise throughout the Gospel of Ramakrishna, M. has given many instances to show how much compassion Ramakrishna showed to others. The inner tender heart of the saint can be seen in his teachings. Both the saints underlined the need of it to do service to others. This chapter deals with their views on compassion.

RAMALINGA

Compassion forms the foundation for Ramalinga's philosophy of sanmartha. According to him compassion is of two kinds: one, alleviating the hunger of the starved people and two non-violence, which is a virtue of avoiding meat-eating and sacrificing animals. In one of his treatises, Ramalinga explained in minute details the sufferings of a hungry man. The work was rightly named as 'Jivakarunya'. To stress the virtue of non-killing of animals, he wrote another treatise named 'Manumurai kanta vacakam' (The way how a king, manu showed justice). These two works are considered to be the few of the best in Tamil prose works.

Ramalinga defined the word 'compassion' as 'the natural expression of the soul'. It is the spontaneous quality of Grace that exists in every living being. He describes this as the necessary morality which links one another and thus creates an empathy which melts one when one sees the sufferings of others. Doing so itself is a form of worship. It is the key which unlocks the gates of heaven. The kingdom of God is open to those who have compassion. This compassion expects one not to trouble others in
any way. Bhakti is nothing but the same compassion. God is virtue; grace is knowledge and Grace is all.⁴

These were the various explanations given by the saint to bring out the meaning of compassion. It is a morality, a form of worship, spontaneous quality of the virtue, bhakti and Love and Grace itself. Ramalinga did not consider sanmargha different from compassion. In the prose work 'Jivakarunya', he said that if one had compassion, he would understand the difficulties of others; that understanding will make him come forward to help the sufferer; and from that, love would bridge them. Without this basic pity, no love exists and no humanism exists.⁵

Man, who studies many things, should study deeply the ideas of Ramalinga given above. He has clearly showed the various stages of development of compassion. Man has a subtle and rational mind. He can understand more deeply than any other living being. He is the pinnacle of glory in the organic evolution. Then, it is but natural that he should be pitiful; if not, the evolutionary process itself will be at stagnation. Knowledge without compassion is empty and dreary. That knowledge which lacks pity, is far more dangerous than ignorance itself.⁶

A man may do many rituals. He can adore himself with many external symbols or things like beads, garland etc. But if he lacks in compassion, he is nothing and his external show and actions are useless magical expressions. His yoga, knowledge, penance and meditation will not carry him to the threshold of God's palace.⁷ The fundamental trait to be a man is compassion; without it nothing will make him a man.

Ramalinga beautifully drew the line between man and God, by saying that Grace is the benevolence of God; and compassion is the benevolence of human soul. Like lighting a bigger lamp with a smaller one, like lighting a bigger fire with a small cinder a man can have the grace of god if he exhibits compassion.⁸ Ramalinga further declared that divisions and

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differences on the basis of caste, clan, country, religion and language are real obstacles in having compassion. If one is compassionate all these would vanish.\textsuperscript{9}

If one is compassionate, God is there. It is an easy way to see God and get blessed by Him. Then why man is not having that quality? Ramalinga answered that because of his nature to find fault with others.\textsuperscript{10} To cultivate compassion, one should not find fault with others' actions. This idea is an echo of Thiruvalluvar, who said two thousands years ago that would there be any suffering for a soul, if one looked into his faults as he looked into others'.\textsuperscript{11} Ramalinga's service was to revive the old thoughts in a new way. This is the real renaissance.

Ramalinga goes on discussing the merits of having compassion. He asks a simple question; what is the difference between a man and an angel? He himself gives the answer. One who possesses the true wisdom, knowledge with compassion, is an angel; and if one possesses only knowledge without any love, then he is not a man, but below an animal in the rank.\textsuperscript{12} A compassionate man is an angel in this world; he is the real man, 'the holiest of the holy". Ramalinga said that if a man thought for a moment how small he is in this vast universe then compassion would automatically come to him. It was spontaneous.\textsuperscript{13}

Ramalinga in one of his commentaries, has explained various types of worlds in a philosophical manner. He gave a long list of more than 2000 worlds in it, and named them in the spiritual background, concluded with the words that 'to explain further will add many worlds'.\textsuperscript{14} It shows his deep knowledge in sāstras and scholarship in philosophy. When compared with that vastness, that 'Akanda AKARA', 'sat chit Ananda', man is nothing but a fleeting dust or a speck. One should try to understand the magnanimity of God, who created man with understanding power. If he lacks in it or rather does not use it to identify himself with others, then what is the use of having knowledge? Thiruvalluvar declared,
"Even if one has a knowledge, sharp like that of a file,

Let him lack that humanism, he is to be considered a fallen dead tree." 15

Ramalinga further tells that a living being is susceptible to be stricken with hunger, being killed or to fall sick due to carelessness and to unknown causes. All are not able to stop these due to ignorance. But one who is capable of doing so, should help to relieve them from these. This is real compassion.

Ramalinga thought it as compassion of higher order (para jivakarunya) to stop murder and killing and also to alleviate hunger. One can live with thirst and sickness for some time; but he cannot do so with hunger for a long time. There is no cruelty more cruel than losing one's life. If that happens in a natural way, it is different; but if it is inflicted by some one it is the most cruel thing. One should stop it or try to prevent it.16

It is in this view Ramalinga opposed meat-eating so vehemently. Non-vegetarianism is quite contrary to compassion. In order to sustain one's body, no one has the right to kill and eat another's. To do so is not human, but animal like. There are so many references in his prose works about this matter. It is enough to mention that after Thiruvalluvar, it was Ramalinga who strongly advocated vegetarianism.

Ramalinga opposed killing of animals. He denounced the act in no uncertain terms and strong words. Those who do such acts are not men of sanmargha. The path of sanmargha is the path of not killing and not losing mercy. Ramalinga happened to see animals being taken to temples for sacrifice. Those animals with the garlands on their necks produced shudders in his frame. His pity turned into anger over those minor gods. He spared not in denouncing them. He called them as minor gods, merciless, wicked and cruel and disastrous. Here is his song;

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"My Father, You know yourself, how much
I suffered to see those pitiful animals,
The goat, the pig, the calf, garlands on
their necks, taken to the temples of
'murdering gods';

My Father, You know yourself, how much
I was afraid of seeing those 'wicked temples'
of murdering gods".  

Nowadays sacrifice is legally banned; but nobody is sure
how far it is followed. But the contribution of Ramalinga to such
a law has to be remembered.

Ramalinga was compasionate to its full meaning. He
looked always sorrowful. The period he lived, was the period of
famines. Poverty, sickness, ignorance and slavery ruled the people
everywhere. Their sufferings were beyond any description. Nobody,
even if he has a little love, could be unconscious of the situation.
In one of the songs, mostly quoted so often, Ramalinga says;

"I withered, whenever I happened to see
a withered plant;
My heart trembled whenever I saw those
skeletal frames stricken with hunger,
begging at every door-step without getting any,
Every part of my frame became chill to see
those men, inflicted with chronic diseases
moan in agony; and
I became leaner and leaner to see those
lean and hungry, poor and orphans, who
are lean in their hearts too".  

The above verse is the real expression of his inner
constitution. The words and the sentiments show that Ramalinga
was the embodiment of compassion. One of his long poems has
been given the title, 'Great Appeal of a Son'. It is in the form of
a son appealing to his father, expressing his desires and what the
things he wants. 9 Here the God is the beloved father and Ramalinga the son. It consists of 133 verses. These are autobiographical in nature and one may note many of his ideas and views and personal experiences in these.

There are references of his compassionate nature in other works also. He was full of love for others. Many people came to him, seeking his advice to solve their problems or to seek solace for their troubled mind or to have medicines for their sickness. Whenever these people visited him, they told all things to him, matters concerning a person, or a place or the condition of the society and likewise things. He was a native doctor and personally prepared some medicines using herbs and other ingredients. Thus all these made him restless and he had to fall sick due to overwork sometimes.

Leave alone human beings, other living things were also of his concern. The cawing of a crow in the middle of night evoked pity in his heart; lisping of a lizard made him think what happened to it in the dead of night; he was afraid of hearing sounds in the night, in the sense what suffering others were experiencing; the squeaking of an owl made him sleepless. Like these Ramalinga gives a long list of the situations in which he had identified with other living things. 20

The day to day happenings in the street and in the house produced emotional disturbances in him. When a strong man beat a weak person, he wept for the beaten one; when a drunkard fell on the street due to his seduced state, Ramalinga pitied for his condition; when he heard that someone had stolen somebody's wealth, he worried much as if he was the loser; and whenever he saw tears in others' faces, his eyes began to shed the same spontaneously; and even the skeletal frames of the bullocks and the bellowing of animals brought immense sorrow in him. 21 He was so sensitive that even a small dot in his white cloth produced shocks in him. Therefore G.V.Pillai rightly called him as a 'living seismograph'. 22 The word gives the correct description of
Ramalinga. Like a seismograph which registers all the tremors of an earthquake, Ramalinga registered in his mind all types of sufferings and sorrows of others. Another poet, a contemporary of Ramalinga, noted;

"If you take compassion from Ramalinga,
he will die incessantly,
He and compassion are one and the same;
he will even weep for a small beetle
of pepper size, if it falls into the fire".23

Ramalinga's mind was serene and crystal clear. He had no attachment in any way, with the world and material. His aim was to serve the poor and it was to him a worship. He sings;

"My Father, bless me in granting
whatever I ask from You,
I should serve and show love to
All living beings".24

This was his request. 10 verses of each 8 lines in his poems, reveal his real desires. Even one among them is not his personal desire; all of them are for others.

As he had a tender heart, Ramalinga really experienced the sufferings of others, when they were narrated to him. He looked always sorrowful, in the sense that always he was thinking (sorrows) of others'. A little sleep, a little diet and deep concern for others all these made him lean and weak. But he was not an 'empty' ascetic, who is unconscious of what happened around him. He lived in the middle of the people and he lived for them. Therefore he had to be so. But he had to pay for it, in weakening his health. But that is natural for any altruist.

Compassion, in its culmination, has been called by Ramalinga as 'soul integration'. Modern man talks of so many integrations, but Ramalinga's ideas were different. Whatever may be, all things have been created by the same God. Logically then
they tend to be brethren. The kindness of one towards another, therefore is natural and it is the love of the soul. Likewise one's pity shown to another, is the soul's right. These love and right comprise the 'soul integration'. The final vision of sanmargha is this integration.  

These are the thoughts of Ramalinga, found in his prose works. His rational and scientific argument why one should have compassion towards others, is appealing. He is of the view that this compassion is spontaneous and an instinct found in nature. Man by his way of living and selfishness has lost and forgot that golden virtue.

Ramalinga was blessed with that virtue. He could visualise that oneness within. He yearned for a time when this world would have such an outlook. He sings;

"My Father, bless me in granting
what I ask from Thee,
Those who are equal, who are great
And who are weak—all these
Should become one and lead the
integrated life".  

It is a known proverb that altruists wish the world has all that give happiness to them.

Ramalinga went further and said that if that identification was true then it should identify the sufferings also. This is real soul integration. This is a new explanation. Where the compassion is, there is the Lord. Thirumanthiram says;

"The foolish alone will say that
Lord Siva and Love are different;
Nobody knows clearly that Pure Love
becomes that Siva;
If anybody finds and lives that
Love is Siva,
He will be blessed with that Love".  

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The surge of divine love thus flows into the lives of all things in the world and it is the duty of the man, who has power to perceive, to identify it and live accordingly. Ramalinga lived such a life as the very example of this verse. He sings, merrily:

"My lady companion, do you know
What boon I have!
My Lord blessed me for my love and kindness;
And now I have found my path, and
It is the sanmargha".29

The blessings Ramalinga received were two-fold; he was fortunate to identify himself with every living being and he was ready to serve them by showing that love. This is the simplest way of getting blessed by the Lord. He sings again;

"Who is there,
who without any discrimination,
Thinks that all the living beings are like his own,
and who treats all of them equally with joy,
I bow to him, then his heart is the Dancing Hall of
Our Lord Siva, the Sat Chit Ananda,
To me he is the most learned and revered,
My heart wishes to serve him with servitude".30

Ramalinga's joy and the blessings he received were boundless beyond description. He wished that this world also should have them.

