



# **RAMAKRISHNA**

## **HIS LIFE AND SAYINGS**

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**RAMAKRISHNA**  
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## Preface

The name of Râmakrishna 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 Râmakrishna belonged, there are certainly some of them who deserve our interest, or even our warmest sympathy. The tortures which some of them, who hardly deserve to be called Samnyâsins, 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 Râjahs and Mahârâjahs, 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 Samnyâsins, 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 Râmakrishna, their doctrines are being spread by zealous advocates not only in India, but in America also, and even in England.

We need not fear that the Samnyâsins 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 than : 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, or rather 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, or rather 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' (213).*

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, or rather the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Râmakrishna, 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.

# The Life and Sayings of Râmakrishna

## The Mahâtman

It is not many years since I felt called upon to say a few words on certain religious movements now going on in India, which seemed to me to have been very much misrepresented and misunderstood at home. To people who are unacquainted with the religious state of India, whether modern or ancient, and ignorant of the systems of philosophy prevalent in what has often, and not unjustly, been called a country of philosophers, it is very difficult to understand these movements, more particularly to distinguish between their leaders, who may be open to criticism, and the ideas themselves by which they feel inspired, and which they preach, often with great eloquence, to the multitudes that believe in them and follow them. My article, entitled 'A Real Mahâtman,' appeared in the August number, 1896, of the *Nineteenth Century*, and gave rise to a good deal of controversy both in India and in England. My object was two-fold: I wished to protest against the wild and overcharged accounts of Saints and Sages living and teaching at present in India which had been published and scattered broadcast in Indian, American, and English papers, and I wished to show at the same time that behind such strange names as Indian Theosophy, and Esoteric Buddhism and all the rest, there was something real, something worth knowing, worth knowing even for us, the students of Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, in Europe. What happens so often to people whose powers of admiration are in excess of their knowledge and discretion, has happened to the admirers of certain Hindu sages. They thought they had been the first to discover and unearth these Indian Mahâtman, whom they credited not only with a profound knowledge of ancient or even primeval wisdom, but with superhuman powers exhibited generally in the performance of very silly miracles. Not knowing what had long been known

to every student of Sanskrit philology, they were carried away by the idea that they had found in India quite a new race of human beings, who had gone through a number of the most fearful ascetic exercises, had retired from the world, and had gained great popularity among low and high by their preachings and teachings, by their abstemious life, by their stirring eloquence, and by the power ascribed to them of working miracles. Mahâtman, however, is but one of the many names by which these people have long been known. Mahâtman means literally great-souled, then high-minded, noble, and all the rest. It is often used simply as a complimentary term, much as we use reverend or honourable, but it has also been accepted as a technical term, applied to a class of men who in the ancient language of India are well known to us by their name of Samnyâsin. Samnyâsin means literally one who has laid down or surrendered everything, that is, one who has abandoned all worldly affections and desires. 'He is to be known as a Samnyâsin,' we read in the Bhagavad-gîta V, 3, 'who does not hate and does not love anything.'

### The Four Stages of Life

The life of a Brahman was, according to the Laws of Manu, divided into four periods or Âsramas, that of a pupil or Brâhmakârin, that of a householder or Grihastha, of an ascetic or Vânaprastha, and of a hermit or Yati<sup>1</sup>. The first and second stages are clear enough; they represent the scholastic and the married stages of a man's life, the former regulated by the strictest rules as to obedience, chastity, and study, the second devoted to all the duties of a married man, including the duty of performing sacrifices, both public and private. The names of ascetic and hermit for the third and fourth stages are of course approximate renderings only; not having the thing, we have not got the name. But the chief difference between the two seems to be that in the third stage the Brahman still keeps to his dwelling in the forest outside his village, and may even be accompanied there by his wife, see his children, and keep up his sacred fires, performing all the time certain exercises, as enjoined in their sacred books, while in the last stage a man is re-

leased from all restrictions, and has to live alone and without any fixed abode<sup>2</sup>. Some translators have used hermit for the third, and ascetic for the fourth stage. In Sanskrit also there exists a variety of names for these two stages, but the distinctive character of each is clear, the third stage representing a mere retreat from the world, the fourth a complete surrender of all worldly interests, a cessation of all duties, a sundering of all the fetters of passion and desire, and a life without a fixed abode. The modern Mahâtmins should therefore be considered as belonging partly to the third, partly to the fourth or last stage. They are what we should call friars or itinerant mendicants, for it is their acknowledged privilege to beg and to live on charity.

