



IMAGE: SRI RAMAKRISHNA TEMPLE, BELUR MATH / DR SAIBAL GUPTA

# ***Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda Revisited in the Light of Tantra***

**Swami Atmapriyananda**

## ***The Science and Technology of Religion***

**T**HERE ARE TWO DISTINCT but related streams in any discipline: theory and practice, the theoretical aspect and the applied aspect, the science and the technology. In Vedantic parlance, the first is called *vidya* and the second yoga. Vedanta itself is called *brahma vidya* and its application or practice which may be called applied *vidya*, and applied science is called yoga. These two words, *vidya* and yoga, are very ancient and are found in the Upanishads as well as the Bhagavadgita. For example, the very

last mantra of the *Katha Upanishad* says: ‘This *vidya* or science of Brahman or Atman along with *yoga vidhi*, or the technology of realisation was taught by the god of Death to Nachiketa, who having obtained this knowledge [the science and technology of Brahman realisation] attained Brahman and became absolutely pure and immortal. In the same way, anyone else who pursues the same spiritual discipline will attain the same goal.’<sup>1</sup>

The yoga technology has its basis in the Sankhya science. Sankhya-yoga is thus the science-technology complementing each other. Similarly, Vedanta-tantra is the science-technology complementing each other. To draw a parallel from Western philosophy: Hegel’s idealism,

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Kierkegaard's existentialism, and Hegel's journey towards his own notion of the Absolute—which he calls the 'concrete reality'—through his dialectical approach of being-nonbeing-becoming triad. In Indian philosophy, the oppositely positioned are *sat*, the Being, in the transcendental realm and Shakti, the becoming, in the immanent realm of the relative. While Vedanta has to do with the realm of the Absolute—Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, and Bliss Absolute—tantra deals with the realm of the relative wherein the Absolute manifests as Shakti, which is identical with Brahman as *brahma-shakti*.

The late Swami Hitananda, who was engaged in ritualistic worship at the temple at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math for several decades, told the author that the tantra is the practical means by which the Vedantic truth of Oneness or Advaita is realised. The truth behind this statement could be easily understood when we see how, the mystic—to some extent esoteric—tradition of spiritual practice coming down over the generations from Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to the present gurus of the Ramakrishna Order, that is based essentially on repetition of the holy name and the meditation on the holy image, is derived from tantra, rooted in Sri Ramakrishna's transcendental and esoteric realisations. Ramakrishna tradition, as it were, places Vedanta at the core of its Movement, but practises the 'Practical Vedanta' enunciated by Swamiji that is based on Sri Ramakrishna's realisation of the state of *vijñana* wherein the world of relativity is not sublated in the transcendental realisation, but appears as the playful expression of the same Reality that was realised as Absolute in the transcendental state.

Swami Tapasyananda equated this state of *vijñana* with *bhavamukha*, a state of Being-becoming, in which Sri Ramakrishna was commanded

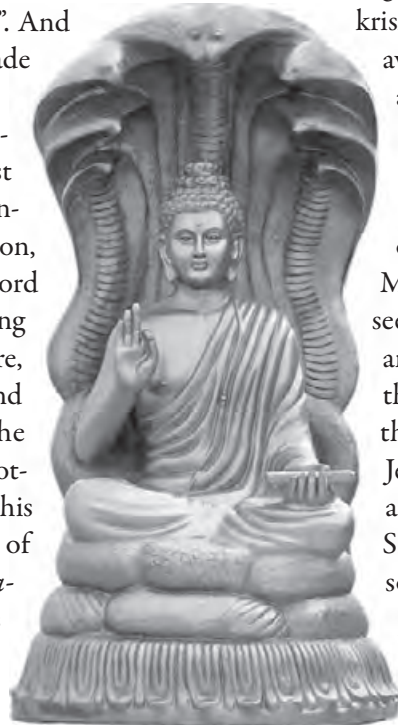
to stay put, for the good of the world, by the Divine Mother Kali, *brahma-shakti*. The philosophy or theory of the Ramakrishna Order and Ramakrishna tradition is Vedanta in its Advaitic aspect, as vouched by no less an authority than the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. It would be appropriate to quote here an interesting incident in the history of the Ramakrishna Order. When a dispute arose about Swamiji devoting his Himalayan ashrama at Mayavati exclusively to Advaita and discouraging any dualistic worship there, Sri Sarada Devi emphatically ruled: 'One who is our guru [Sri Ramakrishna], he is Advaita. Since you all are his disciples, you too are Advaitins. I can emphatically say, you are surely Advaitavadins.'<sup>2</sup> Despite this, the personal and esoteric practice performed by the monks and other lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna is meditation on the divine form and repetition of the divine name, the sacred mantra. There is no conflict between these two approaches if we remember and constantly keep in mind Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful harmony and reconciliation in the following words:

Brahman and Sakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. ... one cannot think of Brahman without Sakti, or of Sakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute. ... The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were. This Power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali.<sup>3</sup>

Every outstanding philosopher-saint in India, upholding and spearheading a great philosophic-religious tradition, has a highly esoteric leaning which he does not reveal or preach to the world at large. For example, Swamiji, a paragon of Vedanta tradition, who was never tired of preaching the universal gospel of Advaita to the world at

large, had an esoteric leaning towards Kali worship. In his own words: 'Kali worship is not a necessary step in any religion. The Upanishads teach us all there is of religion. Kali worship is my special *fad*; you never heard me preach it, or read of my preaching it in India. I only preach what is good for universal humanity. If there is any curious method which applies entirely to me, I keep it a secret and there it ends. I must not explain to you what Kali worship is, as I never taught it to anybody.'<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, it is the same Narendranath, Swami Vivekananda's pre-monastic name, who struggled to fight and revolt in vain against his master, Sri Ramakrishna's attempt to make his beloved Narendranath accept Kali and become her chosen instrument to teach humankind. Narendranath had to ultimately surrender helplessly to the *mahashakti*, great power, whom Sri Ramakrishna called Kali as discussed more elaborately later. Narendranath was to confess later: 'She made a slave of me. Those were the very words: "a slave of you". And Ramakrishna Paramahansa made me over to Her' (8.263).

Sri Ramanuja, the great philosopher-saint and the protagonist of Vishishtadvaita, qualified non-dualism, philosophy and tradition, had for his spiritual strength Lord Narayana in infinite and unending *ananta shayana*, reclining posture, with whom he communed day and night. Sri Madhavacharya, the great philosopher-saint and protagonist of Dvaita, dualism, had his esoteric leaning to Sri Krishna of Udupi. Even the extreme *shunya-vadin*, nihilist, Nagarjuna had as his esoteric source of strength, Prajna Paramita, the female Buddhist deity akin to Kali.



Why this female power, why not male? What is the special significance of the female principle in tantra? An inkling of this aspect of tantra could be found in the divine play of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna.

### **Shakti and Divine Incarnations**

Interestingly, most of the prophets and incarnations and the spiritual traditions initiated by them have a female power to provide sustenance to them and their respective traditions. In the case of married prophets and avatars, the holy consort is regarded as their female power or Shakti. In the case of unmarried prophets and avatars, the mother of the respective prophet or avatars is considered as the female power or Shakti. For example, the two great incarnations of Hinduism, Sri Ramachandra and Sri Krishna had respectively their holy consorts, Sita and Radha as the sustaining female powers.

Starting from Buddha down to Sri Ramakrishna, we see the power behind the avatars and the tradition he initiated, coming from a sustaining female power. Buddha's tradition had his wife Yashodhara at the head of the women's Order of nuns that he initiated. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, we see Nagarjuna drawing sustenance and power from Prajna Paramita, the female power worshipped in this tradition. The tradition of Jesus the Christ has Mother Mary as the female power or Shakti. Sri Chaitanya had his holy consort Vishnupriya as the female power or Shakti. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna and the tradition of Ramakrishna Order that he initiated through