"My God, You woke me up in the middle of night,
You blessed this sinner with Your Light of Grace,
How can I describe the bliss of that blessing!

But wish my Father, that this world should
also have them like I did".31

Thus is the summum bonum of Ramalinga's compassion. Many learned men hailed this principle in many ways. P.S.Acharya, who wrote a small book on Ramalinga and
Ramakrishna in Tamil, said that Ramalinga's compassion was basically socialistic in structure, and it aimed at seeing a social transformation. Mrs. Rukmani Arundale, the founder of Kalashetra at Chennai, hailed it as the highest virtue of humanity. Non-violence is not a negative principle, but a positive way of realising God in every soul. It embraces all the souls. To treat all living beings as one's equal, is not an easy thing. Only by constant efforts and empathy one can have it. It is in one way equal to saka margha, one of the paths to get God's grace. Worshipping God as one's companion is soul integration. They have no difference. A. Sivasubramaniapillai, who did research on the philosophy of Ramalinga, said that universal brotherhood is not a mere philosophy found in nature; it is one of the constituents of life. It showed the high state of life: it is the maxim of human virtues.

The two practices of meat eating and sacrificing animals, are universal and very old ones. Hinduism does not forbid these. Veer saivism, a sect of Saiva predominantly found in Karanataka, opposed both of them vigorously. Buddhism does not support killing but does not forbid meat-eating. Christianity and Islam also accept non-vegetarian diet. It is only Jainism which has stood against these two all along. Thiruvalluvar 2000 years ago, in 20 couplets, preached against these two practices. After him no saint attempted to follow him. It was Ramalinga, who in the last century gave a renaissance to these virtues.

Ramalinga, had a predecessor who had hinted the path of compassion. He was Thayumanavar. One of his songs is this;

"My Father, I did not do my puja today,
You Yourself know the reason;
It was chill in the early morning,
The pearl-like dew drops soaking
the petals of flowers,

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When I as usual stretched my hand
to pluck the flowers for prayer,
There my God, I found You even inside the flower,
I withdrew my hand and returned".36

Thayumanavvar sings again,

"My Father, make me serve those
who are really your bhaktas,
It is enough and your blessings and bliss will come to me automatically".37

One who studies these verses of Ramalinga's predecessor deeply will certainly hear an echo of the same thoughts of compassion. There are many more verses of Thayumanavvar of such nature. Certainly they would have evoked an influence on Ramalinga's thoughts. To sing 'I withered whenever I happened to see a withered plant', the song of Thayumanavvar in which he showed his love in extremity to find God inside a flower, would have been the cause. Getting bliss and getting blessed by God through service is also the motto of Thayumanavvar and the same finds its places in Ramalinga too.

Ramalinga's compassion in this sense is revival of the old principle as shown by Thiruvalluvar and Thayumanavvar. It is nothing but renaissance. His 'jivakarunya' or compassion thus got revived during last century from the ancient scriptures.

Tamil encyclopedia notes that to see God in all and to serve them as such is a spiritual path in saivasiddhantha.38 Then one more feather is added to Ramalinga's principle. He as a saivite, revived the spiritual path of siddhantha in stressing the importance of love and service. It is also a renaissance.

The best symbol of humaism is to have pity, not acquired but a natural one. Universal brotherhood expresses that humanism and through it human culture. Sanmargha and Compassion are thus the conscience of humanity and voice of the divine.
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RAMAKRISHNA

Romain Rolland wrote that Ramakrishna 'plucked the three beautiful fruits of the tree of knowledge-compassion, devotion and renunciation'.¹ Ramakrishna was an ascetic and therefore renunciation; he was a bhakta and therefore devotion. But of compassion, with humility it is to be noted that the world does not know much. But he was so, a virtual embodiment of love and compassion. His whole life was spent in doing service to others. Romain Rolland said again; "His whole doctrine of love working for others to the limits of personal sacrifice is in essence the doctrine of service".²

One day a disciple asked Ramakrishna if he could continue his household duties. Ramakrishna answered that everybody should do his duties first and continued "a man without compassion is unworthy of the name of a man".³ Thus he has defined indirectly what compassion is. It is the deciding characteristic feature whether one is a man or not. To be a man, one should be compassionate.

But this compassion should be spontaneous without even a slight consciousness that one is showing it and another is receiving it. Nobody has any right to think he is superior because of doing such a thing, or for that matter other is inferior because of receiving it. Empathy is a natural phenomena, which involves not one's mind but one's heart. Vivekananda said,

"It is the heart that takes one to the highest plane. It is the heart that makes for inspiration".⁴

A melting heart produces that inspiration and brings compassion to raise a man into higher state, in which he will find God. Ravidas, the famous mystic-saint, said;

"Lord resides within the hearts of the devotees and cannot be known through the performance of any rites and
ceremonies. Only one who has known the pain of divine love will find Him and the highest expression of religion in life is the service of man".⁵

Ramakrishna knew that path of divine love and he lived a life of religion in doing service to man. He was extremely compassionate to know, to feel and identify the sufferings of others. Vivekananda said of his master thus;

"The one (Sankara) had a great head, the other (Chaitanya) a large heart and time was ripe for one to be born the embodiment of both the head and heart... the brilliant intellect of Sankara and the wonderfully expansive infinite heart of Chaitanya, one who would see God in every being one whose heart should weep for the poor for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for every one,... Such a man was born and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years".⁶

This passage needs no explanation. It was fortunate for India to have such a man of extreme compassion and real knowledge. He combined both to show to the world what is a real religion made of. To him God was everywhere. Once when he was talking to M. Ramakrishna told that in certain state of mind "I see God in all beings, even in an ant".⁷ Another day during one of his discourses, he said;

"When God is realised, the whole world appears meaningful, never empty. He who has attained Him sees that the Lord Himself has become all these, the universe and its creatures".⁸

Thus was Ramakrishna in his compassionate state of realisation. He saw 'his own self in everybody and everybody's self in himself".⁹ Once he understood his 'self' with others', then his love knew no bounds. To him the world did not appear as an illusion, the maya as described in scriptures; but as a lila. His manifestation in Compareless Beauty. "He was all love and
devotion towards it". It was his constant prayer to The Mother to bless him to be among the devotees forever. "Oh! Mother, let me remain in contact with men. Do not make me a dry ascetic". 

And this was his prayer. What did he mean by the words 'dry ascetic'? An ascetic of penance and knowledge with all powers but who is beyond the reach of an ordinary man. Then what is the use of his powers? What is the use of his knowledge or penance? Anything attained should be used for the uplift of mankind. A man, who is fortunate to have such powers, should be grateful to God, for His Grace and grateful to the world for giving a chance to exhibit them. But if he is without mercy or compassion then there is no use in them. Ramakrishna told a disciple;

"Are you seeking God? Then seek Him in man. The divinity is manifest in man more than in any other object".

Ramalinga spoke of the human body as a seat of spiritual enlightenment and a seat of Divine Grace. He further said that human birth is the best benevolence given by God to attain moksha, the bliss. The similarity in the ideas of the two saints is to be understood.

Ramakrishna did not write or speak much about this noble virtue of compassion, jivakarunya. But there are many references throughout his life, in which he was concerned with others' problems. M. has recorded such incidents. Swami Shivananda wrote to Romain Rolland;

"His (Ramakrishna's) heart was full of love, to overflow for all. Those who did not see it cannot imagine to what an extent this man, so detached from the world was constantly occupied in listening to the story of their worldly tribulation poured out to him by men and women alike and in lightening their burdens. He could not bear to see the sufferings of others".
As in the case of Ramalinga, the saint of Calcutta too was concerned in the day to day affairs of others. They were one way or the other affected by the sufferings and sorrows of others.

Once Ramakrishna said, "With the knowledge that the whole universe is the household of the Lord, show pity to all creatures". But then as if he had done some wrong, he admonished himself and repeated thus;

"Pity to all creatures! You who are lower than even a worm... how dare you speak of showing pity... Who are you to show pity? It is not pity... It is service to them in the consciousness that they are verily God Himself".

Both these quotations make one thing clear. Showing pity or sympathy for fellow beings is the highest virtue, no doubt. But this should not make one feel proud of doing so. This egoism, 'consciousness' of helping others, is as bad as pitilessness. Vanity, in any form has no tenderness, but rigidity. And this should be avoided.

When Mathur Babu was not in a mood to help the poor and starving, Ramakrishna who accompanied him during that pilgrimage got angry and said;

"You are only the steward of the Mother. They are the Mother's tenants... Jiva is Shiva... Who then dare talk of showing mercy to them? Not mercy, but service, service for man must be regarded as God".

It was well known that Ramakrishna sat down and almost did a sathyagraha to make Mathur do the needful. He could not move from that place, after seeing the suffering of the wretched people.

On another day he admonished Manilal, a rich man who would often come to see Ramakrishna, for his neglecting the local needs of the people. He told him;
"Rakhal says that the people in his native village have been suffering seriously from scarcity of water. Why don't you build a reservoir there? You have so much money. What will you do with all your wealth?"."

These two incidents reveal the true mind and heart of Ramakrishna. He did not compromise with anyone in showing love or doing service to the people.

What was described by morality of soul by Ramalinga, Ramakrishna described it in other words. It is the morality of jiva, the living being, to be empathetic with others. Ramakrishna, like Ramalinga, was concerned with sufferings of others. Whenever a bhakta or a disciple approached Ramakrishna with some physical pain or mental agony, his heart sympathetically experienced the same, and his sensitive body went through those sufferings. It has been recorded that one day a boat man was slapped by another in the presence of Ramakrishna. He cried aloud, saying, "Help! I am hurt" and people acutally noticed on his back fresh wales recording mysteriously, the finger prints of the assailant.18 'At the sight of bereaved persons Ramakrishna's heart would melt as if he himself was the sufferer".19

These words are enough to show the real nature of compassion of Ramakrishna. He was able to feel and pine for others. Experiencing of woes and sorrows of others is the highest virtue. Only then can one really understand what is sorrow or for that matter others' minds. This is otherwise called empathy. If one is blessed to have this highest sense, then his human life on this earth is complete and meaningful, purposeful and useful.

Ramakrishna did not accept the preaching or helping or showing pity to others. Swami Ashokananda expressed this sentiments as;

"Service originates from love and sympathy in the ordinary plane... It seems still more beautiful, still purer and higher
to love and to serve the sufferer without any thought of the divine, simply because he is suffering. Forgetfulness of the Divine is perhaps nearer to Divine."  

Thiruvalluvar said, "Hold on the attachment of the Lord, (Who is without any attachment) to shed all your earthly attachments and then leave that attachment too to attain Him". Meaningful and thoughtful words are these to ponder over. One's attachment should not shackle one, but rather help him to shed it.

Voluntary and spontaneous service to others forms the basic principle of compassion. Ramakrishna was an ascetic but it would be surprising to note how far he lived for others. Once he said, "I am ready to die more than once and to be condemned to be born again in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul". To him a day without service was a useless day. Helping was thus a service to the Lord Himself.

Ramakrishna visualised the Almighty in each and everything. His universal love embraced all. This clairvoyance made him identify with both animate and inanimate things. He said;

"One day it was suddenly revealed that everything was chinmaya, the Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, altar, doorway, all was spirit: men, beasts, birds, everyone was chinmaya...whatever I saw, I worshipped".

And again;

"I see Him in all things. Men and other creatures seem to me like miniature figures clothed in flesh and it is the Lord within... Everything is pure spirit. And like a mad man I began to rain flowers over everything, everything that I saw, I worshipped".
One Alvar, one of the twelve vaishnava saints of Tamilnadu, identified himself what he ate as food, what he enjoyed as pawn and what he drank as water and thereby he found all these as the Great Forms of Lord Krishna. And this was the highest state of realisation.

Ramakrishna, by saying the above quoted words, became one with everything. The joys of the world, therefore, were his as much as the sorrows of the world were. He did not go into the silent bliss of samadhi, oblivious of the sorrows of the men surrounding him. Nobody can truly love God, if he does not love man and things around him first. Vivekananda later declared, "He who sees Siva in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased really worships Siva".

This quotation seems to be the translation of a verse of Ramalinga given elsewhere. Both the saints thus worshipped Siva, in their exemplarly path of compassion.

