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RÂMAKRISHNA  
HIS LIFE AND SAYINGS

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RÂMAKRISHNA  
HIS LIFE AND SAYINGS

BY

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## PREFACE

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THE name of Rāmakṛishṇa has lately been so often mentioned in Indian, American, and English newspapers that a fuller account of his life and doctrine seemed to me likely to be welcome, not only to the many who take an interest in the intellectual and moral state of India, but to the few also to whom the growth of philosophy and religion, whether at home or abroad, can never be a matter of indifference. I have therefore tried to collect as much information as I could about this lately-deceased Indian Saint (died in 1886), partly from his own devoted disciples, partly from Indian newspapers, journals, and books in which the principal events of his life were chronicled, and his moral and religious teaching described and discussed, whether in a friendly or unfriendly spirit.

Whatever may be said about the aberrations of the Indian ascetics to whom Rāmakṛishṇa belonged,

there are certainly some of them who deserve our interest, nay even our warmest sympathy. The tortures which some of them, who hardly deserve to be called *Samnyāsins*, for they are not much better than jugglers or *Hathayogins*, inflict on themselves, the ascetic methods by which they try to subdue and annihilate their passions, and bring themselves to a state of extreme nervous exaltation accompanied by trances or fainting fits of long duration, are well known to all who have lived in India and have become acquainted there not only with Rājahs and Mahārājahs, but with all the various elements that constitute the complicated system of Indian society. Though some of the stories told of these martyrs of the flesh and of the spirit may be exaggerated, enough remains of real facts to rouse at all events our curiosity. When some of the true *Samnyāsins*, however, devote their thoughts and meditations to philosophical and religious problems, their utterances, which sway large multitudes that gather round them in their own country, cannot fail to engage our attention and sympathy, particularly if, as in the case of *Rāmakrishna*, their doctrines are being spread by zealous advocates not only in India, but in America also, nay even in England.

We need not fear that the *Samnyāsins* of India will ever find followers or imitators in Europe, nor would it be at all desirable that they should, not even for

the sake of Psychic Research, or for experiments in Physico-psychological Laboratories. But apart from that, a better knowledge of the teachings of one of them seems certainly desirable, whether for the statesmen who have to deal with the various classes of Indian society, or for the missionaries who are anxious to understand and to influence the inhabitants of that country, or lastly for the students of philosophy and religion who ought to know how the most ancient philosophy of the world, the Vedânta, is taught at the present day by the Bhaktas, that is 'the friends and devoted lovers of God,' and continues to exercise its powerful influence, not only on a few philosophers, but on the large masses of what has always been called a country of philosophers. A country permeated by such thoughts as were uttered by Râmakrishna cannot possibly be looked upon as a country of ignorant idolaters to be converted by the same methods which are applicable to the races of Central Africa.

As the Vedânta forms the background of the sayings of Râmakrishna, I thought it useful to add a short sketch of some of the most characteristic doctrines of that philosophy. Without it, many readers would hardly be able to understand the ideals of Râmakrishna and his disciples.

I am quite aware that some of his sayings may sound strange to our ears, nay even offensive. Thus the conception of the Deity as the Divine Mother is apt to



startle us, but we can understand what Râmakrishna really meant by it, when we read his saying (No. 89) :

‘Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than any one else.’

Sometimes the language which these Hindu devotees use of the Deity must appear to us too familiar, nay even irreverent. They themselves seem to be aware of this and say in excuse :

‘A true devotee who has drunk deep of Divine Love is like a veritable drunkard, and, as such, cannot always observe the rules of propriety’ (104).

Or again :

‘What is the strength of a devotee? He is a child of God, and tears are his greatest strength’ (92).

Unless we remember that harem means originally no more than a sacred and guarded place, the following saying will certainly jar on our ears :

‘The Knowledge of God may be likened to a man, while the Love of God is like a woman. Knowledge has entry only up to the outer rooms of God, but no one can enter into the inner mysteries of God save a lover, for a woman has access even into the harem of the Almighty’ (172).

How deep Râmakrishna has seen into the mysteries of knowledge and love of God, we see from the next saying :

' Knowledge and love of God are ultimately one and the same. There is no difference between pure knowledge and pure love.'

The following utterances also show the exalted nature of his faith :

' Verily, verily, I say unto you, that he who yearns for God, finds Him ' (159).

' He who has faith has all, and he who wants faith wants all ' (201).

' So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get Divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that thou hast acquired, and become as ignorant about it as a child, and then thou wilt get the knowledge of the True ' (241).

' Where does the strength of an aspirant lie? It is in his tears. As a mother gives her consent to fulfil the desire of her importunately weeping child, so God vouchsafes to His weeping son whatever he is crying for ' (306).

' As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God ' (288).

' God is in all men, but all men are not in God : that is the reason why they suffer ' (215).

From such sayings we learn that though the real presence of the Divine in nature and in the human soul was nowhere felt so strongly and so universally as in India, and though the fervent love of God, nay the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Rāmakṛishṇa, yet

he perfectly knew the barriers that separate divine and human nature.

If we remember that these utterances of Râmakrishna reveal to us not only his own thoughts, but the faith and hope of millions of human beings, we may indeed feel hopeful about the future of that country. The consciousness of the Divine in man is there, and is shared by all, even by those who seem to worship idols. This constant sense of the presence of God is indeed the common ground on which we may hope that in time not too distant the great temple of the future will be erected, in which Hindus and non-Hindus may join hands and hearts in worshipping the same Supreme Spirit—who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

F. M. M.

IGHTHAM MOTE,  
*Oct. 18, 1898.*

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