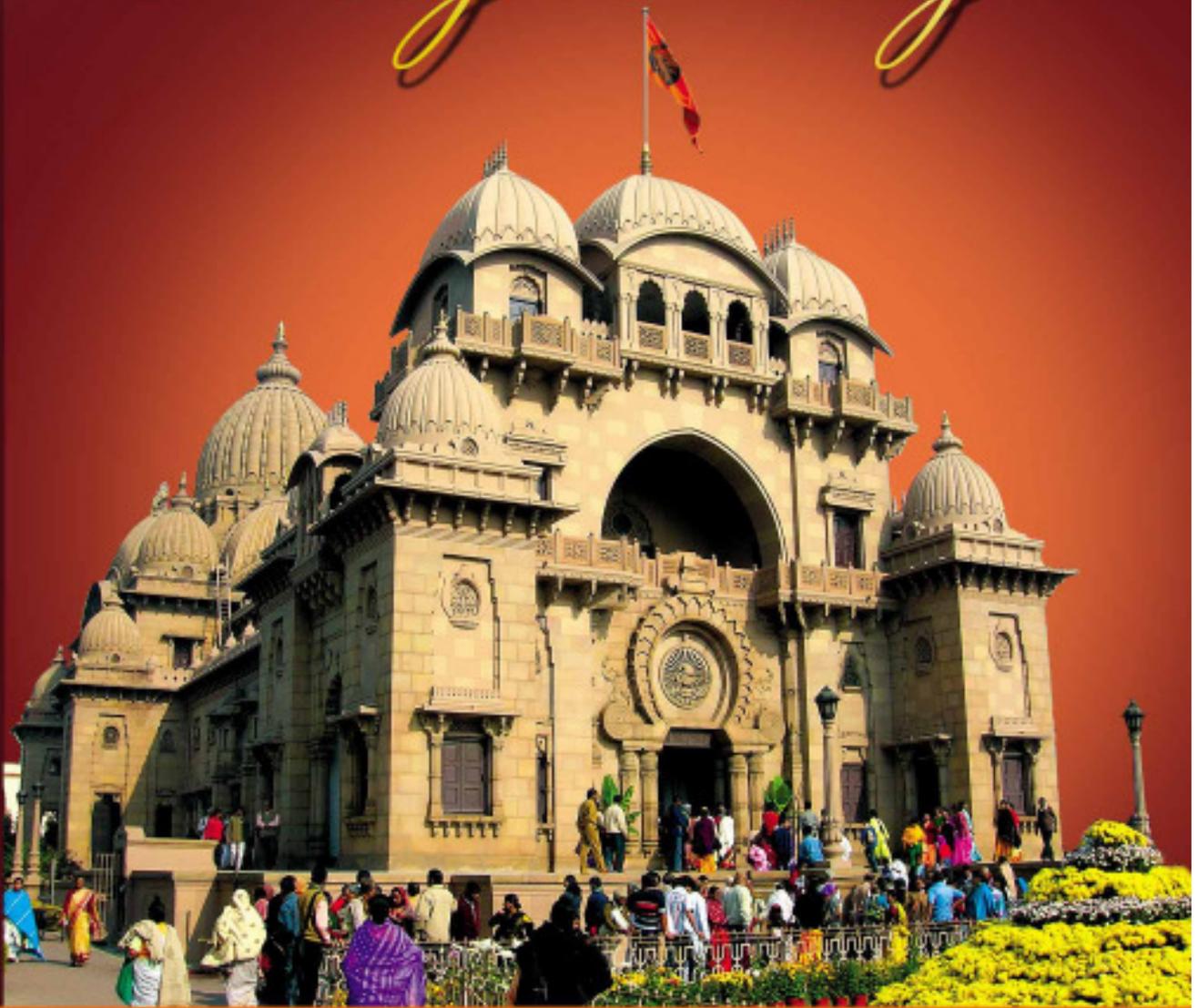




Pilgrimage
BELUR MATH



A Guide to the Holy Places Associated with
Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda

Pilgrimage BELUR MATH

Swami Asutoshananda



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Published by :
Adhyaksha
Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore, Chennai - 4

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I-2M 3C-7-2009
ISBN 978-81-7823-515-8

Printed in India at
Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press
Mylapore, Chennai - 4

Publisher's Note

Swami Vivekananda founded Belur Math in 1898. Besides being the home to the headquarters of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, the Belur Math is well known for its architecture elegance, clean environs, sacred associations and its spiritual atmosphere. Located on the western bank of the Ganga, it is a haven of peace, drawing thousands of people to it every day from all over the world.

The following pages provide information and guidelines to pilgrims to Belur Math. Devotees on a pilgrimage to Belur Math and places associated with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda often look for a reliable guidebook to make their pilgrimage fruitful. This book is a humble attempt to fulfill this need.

Appendices at the end of the book provide additional information like distances between various places and the time taken to reach them, list of books to be read before undertaking the pilgrimage, and the contact addresses of the various pilgrim centres. A colour sketch of the entire Belur Math premises adds to the value of the book.

Swami Asutoshananda, who teaches at the monastic probationer's training centre at Belur Math, has authored this book drawing generously from articles written by Swami Prameyanandaji

(a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order), Swami Prabhanandaji (General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission), Swami Vimalatmananda (a trustee of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission), Swami Purnatmananda (former editor of *Udbodhan*, the Bengali Monthly of the Ramakrishna Order) and Sri Sankari Prasad Basu, eminent scholar and researcher on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. These articles appeared in 1996 in *Sri Ramakrishna Mandir*, a Bengali publication of Ramakrishna Vivekananda Ashram, Howrah, West Bengal. Other publications in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature have also been consulted in preparing this book. We express our gratitude to all of them.

We owe our gratitude to a number of people who helped us with this publication: To Swami Yuktatmananda, Minister, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, for going through the manuscript and offering valuable suggestions about language and style; to Swami Atmashraddhananda (Editor, *The Vedanta Kesari*, our English Monthly) and volunteers at the Vedanta Kesari Editorial Office for their help with proofreading and improvement of the book; and to the swamis and brahmacharins who helped with the preparation of the appendices and maps.

We hope that this book will be well received and fulfill a long-felt need of many people.

Swami Ramakrishnananda Jayanti
20 July 2009

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Prologue

Hundreds of thousands of people across the globe visit Belur Math which is one of the foremost places of pilgrimage. The purpose of this booklet is to give a fair idea about the various places to see in Belur Math, and their significance.

Swami Shivananda (Mahapurushji Maharaj¹) once observed: 'If you want to achieve anything substantial in spiritual life, visit Belur Math, stay here and do spiritual practices. It is for this purpose alone that Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) dedicated his life and founded this Math.'²

1. Swami Shivananda, the second president of the Ramakrishna Order, was a God-realized soul and an apostle of Sri Ramakrishna. He was called Mahapurush (a great man) by Swamiji for his extraordinary self-control. Once Swami Shivananda elaborated on this: 'Sri Ramakrishna initiated me with a mantra. I attained perfection in that mantra in a considerably short time. My brother disciples were discussing this one day when Swamiji exclaimed, "Don't you know that Tarak-da ("Brother Tarak"; Tarak was the pre-monastic name of Mahapurushji Maharaj) is a Mahapurush? Nothing is impossible for him.' (*Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, 283; Udbodhan Karyalay, Kolkata, 2005, hereafter *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*.)