Ramakrishna, like Ramalinga melted even for plants. To him, they were full of sense and they had life. He said:

"One day in the course of Siva worship, I was putting the vajra on the Sivalinga, when came the revelation that the universe itself is Siva... That day ended my worship of Siva in His images. I was once plucking flowers when suddenly it was revealed that each flowering plant was a nosegay adoring the universal form of God. That was my last flower gathering".

One can hear the echoes of the song of Saint Thayumanavar, whereby he went to pluck the flowers for worship but could not do so after seeing the Lord within the flower itself.

Ramakrishna one day told M. about his matured state of compassion thus:
"I began to perceive God in all beings. Formal worship dropped away. One day I plucked a leaf, a bit of the bark came off. I found the tree full of consciousness. I felt grieved because I had hurt the tree... One day I tried to pluck some durva grass, but I found I could not do it... I cannot cut a lemon... One day I was about to gather some flowers... They looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the deity... I could not pluck them".27

A flower, a bark, a leaf and some grass were enough to produce those seismic tremors in Ramakrishna’s body. The world came to know that the plants too have life and consciousness through another man from Bengal, Jagdhish Chandra Bose. Ramakrishna, making his own body as the laboratory proved to the world that such things are true.

Vivekananda said once, "Him I call a mahatma, (high souled one), whose heart bleeds for the poor".28 Max Muller called Ramakrishna a mahatma and J.J.Jordens, in a book edited by A.L.Basham called Ramalinga a mahatma.29 Vivekananda’s words and the descriptions of the above two scholars have to be correlated. These are not empty words simply uttered for flattering. They carry a weight of immense nature. The universal brotherhood of the two saints as revealed in their lives, expresses itself as the virtue of a mahatma. The disciple of the saint of Calcutta gave the definition of the word, to show the world that one existed in such a way. The hearts of the two saints bled for the poor and the suffering. Their spotless lives, both physical and spiritual, were the witnesses for the greatest virtue of the compassion, the humanity has not seen so often. Vivekananda, when he described the qualities of his master, did not know that such a saint of same stature lived in the southern most part of India.

In the lives of the two saints, one can find an example of the bond of the divinity and man. God-intoxication, spotless purity and surging love for humanity were given their real meaning through the lives of the two saints.
Both Ramalinga and Ramakrishna had a commission to carry out. They were born to save the suffering humanity. As to them, God is one with the humanity, there was no difference in doing the service. They were born here for others, they lived for others and in their disappearances they showed the reality to others. It has been shown earlier how Ramalinga wished that all that he had in bliss and blessings should be had by the world also. Ramakrishna echoed these sentiments thus;

"The saviours of humanity are those who see God and being at the same time anxious to share their happiness of divine vision with others and unwillingly undergo the troubles of re-birth in the world in order to teach and lead the struggling humanity to its goal".30

And again,

"Great souls moved with pity at the sight of the sufferings of the world".31

The thoughts are autobiographical in nature. They do not need further explanation. Particularly the terms 'great souls' denote the meaning of mahatma.

Before concluding this chapter two glaring differences between the two saints are to be noted. Ramakrishna as shown in these pages was a man of immense love and a great soul of compassion. Yet it is to be noted with humility and with due regards, that he did not shun the two practices of meat eating and animal sacrifice. It is strange to know that a brahmin took flesh eating and Ramalinga, a non-brahmin advocated all through his life avoiding of meat. Very later Ramakrishna stopped eating meat but had fish instead. And also it is stranger that a saint who was able to visualise God even in flowers (and thereby stopped flower gathering) was a witness to animal sacrifice in the temple of Kali. He was not there when the animal was actually killed but moved out just before it was done.32
These two things are to some extent unpalatable to a south Indian. Regional differences are there; customs and conventions are there. In the south, asceticism means penance and vegetarian diet. It is even unthinkable of an ascetic having flesh for his diet. As men of God, the sanyasins are expected to avoid the body of one to nourish their own. They have to consume only the minimum in the forms of fruits, vegetables and other plant food.

But no correct explanation can be given for the differences. This doesn't mean that Ramakrishna was less in his state of compassion or Ramalinga was more in his. The truth has to be mentioned in a research field and it is not the purview to estimate the truth.

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IV BHAKTI

India is fortunate in the world to have bhakti literature in its fold. The concept of bhakti is ancient, as old as vedas. With philosophy, religion and ethics bhakti also finds its eminent place in an ordinary Indian life.

The origin of bhakti cannot be described correctly. Bhakti, like philosophy, begins in wonder, a sense of awe in the presence of God’s beauteous creation. The sense of awe and wonder, gradually develops into emotions of admiration gratitude and reverence.¹ These emotions of admiration sprang forth as songs, melodious and heartmoving.

The following passage is worth to be noted;

"A wave of spiritual ardour and devotion swept across the land of ours in the south during the seventh to ninth centuries. It was during this period that a good many saiva nayanmars and vaishnava alwars gave the people the melodious songs that stirred their emotion and chastened them once again since the days of Bagavad Gita and Paripadal (an ancient Tamil literature). These teachings were thrown open to all classes of people".²

And again another note from the same author;

"This hymnal literature seems to have developed spontaneously as in the case of vedic mantras... The religious mysticism of alwars and nayanmars is deeply devotional. A.L.Basham describes the hymns as among the greatest contributions of India to the world’s religious literature".³

The words give an idea about the bhakti cult in the south. Indian history, particularly south Indian history, if studied deeply, will make one understand the bhakti movement in the south. Particularly in Tamilnadu, in the medieval period this movement gained momentum.

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The scholars accept the origin of bhakti in the south. One says, "Bhakti is said to have been born in south". Another is of the opinion that

"From about the 6th century the religious life of South India was influenced by the vaishnavite alwars and saivite nayanmars. With them begins the line of poet-saints which later became a distinguishing feature of Indian life".

And Kshitimohun Sen comments that the absolute surrender (prabatti) of the bhakti cult came from the south. He continues "Bhakti first arose in the Dravida land. Ramananda and others brought it to the north and Kabir spread it".

These thoughts of great men prove clearly that Tamilnadu was the central seat of bhakti. It has been always the centre of religious heritage too. For thirteen centuries, right from the sixth to the 19th century, scores of saint-singers or poet-saints were born here to carry on the message of that religious heritage. Successive generations kept up that tradition in spite of many hardships like foreign invasions and other religious influences. It may be undoubtedly said that Ramalinga was the last in that line in the 19th century. Though Subramania Bharathi sang devotional songs in numbers, he was multi-faceted and was not singular in his ideal. The bhakti movement in the old tradition ended (for temporarily, one may hope) with the saint, Ramalinga.

In Bengal, Ramakrishna, after Chaitanya Maha Prabhu is being considered the greatest saint in the bhakti line. Ramakrishna did not write songs but he was a good singer. M. has given scores of instances, in his book, about the bhakti mood of Ramakrishna. Whenever there was singing by his disciples Ramakrishna joined them and danced too. Dancing and Singing are the essential features of any bhakti cult.

This chapter attempts to bring out the contributions of the two saints to bhakti movement.
What is bhakti? The definition varies. Narada described it as 'Parama Prema' or intense love towards God; the devotion is of the nature of nectar in putting a stop to of births and deaths. One does religious observances in the path of realisation. In course of time the mind is trained on the Absolute and becomes subtle. 'It flows like a stream into God. The state of mind thus attained to God is bhakti'.

Bhakti is not mere emotional outburst. It is prema, the devotion to God in its high ecstasy, a passionate love. It can be rightly described as integrating oneself with God through wisdom, jnana. To a devotee wisdom is not empty knowledge but true love towards the Absolute. Romain Rolland wrote that Ramakrishna at his death bed, recognised in Vivekananda all the signs of 'Bhakti-knowledge through love'. Vivekananda gave expression to that recognition earlier by the following verse in the presence of Ramakrishna.

"In wisdom's firmament the Moon of love
is rising full,
And Love's flood tide in surging wave
is flowing everywhere". And again;

"Make me mad with Thy love,
What need have I of knowledge or reason?"

Thus a line is drawn between bhakti and knowledge. Knowledge through love is bhakti and love is more important than knowledge, which at last should end and mingle with love. The purpose of attaining knowledge is to cultivate love to others and by that way towards God, which is the destination of human aspiration. Thiruvalluvar asks,

"What use of one's knowledge is,
If he does not worship the
Lotus Feet of the Lord".
These thoughts of Thiruvalluvar echoed in the heart of Ramakrishna thus;

"The object of study is to find means of knowing God and realising Him."\(^4\)

Ramakrishna, though had no much learning in the worldly sense, was a man of wisdom. He said one day that pure knowledge and pure love were one and the same thing.\(^{15}\) Vivekananda, who was there at that time, when heard these, gave a quotation from Hamilton: which was, 'A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion'. Ramakrishna was interested to know the meaning as the quotation was in English; when he heard it through the translation of Vivekananda, he beamed with joy and said in English 'Thank you, thank you'. Everyone laughed.\(^{16}\)

This fascinating anecdote gives the real meaning of bhakti, which is burning faith in God. Sradda, anuraga and prema are other words for it. One should forget one's learning to become ignorant of his knowledge, then blossoms the intense love. Thus, if worldly knowledge does not help in the way of achieving that love, then it is an impediment and really an ignorance.

No need is there to tell the bhakti state of Ramakrishna. As a man of devotion should be, he was meek and simple. His path was straight, undeviated and without distraction. To him it was an easy path to follow, because 'The path of bhakti is easy, because it fills the soul with peace and ecstasy'.\(^{17}\) Once one had that inner peace, that mental tranquility, then it will be easy for him to get whatever he liked. Ramakrishna said;

"One can know everything through bhakti... I wept before the Mother. 'Please tell me, please reveal to me what the yogis have realised through yoga and the jnanis through wisdom!!... She has shown me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas and the Tantra'.\(^{18}\)"
All knowledge can be acquired through bhakti. By serving and worshiping God contemplating on Him and constantly singing and chanting His names and glories one can be in the bhaktimargha.\textsuperscript{19}

This bhakti margha is not new. "Supreme mystics emphasized pure devotion and simple faith as sure path to the highest religious experience".\textsuperscript{20} Sivapurana states that the highest virtue, the state of devotion, is the realisation of God's presence in everything.\textsuperscript{21} A true bhakta has no discrimination. He has a universal outlook and larger vision. There is no friend or foe for him. As his mind is always surrendered towards God, he is free from all ills. Therefore he gains immense mental power.

"It is bhakti which gives the underdog that heart to face and brave the cruel rigours of fate shielded and protected by that powerful armament of soft love".\textsuperscript{22}

Thus love, though soft and gentle, is a powerful armament that protects one from the sorrows and shocks of the world. Soft and gentle ones are always stronger than those who are hard-nuts to crack.

Bhakti is a path of streamlined and sublimated emotions. It needs music and poetry to express itself in the form of songs. As bhakti is a powerful feeling, it comes out spontaneously as that of poetical thought. Ramakrishna was an ardent lover of music and poetry. He was delightful to join his disciples in singing and dancing. He recited beautiful hymns and passages to enjoy the bliss with others. He was attracted in this margha as an iron was to a magnet. He said;

"God is to man what magnet is to iron. Why does He not then attract man? Soul is thickly embedded in Maya. When we wash the iron with water it will be attracted. Likewise by constant tears of prayer and repentence the soul washes away maya".\textsuperscript{23}
An easy way of getting bhakti. One should weep at the altar of God and that will be enough; the tears will bring bhakti.

After hearing this M. changed the simile slightly.

He said to the master,

"In the beginning God becomes the magnet and the devotee, needle. But in the end the devotee himself becomes the magnet and God the needle, that is to say God becomes smaller to His devotees".24

This brings a reminiscence from one of Ramalinga's verses.

