

NOTES:

THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

---K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

During this period, the Hindu beliefs and customs were subjected to withering ridicule. But the West meant merely unadulterated freedom to them. For the missionaries this was a favourable climate for the conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. The missionaries and the new Christian converts carried on a ceaseless war against Hinduism and converts became Westernised in every way. The new education took long and rapid strides in Western and South India, and Christianity made deep inroads into the former preserves of Hinduism. Finally the Hindu leaders realized the danger and decided to put an end to such a peril.

Owing to historic reasons, Christianity established its first strongholds. Side by side missionary institutions were started and proved its mettle. It was the 'open sesame' to knowledge, freedom and power. It cut the old bonds of convention and tradition creating new world and a new life possible. People were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness. Though they didn't embrace Christianity, they tried to Westernize their lives and even their outlook on life. The women resisted to this pull and so the anglicized Indians sometimes had the worst of both the worlds, the West and the East.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy too was attracted by the West but he was cast in a different mould. He was always able to look beneath the appearance and see into the truth of things. As for Hinduism, he went to the Vedas and the Upanishads. The basic affirmations of Hindu faith, "All is Brahma" had nothing to do with idolatory, caste, sati and many other futile practices and beliefs in the Hindu fold. With a few selected friends he held counsel from time to time on the perennial truths of all religions and founded the Brahma Samaj in 1828. His work was continued by Prince Dwaraknath Tagore and his son Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. They were required to take the seven vows – 1) I will worship the God, the creator. 2) I will worship no created object as the creator. 3) Everyday I will engage in love and veneration of God. 4) I will exert myself in righteous deeds 5) I will be careful to keep myself from vicious deeds. 6) I will redeem myself from vice and be careful not to do it again. 7) Every year on happy occasions I will bestow gifts upon the Brahma Samaj.

The meeting of Debendranath and Keshub Chunder Sen was great event in the history of the Brahma Samaj in 1857. They worked together for ten long years and made it powerful in Bengal, the meeting point of both the religious and cultural renaissance. But Keshub was very much attracted to Christ and his Gospel and organized his own church in 1866. Many problems

arose in the Brahma Samaj and everything was solved and thus the Samaj played a vital role in Bengal's cultural history during the 19th century.

Raja Rammohan Roy started several fronts for the great task of national reconstruction. Then Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar became the most determined social reformer after Roy. Likewise the task of religious regeneration was taken up by Keshub Chunder Sen. Being an impassioned speaker, his oratory made a profound effect on his hearers in India and England. As a result, the merging of Christianity and Hinduism was made. An equally important man was the Hindu leader from Punjab, Dayanand Saraswathi, the founder of the Arya Samaj. While others tried to build a bridge between Hindu spirituality and Christian thought, in short, to gain the best of both the worlds. Dayanand's cardinal objective was to purify and preserve Hinduism and to achieve these ends he organized the Arya Samaj in 1875.

Ultimately social reform, educational reform and religious reform had to go together which would lead to economic progress and in turn paved way for political emancipation. Such was the intellectual and moral climate which brought institutions like the Paramahansa Sabha and the Prarthana Samaj laid the main emphasis on the pure worship of God. The prominent leaders of the movement were Kashinath Trimbak Telang and Mahadev Govind Ranade. Kashinath was well read in English and Sanskrit and he translated the Bhagavad Gita for the sacred books of the East Series. Rama Krishna was the living embodiment of human unity through God-realization. His concept is that Love, after all, is the final law of life. Without love there can be no true giving or taking ;and love emancipated and purified –is the pathway to felicity.

Swami Vivekananda, a well known educationalist established the Ramakrishna Mission. It meant no turning back on the West but he made it possible for the Indian intellectual to take the best from the West, yet not to give up the spiritual heritage of his forefathers.