2. *Shivananda Vani*, 2.175; Udbodhan Karyalay; 1355 BE

The spiritual current that flows in Belur Math is, as it were, the resultant of different forces that originated at various centres. Hence our pilgrimage to Belur Math becomes complete with a visit to some of these important centres connected with the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

We begin our pilgrimage with Belur Math.

I. Belur Math

Predestined Choice

The western bank of the Ganga is traditionally extolled as a holy place like Varanasi. Belur Math's mere location on the western bank makes it a holy place. Added to this, it is sanctified by Mother (Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi), Swamiji, Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and many saintly monks of the Ramakrishna Order who lived here. To crown it all, the eternal presence of Sri Ramakrishna, invoked by Swamiji,¹ makes Belur Math a unique place of pilgrimage.

Mother once spoke about Belur Math: 'Ah! How well I was at Belur! What a peaceful place it is! Meditation came naturally. And that is why Naren (Swamiji) wanted to have a piece of land there!' ²

Strange though it may appear, the present site of the Belur Math seems to have been a predestined choice. Once Mother was travelling towards Dakshineswar by boat. The place where Belur Math is located now was then a plantain field. As the boat was crossing this place, she had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna

1. See the footnote 1 in p.5.

2. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 264; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; 1977

walking amidst the plantain trees. 'Why is he walking here,' Mother mused. The same day she conveyed this to her companions also. Later, when Swamiji purchased that very land, Mother became very pleased and said, 'Sri Ramakrishna had already selected this very place. The western bank of Ganga is equal to Varanasi. Naren has done a wonderful work by establishing the Math there.'¹

Swamiji too had a premonition about the location of Belur Math. After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, his monastic disciples were living in a dilapidated house at Baranagore, a thirty-minute drive away from Dakshineswar. Once, while they were standing on the Baranagore Ghat, Swamiji said, 'Something tells me that our permanent Math will be in the neighbourhood across the river.'²

Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, said about Belur Math: 'This Belur Math is like Kailas. Here the guru and the Ganga are present. ... This is Vaikuntha. ... I shall never be able to cut my attachment for Belur Math. Even after my death I shall watch Belur Math from above.'³

Swami Shivananda said: 'Swamiji brought Sri Ramakrishna on his shoulders and installed him

1. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p. 503.

2. *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Vol., 2, 309; hereafter, *Life*.

3. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them*, 113; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

here.¹ Where lives Sri Ramakrishna there live Mother, Swamiji and all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. All live here eternally, in Belur Math... Sometimes we see them.’²

We are now on a visit to such a holy place.

1. Sri Ramakrishna Temple

We shall visit Sri Ramakrishna temple first.



The awe-inspiring majesty of the temple coupled with its austere simplicity spontaneously kindles devotion in us. As we climb the steps of the main entrance and behold Sri Ramakrishna seated on a lotus in his majestic glory, we are reminded of the Vedic hymn,

1. This has reference to Sri Ramakrishna’s assurance to Swamiji during the former’s last days; he said: ‘Taking me on your shoulders, wherever you keep me, I shall stay there for ever for the good of the world.’ (*Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.493)

2. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.484.

‘O King of kings! O granter of success and wealth! We offer our salutations to you!’¹ What Swami Shivananda said about the earlier temple² echoes in our ears: ‘This is our shrine. Sit here for a while and do japa. Sri Ramakrishna is present here fully awakened; he sees and hears everything; ... pray to him for bhakti, mukti, wisdom, power of discrimination, dispassion, liberation or money, power, pleasures of life or anything; you will get whatever you want.’³ We sit for a while in silent prayer before Sri Ramakrishna.



The sanctum is serene and austere, devoid of any ornate decoration, befitting the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna.

1. राजाधिराजाय प्रसह्यसाहिने । नमो वयं वैश्रवणाय कुर्महे ।

—*Taittiriya Aranyaka*, 1.22.

2. Information about this temple is given under ‘Old Temple’ in p.17.

3. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.384, 730.

He is sitting on a full-bloomed lotus sculpted in white Italian marble. The rectangular altar below is curved in the middle like the *damaru*¹ of Shiva. The front, left and right sides of the altar have a *hamsa*² engraved on them. The sacred dust of Mother's feet is preserved and worshipped in a niche on the eastern wall, to Sri Ramakrishna's left. In the niche on the western wall is a small Shivalinga, known as Baneshvara Shiva, which is worshipped every day.

The frame of the beautiful canopy over the altar is made of teakwood. The canopy is adorned by Om in Sanskrit. The doors of the sanctum were fashioned by a Chinese carpenter.

Sri Ramakrishna is known to the world as the Prophet of harmony. Swamiji envisaged the Great Master's temple as an expression of his message of harmony. A closer look at its features can enable us to see how this idea of harmony has found expression in this grand temple.

The temple blazes a new trail in temple architecture with a blend of Eastern and Western architectural styles. The sanctum (*garbha-griha*) is connected to the prayer hall (*natmandir*) by a closed

1. A kind of small drum that symbolizes creation.

2. A *hamsa* is a mythical bird believed to have the capacity of separating milk from the mixture of milk and water. Monks of great renunciation are compared to a *hamsa* as they can separate God from the world and live in God alone. Sri Ramakrishna is known as a *Paramahamsa*, or the Great Swan. Swamiji wanted Sri Ramakrishna's image on a thousand-petalled lotus, blooming on the top of a swan.

vestibule, making the structure resemble a church. This is unique in Indian temple architecture. Temples of yore have no common prayer halls, where people could gather and attend the worship.

The arched ceiling, hanging balconies and the two rows of stately pillars are all reminiscent of the Buddhist caves in the Great Chaitya Hall at Karla near Mumbai. The windows and the arches around the sanctum are after Rajput and Moghul styles.

Now, let us circumambulate the temple. Over the arches on the wall around the sanctum are stone carvings of the nine planetary deities: Surya (Sun), Brihaspati (Jupiter), and Mangala (Mars) on the northern side; Soma (Moon), Shukra (Venus), and Budha (Mercury) on the eastern side; and Ketu, Shani (Saturn) and Rahu on the western side, resembling Oriya temple motifs. Atop the western and eastern entrances are the images of Hanuman and Ganesha.

The curved main entrance is after the Buddhistic style. The superstructure above this entrance slightly resembles the *gopura* of South Indian temples. Above the main entrance is an exquisite carving of the emblem of Ramakrishna Order, which was designed by Swamiji himself. The emblem is so carved that it also doubles as a ventilator. The emblem conveys the idea that through the harmonious combination of selfless work (wavy waters), love of God (lotus), knowledge (sun) and meditation (snake), Self-knowledge (Swan) is attained.

A little above the emblem is a Shivalinga. There is a special significance of Shivalinga in Sri Ramakrishna's life: his mother Chandramani Devi felt that she was with child after a flood of divine light emanated from a Shivalinga entered into her.

Brief History

It was Swamiji's lifelong desire to preserve the mortal remains (holy ashes) of Sri Ramakrishna and enshrine it in a grand temple dedicated to him. This could not happen during Swamiji's lifetime. So he installed Sri Ramakrishna in what is now known as the 'old temple'. However, before leaving his body, Swamiji had a plan ready for a monumental temple. Following his directions, Swami Vijnanananda, his brother disciple and a qualified civil engineer drew the plan. Though Swamiji did not live to see this temple, he assured that he would see it from 'above'.