"My, Lord, You, the mountain of Grace,
Are clasped by me in my palms of love;
My Lord, You the king of kings
Have entered my thatched hut of Love".25

Bhakti does thus miracles. Rumi, the famous Sufi saint sings in the line of Ramalinga;

"Through love bitter things seem sweet,
Through love bits of copper made gold,
Through sickness love is health, and
Through love the dead rise to life".26

The tears shed by one, yearning for the blessings of God, are so powerful. They melt not only one's mind but his spirit and body also. They are holy and mighty. Ramakrishna once said, "One's devotional tears are his mightiest weapon".27 When Rumi sang that the dead rise to life through love, he did not mean that there would be no death at all for all. The true bhakta may die physically but he mingles with God in eternity, in deathlessness. This immortality has been stressed by all the saints throughout the ages. Manickavacakar sings;

"False am I, I know;
False is my heart, I know;
But, being a sinner though,
Through weeping and shedding tears
I can redeem myself and also can get You".28

Getting of divine is sure and evident through bhakti. Ramalinga, who followed the path of Manickavasakar sang;

"Thinking and musing over and again
Feeling and pining for constantly
Melting and softening within and without
Wetting and soaking the body all over
With the tears that spring forth like a fountain,
Oh men of the world!
'Say Lord Siva, Nectar of Grace Benevolent Wealth! My Master of Cosmic Dance
My rightful All',
If we pray again and again so saying
We will live in a deathless world.
It is not my imagination:
Nor am I telling lies; but I tell the Truth.
It is the correct time to enter the Golden hall of chiti".29

Ramalinga makes in these words one thing evident. Having devotion constantly towards God is enough; and that devotion should be cultivated by constant tears of genuine love; in course of time that will bring eternity, the deathlessness. Ramakrishna was having the same type of concept. He said to M. one day;

"What is needed is absorption in God, loving Him intensely. The 'Nectarlike' is the lake of immortality. A man sinking in It does not die but becomes immortal".30

The religious ideal of Ramalinga in its end was this deathlessness. He has sung about this in many songs and has written much in his prose works. But people did not understand properly what he meant by the word 'deathlessness'. They thought and still some of his followers think that there is no death for the saint. Physique is physique and a mortal body has to reach the state of mortal remains. The mind and spirit are more important
than this physical structure. His disciples did not understand the real meaning and brought all kinds of ill names for the saint.

Leaving this, songs like the one given above, sung by Ramalinga and thoughts like the one given above told by Ramakrishna are simple and nearer to the hearts of ordinary people. They bring the mind of the common folks nearer to God. Such songs are in abundance, in poetic excellence. They bring the union of spontaneous beauty of motive and lyric skill.  

Bhakti marga is of two types and it is a surprise to note that both Ramalinga and Ramakrishna used the same simile to describe them. Perhaps it may be found in our old scriptures. The two types are, the monkey and the cat. Ramakrishna said one day to his disciples;

"The young of a monkey clasps and clings to its mother tightly when she moves about. The kitten on the other hand does not do so but mews piteously and the mother grasps it by neck. If the young monkey lets go its hold, it falls down and gets hurt. This is because it relies upon its own strength. But the kitten runs no risk of such nature as the mother takes care. Such is the difference between self-reliance and entire resignation to the will of God".

Both Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were of the second type and surrendered their all, the body, the mind and spirit to their Gods. They believed in their heart of hearts that everything happens according to the will of God. They were extremely cautious and conscious that they had nothing on their own. This surrender makes one become meek and humble. Ramakrishna said;

"I am the instrument and He is the welder. I do as He makes me do. I speak as He makes me speak".

And now here is a verse from Ramalinga;

"My Master! If You make me sing I do so; If You make me bow down, I bow down;"
If You make me merge with you, I am blessed to do so;
If You melt me with Thy fire of Grace, I enjoy that bliss;
If You ask me to eat particular food, I do take it;
If You make me sleep, I am blessed to have it; Or
If You make me sleepless, restless and wander I become so and do as said;
Then, what else this low and humble man can do
If everything is done by Your will?"34

Words like these given above, show the true nature of both the saints. They show the complete surrender that they had with the divinity. It is to be noted that the principle of 'Saranagathi' (surrender), hailed as the best virute in vaishnavism had its orign in bhakti marga.

One day Ramakrishna was heard praying thus inside the temple of Kali,

"O, Mother! I throw myself on your mercy. I take shelter at your Hallowed Feet. I do not want bodily comforts. I do not crave for name and fame. I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for you, Mother".35

Compare this with the song of Manickavacakar;

"I don't want my relatives;
Nor I want any village or land;
I don't want any name or fame,
Nor I want those 'learned men',
Which is to be really learnt
I am going to learn hereafter".36

One should see the similarities in thoughts. The inner sentiment is that for such saints devotion, the bhakti alone is supreme and all else whether they are personal properties, or relatives or fame or name for which this modern world wanders, are all nothing. Devotion, simple devotion is enough. They are in no mood to forget the name of God, in any eventuality. Always
and in all places they chant the holy name of the Almighty. Here is a verse of Ramalinga;

"Let a son forget his loving mother, or
For that matter, let the mother forget her son;
Let the soul forget the body, where it lies, or
For that matter let the body forget the soul;
Let the learned mind forget all the arts it learnt,
Let the eyelids forget to make the winks,
But I will not forget, even if all these happen,
The Five Letters of 'Namacivaya'."  

This is the bhakti viraga. The soul pines for the Lord. It sees Him in every possible figure and form. The bhakta becomes once a mother, then a child, afterwards a friend and so on. He forgets what he is or what he is made of. There are numerous verses sung by Ramalinga in his zenith of bhakti state seeing the Lord in various relative forms. They are all in the nature of mysticism, which is nothing but the end product of real devotion, which makes one even forget his own name. Ramakrishna told one day to M.;

"I am in the mood of a child. That is why I am playing with the flowers this way. (He picked up the flowers brought by the devotees and touched his head, throat and navel with them)... I see God both inside and outside".  

This exalted state of divine consciousness of Ramakrishna evoked mixed response. The close disciples stood gazing at him with awe and wonder. But a few like Dr. Sircar commented this type of state as psychic imbalance. But to them here is a verse from Thiruvacakam, as the apt reply. Manickavacakar sings;

"They call us mad and shout, these worldly people,
(who do not know what is real)
Let them do so;
We have also the same right and
Let us call them 'mad' ".
Men of bakti are not living in a different world but in a different state. Leaving everything to God, they feel free, but they are always pensive and anxious to have the dharsan of Lord. There is no place for man, except God's abode which gives him solace. Whatever he may think or do but all of them culminate in divine power. Ramakrishna has given an anecdote in connection with this;

"A bird perching upon the mast-head of a ship in mid-ocean gets tired of its position and flies away to discover a new place of rest. But failing to find any other, it returns at last to the old roost weary and exhausted".\(^{41}\)

Kulasekarappperumal, the king turned into a vaishnavite saint and later took a place among the twelve alwars, sang the following verse, which in its essence and similarity the very echo of Ramakrishna's above words;

"My Lord, God of the holy place Vittuvakkodu,  
Where I can go and live, leaving your Lotus feet,  
I am just like that bird perching on the mast of the ship,  
Which flies and flies here and there to find another place for its stay,  
But returns to its older seat after much effort".\(^{42}\)

These words show without any iota of doubt that there is none other than God that one seeks as a resort and nothing is more important than the Almighty. Ramakrishna appealed to The Mother more than once that he had no place to go and had none to seek help. M. has recorded the following;

"Mother, I do not know how to worship. I am without austerity. I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy lotus feet."\(^{43}\)

And here is a beautiful verse of Ramalinga in the same vein:

"Oh, my Lord!  
If a father beats his prodigal son,
The mother will intervene and embrace him;  
If the mother beats him, the father's embrace  
will protect him;  
What can I do? I can not bear more; You are my father  
and mother,  
It is enough this suffering, the separation;  
And it is enough of your beating;  
Come and embrace me with Your Grace".44

It is not an unexpected thing that both the saints approached God in a similar mental state. It is the path of bhakti that takes one to that level. They were sure that with God alone this world has to move and without it nothing can exist.

It was an early morning. M. was singing alone a prayer song. He was not aware that Ramakrishna was standing behind him. The song expressed the anguish of a real bhakta who yearned for the grace of The Mother. It was a moving one and M. sang thus;

"I am without the least benefit of prayer  
and austerity, O! Lord!  
I am the lowliest of the lowly; make me pure  
with your hallowed touch,  
One by one I pass my days in hope of  
reaching your Lotus Feet,  
But you, alas I have not found".45

Hearing these lines, particularly the second line, Ramakrishna became immersed in that divine sorrow and his eyes became heavy with tears. The same emotion and sentiment can be seen in the verse of Ramalinga;

"O, Here runs the sun very fast, and  
The days run after him with the same speed  
one by one;  
My mind, why you afraid of the Death, and why
you wither and wilt in that thought,
Shed your fears, Have you not heard of Marghanda,
The Five letters 'Namacivaya' alone are our help".46

The devotional literature contains many forms of songs in its fold. Kirtan is one among them. This form was adopted by Nayanmars and Alvars in the south and saints like Thulsidas, Mirabhai, Chaitanya and others in the north. Kirtan is a form of flexibility which gives room for music and content. Romain Rolland noted;

"Chaitanya's disciples spread throughout Bengal. They went from village to village singing and dancing to a new form of music called kirtana, the wandering bride, the human soul seeking the Divine Love. The feet of the child Ramakrishna moved to the rhythms of these kirthanas. He drank the milk of this vaishnavite music and it is true to say that he himself became its masterpiece, his own life itself its most beautiful poem".47

These are poetical words indeed. Chaitanya's bhakti movement had an impact on Ramakrishna. An important and basic aspect of that movement was music-kirthana. Kirthana is a lyric form which allows one to laud various aspects of the Lord. Kirthana allows a bhakta to see Him not only as the Almighty, the all powerful Master or Father but also in the forms of personal close relationship such as companion, lady in love, child, father, guru etc. "The way of jnana is that of the absolute or impersonal God. But the way of bhakti is that of personal God".48 Therefore it is natural and normal to see the God in such a close relationship, so that the inner feelings are expressed more intensely and without any inhibition.

Ramalinga's collection of hymns was rightly named as Thiru Aruptha, Song of Divine Grace. Almost every song in this collection is filled with the nectar of bhakti. K.R.S.Iyengar wrote;

"Thiru Aruptha is a truly impressive and inspiring body of devotional poetry. The one perennial theme is Divine but
Ramalinga plays numberless variations on it, using with marvellous dexterity about thirty varieties of metrical form and many popular tunes. It is the bhava, the utter earnestness and sincerity, the total absorption in the divine, the complete identification all humanity and all life that made Thiru Arutpa wholly worthy of the name... The very qualities of spontaneity, emotive richness and mellifluous sweetness that make the songs immediately so effective and moving".49

There is no further need to describe the songs of Ramalinga. The above words are from a true scholar showing a fine judgement. Some of the songs were sung by people in the temples, in Ramalinga's presence. He had such recognition in his life time itself. In these songs one may find similes, metaphors, imageries and symbolisms. In spite of all these, the language and style are very simple, almost in a spoken form. One should remember that carrying the knowledge and literature to the popular mass in a simple language is a kind of renaissance.

There is a blending of poetry and music in rich lyrics in these songs, as a golden thread is concealed in the garland of gems, in these qualities. Using popular words, current phraseology and understandable style Ramalinga made these songs so vibrant and living. The people got themselves awakened because the other devotional songs which existed before, were not to their level of understanding. They were classical in sense, strictly grammatical and full of words of rare meaning. It was really a surprise. The basket of Tamil literature was full to the brim with the songs of saints like Nayanmars and Alwars who lived earlier. To find a place in it was not an easy thing. Others would have found it difficult to do so. But, for Ramalinga, to be on par with the saints of Manickavacakar and Thirunavukkarasar etc. was a tribute. The main difference or for that matter the real merit his songs had that place is in the words of a scholar;

"His imagery is profuse and it shows his love of nature and knowledge of human relations. Poetic vitality never fails
him. Lustre, sonority and vigour pervade all his poetry. It has the freshness of a morning spring, lovely ardent and playful, the blooming flowers and the warbling birds". They linked the earth to heaven.

Mysticism involves love and music. Songs of music and love bring the paradise to the earth. His songs produce that devotion which makes him one enjoy that divinity. They do not show an escape into another world of felicity. Here on this very earth, one could attain the reality, if one follows the bhakti marga. Ramalinga's songs are the witnesses of it. They have a very important place in the bhakti movement and religious renaissance.

Ramakrishna, though not a poet, was highly gifted with poetry and arts. From his childhood, as was evident from the words of Romain Rolland quoted above, he was infatuated in music and dancing. The wandering devotees and their songs were the attractions to him in that period. His life in bhakti movement was spontaneous. Dancing and singing were the two activities part and parcel in Dhakshineshwar. The group singing welded all sorts of people, the learned and the unlearned, the poor and the rich, people of low caste and high caste all came under his spell of music. As a mother holds her child in her bosom, so the bhakti holds the devotees in its fold together.