Swami Vivekananda, Sri Sarada Devi, the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna is considered as his Shakti as well as the the mother of the Order. It was Swamiji, who discovered and taught the real significance of the advent of Sri Sarada Devi as the female power, Shakti, behind the Ramakrishna Order, the Ramakrishna tradition, and the Ramakrishna Movement. His powerful words, written to his brother-disciple, Swami Shivananda, are worth quoting here:

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries?—Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. Dear brother, you understand little now, but by degrees you will come to know it all. ... Without the grace of Shakti nothing is to be accomplished. What do I find in America and Europe?—the worship of Shakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense-gratification. Imagine, then, what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in a Sattvika spirit, looking upon Her as their mother! I am coming to understand things clearer every day, my insight is opening out more and more. ... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me. ... Please pardon me. I am a little bigoted there, as regards Mother. If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything. Brother, before proceeding to America I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessings came, and at one bound I cleared the ocean. There, you see. In this terrible winter I am lecturing from place to place and fighting against odds, so that funds may be collected for Mother's Math. ... Brother, often

enough, when I am reminded of the Mother, I ejaculate, 'What after all is Rama?' Brother, that is where my fanaticism lies, I tell you. Of Ramakrishna, you may aver, my brother, that he was an Incarnation or whatever else you may like but fie on him who has no devotion for the Mother (7. 484-5).

Shakti is what moves the universe—its origin, sustenance, and final dissolution—all these are the divine play of Shakti. Brahman, the supreme Reality or Being Absolute, is powerless without Shakti. The famous hymn *Saundarya-Lahari* of Acharya Shankara begins with this memorable passage: 'United with Sakti, Siva is endowed with the power to create the universe. Otherwise, He is incapable even of movement. Therefore, who except those endowed with great merits acquired in the past can be fortunate enough to salute or praise Thee, Mother Divine, who art the adored of even Hari, Hara and Virinchi?'<sup>5</sup>

In the Sri Vaishnava tradition of Sri Ramanuja,  
*Vishnupriya*



it is emphatically stated that it is only through the intervention of Sri Devi, the Shakti of Lord Narayana that grace descends on the jiva, the individual soul. This concept is very similar to the Catholic Christian tradition wherein Mother Mary is regarded as an inevitable intervener between God and man for God's benign grace to fall on man.

Swamiji calls a divine incarnation, a wave in the ocean of Shakti. In his famous hymn on Sri Ramakrishna—where he does not mention Sri Ramakrishna's name, but just calls him the guru-Shakti—he says: 'I surrender myself to my Guru, the physician for the malady of Samsara (relative existence) who is, as it were, a wave rising in the ocean of Shakti (Power).'<sup>6</sup>

### **Naren, the Rishi of the Absolute Plane, Accepts Kali**

All these show one thing: That there is a female power, a female principle guiding and regulating all beings in the phenomenal world that is termed *maya* in Vedanta, that is the power of Brahman or *brahma-shakti*—which as Sri Ramakrishna points out so emphatically—is identical with Brahman: 'Brahman and Sakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire.'<sup>7</sup>

Brahman and Shakti are identical, inseparable, as fire and its burning power, snake and its wriggling motion, milk and its whiteness. While Brahman is transcendental and beyond space-time-causation, incomprehensible to thought and speech, unreachable by the senses, *brahma-shakti* interpenetrates and envelops all the relative universe of creation, while all the time it is transcendental being identical with Brahman. In this sense, Shakti is transcendental and immanent, absolute and relative, absolute Being

and relative becoming, formless and with form, beyond all and within all! Swami Tapasyananda used to say that Sri Ramakrishna replaced the truth-falsity paradigm of Shankara with the *ni-tya-lila* paradigm.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's desperation in trying to persuade his beloved Naren to accept Kali is a landmark in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda relationship as it is an inevitable necessity for Swami Vivekananda to engage himself for the good of the world. For the good of the world, for the emancipation of the individual soul in bondage, Narendra was pulled out of his absorption in samadhi in the transcendental realm, what Sri Ramakrishna called the home of the indivisible, where not even a trace of duality exists. Unless Narendra accepted Kali, the empress of the relative existence called the universe, he would definitely not feel inclined to do good to the world, which his Advaitic absorption in the realm of indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute would reject as unreal! Hence, the great eagerness of Sri Ramakrishna, bordering on mad desperation, to make his Naren accept Kali as the Shakti of Brahman.