The foundation stone for the temple was laid by Swami Shivananda on 13 March 1929, Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. For paucity of funds, the construction could not begin immediately. It started only after five years with substantial contributions from Miss Helen Rubel (also known as Bhakti) and Mrs. Anna Worcester (also known as Annapurna). By their munificence, these two American devotees have become inseparably connected with the history of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and have endeared themselves to all devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

Before the construction began, the foundation site had to be shifted about a hundred feet from the original spot, as advised by engineers. Swami Vijnanananda, the then president of the Order, re-laid the foundation on 16 July 1935, the day of Guru-purnima. In the morning, he went to the shrine to seek Sri Ramakrishna's blessings. The auspicious time fixed for laying the foundation was 8.15 am. He was known for his punctuality, but that day he spent a long time in the shrine. It was past 8.30 a.m. when he came out of the shrine. When asked about the delay he said, 'What I shall do! Sri Ramakrishna did not allow me to take leave of him.'

On the foundation day too something mysterious happened. At the beginning of the ritual, Swami Vijnanananda stood in front of the picture of Sri Ramakrishna, decorated for the purpose, holding in his hands the *arghya* (flowers, sandal paste, vilva leaf, and so on) to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna. Then blew a gentle breeze that displaced the *arghya* from his hands and placed it right on the spot where it was to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna. It was as if Swamiji had offered this first *arghya* to the Master. Swami Vijnanananda then offered another *arghya* to the Master.

The new temple was dedicated by Swami Vijnanananda on 14 January 1938, the day of *Makara Sankranti*. After the dedication he said: 'I had said to Swamiji, "Swamiji, you told me that you would witness the temple dedication from above. Here, behold! Sri Ramakrishna, whom you have installed, is

seated in the new temple, which is built according to your own design.” Then I distinctly saw there (showing the south-western direction) Swamiji, Brahmanandaji, Mahapurushji, Saradanandaji, Turiyanandaji and Akhandanandaji—all joyfully watching and blessing the dedication!’

About the presence of Sri Ramakrishna in Belur Math, Swami Shivananda observed: ‘Sri Ramakrishna is living here in all his glory. We live in his presence always as we lived and talked with him in Dakshineswar. By his presence, the mind is brimming with bliss.’¹

Sri Ramakrishna’s disciples were particular that the novices at Belur Math were always conscious of Sri Ramakrishna’s eternal presence at Belur Math. Swami Shivananda once admonished a young swami for his carelessness while preparing fruit offering to Sri Ramakrishna: ‘What kind of service is this! You have not removed the fibres properly from the bananas and oranges. Be careful not to commit mistakes while serving Sri Ramakrishna. He is living, so worship him with great care. He is accepting the worship; I see it.’²

Swamiji too had emphatically said, ‘The Lord has not yet given up the Ramakrishna form. Some see Him in that form even now and receive instructions from Him, and all can see Him if they so desire.’

1. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.193.

2. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.259.

2. The Math Complex



*B*ehind the Main Temple, towards the south-east, is the Math Complex, which includes two of the earliest buildings.

Belur Math land came in possession of the Ramakrishna Math in February 1898.¹ In the northern side of that land existed a dilapidated single-storeyed building. This was renovated under the supervision of Swami Vijnanananda. The expenses were borne by Mrs. Ole Bull, an associate of Swamiji. The project took a year to complete.

Mother visited this Math on 12 November 1898 when the renovation work was still in progress. She brought with her the picture of Sri Ramakrishna that

1. Originally it was only 7.3 acres of land; the other portions were purchased gradually.

she used for daily worship and worshipped him in some part of the building after duly cleaning the place.

We now enter the Math courtyard. The complex in front of us and the building to our right form the Belur Math, of Swamiji's time. The complex on our left, presently known as the Math Office, is a later addition.

This courtyard is a sacred place. In a vision Swami Shivananda saw Sri Ramakrishna walking here. After this experience he ensured that this place was always kept clean and well maintained. To a brahmacharin who was cleaning the courtyard he said: 'My boy, you are not doing it properly; there is still some dust here, and some burnt matchsticks scattered there. Sri Ramakrishna walks here. Clean the place carefully so that nothing pricks his feet and he is able to walk unhurt.'¹

This courtyard is associated with Mother too. Mother visited the Math in 1916 during Durga Puja. Monks and devotees were busy cutting vegetables in the hall below the old temple, which is now part of the Math Office. In those days this place was used as a general store, kitchen and dining hall. Mother was then walking by the hall. Seeing the devotees and monks busy dressing vegetables, she remarked, 'How nicely my children are dressing vegetables!' Ramani (later Swami Jagadananda) replied, 'Our aim is to attain the grace of the Divine Mother—be it through meditation or by dressing vegetables.'

This courtyard is also eternally associated with Swamiji. On 4 July 1902, the last day of his earthly life,

1. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.253.

he meditated in the bedroom of Sri Ramakrishna in the morning for about three hours. Then ‘descending the stairs of the shrine, he walked back and forth in the courtyard of the monastery, his mind withdrawn. Suddenly he let out a whisper loud enough to be heard by Swami Premananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was nearby: “If there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done! And yet, how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time!”¹

3. Swamiji’s Mango Tree



On the eastern end of the courtyard stands a mango tree. This is one of the trees that has existed from the time the land was purchased. Swamiji’s

1. *Life*, 2.601.

biography records: ‘Another favourite seat [of his] was under the big mango tree in the courtyard between Sri Ramakrishna’s shrine and the monastery building. Here he would usually be found in the morning hours, seated on a canvas cot and attending to his correspondence, or writing articles, or reading, or engaged in conversation.’¹ And, thus this tree is sacred to devotees and is known as ‘Swamiji’s mango tree’. This tree has witnessed many incidents connected with Swamiji’s life. Let us see a couple of them.

It was one evening. Swamiji was on the banks of the Ganga. Chanting the *Gayatri avahana* mantra² he was returning towards the Math. Everyone around there remained spellbound hearing his enchanting voice. When he came to the mango tree he stood motionless in a trance. After a while he started pacing up and down under the tree raising loud noise ‘hum’, ‘hum’. His steps faltered as if he was

1. *Life*, 2.556.

2. आयाहि वरदे देवि त्र्यक्षरे ब्रह्मवादिनि ।
गायत्रि छन्दसां मातर्ब्रह्मयोनि नमोऽस्तुते ॥

[I invoke Thee, the Effulgent One, the Bestower of Blessings, the Signifier of God in three letters! Salutation be to Thee, O Gayatri, Mother of Vedic Mantras, Thou who hast sprung from God!]

Swamiji once had a vision in which he saw an old sage standing on the banks of the Indus and chanting Vedic hymns in a way distinctly different from the way it is intoned in modern times. The above was the passage that he heard. He believed that through this vision he had recovered the musical cadences of the early Aryans. He also found some remarkable similarity to these cadences in the poetry of Shankaracharya [vide *Life*, 1.347].

drunk and his eyes turned red like hibiscus flowers. All stared at him in awe and wonder. After some time he became normal. Those around there felt an extraordinary spiritual power manifesting in him. They felt that the power could attract not only human beings but even animals and birds.

