

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

Human Aspects of Sri Ramakrishna

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The *Avatàra* or Incarnation of God comes down for the welfare of the common people, because they cannot afford to go to the *Avatàra* who can be reached only by hard austerities and superhuman purity. That is why, when the *Avatàra* comes, he is known only to a few sages, while he remains unknown to ordinary people. Sri Ramakrishna used to give the example of a king in disguise to explain this incomprehensible phenomenon. A king of a country, he said, used to move in disguise amongst his subjects to enquire about the state of affairs in the society and most of the people could never recognize the king. But his very intimate officers knew that he was the king. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, he is called the greatest *Avatàra* because he looks most common and human. Even the most intelligent people were fooled by the idea that he was only an ordinary priest of Goddess Kali! In the *Ràmàyana* too, we find Sri Ràma describing Himself thus: 'I am only a man and the son of Dasharatha. I do not know anything about my divinity'.

We shall now refer to some incidents revealing the human aspects of Sri Ramakrishna, who was basically the Supreme Being Himself in flesh. Great men differ from the ordinary ones in terms of their possession of abundant good qualities like truthfulness, purity, selflessness, faith, etc. Therefore, I have called these qualities or values 'human aspects'.

Being afraid of uncommon things is a natural human trait and Sri Ramakrishna pretended 'being afraid' of Mathur Babu, a rich person who supplied all his requirements during his stay at Dakshineswar. But in reality, he was a Guru, guiding Mathur Babu's spiritual life through strong advice against anger, lust, greed, etc. Similarly, we see that Sri Ramakrishna was initially 'afraid' to face the great orator, Pundit Shashadhar Tarka Chudamani. When Shashadhar was to visit Sri Ramakrishna, he (Sri Ramakrishna) was initially very hesitant to meet the scholar. He expressed his anxiety whether he would be able even to talk to the great Pundit. But, actually when Shashadhar met him, it was Sri Ramakrishna who asked the first question: 'Pundit, have you realized God?' The Pundit said, 'No Sir'. Sri Ramakrishna then said, 'If you have not realized God, how can you then preach religion? People will just hear and then forget your words. You cannot impress people on a matter which you do not know'. Pundit Shashadhar accepted defeat.

Similarly, Sri Ramakrishna seemed to get afraid of Hridayram, his nephew and assistant. He used to placate Hridayram by many words and deeds to see that the latter did not get offended and go away. Sri Ramakrishna would be afraid to receive what the devotees gave him in the presence of Hridayram lest he might object. But it was Sri Ramakrishna himself who later consoled Hridayram, who was driven out of his job by the temple authorities for some indiscipline.

Consideration for others

Sri Ramakrishna's another human aspect was his consideration for others. It started with his very birth at 5 am on 18 February 1836. His parents were afraid that their daily rituals connected with the puja in the family shrine till 9 pm would be affected if he were born before their worship was over. But the time of Sri Ramakrishna's birth at 5 am was perfectly convenient to everyone!

Once, during his Dakshineswar days, Sri Ramakrishna went to Calcutta to attend a congregation. Though it was late at night, the host had not cared to serve them dinner. Rakhal (later Swami Brahmananda), who accompanied Sri Ramakrishna, was displeased with such treatment meted out to the Master and wanted to go back to Dakshineswar for taking dinner there. Here, too, Sri

Ramakrishna's response to Rakhal was typical. He said, 'Of course, we can return to Dakshineswar. But who will prepare your dinner at this hour and serve you?' One can see the consideration he had for his wife living at Dakshineswar. Had they not dined in that devotee's house, Sarada Devi would have to attend to their food in that late night—that was Sri Ramakrishna's argument.

Sri Ramakrishna was a very lovable child. He would pick up whatever was taught by his father by just hearing once. Thus, he had memorized the whole lineage of his ancestors and many other names of gods and goddesses as told by his father, Khudiram Chattopadhyaya.

Next, we see him as a very rational boy, though boyhood is usually not accompanied by rationality. As a young boy, once he went with his friends to swim in the village tank called Haldarpukur. Some women were bathing there. The boys splashed water on them. The women were upset and one of them scolded Gadadhar saying, 'If you do like this (ie see women bathing), you will incur sin and will suffer'. The incident ended there for the day. But, Gadadhar did not keep quiet. After three days he appeared before the same lady and said, 'You told me that I will incur sin if I see women bathing. I saw the day before yesterday 8 women bathing, yesterday 6 and today 4. Nothing bad has befallen me. How do you explain that?' This lady naturally got upset. She went to his mother Chandramani, and complained about his mischief. Chandramani reasoned with Gadadhar saying, 'Nothing bad may befall you dear, but the women feel unhappy when someone else intrudes into their privacy. Consider that all women are like me. Would you like to annoy them?' Gadadhar was satisfied with his mother's explanation and that was the end of his mischief.

