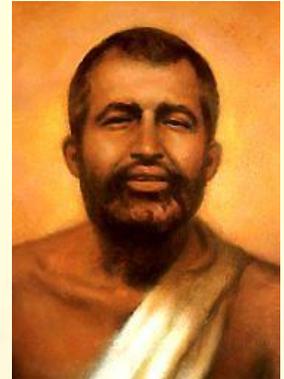




Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of NSW

Sri Ramakrishna: A Short Biography



IN 1852 A TEENAGER left his village in the peaceful, timeless, countryside of West Bengal, accompanying his elder brother on a journey to the crowded atmosphere of Kolkata. A few days later, when they made their tired way into the city, nobody noticed. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, we can link the arrival of these two village Brahmin brothers to a series of extraordinary events that have influenced the history of India and the world.

In 1852 Kolkata was the capitol of India, second in importance only to London in the mighty British Empire. Through a blending of European and Indian Cultures and the questioning spirit of the modern mind this was a time of great creativity and transformation in that city. Great reformers, educationists, poets, writers and spiritual giants arose in India and in Kolkata in particular.

In a gleaming new temple at the northern end of the city, some years after his arrival there, the village Brahmin teenager, known as Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), had become a priest. Having explored the varying spiritual paths of Hinduism and having experienced the best of Islam and Christianity as well, the word went out amongst the intelligentsia of Kolkata that a very unusual Holy Man , a real spiritual genius, was in their midst. Having immersed himself in intense meditation and other spiritual practices Sri Ramakrishna lived in that rare world of the mystics, a borderland between normal and super-consciousness.

To Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar, came creative, brilliant, questioning minds, minds that were a jumbled mix of Eastern and Western ideas. To name just a few, Mahendranath Gupta, recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Dr.Mahendralal Sarkar, founder of the Indian Association of Science, Girish Ghosh the famed dramatist and a student called Narendranath Dutta, the future Swami Vivekananda. To their astonishment they saw in Sri Ramakrishna a type of spirituality and mystical states they had only heard about, or read about in books. He also had a special ability to convey deep spiritual truths through homely illustrations.

Through them Sri Ramakrishna came face to face with the modern mind, with its doubts, its impatience, its restlessness, its arrogance and its crying need for proof that God is real and can be experienced. In Sri Ramakrishna they found living, walking, talking proof that God does exist, and can be experienced here and now, and that there is no greater joy than this. Any doubts raised by their thoroughly modern education about the reality of spiritual life and experiences began to fade away. In Sri Ramakrishna's presence they realized that sages still walked on this earth.

The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his famous disciple Swami Vivekananda have inspired and instructed most of the leaders of modern India, significantly influencing the emergence of a more self-confident India on its way to becoming a world superpower.

Sri Ramakrishna declared, from his experience of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, that all faiths lead to God and it is only sincerity in religious life that is needed to reach God, an important and relevant message for the modern world.

Suggested Reading *(See Books Section for further information):*

- Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
- Ramakrishna and His Disciples
- Ramakrishna and His Divine Play
- Great Thinkers on Sri Ramakrishna & Swami Vivekananda

Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna

ARNOLD TOYNBEE -English Economic Historian.

'In the Hindu view, each of the higher religions is a true vision and a right way, and all of them alike are indispensable to mankind, because each gives a different route to the same goal of human endeavours. Each, therefore, has a special spiritual value of its own which is not to be found in any of the others.

'To know this is good, but it is not enough. Religion is not just a matter of study; it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness. He practised successively almost every form of Indian religion and philosophy, and he went on to practise Islam and Christianity as well. His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive.....'

DALAI LAMA – Former Head of the Tibetan Govt. in Exile & Nobel Peace Prize Winner

'Sri Ramakrishna was one of the greatest of India's spiritual adepts of recent times, actively embodying India's profound tradition of plurality. By assimilating the sadhanas, customs, and practices of different faiths into his own personal practice, he presented a powerful example of respect for other traditions even while maintaining a deep fidelity to his own. His transparently pure and well-documented life remains a guide and inspiration to millions on their spiritual path.'

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU – First Prime Minister of Independent India

'Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. He appears to be in the tradition of the great rishis of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit....

'Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet when they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God and ceased to scoff and "remained to pray."

PHILLIP GLASS – Composer

'It would be hard to overestimate the impact that the life, presence and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna had on the formation of the modern India we know today. It was as if the sleeping giant of Indian culture and spirituality – certainly one of the foremost cultures of the ancient world – had been re-awakened and empowered to take its rightful place in modern times.'