The Renaissance In India

Towards the end of my last talk, I referred to the work of the precocious Henry Derozio "the marvellous boy who perished in his prime", though not before blazing the trail for many a younger man who had studied under him in the Hindu College. Derozio had indeed taken a large view of his duties as a teacher; he not only taught English literature, but also made his pupils ask questions, think for themselves, and not shrink from the right answers. The ruling ideas of the French Revolution and the poetry of the great English Romantics fired his imagination, and he communicated this fire to the more eager among his pupils. The 'old order' in India, which was more of a diseased disorder, came in for much castigation, and Hindu beliefs and customs were subjected to withering ridicule. When Derozio was compelled by the opposition of orthodoxy to his intellectual incendiarism to give up teaching and turn to journalism for a living, this only further raised him in the estimation of many of his former wards, while his early death added the necessary touch of martyrdom to his life. The 'Derozio men' became rather a law unto themselves, and they went further than Derozio himself would have gone or have liked them to go. They played the iconoclasts in many obvious ways, defied orthodoxy in terms of cheap exhibitionism, and generally behaved like thoroughly irresponsible young men. The West meant merely unadulterated freedom to them,—but for other Western values they cared little. In short, they were nihilists, intoxicated with a sense of false importance; they were just rootless beings, with dark despair seated at the centre of their lives.

For the missionaries this was a favourable climate for proselytization. One cannot live in despair for long, and the missionaries were able to cajole some of the 'Derozio men' into accepting the certitudes of the Christian faith. The missionaries

and the new Christian converts now carried on a ceaseless war against Hinduism, and the converts became Westernized in every way, despising everything Indian. The Babu became anglicized overnight in name, dress, manners, speech; in Professor S. Radhakrishnan's words, the Babu's voice now became "an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain, and his free spirit a slave to things". Although there was no Derozio in Bombay or Madras, the situation there too was not very different from the situation in Bengal. The new education took long and rapid strides in Western and South India, and Christianity made deep inroads into the former preserves of Hinduism. Especially was the conversion of high caste Hindus (and in Bombay, Parsis also) both a bright feather in the missionary's cap and a shock to Indian complacency. At last the leaders among the Hindus awoke to a realization of the peril, and decided that the peril should be met squarely and turned back once and for all.

On the whole Madras was more conservative than Bombay, and Bombay more conservative than Calcutta, though it was in South India that, owing to historic reasons, Christianity established its first strongholds. Side by side with the missionary institutions, Hindu or Native schools and colleges were now started, and it is said that Rabindranath Tagore's father, Maharshi Debendranath, himself went from house to house from morning till evening, entreating Hindu parents not to send their children to missionary schools but only to native schools. Nevertheless, Western education was as yet carrying all before it. It was the 'open sesame' to knowledge, freedom, power; it cut the old bonds of convention and tradition; it let in light into the old dark rooms of an obscurantist faith; and it made a new world and a new life possible for its beneficiaries. In the words of Surendranath Banerjea,

Our fathers, the first fruits of English education, were violently pro-British. They could see no flaw in the civilization or culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness. The enfranchisement of the individual, the substitution of the right of private judgement in the place of traditional authority, the exaltation of duty over custom, all came with the force and suddenness of a revelation to an Oriental people who knew no more binding obligation than the mandate of immemorial usage and venerable tradition

Everything English was good—even the drinking of brandy was a virtue; everything not English was to be viewed with suspicion...

Even when they didn't embrace Christianity, they often made it clear that they had no use for Hindu bigotries and superstitions, and tried to Westernize their lives and even their outlook on life. The women, however, often resisted this pull, but this only made for a divided home, and so the anglicized Indian sometimes had the worst of both worlds, the West and the East.