Bhakti is thus in a sense feminine in nature. Ramakrishna said, "Bhakti is the moon while jnana is the sun... Jnana is like a man and bhakti is like a woman". And further Ramakrishna elaborated this as following;

"Sri Krishna is called Tribange, (bent in three directions). It is only a soft thing that is capable of being twisted. So this form of Krishna implies that he must have been softened in some way or other. The softening in this case is by Prema or ecstatic love".

God Himself has been softened by that Prema. If it can do such a thing on God, it can produce still more deeper softening in human soul. Ramakrishna expressed this thought. It
will be useful to know the thoughts of Ramalinga on this matter. He has given a definition for the word bhakti.

"Bhakti is nothing but softening of one's mind. It brings softening of soul to one who prays God. Bhakti is seeking Grace of God".53

And again,

"Sun is the male form and the moon is the female form. The moon is in the right side and the sun is in the left side."54

One should remember that Lord Siva is worshipped at some temples as 'Arthanarreeswara', which means the 'Lord of having Goddess Uma in half of His body'. That half is usually the right side and Ramalinga said that side as the moon side. Mother denotes love and bhakti.

The words of the two saints may differ in some form but the meaning does not. The devotional songs contain both spiritualism and love, jnana and bhakti. It is worth to note the words of Sri Aurobindo here;

"It was always poetry of this type that was nearest to the heart and mind of the people. In abundance, in poetic excellence, in the union of spontaneous beauty of motive and lyric skill, this poetry has no parallel in its field in any other literature. A sincerity of devotional feeling is not enough to produce work of this high turn of beauty. It needs a rich and profound spiritual culture".55

Each and everybody cannot create such a skill or beauty in words. Devotion with a cultural background, which one has as his heritage, makes him do so. Wisdom and devotion thus interact to exhibit themselves as divine songs.

These hymns are our heritage. Almost all Indian languages do have bhakti songs. Music plays an important role in these songs. M. has given a long list of songs sung by Ramakrishna and other disciples in Dhakshinewhwar. Out of 5818
songs of Thiru Arutpa, 1010 verses are in the lyric form. It is almost one sixth of the total. Song and music are two powerful media that take one nearer to God than other types of worship. The famous saint-singer of Carnatic music, Thyagaraja worshipped Rama as Natha (the Absolute Sound) itself.

In later years Ramakrishna was a man of bhakti to its full meaning. "For a period of nine years (1856-64), he had been thinking of nothing but God in one or other of His divine aspects and the bulk of this period he had spent in the living presence of Personal God with different names and forms". At that period Ramalinga was living in Vadalur writing many lyrics. Contemporary saints thought and lived in contemporary thoughts and actions.

At the end of the quest Ramakrishna declared;

"The path of bhakti alone is best for the people of kaliyuga. It is an easy path... But one cannot realize God without prema bhakti or raga bhakti".

One of the disciples, hearing this asked, "Is bhakti alone sufficient for attainment of God, for His vision?" and Ramakrishna answered, "Yes, one can see God through such bhakti alone". Both the saints were of the view that bhakti is the simplest way to follow.

Ramalinga and Ramakrishna did not approve other marghas like yoga to attain realisation. They did not denounce them either. But they thought that these were not for ordinary people to be followed. Ramalinga said, "It is not necessary to do yoga. If one goes deep in it, then it would be very hard to return to normal level".

One day a student came to Ramakrishna and said that he had a vision of far off things and people. Ramakrishna advised him, "My boy, don't meditate for some days. These powers are obstacles to the realisation of God". Here is a song often enjoyed by Ramakrishna and M. has recorded.
"What need is there of penance
if God is worshipped with Love?
What is the use of penance
if God is not worshipped with Love?"60

This song stresses the point that bhakti is more important than doing penance or yoga.

Both the saints came from a rich heritage. Their predecessors had already made rich their fields and like two seedlings which later grew into great banyan trees they shone in the horizon of the bhakti world. "The creed of love as profounded by Chaitanya has found exquisite expression in lyrical poetry and music in a richly emotional school of devotional hymns".61 Ramakrishna rightly belonged to this devotional arena and has illuminated it like a star.

Ramalinga on the other hand was a son of a very great spiritual lineage, more than 1000 years old. He sings;

"My Father, Am I not one among them in the
Spiritual lineage, which thrives still
Like a plantain tree gives offshoots?"62

It was left to Ramalinga to carry on the torch of bhakti in Tamilnadu in the last century, when all was in chaos and our religion was in shambles. And he successfully did it.

The vedas had their birth in the north. Sankara and Ramanuja came from the south to give new vitalities to the vedas. The bhakti cult had its birth in the south. Chitanya, Tulsidas, Mira and others illuminated it to the maximum. These were not accidental. Even before the talk of national integration, this spiritual integration was there in India from time immemorial. The kingdoms changed; the boundaries changed; the lives of the people changed and the way of living changed. But this spiritual oneness was always the same, despite the difficulties during the ages. In the 19th century these two saints did service and played their role to maintain that oneness.
Renaissance is re-birth. It is carrying a movement, or a religion from one generation to another. To achieve this one or two persons of the colossal stature are needed. Bhakthi is said to be re-born with them. This re-birth or bhakti renaissance saw Ramakrishna and Ramalinga as their saviours.

Music and song are the two essential things in bhakti. Though music expresses one's inner emotions, it is really the language of the soul. Music needs external influences for its expression, no doubt of it. But one can feel the beating of the heart in one's music. That is why music attracts and moves the hearts of others. Music reaches its peak in divine songs. If sincere, it fulfils itself in prayer. One who follows it can hear the absolute sound within. That absolute is everywhere, in the whistling of the blades of grass, in the twittering of the birds and in the roaring of the thunder and torrents. The bhakta hears it and enjoys it. As God is omnipresent, so is music.

This chapter is concluded with the following words;

"When the great Hindu kingdoms declined, invasions increased, the ideas and institutions of Dharma and Bhakti were in peril, these minstrels of God, always on their feet, kept up the morale of the people and through the attraction of the form with which they played with freshness and variety on the refrain of morality and character and the superiority of special values over mundane pursuits revitalised the devotion and faith, the bhakti and shradda of the classes and the masses".63

These words of eminent Sanskrit Professor speak of the reality. The same author included the name of Ramalinga in the list of Devotional Poets and Saint-singers of India. To occupy a national place in the sky of the saintly world is the recognition given to the saint. Even now it is a practice in Tamilnadu, to sing a song of Thiru Arutpa in the classical concerts. His verses evoke a deep and empathic sense of bhakti in the minds of people.
Ramakrishna's contribution to bhakti movement needs no introduction or explanation. He was a magnum opus of the bhakti movement and the remnants he left are still the guidelines for the coming generations.

As it is, Ramalinga and Ramakrishna have been the last in the line of the bhakti cult. Nobody of such a high state is known today, future may produce one tomorrow.

"Devotion is the means of devotion
Devotion is the end of devotion."\(^{64}\)

"The path of religion for this age is
the path of devotion".\(^{65}\)

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MYSTICISM

The path to attain the grace of God is of four types; the attitude of a child (satpathra margha); the attitude of a friend (saka margha); the attitude of a servant (dasa margha) and the attitude of a lady in love (madhura). Thinking of God as one's Lord and yearning for his love and union, forms the basis for the madhura bhava. Bhakti literature contains many songs which expresses that intense and divine love. This mysticism, rightly called bridal mysticism is the highest experience in one's spiritual quest. Both the saints Ramalinga and Ramakrishna had experiences in that maha bhava and expressed those experiences in their songs and words. This chapter tries to deal with this aspect.

Aldous Huxley has defined the term 'mystic' thus;

"He is one who surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human and advances towards God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason and of human conceptual knowledge".¹

G.N. Mallik gives a different interpretation;

"Philosophy, by thought process, tries to know the Reality. It can reach the goal in two different pathways; beginning its journey either from God as the starting point or from the world. When it begins from God it is mysticism and when it begins from the world it is philosophy".²

After giving this definition for 'mysticism', Mallik himself admits that it cannot be adequately defined. He says,

"Mysticism is a phase of thought arising from a relationship established between human personality and the personality of God. The concept of personality is so rich in its content, so infinite in this thought process that it cannot be gauged in any way either from the rationalistic stand point or from the point of view of pragmatism. Owing to this immeasurable potentiality, mysticism cannot be adequately defined".³
From the above, one thing is clear. Mysticism has to be felt and experienced. It cannot be analysed and explained. Mysticism is an experience, experience of soul, which receives a message from divinity. The soul is great, holy and blessed to receive that. Rationalism or knowledge or intellect can do nothing before it. Ramakrishna said, "In the kingdom of God, reason, intellect and learning are of no avail. There the dumb speak, the blind see and the deaf hear".4

In mysticism the soul is in identity with God. No language can be enough to describe that spiritual experience. Not only mystics in India, but of other religions and other countries also had experiences of such state. The mystics in Islam, who are known as sufis, hold that the intellect and intellectual life in general were not only valueless but they were a positive hindrance.5 Once a group of intellectuals approached a sufii to become his disciples. He said to them, "To be able to receive aid from me you must go back to forget all that you have learnt".6

Learning imprisons one; knowledge limits one's thinking. The more one reads, the more he becomes a slave to his acquired power. He loses his originality and individual nature. Browning said;

"You keep studying facts and fumbling about them till one fine morning you get up with what may be described as an insight into them as if it was really a case of 'opening out a way for the imprisoned splendour to escape'."

The mystics find their 'selves' not in logic but in themselves. They released themselves from the prison of knowledge and thus found liberation and that beauty. When the learned philosopher argues and guesses what is what the mystic is lovable. Great saints have declared then and there that the purpose of human birth is to know God.

Mystics were of the view that to know God one should have love and the love should bring knowledge and not knowledge first. If one develops that kind of personal knowledge towards God, then it is the highest form of consciousness. This
'consciousness' in its essence is mysticism. Underhill said, 'It is the
soul's solitary adventure, the flight of the Alone to the Alone'.

Mysticism thus involves God and a soul. The essence of
this relation is the hope or faith that there is a 'master' thing
above all things, greater than anything. If there is a microcosm,
then there should be a macrocosm of which the first is a part. If
there is a beauty, then there should be one of more beauty. And
thus everything in this earth should have another thing more
beautiful, stronger and more splendidous. Mysticism leads one
from this microcosm to macrocosm and from 'beauty of form and
body to beauty of mind and spirit' and so to the Beauty of God
Himself.

This mysticism ... Neither numbers nor powers nor wealth
nor learning nor eloquence nor anything else will prevail
but purity, living the life, in one word anubhuti,
realisation".  

Mysticism is of various types according to one's spiritual
state and experience. Of them the most exalted one is that of
'nayaka nayaki bhava' or madhura bhava or bridal mysticism. Here
God is the Lord in Love and the pining soul is the Lady in Love.
Every religion has such mystical songs and no saint's song is an
exception to this. Christianity has such songs and Islam has too.
The songs of Sufis are in mystical forms. Hinduism is very rich
in its heritage to have a bounteous volume of songs. Ramalinga
has written more than 1000 songs on this form. Ramakrishna
expressed his 'bhava' to his disciples more than once.

Ramakrishna said one day about the nature of madhura
bhava thus;

"I assume the attitude of a child. To me every woman is my
mother. The attitude of a 'hero' is difficult (friendship). The
attitude of a servant(service) The attitude of conjugal love...
It has all the rest serenity, service, friendship and motherly
affection".  

And again;

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"To realise God one must assume one of these attitudes; sana dasya, vatsalya, sakhya or madhura. Madhura includes all the four".12

Ramakrishna, though an ascetic as in its true sense, thus advocated the path of madhura. All along his life he advised his disciples to be careful about women and gold. But he chose the path of love to get realisation. Ramalinga too shunned all the earthly pleasures and lived the life of a pure sannyasin, but chose the bridal mysticism to express and enjoy his spiritual bliss. Both were married in this life but did not enjoy the family life. Yet they identified themselves as the ladies in love towards God.