Another name of these Samnyâsins was Avadhûta, literally one who has shaken off all attachments, while in the language of the common people they are often called simply Sâdhus, or good men.

It has sometimes been denied that there are any Samnyâsins left in India, and in one sense this is true. The whole scheme of life, with its four stages, as traced in the Laws of Manu, seems to have been at all times more or less of an ideal scheme, a plan of life such as, according to the aspirations of the Brahmans, it ought to be, but as, taking human nature as it is, it could hardly ever have been all over India. Anyhow, at present, though there are men in India who call themselves Samnyâsins, and are called Sâdhus by the people, they are no longer what Manu meant them to be. They no longer pass through the severe discipline of their studentship, they need no longer have fulfilled all the public and private duties of a married householder, nor have remained for a number of years in the seclusion of their forest dwelling. They seem free at any time of their life to throw off all restraints, if need be, their very clothing, and begin to preach and teach whenever and wherever they can find people willing to listen to them.

That the rules laid down in Manu's Law-book had often been broken in early times, we learn from the existence of a whole class of people called Vṛâtyas. As far back as the Brâhmana period we read of these Vṛâtyas, outcasts who had not practised brahmakarya, proper studentship<sup>3</sup>, but who, if they would only perform certain sacrifices, might be readmitted

to all the privileges of the three upper castes. That these Vṛātyas were originally non-Aryan people is a mere assertion that has often been repeated, but never been proved. The name was technically applied, during the Brāhmana period, to Aryan people who had belonged to a certain caste, but who had forfeited their caste-privileges by their own neglect of the duties pertaining to the first stage, brahmakarya. There were actually three classes of them, according as the forfeiture affected them personally or dated from their parents or grandparents. All the three classes could be readmitted after performing certain sacrifices. In the modern language vṛātya has come to mean no more than naughty or unmanageable.

It is curious to observe how the Buddhist revolt was mainly based on the argument that if emancipation or spiritual freedom, as enjoyed in the third, and more particularly in the fourth stage, was the highest goal of our life on earth, it was a mistake to wait for it till the very end of life. The Buddhists were in one sense Vṛātyas who declined to pass through the long and tedious discipline of a pupil, who considered the performance of the duties of a householder, including marriage and endless sacrifices, not only as unprofitable, but as mischievous. Buddha himself had declared against the penances prescribed for the Brāhmanic ascetic as a hindrance rather than as a help to those who wished for perfect freedom, freedom from all passions and desires, and from the many prejudices of Brāhmanic society. It seems almost as if the early Buddhists, by adopting the name of Bhikshu, mendicant, for the members of their order (Samgha), had wished to show that they were all Samnyāsins, carrying out the old Brāhmanic principles to their natural conclusion, though they had renounced at the same time the Vedas, the Laws of tradition, and all Brāhmanic sacrifices as mere vanity and vexation of spirit.

1. Manu VI, 87.

2. Āpastamba II, 9, 22, 21, &c.

3. Journ. As. Soc. Bombay, XIX, p. 358 (they use silver coins).

## Samnyâsins or Saints

Similar ideas existed already among the Brahmans, and we meet among them, even before the rise of Buddhism, with men who had shaken off all social fetters who had left their home and family, lived by themselves in forests or in caves, abstained from all material enjoyment, restricted their food and drink to a startling minimum, and often underwent tortures which make us creep when we read of them or see them as represented in pictures and, in modern times, in faithful photographs. Such men were naturally surrounded by a halo of holiness, and they received the little they wanted from those who visited them and who profited by their teaching. Some of these saints, but not many, were scholars, and became teachers of ancient lore. Some, however, and we need not be surprised at it, turned out to be impostors and hypocrites, and brought disgrace on the whole profession. We must not forget that formerly the status of a Samnyâsin presupposed a very serious discipline during the many years of the student and the domestic life. Such discipline might generally be accepted as a warrant for a well-controlled mind and as security against the propensity to self-indulgence, not quite uncommon even in the lives of so-called Saints. When this security is removed, and when anybody at any time of life may proclaim himself a Samnyâsin, the temptations even of a Saint are very much increased. But that there were real Samnyâsins, and that there are even now men who have completely shaken off the fetters of passion, who have disciplined their body and subdued the imaginations of their mind to a perfectly marvellous extent, cannot be doubted. They are often called Yogins, as having exercised Yoga.