Raja Rammohan Roy had been attracted to the West, he too had been repelled by Hindu practices and beliefs. But *he* was cast in a different mould, and he was always able to look beneath the appearance and see into the truth of things. He saw that in the West, too, Christian profession and practice could be widely divergent. As for Hinduism, he went to the Vedas and the Upanishads. Many gods were no doubt mentioned, but transcending them all was Brahman. 'All is Brahman'; 'I am Brahman'; 'That thou Art'. These basic affirmations of the Hindu faith had nothing to do with idolatry, caste, *sati*, and the many other foolish, futile, or criminal practices and beliefs in the Hindu fold. Back, then, to the fount of Hinduism; the deep well of its living waters would be seen to mix and merge with the springs of other religions also. In his time Rammohan stood almost alone, while the storms of detraction blew around him. With a few select friends he held counsel from time to time on the perennial truths of all religions, and so the Brahma Sabha or Brahma Samaj was founded in 1828. His work was continued by Prince Dwaraknath Tagore, an intrepid figure who also paid a visit to England, and his son Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. In its great days, members of the Brahma Samaj were required to take these seven vows—

1. By loving God and performing the works which He loves, I will worship God, the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer, the Giver of Salvation, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Blissful, the Good, the Formless, the One only without a Second.
2. I will worship no created object as the Creator.
3. Except the day of sickness or tribulation, every day, the mind being undisturbed, I will engage in love and veneration of God.
4. I will exert myself to perform righteous deeds.
5. I will be careful to keep myself from vicious deeds.

6. If, through the influence of passion, I have committed any vice, I will, wishing redemption from it, be careful not to do it again.

7. Every year, and on the occasion of every happy domestic event, I will bestow gifts upon the Brahmo Samaj. Grant me, O God, power to observe the duties of this great faith.

A great event in the history of the Brahmo Samaj was the meeting of Debendranath and Keshub Chunder Sen in 1857. For the next ten years the two worked together, and the Brahmo Samaj was a power in Bengal, the meeting point of both the religious and the cultural renaissance. But Keshub was more and more attracted to Christ and his Gospel, though he always gave it a Hindu twist, and this in time brought about a split in the Brahmo Samaj. Keshub organized his own Church in 1866 with the help of his cousin Protap Chandra Mazoomdar, while the parent body continued, first as Adi Brahmo Samaj, and later as Sadharana Brahmo Samaj, on conservative lines with Debendranath, Ananda Mohan Bose (a Cambridge Wrangler), and the journalist Akshaya Kumar Datta as its leading spirits. In still later times, the poet Tagore himself tried to close the ranks between the different wings of the Samaj, but without any material success. Judged by mere numbers, neither the original Brahmo Samaj nor any of its sub-sects had what may be called an impressive following either in Bengal or in the rest of India, but many of the leaders of the community were Samajists of one or another hue, and thus the Samaj may be truly said to have played a vital role in Bengal's (and India's) cultural history during the 19th century.

Raja Rammohan Roy had started on several fronts the great task of national reconstruction,¹ and different men were destined to follow his lead in the different directions. Thus Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar became the most determined social reformer after Rammohan, a scholar and a controversialist of eminence, "an intellectual gladiator whom no adversary could overawe or overcome in argument". Likewise, the task of religious regeneration was taken up by Kesub Chunder Sen (1838-1884). Though

¹ "The vision of the modern age with its multitude of claim and activities", said Rabindranath Tagore, "shone clear before his (Rammohan's) eye, and it was he who truly introduced it to his country before that age itself completely found its own mind".

misunderstood in his time, he too came to fulfil and not to destroy. He sincerely felt that Christianity was not incompatible with the spirit of Hinduism, and he felt also that a close understanding between India and England was possible. He was an impassioned speaker, and his oratory made a profound effect on his hearers in India as well as in England. After Keshub's visit to England in 1870, Max Muller thought that Keshub was a sort of Martin Luther for our times and was struck by the fact that "his (Keshub's) name had become almost a household word in England". How adroitly Keshub tried to forge the links between England and India, and Christianity and Hinduism, may be seen from these few extracts—

"Let, then, India learn from England practical righteousness. Let England learn from India devotion, faith and prayer."

"You will find on reflection that the doctrine of divine humanity is essentially a Hindu doctrine, and the picture of Christ's life and character I have drawn is altogether a picture of ideal Hindu life. Surely the idea of absorption and immersion in the Deity is one of those ideas of Vedantic Hinduism which prevail extensively in India..."