When Naren wanted to be immersed in *nirvikalpa* samadhi, only coming down now and then for some food, Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him: 'You are a very small-minded person. There is a state higher even than that. "All that exists are Thou"—it is you who sing that song.'<sup>9</sup> Look at this strange *lila*, the divine play between Sri Ramakrishna and Naren: By Sri Ramakrishna's own admission, he brought Naren down from the transcendental realm of the Infinite and the Absolute, a realm of Pure Being, to the relative world of becoming, of space-time-causation. Having accomplished this next to impossible task of dragging Naren down by the magnetism of his pure and divine love, he was desperately restless to position Naren—the Brahman-intuiting rishi merged in the bliss of *nirvikalpa*

samadhi in the transcendental realm—in the realm of becoming wherein he would, nonetheless, swim in the same bliss, this time of realising the same transcendent Brahman as immanent in all beings and his divine love would issue out in torrents in the form of selfless service to all beings seen directly as veritable embodiments of the same Brahman realised in the transcendental plane! This mystical play of *nara* and *narayana*, of man and God, of an Arjuna and a Sri Krishna, of a Hanuman and a Sri Ramachandra, of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, is the divine play of the Divine Mother Kali as *brahma-shakti*.

### **The Brahmo Naren Beseeching Lord's Mercy**

Although Naren had come down from the transcendental realm unawares by the divine will of Sri Ramakrishna, under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj, he thought of himself as a despicable creature beseeching the mercy of the king of kings, his beloved supreme Lord. Recall one of his earliest songs sung before Sri Ramakrishna: where he sang: 'Thou art the Lord of all the worlds, and I but a beggar here' (508). Where did all his non-dual realisation in the transcendental realm of indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute vanish? Whatever happened to his Vedantic exhortation of relying upon the Atman and denunciation of all dualistic superstitions? Where did it all go? How did he feel himself as a helpless destitute and a beggar crying to the Lord for mercy? That is the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna who is fond of playing his divine game!

### **Naren Turned an Advaitin by Sri Ramakrishna**

In spite of resistance from Naren, Sri Ramakrishna tries to put into his head the loftiest ideas of Advaita by persuading him lovingly to read to him the magnum opus of Advaita, the



Swami Tapasyananda (1904–91)

*Ashtavakra Samhita*. Naren, initially reluctant, read this greatest of Advaita texts in the divine presence of his master till what he read went so deep into him as to transform him into a paragon of Advaitists in modern times, so much so, that later from the world pulpit, this Vedanta *kesari*, lion of Vedanta roared his immortal Advaitic roar: 'Never forget the glory of human nature. ... Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which *I am*.'<sup>10</sup> Saying this, he thumped his chest with great force! This done, Sri Ramakrishna is at his next game of making this Advaitin Naren accept Kali as *brahma-shakti* and be guided to do her dictates for the rest of his life!

### **Naren Accepts Sri Ramakrishna as the Embodiment of Kali, Brahma-Shakti**

The next and last of the acts in this divine play,

was to make Naren realise his own master, Sri Ramakrishna, as the incarnation of Kali. This he perhaps could not accomplish during his lifetime, but he had to wait much later, till Naren surrendered to him totally and completely. Swami Vivekananda himself confessed later that Sri Ramakrishna was the incarnation of Kali and that the thing that made him accept Kali would be a secret that would die with him. This part of the divine play between *nara-rishi* Swamiji and *narayana* Sri Ramakrishna is too profound and too mysterious—perhaps ‘mystical’ is the word—for human comprehension. Reverential reflection and contemplation of this aspect of the play is very much part of the *Reflections on Tantra*, the main theme of the present volume.