## Ascetic Exercises or Yoga

Within certain limits Yoga seems to be an excellent discipline, and, in one sense, we ought all to be Yogins. Yoga, as a technical term, means application, concentration, effort; the idea that it meant originally union with the deity has long been given up. This Yoga, however, was

soon elaborated into an artificial system, and though supplying the means only that are supposed to be helpful for philosophy, it has been elaborated into a complete system of philosophy, the Yoga philosophy ascribed to Patañjali, a variety of Kapila's Sâmkhya-philosophy. As described by Svâmin Râmakrishnânanda in the *Brahmavâdin*, p. 511 seq., it consists, as practised at present, of four kinds—Mantra, Laya, Râga, and Hatha-yoga. Mantra-yoga consists in repeating a certain word again and again, particularly a word expressive of deity, and concentrating all one's thoughts on it. Laya-yoga is the concentration of all our thoughts on a thing or the idea of a thing, so that we become almost one with it. Here again the ideal image of a god, or names expressive of the Godhead, are the best, as producing absorption in God. Râga-yoga consists in controlling the breath so as to control the mind. It was observed that when fixing our attention suddenly on anything new we hold our breath, and it was supposed therefore that concentration of the mind would be sure to follow the holding back of the breath, or the *Prânâyama*. Hatha-yoga is concerned with the general health of the body, and is supposed to produce concentration by certain portions of the body, by fixing the eyes on one point, particularly the tip of the nose, and similar contrivances. All this is fully described in the *Yoga-Sûtras*, a work that gives one the impression of being perfectly honest. No doubt it is difficult to believe all the things which the ancient Yogins are credited with, and the achievements of modern Yogins also are often very startling. I confess I find it equally difficult to believe them or not to believe them. We are told by eye-witnesses and trustworthy witnesses that these Yogins go without food for weeks and months, that they can sit unmoved for any length of time, that they feel no pain, that they can mesmerise with their eyes and read people's thoughts. All this I can believe, but if the same authorities tell us that Yogins can see the forms of gods and goddesses moving in the sky, or that the ideal God appears before them, that they hear voices from the sky, perceive a divine fragrance, and lastly that they have been seen to sit in the air without any support, I must claim the privilege of St. Thomas a little longer, though I am bound to say that the evidence that



has come to me in support of the last achievement is most startling<sup>1</sup>.

That what is called a state of Samâdhi, or a trance, can be produced by the very means which are employed by the Yogins in India, is, I believe, admitted by medical and psychiatric authorities; and though impostors certainly exist among the Indian Yogins, we should be careful not to treat all these Indian Saints as mere impostors. The temptation, no doubt, is great for people, who are believed to be inspired, to pretend to be what they are believed to be, nay, in the end, not only to pretend, but really to believe what others believe of them. And if they have been brought up in a philosophical atmosphere, or are filled by deep religious feelings, they would very naturally become what the Mahâtmanas are described to be—men who can pour out their souls in fervid eloquence and high-flown poetry, or who are able to enter even on subtle discussions of the great problems of philosophy and answer any questions addressed to them.

1. See also H. Walter, *Hathayogapradîpikâ*, 1893.

## Râmakrishna

Such a man was Râmakrishna, who has lately obtained considerable celebrity both in India and America, where his disciples have been actively engaged in preaching his gospel and winning converts to his doctrines, even among Christian audiences. This may seem very strange, nay, almost incredible to us. But we have only to remember what the religion of large numbers of people consists in who call themselves Christians, without even having had an idea of what Christ really taught or what He was meant for in the history of mankind. There are many who know absolutely nothing either of the history or of the doctrines of Christianity, or if they do, they have simply learnt their catechism by heart. They repeat what they have learnt, but without an atom of real faith or love. Yet every human heart has its religious yearnings, it has a hunger for religion which sooner or later wants to be satisfied. Now the religion taught by the disciples of Râmakrishna comes to these hungry