Another day Swamiji displayed extraordinary spiritual power while sitting under this tree. He was sitting on the canvas cot, facing west. His eyes were luminous; his whole frame seemed to be animated with some strange spiritual consciousness. Pointing to the sannyasins and brahmacharins about him, he exclaimed: "And where will you go to seek God? He is immanent in all beings. Here, here is the visible God! Shame on those who, disregarding the visible God, set their minds on other things! Here is God before you as tangible as a fruit in your hand! Can't you see! Here—here—here is God!" He spoke these words in such an inspiring way that peace and insight of deep meditation came over all present there. They stood like statues, so motionless and hushed in silence had they become! Swami Premananda, after his bath in the Ganga, was on his way to the shrine for worship. Hearing the words of Swamiji he fell into a state of absorption and became motionless. After a quarter of an hour Swamiji said to him, "Now go for worship." Only then did Swami Premananda regain normal consciousness. That scene was unforgettable. Everyone in the Math was struck with amazement at the power

of Swamiji who, with a word, could raise the minds of all present to the heights of Supreme Insight.’¹

4. Old Temple



On the northern side of the mango tree we see steps leading to the Old Temple, upstairs. We see two rooms when we enter the temple.

The room on the left is Sri Ramakrishna’s shrine. Until the Main Temple was built, Sri Ramakrishna’s sacred relics are enshrined in a pot known as *atma-rama* casket

1. *Life*, 2.583-84. Referring to this incident, Shailendranath Dhar mentions in his *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda* (2.1372; pub: Vivekananda Kendra, January 1990) that Swamiji became that day a *Kalpataru* (A celestial tree that is believed to fulfill the desires of anyone who stood under it and prayed for something).

and worshipped here. Later his photo was added and his worship continued in this temple for about forty years, from its inception till 14 January 1938. Mother, Swamiji and some of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples have worshipped Sri Ramakrishna here. However, the pictures that we see here now were placed later.

The room on the right is 'Mahapurushji's Room'. Originally this was kept as Sri Ramakrishna's bedroom. With its doors closed, Swamiji meditated here for about three hours on the day he left his body. On that day his actions were most deliberate and meaningful. 'At 8.30 a.m. Swamiji came to the chapel and sat down in meditation there. On Swami Premananda coming there at 9.30 a.m. for doing the daily worship of the Master, Swamiji asked him to spread out his asana (seat) in the bedroom of the Master and to bolt all the doors and windows of that room.'¹ His meditation lasted for a full three hours. 'What transpired there, no one will ever know,' records his *Life*.

After the Main Temple was built, things used by Swami Shivananda were kept in this room, and came to be known as 'Mahapurushji's room'.

On the right, or the southern side, there is a veranda. Swami Shivananda had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna walking there. Once when a young monk had failed to wipe the rain water that had fallen there, he admonished him: 'My boy, what service is this! I see Sri Ramakrishna walking there every evening. He is not

1. Shailendranath Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.1449.

able to walk there due to the water accumulated there. His feet are getting wet. My son! Always see that you do things in such a way that he is not put to any kind of difficulty. He is our everything; he is the Soul of the world. If he is pleased world is pleased.’¹

As we come out of the shrine and stand on the landing of the staircase, we see before us a small wooden lattice that leads to a terrace. From his room Swamiji used to visit the shrine through this terrace.

The staircase, again, is rich with sacred memories. After his morning meditation on the last day of his life, Swamiji came out of the shrine and was descending the stairs with a song on his lips. His *Life* records: ‘In his meditation his own Master and the Divine Mother—to his own realization One and the Same Personality—must have been present, for, when he had finished, he broke forth in a touching song in which the highest Jnana mingled with the highest Bhakti.’² That song was ‘Is my Mother Shyama black?... (*Shyama ma ki amar kalo re...*).’

The building adjacent to the old shrine (presently, the office of the Manager Maharaj of Belur Math) is replete with memories of some great lives. This building was also part of the earlier Math, where lived almost all the direct disciples, the Presidents of the Order till Swami Visuddhananda, the eighth President, and some great monks of later generation who were highly respected for their spiritual attainments. So this building is a temple of sacred memories.

1. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.354.

2. *Life*, 2.601.

We mentally offer our salutations to these great ones and seek their blessings.

In the area between this building and the Old Temple building there are some offices now. Durga puja was held here in the early days.

We now proceed towards the Ganga, along the southern side of the Math building. On this side of the building is a staircase leading to Swamiji's room on the first floor. This staircase was a later addition to enable visitors to see Swamiji's room.

5. Swamiji's Room



Here lived the great sage who Sri Ramakrishna said was a 'Dhyana Siddha (perfect in meditation) even from the very birth'. During Swamiji's time the room must have been less cluttered than it appears today with many pieces of furniture and miscellaneous

things. Swamiji was a man without frontiers and would have liked to live and move like free air. We can imagine him in a spacious room with bare minimum furniture, sitting quietly or meditating, or being absorbed in the scenic beauty of the Ganga. The fact is that many things in this room were later additions. As days went by, things used by Swamiji at different places were received at Belur Math and began to accumulate in his room for want of a better place.

Let us now look into the room.

Things like Swamiji's clothes and footwear are preserved here. We also see his canes, his turban in two glass cases, a tabla and a tanpura, the musical instruments he used. The large cot that we see here was gifted to him by his western disciples. However, he did not use it much. He preferred the canvas cot lying adjacent to it, or he lay down on a mat spread on the floor.

On the eastern side of the room are a table and a chair. On the table there is a picture of Sri Ramakrishna on a wooden altar. Beside the photograph there is an oval crystal image of Swamiji as a wandering monk. In this crystal Swamiji is conceived of as the great God Shiva; hence, the Bull, the vehicle of Shiva, in front of him. Miss Josephine McLeod, an American associate of Swamiji, got it made most likely in 1917. In fact, she got a number of them made and happily distributed them to people as a kind of 'visiting card', as she said. Why crystal? 'Nothing but crystal can represent Swamiji' was her insightful answer.

Swamiji loved his room and was always glad to be back in it after his travels, and even after a short visit to Kolkata. In this room he wrote, gave instructions to his brother-monks and disciples, received his friends, had his meal, slept, and communed with God. And in this very room he gave up his body in final meditation.

Here are excerpts from some of the letters he wrote from this room:

‘Here I am writing in my room on the Ganga, in the Math. It is so quiet and still! The broad river is dancing in the bright sunshine, only now and then an occasional cargo boat breaking the silence with the splashing of the oars. It is the cold season here, but the middle of the day is warm and bright every day. ... Everything is green and gold, and the grass is like velvet; yet the air is cold and crisp and delightful.’¹

‘The moon is not up yet, but there is a sunless glow upon the river. Our mighty Ganges (She is indeed mighty now, during the rains) is splashing against the walls of the house. Numerous tiny boats are flitting up and down in the dark; they have come to fish for our shads, which come up the river this season. ... How I wish you were here to taste our shads—one of the most delicate fish in the world. It is raining outside—pouring. But the moment this downpour ceases, I rain through every pore—it is so hot yet. ...

‘I would not take any supper tonight, as I ate rather heartily of the aforesaid shad! Then I have to think, think, think on my theme; and some subjects I think best in bed because the whole is made clear to me in dream. Therefore,

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Vol., 6.440; hereafter, *Complete Works*.