One may wonder or may express his doubt about this. Can an ascetic sing or speak of conjugal love? Is it proper to do so, even if it is possible? The same questions were asked when John, a christian monk sang mystical love songs. And the scholars answered these questions;

"This monk can give lessons to lovers!" exclaimed Arthur Symons in astonishment of St.John of the Cross. It would be strange if he could not, since their finite passions are but the feeble images of the infinite one".13

Human mind is capable of understanding the emotions of one time in another and the emotions of one in another's. Love, kindness, friendship etc. are tender emotions that can make any mind soft and melt it.

Mystical songs are symbolic in nature. Symbolism is an essential thing in bridal mysticism particularly. A mystic monk is akin to a human lover. Both are ready to die for their beloved. To fall sick, to part with anything, to have union with the Lord, to talk of His virtue, to enjoy His company and to pine of his separation extremely are common things in love. To subdue oneself in simplicity and surrender is the finest expression of love in ecstasy.

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God, when conceived as the Lord in Love, is a great masculine force and the soul as the Lady in Love, is a feminine and receptive force. The meeting of these two is 'the mystic rapture' of the marriage of divinity and humanity. ¹⁴ The love and attraction of the soul for God and those of God for soul are expressed here in terms of the love between man and woman. Thus the mystical poets bring life to earthly things by symbolising God as manhood and the soul as womanhood. The mystic love on the Absolute, which is Formless and beyond all senses, is not meaningless or merely emotional. It gives one strength to 'bear the joys and sufferings'; it gives the strength to shed down selfishness and to subdue and surrender to the Greatest and the Noblest.

Ramakrishna surrendered himself in this madhura bhava to God. He suffered much in the process and also enjoyed much in that bliss. The following passage is worth to note;

"The madhura bhava or the ecstatic emotions of a sweet heart, came upon him with a terrific rush and swept his mind away. He looked upon himself as one of the legendary gopis or milkmaids of Vrindavan rocked by the terrible pangs of separation from their supreme lover, Krishna. He fixed himself up in the pose of a gopi and began to dress, talk, behave and move about like a faithful young woman solely distressed by her lover's indifference. He went almost mad in his passionate love for his divine sweet heart... Krishna captivated his mind, made it wild with love and delighted in adding fuel to fire of this all consuming passion, of keeping himself all in while, at an inaccessible distance".¹⁴

This is a fine passage which enhances the mystical mind and spirit of Ramakrishna. His state of suffering did not end there and continued as shown below;

"Krisha's cruelty stabbed him and he felt as much distressed as the gopis. The pangs of separation became unbearable and the frenzy of a forlorn lover was upon him."
He gave up food, sleep and in fact all contacts with the outer world... His intense mental agony and anguish and severe austerities brought back his old physical sufferings. The burning of separation all over his body, oozing of blood through the pores of his skin and almost cessation of physiological functions during ecstatic fits visited him... Thus Ramakrishna represented in flesh and in blood a complete portrait, found in the vaishnava scriptures of Sri Radha".  

There is no further need to explain. The words are superb and poetic to complete the mental state of Ramakrishna in that exalted ecstasy. One could visualise through these words the lady of Ramakrishna pining and melting for the beloved, Lord Krishna.

Ramlinga's lady in love was not different. Ramalinga himself has given vivid descriptions in his songs about his love, suffering and ecstasy. The love of the lady is great and intense, unsatiatable and imperishable. She tells her lady companion that her Lord is going to bestow His bliss on her even when other bhaktas are begging and weeping, praying and pining for His blessings.

But her Lord is not an ordinary human husband. He is Purity, Life itself and He is her All in all. She suffers when He does not turn to her. Her mind gets dejected and she begins to abuse her Lord thus;

"Is He the same Lord, who
Drank poison to save the angels,
When they churned the milky ocean?

Cannot He remove my sorrow?

He adorns His crown with the crescent;
Won't like my moon-like face?

Sages say, that He rests inside the
Hearts of the devotees, then

Am I not one, more loving and more dutiful?".  

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Sensible and logical questions came from the lady but the Lord is beyond the senses and any logic. Suffering and agony are the part and parcel of bridal mysticism. To feel proud of being loved by God, one has to pay the costliest price. Symbolically, if a human soul wishes to be a thing of His attention it should shed down all its belongings. This leaving of attachments, load-shedding, is unmotivated and has no inclinations. And this is the highest kind of devotion too. To such a soul, even if offered, saloka(living in the same world with God), samipa (being near to God), sarup (having God like body) and sayujjya (union with God) are not great achievements.

There is a beautiful song in Tevaram of St.Thirunavukkarasar. Even at the first sight of the Lord, the lady forgets all; what are they and how is her mind?

"First she asked what was His name,
Then came the questions, where did He put up and
Which was His native place,
And that is all;
She became mad with Him,
She left her loving mother and father,
She forgot her well-trained 'acara', the way of living,
She forgot herself too and her name,
But the Lotus Feet of the Lord
She didn't, but surrendered and held firmly"!

This verse expresses the 'vairagya' one has, when he or she is on the path of spiritual pilgrimage. The saint here gracefully pictured a young virgin who is ready to lose everything, including herself and her name or fame to get blessed by her Lord. This is not infatuation, but passion of the highest state, the best margha of mysticism. To the lady nothing is precious or nothing is to hide. There is only one thing, one name, one thought and one Lord.

Ramakrishna echoed this consiousness of supersensuality thus;
"When one has that prema, one forgets all outer things. One forgets the world, one even forgets one's own body".18

And these words seem to be translation of the above quoted verse, in abridged form. Underhill wrote;

"The bride who has been so greatly honoured caught up to such unspeakable delight sinks her own will and is humiliated below herself".19

But this humiliation is voluntarily acquired and brings joy and respect, greatness and tranquility to one.

Vivekananda's words add further beauty to this sentiment. He spoke,

"The true lovers of God only want to serve Him and that in itself gives them full satisfaction. They seek nothing in return, not even moksha".20

A vaishnavite saint, Kulasekara Perumal (meaning one who worships the holy dust of the feet of the devotees) sings;

"Oh, my Lord Vishnu, the King of Seven Hills, The destroyer of the karmas which entangle me Like the roots of a plant; Bless me with your Grace, I want not to be a king of heaven, where The wealth is immeasurable and where The apsara women surround, I want not to be a king in this world either; and instead I want to be born as a fish in the holy pond of Sri Venkadam, where the flowers bloom".21

The saint's mind is in such a firmness even to refuse the boon of being a king either in heaven or in the earth. To him those royal splendour and luxurious way of living seem to be worthless and dustlike before God in His altar of divine love.

The feeling of separation and the suffering therefrom are great in this margha. Viraga is the right word which describes the
pangs of sufferings. Ramakrishna himself went through that agony and describes it thus;

"Immense is the suffering that arises from viraga. I was almost unconscious for three days while in that state I could not move and I lay in one spot... The earth with which the body was smeared got burnt. I used to feel as if a big spear had been passed through my spine. I would cry out at times that I was dying. But it was always followed by intense beatific feeling".22

To wait for Him and to weep for His grace is no doubt immense suffering; but it is a great 'sweet agony'. One who enjoyed that sweetness will like to have more weeping and more sorrow. Ramakrishna's words of enjoying the 'beatific feeling' make it evident. It is only a few on this earth who are ready to suffer so. No victory or joy comes without suffering.

The reason for this suffering is to be understood. When the mind of one inclined towards the Lord, naturally it wants to perceive Him in each and everything through the five senses. The Lord is not visible to these physical eyes; His words are not heard by these ears. But through sublimation of senses one can do so. It is possible for one in that state to speak with Him; to hear Him; and to see Him. Ramakrishna explained it this way;

"God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a 'love body' endowed with 'love eyes' and 'love ears' and so on. One sees with those love eyes', God.23

But acquiring of that 'love body' is not an easy thing. It is highly arduous and risk taking. Underhill tells, after giving a short description, that it is a state of breakdown of our senses. The thoughts are:

"Our bodies are animal things; made for animal activities. When a spirit of unusual ardour insists on using its nerve cells for other activities, they kick against the pricks and inflict (as the mystics themselves acknowledge) the penalty of mystic ill-health".24
Ramalinga underwent such ordeals and he has recorded them in a long verse.

"The skin as a whole dried up;
The nerves lost their rigidity and became flexible;
The bones became thin and brittle;
All the muscles shranked and adhered with the dried bones;
The blood condensed within and dried; and
The inner liquid (sperm) surged together
As a ball and centred in my chest;
There were sweets on my forehead,
My hair themselves broke into pieces;
My mouth spoke with stammer".25

Ramalinga continues to give these symptoms further and ends up with the bliss received by him at the end. It will be useful to draw a parallel from sufism.

"Sufists think that real love for God is too dangerous a thing to play with. It means death at every instant, a death severer than that of the body. The delicate ones must not practise love. The lion-hearted, calamity bearing ones alone place their foot in this dangerous valley".26

And again;

"The hair stands up; the body perspires and trembles with joy; tears trickle down; excessive joy wells up in the heart; the throat is choked up; the tongue is tight and the breathing is quietened".27

The description and the warning are to be noted seriously. The physiological activities completely undergo serious changes. The warning that delicate ones should not attempt this line is worth noting. Unbearable suffering is the price, one has to pay for the bliss he is going to have. But in the process the whole functions of the body and mind will go out of gear. It is not an easy thing to withstand the onslaught because our normal body,
which has its constitution for one purpose, tries hard being unable
to adjust with the new ordeals. Ramakrishna rightly said;

"An ordinary man would have died if he were to
experience even a fourth of the spiritual metamorphosis
that my body and mind underwent... For six long years
not a wink of sleep even visited my eyes and the
eyelids would never close, try though I might".28

And now Ramalinga expresses his condition thus;

"Lord Muruga, seated on peacock, the son of Siva,
The Everlasting nectar, My Life itself,
Stood before me; that is all,
I forgot myself; my blue eyes pregnant with tears
Left the eyelids and the virtue I had till then
Left me".29

Leaving one's honour and virtue, one has to bow down
in extremity to God. But this surrender springs forth like a
fountain with 'willing' pleasure. Ramakrishna continues;

"Mahabahava is a divine ecstasy. It shakes the body and
mind to their very foundation. It is like a huge elephant
entering a small hut. The house shakes to its foundation,
perhaps it falls to pieces... The burning pain that one feels
when one is separated from God is not an ordinary feeling.
It is said that this fire of anguish scorched the leaves of
the tree".30

Ramakrishna thus gives a vivid description of the spiritual
condition. It is just like going through the fire. If that fire
scorches the leaves of the tree, what it will do of the human body
can be understood. The body falls sick and an extreme weariness
comes. Ramakrishna said;

"Assuming Radha's attitude I would cry for Krishna
and assuming Sita's attitude I would cry for Rama".31

And again;
"When the spiritual waves arise, the consciousness of the body vanishes, but it tells upon the body in the end".  

This is the state of the mahabhava of maximum hardships. But these do not deter the valiant soul in pursuing its journey. Separation from the Lord makes them more and more lovable. The sufferings are in one way or the other the blessings because they make them bolder, stronger and more sensitive. Narada said once;

"He (a devotee) feels the pang of separation from his beloved, which is the highest consummation of love. He is eternally united with Him in separation from Him".

Real and meaningful words indeed. To recognize and enjoy the love of a mother, a child has to be separated from her. It is natural, then to receive the love and the blessings of the Great Mother, God, one should be in that position.

An alwar, the vaishnavite saint, Kulasekara Perumal, wished he was made a stone in the foot steps of Sri Vengadam, the Seven Hills, so that he would see the Lord daily in His procession; he wished to be born as a fish in the pond where the Lord would come for his morning bath and begged again and again not to bless him with moksha, because it would be the end of seeing Him.

Ramalinga also has vividly described all his agony in his songs. His summum bonum in bridal mystical theme, is a collection of 100 verses rightly named as 'Anubhava mala', the garland of spiritual experiences. It was his last work and considered as the finest literature in bridal mysticism. It would be beneficial for all, particularly to those disciples of like sentiments if they are made available in translation. The step by step achievement in his spiritual pilgrimage is given in it.