Sri Ramakrishna was also very truthful. Once, during his days at Dakshineswar, he went to his devotee Sambhu Mallick's garden house. He wanted some medicine from him. But Sambhu Mallick forgot and left the place without giving him the medicine. Therefore, Sri Ramakrishna went to his assistant and picked up the medicine. But lo, he could not proceed towards his residence with the medicine. He could not see his way at all. Then it dawned upon him that because he was not truthful in accepting the medicine from the assistant without Sambhu Mallick's permission, he was unable to see his way back. That was the tremendous training he had undergone in being strictly truthful.

Another day at Dakshineswar when lemons from a garden were brought to him as usual by one of his disciples named Jogin, he could not drink the juice of the fruit. He asked if there was something wrong with the fruit. Others wondered what was wrong with the fruit. However, when Yogin (later Swami Yogananda) enquired about the same, he came to know that the proprietorship of the garden from where the fruit came had passed on to a new person, on the very same day when the lemons were collected.

Another time, Naren, the young disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, joked about the cosy bed of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna replied jovially and said, 'You will have a thicker bed than this'. And it actually happened that during the last days of Swami Vivekananda (Naren) in Belur Math he had to use a very thick bedding because he suffered from breathing trouble.

Now we shall see Sri Ramakrishna's love for holy men. Even as a young boy, he would visit holy men who stayed in a guest-house nearby in his village Kamarpukur. He was so fond of them that he would serve them, sit with them, worship with them and also meditate with them. One day he dressed himself as a holy man by tearing his dhoti into pieces and wearing it as loin cloth as the holy men did. Though this whim of Gadadhar very much alarmed his mother, we see the tremendous love and admiration of the small boy for holy men.

Now we come to his unalloyed sincerity in everything he did! Sri Ramakrishna used to call sincerity, ie making one's actions tally with one's thoughts, as the most important quality of a spiritual person. When his elder brother sent him to school as a young boy, he saw that the teacher talked about big morals of selflessness, philanthropy, service, etc. But his life did not reflect those virtues. On the

contrary, he observed that learning was only for earning money and honour. Therefore, he emphatically refused to go for this type of bread-winning education. He was fully sincere and he never budged from this principle throughout his life. Later on, when he became the priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, he wanted to be really sincere and dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the worship of the Mother. As such, he refused to take the responsibility of keeping Her ornaments and other valuable things. How sincere he was about his loving service to Mother! When he proceeded further in his worship of the Mother Kali, he went on imploring Her to reveal Herself, every time telling Her, 'If You are living, why do You not speak to me? Why do You not eat the food I give? Why do You not reveal Yourself to me?' At the end, the Divine Mother yielded to his sincere prayers and pleadings and was with him like a shadow all through his life, at all times.

His unbounded sympathy for women was another human aspect. In the village Kamarpukur, there were many hardships for women. Sri Ramakrishna even as a boy was very sympathetic to them. They did not have the freedom to move out of their houses, or even to see holy men and hear their words. One Durga Das Pyne was very strict about this and insisted that all the women in his house should always live in purdah, away from the gaze of men. He used to boast that nobody had ever seen the women of his house, or could know anything about the inner apartments where they lived. To remove his pride, young Gadadhar once told Durga Das that he would some day enter his house and meet his women folk. One day, dressed as a young weaver woman, he went to Durga Das Pyne's house and told him that she (he) has been left behind by mistake by her other women friends and, therefore, wanted shelter for the night. Durga Das allowed her (him) to stay. Thus Gadadhar spent the whole evening there. But when his elder brother, Rameswar, called loudly by his name, in his female dress he came out and told Durga Das that he had gone in and met the women in his house just as he had told he would do.

His sympathy for the poor was also great. One of the very poor residents of Kamarpukur village was Chinu (Srinivas) Sankhari. He was a bangle seller. Though poor and not looked upon with respect by most of the people, Gadadhar showed great sympathy for him. He would go to him and read books like the *Bhāgavatam*. It was to Chinu that he revealed himself as an *Avatāra*. Chinu worshipped him with sandal paste and flowers and said, 'You are going to do great things, but I will not be alive to see them. Hence, accept my adoration right now'. Indeed, Chinu did what the greatest seers and sages could not!

The next human aspect is his consent to his marriage. Though by now he was an ascetic undergoing extraordinary austerities for the realization of God in His various aspects, he consented to marry. He himself told his brother and mother to go to Jayrambati and search for his bride, who was waiting for him there. They went to Jayrambati and found his bride, Saradamani, who became his consort and subsequently inherited the mantle of spiritual mission for him. Sri Ramakrishna's unselfish love towards Holy Mother is his greatest blessing to womanhood. He set an example to all men how they should treat their wives and the would-be mothers. He taught Holy Mother, when she was just 14 years old, all about leading a practical, selfless social life and about the highest *samādhi* in spiritual life also. As a result, Holy Mother said that she felt a current of bliss flowing within her heart always, irrespective of the external circumstances of her life. When she was 18 years old, she went to Dakshineswar to meet her husband. Even then, being in the midst of hard spiritual austerity, Sri Ramakrishna welcomed her, gave her unselfish love, guided her to spiritual enlightenment and worshipped her as the Divine Mother Shodasi. Thus Sarada Devi became the Holy Mother to all, including her husband, at 18 years. When Sri Ramakrishna left his mortal coil in Mahā samādhi, Holy Mother carried on his work of enlightening the spiritual seekers.