souls without any outward authority. So far from being forced on them, it is to them at first a heathen and despised religion. If they listen to it at all, it is of their own free will; and if they believe in any part of it, it is of their own free choice. A chosen religion is always stronger than an inherited religion, and hence we find that converts from one religion to another are generally so zealous for their new faith, while those who never knew what real religion meant are enthusiastic in proclaiming any truths which they seem to have discovered for themselves and to which their heart has yielded a free assent. Hence, though there may be some exaggeration in the number of those who are stated to have become converted to the religion of Râmakrishna, and though some who now call themselves converts to the Vedânta may in reality have made but the first step towards real Christianity, there can be no doubt that a religion which can achieve such successes in our time, while it calls itself with perfect truth the oldest religion and philosophy of the world, viz. the Vedânta, the end or highest object of the Veda, deserves our careful attention<sup>1</sup>.

Râmakrishna himself never claimed to be the founder of a new religion. He simply preached the old religion of India, which was founded on the Veda, more particularly on the Upanishads, and was systematised later on in the Sûtras of Bâdarâyana, and finally developed in the commentaries of Samkara and others. Even in preaching that religion, and in living the life of a recluse, as he did, Râmakrishna by no means claimed to stand alone. There were several leading Vedânta preachers in India during the last fifty years, sometimes called Paramahamsas. Keshub Chunder Sen, well known in England and America, who was a great reformer with a strong leaning towards Christianity, was not counted as one of them, because he never passed through the proper discipline and did not live the life of a Samnyâsin. But he mentions four among his contemporaries who deserved that title: first, Dayânanda Sarasvatî, for a time unfortunately connected with Madame Blavatsky; secondly, Pawâri Bâba of Ghazipur; thirdly, the Sikh Nagaji of Doomraon; and lastly, our Râmakrishna, commonly called the Paramahamsa of Dakshinesvar. 'These,' he adds, 'are the four ascetic saints whom our

friends have from time to time duly honoured, and in whose company they have sought the sanctifying influences of character and example. May we respect,' he continues, 'and serve with profound respect and humility, every ascetic saint whom Providence may bring to us. The impure become pure in the company of Sâdhus.'

1. This is the explanation given of the name of Vedânta. But it is probably an after-thought. Like other compounds in *anta*, such as *Siddhânta*, *Sûtrânta*, &c., it was probably meant at first for no more than the subject-matter of the Veda; then, as it stands at the end of *Brâhmanas* and *Āranyakas*, it was explained as end of the Veda, and lastly as the end, i.e. the goal, the highest object of the Veda.

### Dayânanda Sarasvatî

Of the life of the first, of Dayânanda Sarasvatî, we have very full accounts. He initiated a great reform of Brahmanism, and seems to have been a liberal-minded man, so far as social reforms were concerned. He also was willing to surrender his belief in the divine revelation of the *Brâhmanas*, though he retained it in full strength with regard to the Vedic hymns. He published large commentaries on the Vedas, which show great familiarity with Sanskrit and very wide reading, though at the same time an utter want of critical judgement. He sanctioned the remarriage of widows, supported the movement in favour of raising the marriageable age of boys and girls, and altogether showed himself free from many prejudices as to caste, food, and all the rest. He condemned idolatry and even polytheism. His name became better known in Europe also, from the time that he fell into the net spread for him by Madame Blavatsky. But this lasted for a short time only, and when he perceived what her real objects were, the Samnyâsin would have nothing more to say to her. She was not quite the Maitreyî he had expected. He did not know English, she did not know Bengâlî or Sanskrit; hence they did not understand each other at first, while later on, as some people said, they understood each other but too well. However that may be, he certainly seems to have been a powerful disputant, his influence became greater and greater, till at last his opponents, the orthodox and unchanging Brahmins, were suspected of having poisoned their dangerous rival.

He died suddenly, but his followers, under the name of Ârya-Samâj, form still a very important and growing sect in India, that keeps aloof from all European influences.