"Let India, beloved India, be dressed in all her jewellery—those 'sparkling orient gems' for which this land is famous, so that at the time of the wedding we may find her a really happy and glorious bride. The bridegroom is coming. Let India be ready in due season."

"The Hindu shall eat Thy (Christ's) flesh in rice and drink Thy blood in pure water, so that the scripture may be fulfilled in this land."

But Keshub could also speak in another strain, paint a vivid picture of the sorrowing East, and peremptorily call Europe to order. His lecture on 'Asia's Message to Europe' given in 1883, the last year of his life, was typical of the man and his powers of oratory—

Behold the sweet angel of the East, into whose beauty the very colours of heaven seem to have been woven—the fair East 'in russet mantle clad' lies prostrate, a bleeding prisoner!... The desperate onslaughts of Europe's haughty civilization, she says, have brought sorrow into her heart, ignominy on her fair name, and death to her cherished institutions... Alas! before the formidable artillery of Europe's aggressive civilization, the scriptures and prophets, the language and literature of the East, nay her customs and manners, her social and domestic institutions, and her very industries have undergone a cruel slaughter. The rivers that flow eastward and the rivers

that flow westward are crimson with Asiatic gore; yes, with the best blood of oriental life. Enough. Stay, Europe, desist from this sanguinary strife...

This is no doubt the style of an earlier day, but in his time Keshub seems to have created a great impression on his hearers. He was boldly classed with Gladstone and Gambetta, and the Rev. Joseph Cook declared: "He is an orator born, not made. He has a splendid physique, excellent quality of organization, capacity of sudden heat and of tremendous impetuosity, and lightning-like swiftness of thought and expression, combined with a most iron self-control".

Such was Keshub Chunder Sen, one of the most remarkable men produced during the ferment of the 19th century. A not less important figure was the Hindu leader from the Punjab, Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj. The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj had, in their different ways, tried to effect a marriage of India and the West, to build a bridge between Hindu spirituality and Christian thought, to gain in short the best of both worlds. Dayanand Saraswati, however, wanted only a return to Hinduism in its pristine Vedic simplicity, clarity and spirituality, and asked for a determined elimination of the accumulated accretions of the ages. Describing Dayanand in memorable terms, Sri Aurobindo says—

It is as if one were to walk for a long time amid a range of hills rising to a greater or lesser altitude, but all with sweeping contours, green-clad, flattering the eye even in their most bold and striking elevation. But amidst them all, one hill stands apart, piled up in sheer strength, a mass of bare and puissant granite, with verdure on its summit, a solitary pine jutting out into the blue, a great cascade of pure, vigorous and fertilizing water gushing out from its strength as a very fountain of life and health to the valley.

To purify and to preserve Hinduism were Dayanand's cardinal objectives, and to achieve these ends he organized the Arya Samaj in 1875. *Stuti* (praise), *prarthana* (prayer) and *upasana* (community) were to be the means of realization, while even the non-Hindu was to be proselytized, if he desired, by means of *suddhi* (purification), *sangathan* (union) and *vidya* (national education). Dayanand's work was continued by Lala Hansraj,

Swami Sraddhanand and Lala Lajpat Rai, and the Arya Samaj remains a power even today, now as always playing the part of the Church Militant (somewhat like the Society of Jesus in Europe after the Reformation) in Hindu society, being rather more intimately associated with the deeper springs of Hindu tradition than the Brahmo Samaj.