### **Swami Vivekananda’s Substantiation of this Divine Play**

To substantiate that this version of the *nara-narayana lila* is not entirely the author’s imagination or fanciful construction, but has been culled and constructed cogently from the available authentic records scattered throughout the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, we quote some relevant utterances of Swamiji:

The future, you say, will call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali? Yes, I think there’s no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends. ...

*You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali and Mother. ... And I believe in Brahman too. ... But is it not always like that? Is it not the multitude of cells in the body that make up the personality, the many brain-centres, not the one, that produce consciousness? ... Unity in complexity! Just so! And why should it be different with Brahman? It is Brahman. It is the One. And yet—and yet—it is the gods too!* (8.264).

‘How I used to hate Kali!’ he said, referring to his own days of doubts in accepting the Kali ideal, ‘And all Her ways! That was the ground of my six years’ fight—that I would not accept Her. But I had to accept Her at last! Ramakrishna Paramahansa dedicated me to Her, and now I believe that She guides me in everything I do, and does with me what She will. ... Yet I fought so long! I loved him, you see, and that was what held me. I saw his marvellous purity. ... I felt his wonderful love. ... His greatness had not dawned on me then. All that came afterwards when I had given in. At that time I thought him a brain-sick baby, always seeing visions and the rest. I hated it. And then I, too, had to accept Her!’

No, the thing that made me do it is a secret that will die with me. I had great misfortunes at the time. ... It was an opportunity. ... She made a slave of me. Those were the very words: “a slave of you”. And Ramakrishna Paramahansa made me over to Her’ (8.263).

Swami Vivekananda’s experience at Kshir-Bhavani in Kashmir is well known. The Divine Mother spoke to him in a clear voice: ‘Do *you* protect Me? Or do *I* protect you?’<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, upon hearing about this incident, the ever-inquisitive disciple, Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, asked Swamiji: “Sir, you used to say that Divine Voices are the echo of our inward thoughts and feelings.” Swamiji gravely said, “Whether it be internal or external, if you actually hear with your ears such a disembodied voice, as I have done, can you deny it and call it false? Divine Voices are actually heard, just as you and I are talking.”<sup>12</sup> The significance of this experience could be somewhat understood when read in his own words quoted earlier: ‘I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali and Mother.’

Now the question worthy of deep reflection: Swami Vivekananda’s staunchest commitment

to Advaita which he believed will be the 'future religion of thinking humanity' (8,348) and his equally staunch attitude of surrender to what he called Kali and what his master Sri Ramakrishna revealed to him—are these two contradictory? Was Swami Vivekananda displaying two contradictory traits in him, one universal, Advaita, another personal and esoteric, surrender to Kali? Our aim in stating this is to rouse in the readers of this special issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*, devoted to the theme, *Reflections on Tantra*, deep reflection on this question in the light of the divine play between *nara* and *narayana*, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna as portrayed earlier. This reflection would reveal and uncover the secrets of the strange and esoteric, the profound and mysterious aspects of tantra itself, as demonstrated and enacted in the present age, before our very eyes, the moderns of the twentieth and twenty-first century with our vaunted intellectuality and rationality.

### **Ramakrishna Order's Tradition of Kali worship vis-à-vis the Divine Play**

It is very interesting to note that in the divine tradition of the Ramakrishna Order, Vedanta and tantra run parallel. After receiving the highly Advaitic sannyasa mantras, the monks would be seen quietly doing japa and meditating on

the chosen ideal on the lotus of their hearts in a purely tantric fashion! Monks participating in the worship of the Divine Mother, singing devotional songs of the divine glory of the Mother, juxtaposing it with the study of Vedanta scriptures—some of them engrossed in the study of deeply Advaitic texts and commentaries thereon—are common occurrences and no monk feels uneasy with this. Harmonising Ved-



*Kshir-Bhavani Temple in Kashmir*

anta with tantra resulting in a highly balanced spiritual sadhana that integrates spiritual life with the so-called worldly life to make all life one continuum of spiritual sadhana is one of the greatest gifts of the Ramakrishna Order coming from the spiritual giants beginning from persons like Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Brahmananda and the world is yet to understand the profundity of this contribution. We quote below Sister Nivedita's immortal words in her introduction to Swami

Vivekananda's *Complete Works* which has this Vedanta-tantra integration as the philosophical basis although not spelt out explicitly:

No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as



divorced from, but as expressing Jnana and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, science, and religion,' he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita' (1.xv-xvi).