I am going to bed, and *Gute Nacht* (good night), *bon soir* (good evening), etc., etc. No, no, it is now about 10 a.m. in Detroit.¹ Therefore, a very happy day to you. May all good realities reach you today while I am expecting dreams.

Ever yours with love and blessings,
Vivekananda.²

Swamiji is still here!

During the dedication of Swamiji's temple in January 1924, Swami Shivananda said: 'Swamiji lives in this Belur Math even now. How many days I have seen him in his room immersed in deep meditation! Sometimes I saw him pacing in the room.'³

It is worth recalling a few experiences of some disciples of Sri Ramakrishna:

1. Years after the demise of Swamiji, Swami Vijnanananda was asked: 'Do you see Swamiji even now?' Swami Vijnanananda's reply was: 'Won't I see him when he is here?' He clarified his statement on another occasion: 'Swamiji is still here! When I pass by his room, I tiptoe lest he should be disturbed. I don't generally look into his room lest his eyes should catch mine. He takes his walk along this balcony, moves about on the terrace, sings in his room, and does many other things.'

2. Swami Akhandananda's pre-monastic name was Gangadhar, and Swamiji used to affectionately call him

1. This letter was written to Sister Christine, his disciple, who was living in Detroit, US.

2. *Complete Works*, 9.164.

3. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.484.

as 'Ganga' or 'Ganges'. It was the time of Durga Puja in 1933. During those days Swami Akhandananda was seen sitting near Swamiji's room and chanting Durga's Name aloud in the early morning. When asked for the reason, his simple answer was, 'I am chanting for Swamiji to hear'. And on one night he had a vivid dream: Swamiji appeared before him and asked, 'Ganga, see, my clothes smell of moth balls. Will you not give me a new set on this auspicious day?' Swami Akhandananda woke up with a start and went straight to the pujari swami's room, woke him up, and told him, 'Take a piece of new cloth and follow me.' The young swami could not understand what the matter was. But he obeyed Swami Akhandananda implicitly. Then they went to Swamiji's room. After burning incense there, Swami Akhandananda sprinkled perfume over the new cloth and offered it to Swamiji. Then he asked the young swami to perform mangalarati! 'But, Maharaj,' the perplexed pujari swami murmured, 'it is just 2:30 a.m.' As if he was in a world of bliss, Swami Akhandananda insisted, 'Today consider 2:30 a.m. as 4:00 a.m. and do the arati.' The pujari obeyed him.

3. For want of a resting place, two young swamis once slept in the narrow passage in front of Swamiji's room. Seeing this, Swami Shivananda asked them to get up and sleep elsewhere. He told them, 'My boys, Swamiji walks here; it will be inconvenient for him if you people rest here. He very much lives here. Don't obstruct his movements.'¹

4. Another day Swami Shivananda was seen in front of Swamiji's room looking intently inside the room

1. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.255.

and repeatedly saying, 'Good morning, Swamiji'. Later he told others, 'Today is a blessed day. I got the vision of Swamiji. Finishing his morning walk he was entering the room; it was just then I saw him. He was overwhelmed in bliss.'¹ That whole day Swami Shivananda was in Swamiji-consciousness and reminisced about Swamiji.

We offer our pranams to Swamiji and slowly descend the stairs immersed in his thoughts, and proceed on the pathway running parallel to the Ganga towards the other temples. We cannot but think, 'Ah! How many times would the holy feet of Swamiji have trodden this path! Almost all the apostles of Sri Ramakrishna and the later monks of the Order and innumerable devotees from all over the world have walked here!'

There is a small flower garden to our right between the Math courtyard and the lawn lying towards the eastern side of the Sri Ramakrishna temple. Here under a *Vilva* tree Swamiji worshipped Sri Ramakrishna on the day (Friday, 9 December 1898) when the Math was shifted from Nilambar House² to this place.

As we proceed further towards the temples, we notice *Nagalinga* and *Bangshee-bat*³—the two big trees

1. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.597.

2. Information about this house can be found on p.39.

3. Banyan, or fig, tree is called *vata-vriksha* in Sanskrit and *bat* in Bengali. There are more than 200 varieties of banyan trees. *Bangshee-bat* or *Thonga-bat* is a rare variety of banyan tree the leaves of which are much used in Ayurvedic and Unani treatments. *Thonga-bat* is popularly known as 'Krishna's fig', or 'Krishna's butter cup', (*Maakhan Kathori* in Hindi) after its cup-like leaves.

on the left of the pathway. They were planted under the supervision of Swami Brahmananda.

Let us proceed towards the temples.

6. Swami Brahmananda Temple



The first temple we see to our left is the temple dedicated to Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and the first president of the Ramakrishna Order. He is also known as ‘Raja Maharaj’, ‘Rakhal Maharaj’ or simply ‘Maharaj’. His temple stands on the spot where his body was cremated on his passing away on 10 April 1922. The temple was built in a short period of two years. Shyam Ghosh, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, bore the expenses, which came to Rs 40,000. Shyam Ghosh was the son of Navagopal Ghosh, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The temple was dedicated by Swami Shivananda on 7 February 1924, Maharaj’s birthday.

The temple has a marble image of Swami Brahmananda. Sri Ramakrishna once declared him to be a boyhood companion of Sri Krishna in his earlier birth. As if to remind that fact, there is a little image of child Krishna below Swami Brahmananda's image. It is worshipped on special occasions like Sri Krishna Janmashtami. On the top of the temple dome there is a Chakra (Disc), symbolising Maha Vishnu's weapon.

The upper storey of the temple is maintained as Maharaj's bedroom; it has a cot and a few other things used by him. It is opened to the public once a year on Maharaj's birthday.

7. Mother's Temple



*N*ext we come to Mother's temple. Our gracious Mother is sitting in all her majesty on a beautiful altar, overlooking the Ganga, which she adored as divine. On her right is a small photo of Sri Ramakrishna,

which was given to her by Gopaler-ma, a woman devotee of Sri Ramakrishna known for her spiritual attainments. On Mother's left is a Baneshvara Shivalinga. Above the door is a niche with a stone figurine of goddess Durga.

According to Swamiji, Mother was born to revitalize power in this world. He said: '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.'¹ Mother's temple stands on the spot where her mortal remains were consigned to flames. Hence the place is a *Shakti Pitha*, an Abode of the Divine Mother.

After the passing away of the Mother, many places were suggested to arrange the pyre. Swami Shivananda selected the present spot and said, 'Mother will sit facing the Ganga and will ever shower eternal peace on the whole of humanity.' Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also felt that the temple would look majestic if it faced the Ganga. The temple

1. *Complete Works*, 7.491.

was erected accordingly; of all the temples in Belur Math, Mother's alone faces the Ganga.

Mahendranath Gupta (M.), the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, records something unique. When he was unable to overcome the grief of Mother's passing away, he had a vivid dream, which he describes in his own words: 'The other day Mother appeared to me in a dream. She said, "What you saw as my passing away was just an illusion. Here, behold! I am still in the very same form!"'¹ Swami Shivananda once remarked: 'Mother is the Divine Mother Herself, and She lives here eternally.'²

Foundation stone for this temple was laid on 31 December 1920, Mother's birthday in the year she passed away. Due to the relentless efforts of Swami Saradananda, who remained always close to Mother's heart, the temple was completed the very next year. He dedicated the temple on 21 December 1921, the sixty-eighth birthday of Mother.