Sri Ramakrishna's love for his mother, Chandra Devi, was also extraordinary. When his father died, he was hardly 7 years old. Though he himself was in great grief, he considered his mother's grief greater than his. Hence, he would never trouble her with any of his boyish desires. On the contrary, he would help her in whatever way he could, which pleased her and lightened the load of bereavement. When

Chandra Devi came to live with him at Dakshineswar later on, he never failed to salute her daily. When he went on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan, there he met a highly spiritual woman called Gangamai. He thought he would settle down there and spend the rest of his life at Vrindavan. But he did not do so. What made him change his mind was his love for his mother waiting for him at Dakshineswar. As soon as the thought of his mother surfaced in his mind, he immediately left Vrindavan, came back to Dakshineswar and started his daily service to her.

Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary love for the suffering humanity is a landmark in spiritual history. He was aware of the sufferings of the grief-stricken humanity wherever they could be. Once when he was on a pilgrimage, he found a village near Deoghar plagued by famine. He immediately asked his supplier Mathur Babu to relieve the sufferings of the poor people there. Otherwise, he said, he would not proceed with his pilgrimage. Thus he got relief extended to these poor, famine-stricken people. Another time when he heard that people of a village, Sikra Kulingram, were suffering for want of potable water, he advised one of his well-to-do devotees to dig some wells there and alleviate their sufferings. He would send his assistants of the nearby market, where poor people would come to sell their handmade products and ask them to buy them. For otherwise what would the poor people selling their wares do for their livelihood? What a compassionate heart that felt the sufferings of the poor!

Another extraordinary human aspect of Sri Ramakrishna was his granting refuge to the needy. Yogen Choudhury [later Swami Yogananda] was one of his young disciples. He was very sincere in his spiritual practices. But somehow he was forced by his parents to marry. After this Yogen thought that he could not lead a spiritual life, for Sri Ramakrishna's first teaching was the renunciation of lust and gold. Therefore, he thought, his spiritual career was doomed. When Sri Ramakrishna learnt about this, he called Yogen and told him very affectionately, 'Oh! what if you are married! Marry a lakh of times, no harm can touch you if you but have the grace of this place (meaning himself).' Such was the tremendous redeeming power of his great refuge.

Girish Chandra Ghose was a drunkard and a sinful person. There was not a sin that he had not committed. Such a person came and took Sri Ramakrishna's refuge. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, 'You give your Power of Attorney to me. Think that you are not the "doer" of anything whatsoever from today, but I do everything for you'. This path of total surrender transformed Girish into a supernormal human being from the worst sinner that he was. When his last moments came, Girish had a divine vision of Sri Ramakrishna. He passed away saying, 'Father, you have come! Please destroy the illusion of the world. Take me away to you from this world'.

The great gift that Sri Ramakrishna gave to humanity was his message of love and harmony. He never considered physical laws as only mechanical laws. He thought that even behind physical laws there is the loving will of God. Once his supplier Mathur Babu challenged him saying that even God had to obey the laws of creation. But Sri Ramakrishna said that He need not. If He wills, He can change any law. When Mathur said, 'Can He make a white China Rose on a red China Rose Plant?' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Yes, He can' and after some time went into the garden and brought one branch of China Rose plant on which one was a red China Rose and another white, thus proving to Mathur Babu that physical laws are nothing but God's will. Therefore, the will of God is superior to all laws.

Sri Ramakrishna was the protector of the good. He had come to protect the good and punish the bad. This he did not do only during the lifetime, but also beyond the lifetime of the devotees. He was always very eager that the *prasâd* (sacramental food) of the Kali Temple should come to him without delay and he should distribute it among the devotees. His explanation was, 'The Temple belongs to Rani Rasmani and she was such a great devotee. She has bequeathed money for the distribution of *prasâd*. Through the priests and others, the *prasâd* finds its way to undeserving persons. I am particular that at least a part of the *prasâd* is distributed to genuine devotees so that Rani Rasmani gets the merit of the same'. What compassion to the devotee who had left the body already!

The supreme compassion of Sri Ramakrishna for humanity does not require elaboration. The incident of his being *Kalpataru* (the wish-fulfilling tree) on 1 January 1886, was the outburst of this compassion. On that day, though Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from the worst disease of cancer, he came down from his room on the first floor and blessed all the people who were there in the garden on the day. There were nearly 30 devotees, some deserving, some undeserving; some even did not know anything at all about spiritual life. But, he blessed everyone of them with spiritual enlightenment. That is why the 1st of January has traditionally been called the day of wish-fulfilling, the Kalpataru Day. Sri Ramakrishna had also promised to his devotees that he would reveal his real divine nature (ie that he was an *Avatàra*) before he would depart from this world.

Thus we see, so many human aspects of Sri Ramakrishna who looked like a most ordinary human being which he was not. He hid his Supreme Divinity very successfully so that we can approach him easily and accept him as our very own.

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