In Bombay, however, the movement for religious reform or regeneration took the form of Prarthana Samaj, less eclectic than the Brahmo Samaj and less militant than the Arya Samaj. Poona and Bombay were important intellectual centres during the second half of the 19th century, and there was besides a cosmopolitan atmosphere in Bombay that made it unique among the cities of India. Many of the young men that passed out of the colleges were possessed of an idealism and a capacity for intellectual discipline that were rather exceptional. In the following passage of sustained eloquence, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar describes vividly the times in which men like Telang and Ranade underwent the baptism of their leadership—

It was an age of splendour when humanity seemed to stand at the start of a quickened life, with the promise of a bright future for modern civilization. In politics, it was the age of the Reform Bill, of Free Trade, of the Abolition of Slavery, of statesmen of towering personalities like Palmerston, Peel, Gladstone, Disraeli, Cobden, Bright, Clarkson and Wilberforce. In social reform it was the age of the Emancipation of Women, of Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale. In literature, which for the period reflects its currents and character and the ideals of its people, it was the age of Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning, reflecting through them 'the mighty hopes that make us men'. The spirit was of humanity, of good things, of great joy for all, breathed by the times in nearly all departments of life and human activity... The Professors of English, Scotch or Irish, who came to teach in our colleges and share in the work of our universities, were men, who more or less breathed this spirit of the times and sought to impart it to the young men brought within the sphere of their influence. These young men caught the ardour, the sentiment of humanity and of the brotherhood of the human race, man's growing power as Nature's conqueror and interpreter, and placed as they were—on account of the superstition of ages—where all seemed dark, they felt that a light appeared to them in the very midst of the surrounding darkness... They lived in an environment of hope realized, of help and encouragement given all round. But their aim was a life of fullness... The first two or three generations

of our men of higher education were men of liberal thought, a wide outlook on life and humane sentiment.

These were not like the 'Derozio men', but men seized with purpose, men who took themselves seriously, and thought and counselled and acted as responsible and mature leaders of a people just awakening from the stupor of the ages. Social reform, educational reform, and religious reform had to go together; these would lead to economic progress; and this in turn would pave the way for political emancipation in the fullness of time.

Such was the intellectual and moral climate which brought into existence institutions like the Paramahansa Sabha (1849) and the Prarthana Samaj (1867), which evidently grew out of the former and laid the main emphasis on the pure worship of God. The Prarthana Samaj did not dissociate itself from the parent Hindu community—didn't flirt with Christianity—didn't establish a separate Church as Keshub tried to do—didn't attempt proselytization—but was content to continue the tradition of the prophets and saints of Maharashtra like Jnanadev, Eknath, Namadev, Tukaram and Ramdas. Of the leaders of the movement only two need be mentioned here, Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850-1893) and Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901).

Kashinath Telang was a remarkable lad. It is said he read almost every new book he could lay his hands on, and that he read Browning's *The Ring and the Book* three times through to take in its full meaning; besides, he read and re-read John Stuart Mill till he became a part of Telang himself. He was deeply read in English and Sanskrit, and he translated the *Bhagavad Gita* for the Sacred Books of the East Series. He was an able lawyer, and was duly elevated to the High Court Bench, and served for a time as Vice-Chancellor of the Bombay University. His speeches and writings on legal, literary, educational, social, religious and political problems were marked by simplicity and lucidity, a flair for cogent reasoning, and the absence of mere rhetoric or bombast—for not in vain had he made Mill the exemplar of English prose. Speaking of Telang's oratory, Sir Raymond West has remarked—

Telang showed remarkable sagacity and judgement in taking up

his positions. He maintained them with great dialectical skill and in language of a limpid purity that would have done credit to an English born orator. He was an assiduous student of Bright's speeches... He could rise with the popular feeling, but he could not sink with it below the level of his own magnanimity

It was said of Telang that he had a perfect House of Commons style, capable of playing "upon the moods of an intellectual audience with the skill of a musician upon a familiar instrument". Above all, Telang was an educator in excelsis, for he felt that without right knowledge there could be no right ground for action. In the words of his biographer, Mr. Vasant Narayan Naik—

There is an art of examination in all his writings... It is an essentially Socratic method... Large views, balance, equipoise, lofty ideas alone enable a man to effect a synthesis between the old and the new. The spread of correct views was especially necessary in the transition stage of society. Public opinion, he felt, was a balance of many forces, and every force must come into play so that opinion may be rational, enlightened, and progressive. To build up such an opinion was the task to which he set himself. He poured all his mind, energy and heart into that one aim. Learning, scholarship, leadership, the spiritual grace of character—all these were directed to that end. That is his glory, that is his claim on posterity.