We now proceed southwards towards Swamiji's temple. Midway, there are three deodar trees on our right. They have been here from the time the land was purchased; that is, for more than 100 years!

The gate in the southwest direction which leads to the jetty (known as launch ghat) used to be the main gate during Swamiji's time. This is the gate

1. Quoted by Swami Prabhananda in *Nibodhata*, July 2002, p.39, a quarterly published from Sarada Math, Dakshineswar.

2. *Shivananda Smriti Sangrah*, p.257.

(smaller then) that Swamiji scaled over on his return to the Math on the night of 9 December 1900 after his second visit to the West. Again, it was here that Mother was given a grand welcome when she visited the Math in 1911 after her pilgrimage to South India.¹

8. Swamiji's Temple



Swamiji's temple is a two-storeyed structure: upstairs there is a shrine with a marble image of Om in Bengali and on the ground floor is Swamiji's shrine with a marble relief of Swamiji. The shrine floor is

1. For details, see Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p.250; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; 1977.

below the ground level because that part of the land was very low when the temple was built.

This temple stands on the spot where Swamiji's mortal remains were consigned to flames. The place was chosen by Swamiji himself. His *Life* records: 'Three days before his passing away, as the Swami was walking up and down on the spacious lawn of the monastery in the afternoon with Swami Premananda, he pointed to a particular spot on the bank of the Ganga, and said to his brother-monk gravely, "When I give up the body, cremate it there!" (He passed away on 4 July 1902.) On that very spot stands today a temple in his honour.'

Strangely, the completion of Swamiji's temple took a long time, almost twenty-one years, for want of funds despite earnest appeals sent not only within India but also abroad. The construction work could begin only in January 1907, almost five years after Swamiji's passing away. But the progress was very slow. However, in January 1909, even when the temple construction remained incomplete, a large portrait of Swamiji was placed and beautifully decorated inside the temple on Swamiji's birthday.

In January 1912, when it was found that the construction work had not progressed much, Swami Brahmananda wrote in *Mahratta*¹ in an admonishing and painful tone: 'Swamiji left his body ten years ago. It is needless to say that his death is a loss to the whole nation. People have expressed their grief and concern

1. A journal started by Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak.

regarding that. But could we make a befitting memorial yet to this patriotic saint of modern India? This is a matter of shame and a standing testimony of the worthlessness of Indians.’ But his reprimand fell on deaf ears.

The marble relief of Swamiji installed inside the temple became possible by the efforts of Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swamiji, and with financial contribution from Mrs Leggett, an associate of Swamiji. At first it was decided to install a smaller relief of Swamiji (than the present one). Mounting expenses did not permit anyone to conceive of a larger one. But when Mrs Leggett, the donor herself, suggested a larger marble relief, Nivedita’s joy knew no bounds. She wrote, ‘That size would be magnificent! It would make the Vivekananda temple look grander all the more and would remain an outstanding event for Ages to come!’

The marble relief was made in Jaipur. Sister Nivedita writes: ‘The sculptor had begun the work with a small puja and offering in front of the marble stone. Then he prayed intensely to Swamiji veiled in the stone: “Swamiji! Kindly manifest yourself in my hands!” He works right from 8.00 in the morning till 7.30 in the evening with a break only for his lunch. He sent me word if the work was not accomplished to the satisfaction of us, he would not accept a single rupee for the work; he would return all the money.’



This marble relief of Swamiji was installed in the temple in a simple way during 1913 and Swamiji began to be worshipped there. The construction work still prolonged and it could be completed only by the end of 1923.

Sankariprasad Basu writes: 'In these long sixteen years many meetings were held in honour of Swami Vivekananda in different parts of the country, and thousands and thousands raised "jaya-dhvani" in his name. Thousands visited Belur Math and offered their devotional salutations to him at the unfinished temple. We cannot doubt the devotion of these people.

However, it has to be borne in mind that our bhakti is intertwined with sluggishness because of which we fail to accomplish anything worthwhile.'

Swami Vijnanananda looked after the temple construction. Before the commencement of the work, he was seen immersed in the thoughts of Swamiji. He used to talk of Swamiji constantly and meditate upon him. He was then living at the Ramakrishna Math at Allahabad. Often he visited the nearby Bharadwaj Ashram and saw the images of the Saptarshis (Seven Sages) and intently observed them, for Sri Ramakrishna had seen Swamiji as one among the seven sages of the Saptarshi-mandala (plane of Seven Sages). He even had an oil painting of the Saptarshi-mandala made for display in his room. He repeatedly said, 'Swamiji is all-pervading in the universe. However, his abode is the Saptarshi-mandala.'

Swamiji's temple as well as the Om temple upstairs were declared open in January 1924.

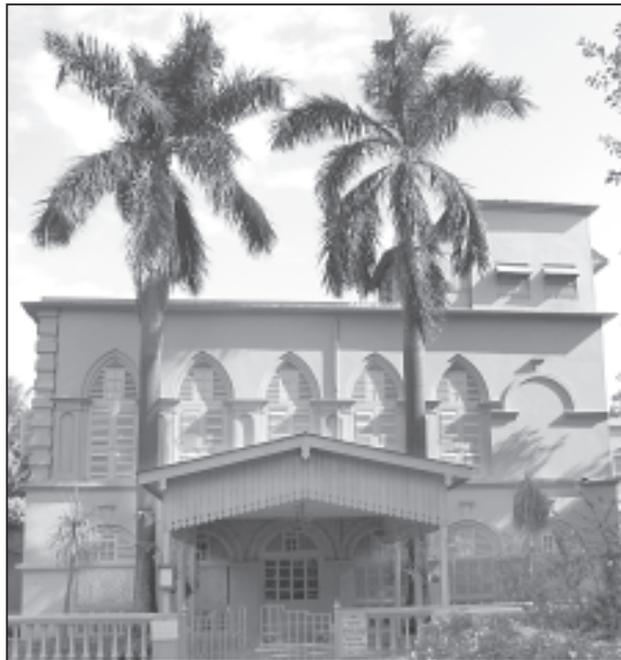
However, many were not impressed by the flight of stairs leading to the Om temple. Known for her refined taste, Miss McLeod wrote that the steps were 'steep, high and narrow and not at all fitting to Swamiji and his thinking'. She did not stop with mere criticism, but made efforts to better the stairs. She got a design from the Villa d' Este in Italy, which was famous for its sweeping and curly stairs, and altered the stairs accordingly.

Sri Ramakrishna once referred to Swamiji as Shiva and himself as his Shakti. There are instances of some of his brother disciples having had the vision of Swamiji

as Lord Shiva. We have seen the oval-crystal in Swamiji's room, got made by Miss McLeod, in which Swamiji is conceived of as Lord Shiva. Symbolically, the apex of Swamiji's temple is adorned with a nine foot *trishula*, a trident, which is a symbol of Lord Shiva. In 1939 Miss McLeod got the heads of the trident covered with gold.

Vilva Tree: There is a Vilva tree adjacent to the right-side stairs leading to the Om temple. On the same spot stood the original Vilva tree under which Swamiji used to sit.