Ramalinga's lady in love was in that extreme mystical condition. Without understanding her nature, the people called her
mad. By undergoing the metamorphosis, as Ramakrishna called it, she is now new and completely changed. Her parents, friends and others could not realise the blessed state in which she is. But she is matured enough to laugh at these people. That 'madness' makes her still stronger to continue her spiritual journey. She does not heed to words of others. Leaving her the people began to attack and defame the Lord, whom she loves. They said,

"Her Lord is a beggar, and He begs
in the streets and burial ground
with a human skull in His hand;
He has no proper dress to wear and wears
the tiger skin around His loin;
He adores Himself with the ornaments of snakes;
such a mad Man is He;
He is in the form of Fire, and melts everything;
He lives in the burial ground and hides Himself
in every being and thing".35

One should see the beauty of the attributes given to Siva by Ramalinga indirectly. But these slanders do not stop the lady in love in her endeavour. His dress, food, dwelling place or His appearance all these are not at all a matter for her. Whatever might be His virtue, she does not care. Once she has Him in her heart, mind and thought, then there is no distraction, whatever may be his attributes. To her His Lotus Feet alone are the things to be kept in mind for ever. She declares, "Even in my dream I won't leave my love on Him".36 They called Him as a form of all consuming Fire, but she knows it more than anybody and wants to be melted by that fire. Lord Siva is of golden colour, the colour of evening twilight. The Fire, the thing they attributed instead of creating a fear sense in her, reminded the Divine Body of Lord Siva. To mingle with the Lord without any fear or inquiry or reasoning is the foremost end of mystical pilgrimage. And the lady in love of Ramalinga continues that path.

It will be useful to note a parallel here. One of the songs enjoyed by Ramakrishna, was called 'Agamani', a song sung
in connection with Durga puja on its first day to invite Uma, the Goddess to Her parent's house. Vivekananda sang it in the presence of Ramakrishna. It is in the form of Uma's mother speaking to Her;

_Tell me, Uma, how have You fared alone in the stranger's house?_

_People speak so much ill of us. Alas, I die of shame;_

_My son-in-law smeared His body with ashes from the funeral pyres,
And roams about in great delight,
You too along with Him, cover with ash Your golden skin;
He belongs to the beggars' sect, going for alms, How can I bear it, being Your mother? This time when He returns to claim You, I shall say to Him, 'My daughter Uma is not at home'.³⁷_

Though there are barriers of time and distance, one can see here in these words same thoughts echoing from the south to north.

The lady in love reaches the maximum. However worse it may be, the suffering has to come to an end. She knows that her Lord will not deceive her. The lady of Ramalinga sings,

"He is not a deserter; He is not a man of cheating type. He is full of pity. His difference towards me is not due to hatred. All along my life my inner mind has understood clearly that He is good and benevolent. It is futile to be angry on Him. Knowing His grace and benevolence, it is good to leave the matter as it is. He knows what I want, and He will bless me with it at the appropriate time. Let Him forget me, but I have come to a conclusion that I will not forget Him ever. Keeping my thoughts on Him I have risen myself to various stages and I cannot stoop down now, It is His will to do or not. Who am I?".³⁸
And this is optimism. The lady in love hopes and waits for His coming. Her suffering still persists.

Ramakrishna reached that point of no return. He said later about his suffering;

"In those days of bewilderment as having face and breast reddened by the afflux of blood his eyes filled with tears and his body shaken with spasms".39

These are the words from Romain Rolland. But Ramakrishna's words echo the same physical pain;

"One day I was torn with intolerable anguish. My heart seemed to be wrung as a damp cloth might wrung... I was racked with pain. A terrible frenzy seized me at the thought that I might never be granted the blessing of divine vision. I thought if that were so, then enough of this life. I was suffocated".40

Like Ramalinga, Ramakrishna was alone, aware of the 'All-Benevolent Grace' of the Lord. He was also optimistic. He did not lose hope. He said one day as an advice to Lady in love;

"God is extremely attentive. He has heard everytime you have prayed to Him. He will surely reveal Himself to you someday or other".41

This optimism did not fail. Her hopes were not belied. Her dream materialised one day. And He came at last to bestow His grace and blessings. She was in complete bliss. This ecstasy carried her to the last stage in that spiritual pilgrimage. This bliss, or ecstasy in its final perfection is an experience too hard to explain.

"It is very difficult to describe in language the exact nature of this state save that the vision of experience is always the vision of the unity... The last stage of ecstatic state is no doubt rightly declared by these mystics as a supreme joy, the most sublime conception of rasa lila".42

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The suffering and the ordeal the lady lonely born, have been paid with bliss. The bliss is directly proportional to the sufferings. More the suffering, the more is the joy. Every mystic has enjoyed this ecstasy. After so much of hardship, Ramakrishna told about his state:

"I lost consciousness and fell. How I passed that day and the next I know not. Round me rolled an ocean of ineffable joy".43

His condition has been described by another author thus;

"A few days after... he came to end of his heart-rending love episode. The curtain suddenly rose. Sri Krishna with His soul enthralling grace appeared, walked up to him and merged in his person. His mad yearning was thus set at rest and his heart became full of divine bliss. The thrill of the vision kept him spell-bound for a period of three months."44

It is very difficult to tell what kind of joy that was. Like all other experiences, it is also an experience, purely personal and purely emotional. To know that, one has to undergo that experience personally. Ramakrishna said;

"One cannot explain the vision of God to others. One cannot explain conjugal happiness to a child, five years old".45

Ramalinga was of the same view. What he had seen in his vision, he says, God alone knows. Yet he gives vivid description of the transformations that took place in his body and mind. The love that was illuminated by the blessings of God has been illustrated in his songs, with the mystic rapture he received. The divinity and humanity had their confluence in that holy vision. Ramalinga has given the title 'miracle of vision', for the ten verses which give the live picture of the Sublime Beauty, he visualised.46 The lady in love could not believe her eyes, when that happened. She wonders,
"Is it dream or real? This vision of the
Absolute, all-powerful,
Is it an illusion or real?
That Beauty grows always and is everlasting;
Nobody can describe its magnitude.
That vision not only blessed me, but also
Through me all my near and dear were
fortunate to enjoy it;
My friend, you cannot draw it in painting;
That beauty is boundless, immeasurable
And it doesn't leave my eyes even for a second".+

This beatific vision brought changes in her outer form. Her body had a peculiar change, shining and more graceful. People who called her earlier mad and who spoke ill of her, began to respect and praise her. Her mother happily said that the daughter was sleepless then. (What a surprise to learn that a mother who ought to have worried about the sleeplessness of her daughter, is happy! She knows the true reason, for the enlightened vision her daughter received radiated outside also).

The body of the lady in love, after merging with the divine, has a smell of divinity. This sweetness is peculiar and abnormal, not like that of anything found on this earth. Like camphor, it sheds smell all around. Wherever the lady goes, those places are perfumed by it. The mystic rapture, the ecstasy, the illumination and the divinity itself make her unconscious of this world and her 'self'. By embracing that bliss of Lord Siva, the illimitable ocean of joy, she illuminates her body within and without. And now, can she have that ordinary human death?; no; she is deathless. She is now free from any wants. The mountain of rich, the Lord as He is, has bestowed on her all. The illumination has lit the light of true wisdom inside her heart and hereafter she has no birth or death. The lady dances in joy saying "What good deed I did in my previous births to receive such a boon!"49
Ramalinga at the same time gives some hints about his condition, after receiving the blessing;

"My king of kings made this body of flesh and blood, into an illuminated matter, by melting my tender feelings. This joy is greater than that of all seven seas. Whenever I think of it, it surges above and surges over. What is the earthly happiness before it? It is meaningless".  

And then Ramalinga gives the changes that took place in a series, one by one in beautiful words, thus;

"All my senses lost their function, but
A nectar had its origin in my brain, and
It ran all over the body (like a fountain flowing from the hills),
There were sweats on my forehead,
My face, still shining, got illuminated further with a golden beam,
My breath was cool and soft like a breezee,
There arose a roar of laughter within my frame,
Hair all over the body became brittle
   and fell scattered;
Tear drops rolled down from the eyes, and
   they wet my body till they reached my feet;
My mouth mumbled, lips shuddered(like leaves in the wind);
Musical instruments produced the Absolute sound,
   'natha' into my ears,
My tender heart moved here and there,
My hands folded like a lotus closing in the eve... but
My mind melted and had a Light within".  

The words themselves are meaningful. There is no need to elaborate further. The various changes in the physical and physiological functions of a human body during the mystical experience are given here vividly.

The following words are worth to note, for they echo the same sentiment.
"The certainty and rapture of this experience of spiritual emotion is all the more amazing when we remember the record of, it was written in agony. When he (Jefferies) was wrecked with mortal illness, his nerves were shattered with pain...physical pain material trouble seemed to serve only to direct him towards and to enhance the glory of the spiritual vision".52

These words are about an English poet. But they are in letter by letter are applicable to Ramalinga's words given above. Beyond boundaries of man made nature, this spiritual vision is same everywhere.

Ramakrishna endorsed these thoughts in the following manner.

"The experience of spiritual ecstasy shakes and sometimes shatters the body of the devotee... The fire of Divine Wisdom burns all passions, anger and other evils and in the end destroys the consciousness of I, me and mine".53

"The mystic ill-health or suffering could not make a mystic despair. 'Despair' is the greatest enemy in the path of progress".54

As long as they have that ecstasy, they need not be sorrowful, no room for any despair. "True ecstasy is notoriously life-enhancing... the sick forth from ecstasy, healthy and with new strength; for something great is given to the soul".55

Hriday, the relative of Ramakrishna, who was with him for a greater period, seeing the intoxicated state of Ramakrishna exclaimed, "Never before have I seen such ecstasy, and never before have I seen such illness".55a Such illness borne by Ramakrishna, shows his fearlessness and sustainment in such a situation. There is a meaning in the words of Sambhu Mallick, when he commented on the mental vigour of Ramakrishna: "Here is a great hero without a sword or shield".55b

Once he got the spiritual ecstasy, Ramakrishan's body began to shine in a peculiar way. An author says;
"His body looked as bright as gold. People began to stare at his lovely appearance and he had actually to wrap himself in a stout sheet to keep off public gaze. He even prayed to the Divine Mother to take back his outward beauty".56

And here is the prayer of Ramakrishna;

"My chest was always flushed. Then I said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside! 'That is why my complexion is dull now. If my body had been still luminous, people would have tormented me; a crowd would always have thronged here... Now there is no outer manifestation... that keeps weeds away".57

In the fear of the undesirable elements, who would have taken vested interest, Ramakrishna concealed his golden and illuminated body. Ramalinga too had that golden shine in his body. He says;

"I crossed with haste the steps of spiritual adventure,
I tasted the nectar of high ecstasy,
I melted within and tears flowed out,
Then I had the smell of jnana, and
At last I found my Lord;
My body made of shaggy flesh and brittle bone became golden and shining".58

"This physical body became golden one,
The Great Light of Compassion
Brought me the nectar of jnana".59

"I attained the golden form of deathlessness".60

But Ramalinga was not fortunate to conceal this golden shine or to avoid undesirable elements. There was a big crowd always around him. Some of them misused his mystical power and began to manipulate it in their own way for their own ends. They were like those 'weeds' as called by Ramakrishna.
In this mystic pilgrimage, the final stage is called the seventh one. There is a striking similarity in the descriptions of all the mystics about this stage. Underhill has given these seven stages as;


The sufis call these seven stages as seven valleys. It is then not surprising that Ramalinga and Ramakrishna have spoken of these seven stages and particularly about the seventh stage. The last stage, annihilation of self is nothing but merger in the Absolute.

Ramakrishna said thus:

"What happens when the mind reaches the seventh plane cannot be described".62

"After remaining constantly in samadhi for 21 days the sadhakas break the thin veil in between and become one with the Lord. This eternal union of the jiva and the paramatman in the sahasrara is known as getting into the seventh plane".63

And again,

"The seventh stage is Prema, the most intense love of God. It goes hand in hand with mahabhava. The two marks of this stage are forgetfulness of the world and forgetfulness of the self... This brings the devotee face to face with God... Prema is ripe fruit... God comes to him whenever he calls".64

Ramakrishna by these words has given his own state. After getting an illumination both in mind and in emotion his self was able to understand and enjoy the unifying principle of reality. He came to know that everything in the universe is enveloped in the Absolute, and a state of calmness and composure with illimitable joy descends on him, who understands this.