Less brilliant perhaps than Telang, Ranade was yet the greater man. The late V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, surely no mean judge of men and affairs, has paid this tribute to Ranade—

...the great Ranade, whom perhaps the most compendious way of describing would be to call him the 'Father of Modern India'... There was not any department of knowledge where he did not hold an eminent position; there was not any department of public activity where he was not a leading light; and there was not an aspect of national welfare where he was not a devout worker. Mr. Ranade was an unrivalled figure, and he had, what few leaders have, the marvellous gift of attracting young and promising men and giving that turn to their minds and hearts which renders them great instruments of public welfare.

And Ranade had a lieutenant in G. V. Joshi, only a poor Head Master, but great in his own way—an unrivalled student of India's economic problems. Later, Gopal Krishna Gokhale be-

came Ranade's disciple, and carried forward the work the Master had begun. Ranade was a scholar, economist, and jurist of unquestionable distinction; he wrote in English his classic *Rise of the Maratha Power*; and he believed that the varied races of India could really fuse into a nation. "His one aspiration through life was", said Gokhale once, "that India should be roused from the lethargy of centuries, so that she might become a great and living nation, responsive to truth and justice and self-respect, responsive to all the claims of man's higher nature, animated by lofty ideals, and undertaking great national tasks". His activities were manifold—the Prarthana Samaj, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, its Quarterly Journal, the Oratory Encouragement Society, the Indian National Congress. In the days of his 'nonage', he taught history, geography, mathematics, logic, economics, and English poetry and contributed articles to the *Indu Prakash*. But early or late, always was Ranade a prince among men. He was no orator who swept one off one's feet with the first few sentences. He started slowly but gained momentum as he went along. Two examples of his restrained oratory may be given here: this from a speech made in 1893—

We bandy words about freedom and independence, but of their meaning many have no clear idea. Freedom means making laws, levying taxes, imposing punishment, and appointing officials. The true difference between a free country and an unfree one is that in the former, before punishment is given, a law must have been made; before taxes are levied, consent must have been secured; before making a law, opinions must have been taken.

And this from the address to the Social Conference held in 1896—

With a liberated manhood, with buoyant hope, with a faith that never shirks duty, with a sense of justice that deals fairly to all, with unclouded intellect and powers fully cultivated, and, lastly, with a love that overleaps all bounds, renovated India will take her proper rank among the nations of the world, and be the master of the situation and of her own destiny. This is the goal to be reached—this is the promised land. Happy are they who see it in distant vision; happier those who are permitted to work and clear the way on to it; happiest they who live to see it with their eyes and tread upon the holy soil once more.

Ranade has also been called rightly the Father of Indian Economics; and Mr. A. O. Hume, the Founder of the Indian National Congress, himself called Ranade his "political guru". As a politician he chose the slow hard way of self-education and adequate preparation, while as an economist he argued that the laissez faire doctrines of Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricardo were not absolutes, and pleaded for state intervention in the context of India's economic backwardness—thus anticipating the views of modern economists like Keynes and Myrdal.

Ranade and Telang were choice spirits, and Bombay and all India benefited greatly from their educative work. Of the two, Telang was more intellectual, Ranade more intuitive; Telang was a thinker, an advocate, a wise counsellor, but Ranade was not only these but also a sage who knew all, and suffered all, and was ready with consolation at the right time. In Justice Candy's words, Ranade had indeed "the patience of the saints, he was entirely free from guile or hypocrisy, and everyone was spontaneously drawn to him".