9. President Maharaj's Quarters



A few feet away from the Vilva tree towards southwest is the residence of Most Revered President Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Order. Devotees can have

his darsan at fixed hours twice a day whenever he is at the Math. The ground floor of this building was constructed mainly with donations from theatres in Bengal in memory of Girish Chandra Ghosh, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the Father of Bengal Drama. Hence it was named 'Girish Smriti Bhavan'. Initially it was a single-storeyed building and the upstairs portion was added later.

From here we proceed eastwards to the Samadhi Ghat.

10. Samadhi Ghat



*O*ur pilgrimage inside Belur Math ends with the Samadhi Ghat, the cremation ground. The mortal remains of seven monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were consigned to flames here. The place is marked by a memorial stone with the names of the disciples

engraved on it. By the side of this memorial and towards the Ganga are two cremation spots that are fenced with iron railings. The northern spot is meant for the last rites of the President Maharajs of the Order and the other for the other monks of the Order.

‘The body would be reduced to ashes; the materials with which the body is made of are going to return to their original source; O mind, think of the deeds done in the past, ponder upon them!’—so goes an ancient Hindu prayer.¹ We stand in reverence there for a while reflecting on those great lives and seeking their blessings.

11. Ramakrishna Museum



Though the great ones are no more, their memories are preserved in the Ramakrishna Museum

1 . A free rendering of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*, 17:
वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मान्तं शरीरम् । ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर क्रतो स्मर
कृतं स्मर ॥

which was opened in 2001. As we enter the Belur Math gates, the museum is located to our left. It has on display some articles used by Sri Ramakrishna, Mother, Swamiji, some great monks of the Order and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. As we witness the exhibits in the museum, the history of Ramakrishna Order, and its uniqueness in religious history unfold before us. A thirty-minute video show on the subject enriches our experience in the museum. The museum remains closed on Mondays and celebration days.

12. The Ganga



Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Just as cows eat their fill, become free from anxiety, and then resting in one place, chew the cud, so after one has visited temples and pilgrim centres, one should sit in a secluded place, ruminate over and get absorbed in those holy thoughts that occurred to one in these sacred places. One

should not apply one's mind to sights, tastes and other worldly objects, immediately after visiting them. For, in that case the godly impression gathered will not produce permanent results on the mind.'¹

Could there be a better place than the banks of the Ganga to 'chew the cud'? So, let us sit on the banks of the Ganga, and in the serene surroundings relive our experiences in the temples.

From here we also catch a glimpse of the spires of the Dakshineswar Kali temple across (north-east) the river. On the other side of the river there are some more pilgrim centres, which we shall soon visit: Cossipore, Udbodhan, and Balaram Mandir.

13. The Old Math

Nilambar Babu's garden house, which housed the Ramakrishna monastery in its early days, is now a part of Belur Math and is known as the Old Math. It is situated about a kilometre southwards from the Belur Math near the Belur boat jetty. Belur Math is the fourth and permanent abode of the Ramakrishna Order, the earlier three being Baranagore Math (1886-1892), Alambazar Math (1892-1898), and the Old Math (1898-1899). The Old Math is associated with sacred memories of all of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. Mother

1 . Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p.791, 2008; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; hereafter '*Great Master*'.



stayed here several times and blessed many aspirants with initiation.

Swamiji wrote here '*khandana bhava bandhana*', the arati song sung during vespers in all the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and '*Om hrim ritam*', the hymn to Sri Ramakrishna chanted after the arati. He also wrote here the hymn on Sri Ramakrishna beginning with '*Achandala*'. He initiated Miss Margaret Noble into brahmacharya here and gave her the name Sister Nivedita. He also gave sannyasa to a number of brahmacharis here.

Places to see here:

Shrine: The room where Mother stayed during her visit to this place is now maintained as a shrine, located on the north-east corner upstairs.

Terrace: Mother used to sit for meditation on the terrace adjoining the shrine. One day while in



meditation she said, ‘My mind is merging in red light and blue light. If this state continues, my body will not last.’

Another day she was so absorbed in meditation that as she emerged from that exalted state, she did not regain her body consciousness and exclaimed, ‘Oh! Where are my hands? Where are my legs?’ Yogin-ma, her lifelong companion, who was nearby, pressed her hands and legs repeatedly, after which Mother regained body-consciousness.

Sometime in 1893 Mother performed here *panchatapa*, ‘the austerity of five fires’, for seven days. It is an austerity performed by sitting in meditation surrounded by five fires—blazing fires from dried cow-dung cakes on four sides, with the burning sun above for the fifth fire. In Mother’s case this austerity had more than one purpose. Once Mother said that she did this for the

good of the world. On another occasion she said that the austerity was meant to ward off a spirit that had been following her. The third answer that she gave was that *tapas*, or austerity, was necessary to achieve anything great, and pointed out that even the Divine Mother Uma had to perform *tapas* in order to get Shiva as Her husband. The last reason was significant, for only after this austerity did her spiritual ministry and her role as guru begin in a significant way.

Bathing Ghat: Mother used to sit on the steps of this ghat and admire the beauty of the Ganga flowing by. It was here on a full-moon night that she had a spiritual revelation of Swamiji's mission. She saw Sri Ramakrishna walking down into the Ganga and his body dissolving in the sacred waters. Swamiji sprinkled that water on innumerable people, chanting loudly, 'Jai Sri Ramakrishna!' The vision created so vivid an impression on her mind that for long she hesitated to enter the Ganga, for Sri Ramakrishna had merged into it. Swamiji's role in spreading Sri Ramakrishna's universal message was revealed to Mother in this vision.

This Math was earlier known as 'Nilambar Mukherjee's Garden House', when it was rented on several occasions for Mother's stay or for the activities of the Math. Finally, it came under the possession of Belur Math in 1984, and, after extensive restoration, was opened to the public on 12 December 1987, Mother's birthday.

Thus ends the Belur Math pilgrimage proper, and the second phase of our pilgrimage begins with a visit to Dakshineswar.

II. Dakshineswar

Swami Shivananda once remarked: ‘I feel Dakshineswar is Varanasi itself. ... Even as Varanasi, it doesn’t belong to this mundane world. ... Sri Ramakrishna lived there about thirty years. How many different kinds of spiritual disciplines did he not undergo there, what ecstasies and transcendental realisations did he not have!’ In fact, the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna’s life started unfolding here.

About a thirty-minute drive away from Belur Math, Dakshineswar is located on the eastern bank of the Ganga. A thirty-minute boat ride from Belur Math to Dakshineswar is a memorable experience; one gets from the boat a panoramic view of the temples in Belur Math as also in Dakshineswar.

Rani Rasmani built this temple-complex in 1855 as commanded by the Divine Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna once said about the sacredness of this place: ‘A part of the piece of land selected by the Rani at Dakshineswar belonged to an Englishman. In the other part of the land there was a Muslim graveyard associated with the memory of a holy man. The piece of land had the shape of the back of a tortoise. Such a graveyard according to the Tantras (scriptures on the worship of Divine Mother) is very commendable for the installation of Shakti and for Her Sadhana. Therefore,

as if guided by Providence, the Rani chose this piece of land.’¹

This naturally holy place is more sacred to a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna because of its association with Sri Ramakrishna, Mother, Swamiji, other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and great sadhakas of various Orders who either lived there or visited the place. A prior knowledge of this association will make our pilgrimage to Dakshineswar even more fruitful. We suggest a study of the two classics, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and a biography of Mother.