The Kali worship tradition in the Ramakrishna Order substantiates our thesis presented in earlier sections. Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, being the authentic keeper of the Ramakrishna tradition as handed over by the direct disciples including Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Shivananda, and all the other saints and gurus up to the present time, the Belur Math tradition is being taken as the model herein.

The whole night worship of Kali or Shakti as *dasha-mahavidyas*, ten aspects of *maha-maya* or *mahavidya*, is the tradition at Belur Math on the birth-*tithi* of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna respectively. Interestingly, albeit believing that the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is the veritable embodiment of Kali or Shakti as *dasha-mahavidyas*, Kali worship is not performed in the night of her birth-*tithi*. This worship of Kali or Shakti as *dasha-mahavidya* is performed not before the public as other public programmes are held throughout the day, but it is performed in the night in the presence of monks alone, showing its esotericism and deep mystical significance. More interestingly, the worship of Kali and Shakti as *mahamaya* is held not with a separate image of Kali or other forms of *mahamaya*, but these worships are done in the

image of Sri Ramakrishna himself in the temple, substantiating Swami Vivekananda's statement quoted earlier which bears repetition given its profound mystic significance: 'The future, you say, will call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali? Yes, I think there's no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends.'


Before Swami Vivekananda passed away, he expressed a desire to worship Kali at Belur Math. Although this wish could not be actualised during his lifetime, Kali worship was performed at the Math after Swamiji passed away.

Both Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna used to look upon each other as the embodiment of Kali. This is a strange relationship between a divine husband and his divine consort. 'One day while Sarada was massaging the Master's feet, she asked him, "How do you look upon me?" The Master replied: "The same Mother who is in the temple, the same Mother who gave birth to this body and is now living in the nahabat, that same Mother is now rubbing my feet. Truly, I always see you as a form of the blissful Divine Mother."<sup>13</sup> Again, when Sri Ramakrishna passed away in *maha-samadhi*, Holy Mother cried out: 'Oh Mother Kali, where have you gone?'<sup>14</sup> This perhaps is the key to understanding Swami Vivekananda's unparalleled, incomparable, matchless, amazing devotion to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, equaling or even surpassing his unflinching devotion for his own guru Sri Ramakrishna.

These mystical traditions that have been handed over from generation to generation right from the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna starting from Swami Vivekananda, give us a clue as to how Divine Mother Kali is the female power, the 'feminine force' that the tantra speaks of, the *brahma-shakti*, who is the central power, that

energises the Ramakrishna Order, empowers its monks and devotees, regulates, controls, and moves it in the right direction. Hence, Swamiji said, as quoted earlier: ‘I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali and Mother.’ And again: ‘Ramakrishna Paramahansa dedicated me to Her, and now I believe that She guides me in everything I do, and does with me what She will. ... She made a slave of me. Those were the very words: “a slave of you”. And Ramakrishna Paramahansa made me over to Her.’

That is Swami Vivekananda, the great Vedantin, the Advaitin, and the rationalist speaking! Well it is therefore that tantra carries with it the ‘esotericism’ tag and because it is esoteric, it is mystical, hence appearing mysterious. It is therefore very profound and powerful. It is well known how the spiritual giants like Swamis Vivekananda and Brahmananda were turned into little children, trembling with emotion, swayed and swept away by ecstatic joy in the presence of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The significance of this small yet profound incident is that they could actually see the Divine Mother Kali, *mahamaya*, appearing before them in human form as Sri Sarada Devi.

This account is a sketchy and highly incomplete description derived by revisiting Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the light of tantra—an attempt to reverentially reflect on their lives and teachings, particularly the esoteric and mystical aspects, which are less studied and much less understood by us, the professed devotees and followers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. 

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*Oil Painting of Sri Sarada Devi  
Used Earlier For Worship at Jayrambati*