Ramalinga earlier has described that there are seven veils, (against the thin veil spoken by Ramakrishna) one has to break one by one. When one is able to break the last one, one sees
God face to face. At Vadalur, where he founded the Sathya jnana sabha, the Absolute in the form of Light, called Great Light of Compassion, is behind the seven screens. Symbolically these denote the seven stages one has to cross to see the God. The screens are of various colours starting from black, goes through blue, green, red, yellow, white and reaching the last one in the colour of mixed. Various interpretations are being given for these. But one thing is noteworthy. Even now once in a year, on the day of Ramalinga's disappearance, these veils are lifted one by one and devotees who gather in thousands have the darshan of the Great Light.

To conclude this chapter and this project the following song of Ramalinga, has to be deeply thought of, as it is the summum bonum of the seventh stage of spiritual pilgrimage. It is in the form of address by the lady love to her lady companion.

"My friend, what to tell of what I have seen 
in that golden chamber of the Lord;
First there was a mountain of jothi,
I went there and at the end found a street;
I walked in and there was a stage
in the middle of the street;
I climbed on it and entered where
I found a big hall through which I pursued;
Then there was a seven-storeyed structure,
How can I express in words my experiences
in the seven storeys?
In one, the white pearl turned into blue,
In another dark blue turned into coral red,
In another emerald green turned into ruby's red."
did not stop him but showed the inner path leading further. He entered it and saw two figures of man and woman. By their guidance he reached the temple of Uma, the Sakti. By Her grace

"I reached the hall of Nataraja, my Lord,
What I received there
I cannot tell,
God alone knows, my friend,
God alone knows".65

This is a long song, full of symbolisms with philosophic meaning, yet beautifully describing the seventh stage of mysticism. The last line 'God alone knows' thus brings down the curtain.

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CONCLUSIONS

The ideas of our ancestors are golden and have to be hailed for ever, no doubt. But such an approach should not be rigid. Society changes according to the change in time. The ideas also have to be adopted to those changes in society. Stagnation in any field does not show growth or development. Tradition should be preserved; culture should be protected. But that doesn't mean that they should be made stagnant. Rather they should be made alive, after doing some necessary changes. In the course of time some ancient thoughts will disappear and some will be altered. A good social scientist has to anticipate it. A society grows as much as an individual does. It suffers like him too. A society which adapts to the needs of the time alone will survive and develop.

But this is adaptation. There is no destruction of old values in it. It is restructuring, not making new. No society can thrive or cherish after forgetting the age old and cherished values. Social changes will not come in a few days or years. As in the biological evolution, it will take a long time to materialise. The interphase, the changing period, is painful and full of crisis. In this evolution the basic vitality does not change. The breath and heart beat remain the same. But the body and external structure tend to be changed. If yesterday's society is anachronistic today, present society will face the same death tomorrow. Nothing should be thrust into the society or removed from it suddenly. The traditions of this land centred on society are really the traditions of religion also. Therefore it would be more appropriate if a man of religion asks for social reformation than a man of social science does. Any religious service without taking into account the social factors, will not succeed. No religion survives merely on empty rituals and dead customs. It should be taken to the society and in reverse society should become the centre of the religion.
SOCIAL SERVICES

The service of the saints to society, as analysed in this project, are centred on the people. There is no religious autocracy in it. They rose spontaneously, keeping in mind the life of the people as its basis.

Humanism is a part of renaissance. The saints did not limit themselves with men only and even the plants and animals received their attention and love. They were full of compassion and to them everything was having an eternity in it. Really those who serve for others deserve to receive the Love of God. That service does not expect anything as its wages. If one goes through these pages, it will be evident that these saints received less from the society but gave it more. They proved by their lives that true asceticism means shedding off selfishness to serve the needy.

Social service itself was a yagna to them. In those days, speaking against casteism and superstition was unthinkable; it was nothing but a revolution. As long as there is casteism no compassion can exist; and as long as individual morality exists, society will be safe. A true education, which builds character first, is necessary to cultivate noble virutes. The same education will bring peace within and without. The two saints thought much and spoke much about these aspects. The project has analysed these aspects.

'Feeding the poor' is a noble virtue, which has been followed traditionally in all sects and in all periods in India. In the last century, it was a necessity. Famine and starvation were the rule of law. People suffered like anything. 'Sathya Dharma Sala' was a turning point in such a state of suffering. Food for all, irrespective of caste or religion, forms the nucleus of a better society. Surprisingly the views of Ramakrishna were akin to those of Ramalinga. To feed all, does not mean beggary. Nobody should beg in the society. Begging makes one lose his stature and that is a degradation. In a good society, beggary is a stain. This project has brought out the contributions of the saints in stressing the
importance of feeding the poor but at the same time the degradation of begging.

The world still exists by the presence of great souls. Social uplift and human progress are being effected by a few men of compassion. A Buddha, A Jesus and a Gandhi proved by their lives to the world the illimitable spiritual power and mental strength of an individual. In that tradition Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were elders to Gandhi. The reason for their victory lies in stressing individual morality, which involves a basic virtue, compassion as its basis. The views of the saints are relevant for today’s world also.

The views of the two great souls on education have been given in this project in detail. Education should satisfy the needs of the changing society. But character should be the first and foremost product of education. An individual can raise his status by the education he gets; but that education and enhancement should be useful to the society he lives in. Education is a wealth common to all; everyone irrespective of his birth or religion should have access to all types of education. They were of the view like Gandhi, that real education should develop body, mind and soul simultaneously. These thoughts have been revealed in this project.

In short, a society sans differences on caste and religion, a society sans starvation and famine, a society where poor are looked after by the rich, a society of educated people, in the sense education of character first and a society of individuals with individual morality was the dream of the saints. If one goes through the pages of this project, one will not fail to note their relevence even today; in fact they are more relevent today than they were hundred years ago. The aim of this project is that these teachings should spread over the nation to solve the present day problems.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Ramalinga and Ramakrishna occupy a very great position in religion and history of the 19th century India. They were the
beckoning stars of renaissance. For the ignorant people, they explained by their way of living, that religion meant not blind rituals and dead customs, but love and service. They were bold enough in a revolutionary manner to condemn superstitions. They were ready to accept sensible and rational new things as much as they were ready to shun the out-dated practices. They revived the bhakti renaissance of the medieval period, to save, support and sustain people's faith in the age-old ever-living religion. Both of them lived among people and carried religion to them. They interpreted religion in new ways and tried to make it relevant to the needs of the time.

Worship is an individual act done by a devotee. It should be left to him to choose the mode of worship. Nobody has any authority to compel him to follow a particular path. 'Form' or 'Formless' he has to decide. The saints made this point clear by stressing the need of both the Form worship and Formless worship. This project points out how Light worship was hailed by the saints.

The principle of Sanmargha of Ramalinga, was none other than the religious tolerance and secularism of Ramakrishna. They were men of religion, true to the meaning of the word, and therefore they did not denounce the faith of others. Today's world is in trouble due to religious fanaticism. This project has attempted to use the teachings of the saints to save the nation and the world from the above disaster. These thoughts are universally acceptable, even now, but they were not new and founded by the saints. They have been sustained here in this land and religion from ancient times. This project points out how the saints revived these thoughts.

Science has developed to an unimaginable dimension. Religion and rituals have come to lose their old pomp and splendour. Peaceful life is the need of modern man. No man can live without the use of science; live forgetting his religion. Thus religion and science have nor can he become the two sides of the human coin. To achieve a scientific religion, man must cultivate the virtue of compassion. War clouds, destabilisation of natural balance
and pollution threatens mankind. Nobody worries over the sufferings of others. No nation worries over the sufferings of another. This is not a true symbol of human achievement. Compassion is needed more now than ever. A man should be a man and humane. Without compassion, he cannot live a meaningful life. The real parameter for humanity is compassion, with which alone humanity will survive and without it nemesis is certain. This project has brought out that the saints lived on this earth to show the veracity of the above fact. They were the finest examples of this virtue.

Bhakti is one of the wealths of a rich heritage in India. The bhakti movement has arisen then and there in India throughout the ages. But the movement did not establish a new religion or creed but tried to re-interpret the age-old ideas to the people of that time. People were brought again to the old way of living and the real wealth was taught to them. Whenever despondency and helplessness were the rule of the law, spiritual giants rose in the horizon as guiding stars, to infuse faith in the minds of the people not to lose their integrity. The 19th century saw such a bhakti renaissance in the lives of Ramalinga and Ramakrishna by tender and simple living, but by powerful teachings and influential living, they poured enormous confidence in the minds of the people. Their thoughts were sincere and deep and they produced the expected result. This project has underlined their powerful contribution to bhakti movement in the last century.

Morality is the foundation of any religion and morality does not come all at once. It has to be practised through tolerance and love. Secularism in religion is the need of the day. Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were the symbols for this tolerance. The project makes clear that through their simple lives among the poor, by following a devoted religious path they respected faith of everyone.

Thus Secularism in religion, faith in God without succumbing to the pressures of both the conservativism and neo-intellectualism, Light worship with pure love, compassion and bhakti
through service to humanity—were the contributions of the two saints.

Ramalinga and Ramakrishna were men of mysticism. They were really the Hindu Siddhars. This project has dealt at length how they achieved the pinnacle of the siddha cult. Their views against casteism and rituals are nothing but part of siddha cult and philosophy. One God and One World were the best principles as visualised by the mystics.

Bridal mysticism is the culmination of the spiritual pilgrimages. Human body mingles with the Divine; human mind merges with the Divine; and human love finds perfection in the Divine love in mysticism of this sort. Through their elevated souls the two saints brought meaning to mysticism. This project has dealt with this in detail and points out that they may be the last in this tradition.

A SAD NOTE

As the services of the two saints are thus in the nature of renaissance of our ancient wisdom, it is a pity that some enthusiastic disciples and followers of both the saints claim that the saints founded new religion or sect separately. In Tamilnadu there are some, who claim that the sanmargha as hailed by Ramalinga is a new religion and Light worship is a new form of worship. It is laughable and condemnable to say so. If one goes through this project he will clearly understand that Ramalinga tried to revive the bests in the Saiva cult. It was not at all his aim to found any new order. More than once he himself had denounced the very idea of calling him even a swamiji.

Likewise some of the disciples of Ramakrishna have begun to tell that Ramakrishna's principles are very much new to India and it is pitiful to note that they are even trying to get a minority status for Ramakrishna Mission under the constitution. (Refer the article 'Quest for a non-Hindu identity' for Ramakrishna Mission, written by one Ram Swarup, in The Indian Express, dated 19.9.90).
Vivekananda declared that 'Ramakrishna's teachings are the gist of Hinduism'. (Selections of Vivekananda's Works, 397). and again, 'Ramakrishna has come for the regeneration of India' (Nationalistic and Religious Lectures, 72). Romain Rolland anticipated such an enthusiasm would come among the disciples and warned that even Ramakrishna was dead against any kind of Ramakrishnaism. (209).

By saying these things, no disregard is shown to the saints, but actually their greatness is revealed in true form. They belonged to the religion of mankind and they imbibed all that is best in Hinduism to bring the renaissance in the lives of the people. There is nothing wrong to tell that they followed Hinduism or for that matter they lived like our ancient saints. Only for the new ideas or thoughts they uttered, to say that they do not belong to Hinduism but belong to a separate identity, is not justified. This project all along has shown that they echoed the ancient thoughts in a new way and form. The method was new but the contents were the same.

Thus the project comes to an end with the note as follows:

Vivekananda said one day of his master that "Outwardly he was all bhakta, but inwardly all jnani... I am the exact opposite" (CHI.549). With humility to the core Ramalinga lived a life of jnani. In the above words of Vivekananda, with a slight change, it may be said that "Outwardly he was all jnani, but inwardly all bhakta". Ramalinga began his spiritual journey as a jnani and ended it as a bhakta. In contrast Ramakrishna began his pilgrimage as a bhakta and ended it as a jnani. In the life of Ramalinga the sun, (jnana) turned into the moon (bhakti); and in the life of Ramakrishna the moon turned into the sun. It was Ramakrishna who said these words:

"Sometimes there appears that unique light which may be called the lunar-
solar light... It 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 occurence as the phenomenon referred to above".

(Sayings, 226).

No explanation is needed. Ramalinga the sun and Ramakrishna the moon, mingled in Ramalinga the moon and Ramakrishna the sun.

"HOLY IS THE SOURCE, HOLY IS THE COURSE, AND HOLY IS THE ESTUARY".
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