Like Ranade and Telang, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar also was journalist, judge, orator, politician, Prarthana Samajist, all rolled into one. His speeches and writings—whatever their subject, social reform, education or literature—drew upon his vast reservoir of knowledge and experience. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) was in a class apart; he taught at the Elphinstone College, entered the British Parliament in 1892, published his *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* in 1902, and twice presided over the Indian National Congress. Another stalwart from Bombay, Phirozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), was an impressive and many-sided personality who gave his best to his city, Province and all India.

Bengal, the Punjab, Bombay—and now, Madras. The new education gave Madras a succession of able lawyers, jurists, teachers, journalists and administrators. There was Sir T. Muthuswami Ayyar, a great judge, who urged that India should assimilate Western culture, science and institutions; and that people educated in English should try to modernise the vernaculars into efficient instruments of expression. There was Sir V. Bhashyam Aiyengar, one of the subtlest and ablest masters of advocacy; there was C. Rangacharlu, who was a great success

as Dewan of Mysore; and there were journalists like G. Subramania Ayyar and scholars like V. Kanakasabhai. But, strangely enough, the real ferment in Madras came from an initially foreign movement, the Theosophical Society. If the Brahmo Samaj was an Indian attempt to link the indigenous and Western springs of spirituality, the Theosophical Society was a Western attempt to fuse with the springs of Indian spirituality. Founded at New York in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky, Col. Olcott and William Q. Judge, the Society shifted to Adyar near Madras in 1878, and has since functioned from there. Annie Besant as President of the Society, gathered many prominent Indians round her, and the Society opened branches in many cities all over India. She was again not a little responsible for the starting of the Central Hindu College at Banaras and other educational institutions, and her many-sided ministry is a notable chapter of recent Indian history.

But none of these movements—neither the Brahmo Samaj nor the Theosophical Society, neither the Arya Samaj nor the Prarthana Samaj—was a really effective or final answer to the 'challenge' from the West, which, paradoxically enough, had a Janus-face: the face of English education and its sense of power, and the face of Jesus Christ, and its transcendent light of holiness. If the doubting Hindu was to be made to believe, a new living manifestation of Indian spirituality was called for. The old 'avatars' and Messiahs—Rama and Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja, the mystic singers and saints—were dimmed by distance, while Rammohan Roy, Keshub Sen, Dayanand, and Ranade were but superlatively gifted men, not 'avatars' or Messiahs. And Ramakrishna Paramahansa occurred at the nick of time, occurred in Bengal, and modern India had the Messiah she needed to salvage and save Indian culture and set it on new foundations. Romain Rolland rightly saw in Ramakrishna "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people"; and though no more present in the flesh, "his soul animates modern India".

Ramakrishna was born on 17 February 1836 within a stone's throw as it were of Calcutta, became a priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, married Sarada Devi (it was a marriage in the spirit), and passed away in 1886. He was not only ignorant

of English, he was actually an illiterate man. He was subject to trances. He was, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "a self-illuminated ecstatic and mystic without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him". Yet the flower of the intellectual aristocracy of the time crowded round him, hung upon his lips, and found in him an answer to its obstreperous doubts and questionings. Others spoke about truth and discussed it or tried to argue you into it; but Ramakrishna was the Truth. People who went to see him felt that he was the Truth, as Christ told Pilate, "I am the Truth". Parables tumbled from his lips. His mysticism was like the ether and embraced the West and the East, all religions, all paths and all forms of realization. He was the living embodiment of human unity through God-realization. The appeal he made was to the lotus of the human heart which at once opened out, petal by petal, and in its full splendour dedicated its beauty and joy to the Supreme. In baby-cat fashion, the frail and the erring were lifted up by his winged love and taken to the haven of redemption. Love, after all, is the final law of life. Without love there can be no true giving or taking; and love—love emancipated and purified—is the pathway to felicity here and hereafter.