### Pawâri Bâba

The second Saint was Pawâri Bâba of Ghazipur. Little is known of him, but his recent death has created a painful sensation all over India. He had lived for about thirty years at Ghazipur, and was venerated as a Saint by the whole native community. The last nine years, however, he had almost entirely withdrawn from the world<sup>1</sup>, living by himself in a compound surrounded by high walls and protected by a formidable gate. Inside there was a small flower-garden, a well, a small temple, and his own dwelling-house, which consisted of one room. He never allowed the gate to be opened, and no one ever saw him except his younger brother. Once every week or ten days, however, he would come up to the gate and converse for a few moments from within with any one who happened to be there. His younger brother always remained within calling-distance. But though his saintly brother had told him that he could not any longer bear the misery which the Kâlî-yuga, i.e. the present age, had brought upon India, he little suspected what his brother meant. The venerable man, after taking his usual bath and performing his devotions, seems to have covered his whole body with clarified butter, to have sprinkled himself all over with incense, then to have set fire to the four corners of his lonely house, and when the flames had taken hold of it on all sides, to have deliberately thrown himself into the fire, thus performing his last sacrifice. Before anybody could rescue him, the old man was burnt to ashes, and what remained of him was consigned with due ceremony to the sacred waters of the Ganges. All this happened only a few months ago. It is always difficult to get an exact account of anything that happens in India. The conflagration of the house in which the old Saint had lived for many years cannot be doubted, nor the discovery of his burnt body. But some of his friends, unwilling to admit his self-immolation, ascribe the fire to an accident, while others

consider his voluntary sacrifice as the proper ending to his saintly life.

His name Pawâri, sometimes spelt Pahâri, is explained as a contraction of Pavanâhâri, he who lives on air.

His teaching was probably much the same as that of Râmakrishna, but I have not been able to get a more accurate account of it. His position, however, as a Sage and a Saint seems to have been generally recognised, and Keshub Chunder Sen is a sufficient authority for the fact that he well deserved a place by the side of such men as Dayânanda Sarasvatî and Râmakrishna. The people of India evidently distinguish clearly between these professed ascetics and saints on one side, and mere reformers such as Rammohun Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen on the other. They evidently want to see a complete surrender of the world and its pleasures, riches, and honours before they quite believe in the truth and the sincerity of any teachers and reformers. Having undergone severe tortures and penances is likewise an essential condition of Sainthood, and for the crowd at large even the power of working miracles is by no means out of fashion yet as a test of being an inspired sage.

The best-known name by which some of these sages are called is Paramahamsa, a name that hardly lends itself to translation in English. Scholars who like to cavil and raise a smile at every custom or tradition of the Hindus, translate it literally by Great Goose, but it would be more faithful to render that ancient title by High-soaring Eagle. Besides, hamsa, though it is the same word as goose, is not the same bird. But though these Paramahamsas form an elite by themselves, we know how many men there have been and are even now in India who, by the asceticism and saintliness of their lives, deserve a place very near to the Paramahamsas in our estimation. We know how Udayashankar, the Prime Minister of Bhavnagar, tried hard to revive, in his own case, the strict rules of life prescribed for the ancient Samnyâsins. The life of Keshub Chunder Sen also, though he was a married man and travelled much and moved in the world, was a life of extreme self-denial, as much as that of any Paramahamsa.

1. Interpreter, June, 1898. Indian Social Reformer, June 19, 1898.



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# RAMAKRISHNA HIS LIFE AND SAYINGS

Ramakrishna (1833-86), was a Bengali Hindu sage. Although theoretically a high-caste Brahmin by birth, he came from a poor, low-caste village and had little or no education. He did not know a word of Sanskrit and his knowledge of the Vedas, Puranas, and Hindu Epics was obtained orally (in the Bengali language). In spite of this, he managed to convey in his aphorisms the essence of the Hindu religion. Ramakrishna worshipped with Muslims and Christians, and propounded a simple approach to religious tolerance: "Creeds and sects matter nothing. Let every one perform with faith the devotions and practices of his creed. Faith is the only clue to get to God."

Ramakrishna's often earthy sayings and short fables are immediately comprehensible to everyone, using vivid metaphors which employ everyday objects and settings to express deep Hindu philosophical concepts. This collection of sayings was collected by his followers after his death and translated by Max Müller.



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