However, the occurrence of Ramakrishna meant no turning back on the West; only, he made it possible for the Indian intellectual to take the best that the West had to give him, yet not give up the spiritual heritage of his forefathers. When Ramakrishna passed away, his chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda, established the Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual and humanitarian movement that has been doing notable work. Vivekananda's own writings and speeches are spread over many volumes. He spoke with knowledge as well as conviction and a sense of urgency, and he was a very effective speaker, bold, audacious, fluent, and essentially educative. Occasionally he essayed English verse, too, and a piece like 'Kali the Mother' is almost an apocalyptic vision of the breaking of the worlds and the Dance of Doom—

The stars are blotted out,
The clouds are covering clouds,
It is darkness vibrant, sonant,
In the roaring, whirling wind

Are the souls of a million lunatics,—
 Just loose from the prison house,—
 Wrenching trees by the roots,
 Sweeping all from the path.
 The sea has joined the fray,
 And swirls up mountain-waves,
 To reach the pitchy sky.
 The flash of lurid light
 Reveals on every side
 A thousand, thousand shades
 Of Death begrimed and black—
 Scattering plagues and sorrows,
 Dancing mad with joy.

Come, Mother, come!

For Terror is Thy name,
 Death is in Thy breath,
 And every shaking step
 Destroys a world for e'er.
 Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!

Come, O Mother, come!

Who dares misery love,
 And hug the form of Death,
 Dance in Destruction's dance,
 To him the Mother comes.

This may be compared with the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati's 'Oozhik-koothu', equally powerful in its evocation of the frenzy of the creatrix who turns the destroyer of the worlds. A few stanzas from Vivekananda's Vedantic 'Song of the Free' may also be quoted—

Let eyes grow dim and heart grow faint
 And friendship fail and love betray,
 Let Fate its hundred horrors send
 And clotted darkness block the way—

All nature wear one angry frown
 To crush you out—still know, my soul,
 You are Divine. March on and on,
 Nor right nor left, but to the goal!...

From dreams awake, from bonds be free!
 Be not afraid. This mystery,

My shadow, cannot frighten me!
 Know once for all that I am He!

Equally characteristic of the Swami are 'The Song of the Sannyasin', 'Angels Unawares', 'My Play is Done' and some of the English verse renderings he made from his own Bengali.

Today the principal organ of the Ramakrishna Mission is the monthly English journal *Prabuddha Bharata*. It was, however, first published from Madras, and its editor then was B. R. Rajam Iyer, a precocious Yogi—a scholar steeped in English, Sanskrit and Tamil—who died at the age of twenty-six. His *Kamalambal* is one of the great novels in Tamil, perhaps the first of Tamil novels. His English novel, *Vasudeva Sastri*, and his philosophical essays and portraits of the saints, all written in pellucid prose, are collected in the volume *Rambles in Vedanta* (1905). It is a book in a thousand, and forms an admirable introduction to Indian philosophy; it is, besides, an illustration of good Indian prose writing in English, unaffected, sensitive, persuasive, not lacking in the play of light and shade, and rising occasionally to sheer poetic heights. As for the novel, although it sometimes descends to the level of burlesque, the central character, Vasudeva Sastri, is delineated convincingly as exemplifying the *Gita* ideal of the *sthitha-prajna* or the man of steady wisdom and enlightenment:

...a middle-aged man of fair complexion and well-proportioned limbs; his face was the most remarkable thing about him. There was a calmness and a serenity in it, a gentleness, a sweetness and a luxuriant cheerfulness like that of a full-blown lotus-flower, which an ancient rishi might have envied; and in his large, beautiful eyes, there was an angelic expression of goodness, which by its silent and sweet magic could have soothed the anger of a Durvasa. The glory of these eyes, if I may say so, lay not in occasional lightning-flashes but in their constant and continued revelation of the ocean of goodness, love and calmness that dwelt within... He seemed to depend for his happiness on nothing outside and he was never known to be excited either by pleasure or by pain, and much less get angry.

Left incomplete, for all its delicate mingling of light and shade, and the play of humour and fantasy, the novel is a promise more than an achievement; but like Derozio, Rajam Iyer too died young before he could redeem the promise of his youth.