Courtyard

We enter the temple-complex through the main door. Passing through the metal detector we step on to the large paved courtyard, rectangular in shape and running north-south. On our right are the twelve Shiva temples, six on either side of the bathing ghat leading to the Ganga; Sri Ramakrishna used this ghat to go to the Ganga for a bath. It was in this ghat that he met for the first time Tota Puri, his guru for the practice of non-dualistic sadhana.

Two temples stand in the centre of this courtyard. The larger one, to the south and facing south, is the Kali temple, and the smaller one, facing the Ganga, the Radhakanta temple dedicated to Radha and Sri Krishna. In front of Mother Kali’s shrine is the spacious *natmandir* or prayer hall.

1. *Great Master*, p.163.

1. Kali Temple



The main temple is dedicated to Divine Mother Kali, worshipped as Bhavatarini,¹ 'One who frees us from transmigratory existence'. The basalt image of the Divine Mother, dressed in gorgeous gold brocade, stands on a

1. However, the original name of the deity in the Deed of Trust made by Rani Rasmani was 'Sri Sri Jagadiswari Mahakali'. How and when the name Bhavatarini came into existence remains a mystery. This name appears in the first chapter of the first part of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the original of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. (Vide. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sri Ramakrishna's Dakshineswar*, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, New Delhi, 1986, p.8-9.)

white marble image of Her Divine Consort Shiva, lying face up and representing the Absolute.

It was in front of this Bhavatarini that a rustic Gadadhar of Kamarpukur village blossomed into the world-adoring Ramakrishna. In 1856 Sri Ramakrishna took up the responsibility of worshipping Mother Kali. His divine experiences with the Divine Mother are unparalleled. Her divine plays with him are wonderful subjects of meditation for a devotee. That God assumes a human form to play with human beings and guides them on the way to God was proved here in this very shrine in the unique life of Sri Ramakrishna. Let us hear what he said about his first vision of the Divine Mother:

‘There was then an intolerable anguish in my heart because I could not have Her vision. ... I thought that there was no use in living such a life. My eyes suddenly fell upon the sword that was there in the Mother’s temple. I made up my mind to put an end to my life with it that very moment. Like one mad, I ran and caught hold of it, when suddenly I had the wonderful vision of the Mother, and fell down unconscious. ... It was as if the houses, doors, temples and all other things vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was a boundless infinite Conscious Sea of Light! However far and in whatever direction I looked, I found a continuous succession of Effulgent Waves coming forward, raging and storming from all sides with great speed. Very

soon they fell on me and made me sink to the Abysmal Depths of Infinity. I panted and struggled, as it were, and lost all sense of external consciousness. ... I saw that form of the Mother with hands that give boons and freedom from fear—the form that smiled, spoke and consoled and taught me in endless ways!’

Again, it was here that Swamiji as young Narendra had the wonderful vision of Divine Mother Kali. Here is the incident in his own words: ‘A firm faith arose in my mind that all the sufferings would certainly come to an end as soon as I prayed to the Mother, ... As I was going, a sort of profound inebriation possessed me; I was reeling. A firm conviction gripped me that I would actually see the Mother and hear Her words. I forgot all other things, and became completely merged in that thought alone. Coming into the temple, I saw the Mother was actually Pure Consciousness, was actually living, and was really the fountainhead of infinite love and beauty. My heart swelled with loving devotion; and, beside myself with bliss, I made repeated salutations to Her. ... My heart was flooded with peace. The whole universe completely disappeared, and the Mother alone remained filling my heart.’

We can also contemplate Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother both standing in front of Kali and worshipping Her. One day Holy Mother made a garland of white jasmine and red (*rangan*) flowers and sent it to the Kali temple to adorn the Divine

Mother. When Sri Ramakrishna came to the temple he was overwhelmed by the exquisite grandeur of Mother Kali enhanced by the garland, contrasting with Her jet black complexion. He enquired and learnt that it was Holy Mother who made the garland. In order that she also experienced the divine beauty of Mother Kali, he had Holy Mother come to the temple, and both stood in front of Mother Kali in worshipful adoration.

2. Natmandir



After offering prayers and worship to Divine Mother Kali, we climb down the stairs and enter the *natmandir*, the hall in front of the shrine. On the top of the *natmandir* there is an image of Bhairava flanked by Nandi and Bhringi, attendants of Shiva. While going

to the shrine of Mother Kali, Sri Ramakrishna used to salute them as if seeking their permission to enter the presence of the Divine Mother.

This hall is rich in memories associated with Sri Ramakrishna. With a ritual conducted at this hall, Sri Ramakrishna concluded his tantric sadhanas, or spiritual practices connected with the worship of Divine Mother. It was here again that Bhairavi Brahmani, the guru of Sri Ramakrishna for his tantric sadhanas, proved to an assembly of scholars that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God.

We will recollect another instance about Sri Ramakrishna from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: ‘M. ... came back to Sri Ramakrishna, who was still in the *natmandir*. In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the Self—as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.’¹

We walk through the hall towards the south and step down, where we see on the ground a pit with a short wooden post driven into it. Animal sacrifice used to be done here on special occasions. Devotees can be seen taking the soil of this spot as prasad. These sacrifices symbolically represent the sacrifice of our animal instincts at the feet of Divine Mother. However, in practice, the external act gained more importance and veiled its true significance.

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p.92; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; hereafter ‘*Gospel*’.

Opposite the *natmandir* is a room that preserves the original silver altar of Mother Kali, with a photo of Her image on it. This altar dates back to Sri Ramakrishna's time. Since it wore out, a new altar was installed in the shrine and the old one moved to this room.

3. Radhakanta Temple



Radha and Sri Krishna are the deities in the Radhakanta temple. The two images stand on an altar facing west. Sri Ramakrishna began his life at Dakshineswar as a priest of this temple in 1855.

There is another similar image of Sri Krishna in a small room to our left, adjacent to the main shrine. This was the original image. One day when the then priest was carrying this to another room he fell down with the image in hand, breaking its leg in the process. Scholars were consulted to know if a broken image

could be worshipped. They answered in the negative and suggested that the broken image be immersed in the Ganga and a new one installed in its place. But Sri Ramakrishna had a different opinion; He said in an ecstatic mood, 'If any of the sons-in-law of the Rani had fallen down and broken his leg, would she have forsaken him and had another son-in-law, or would proper arrangement have been made for his treatment? Let that procedure be followed here also; let the broken parts of the leg of the image be joined and the worship continued in the same image.' Saying so, he himself beautifully set right the broken parts, and he did it so well that even now it is not possible to know that the image ever broke at all. However, long after Rani Rasmani and Mathur Babu passed away, this repaired image was shifted to the adjacent room and a new one was installed in the temple.

The temple veranda is especially sacred to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, for the widely worshipped photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was taken here. Sri Ramakrishna himself worshipped his photograph once and prophesied: 'This is a picture showing a very high state of Yoga. It will be worshipped hereafter from house to house.'¹

1. *Great Master*, p.423; for a detailed description, read Swami Vidyatmananda, '*The Photographs of Sri Ramakrishna*', Vedanta Kesari, 1976-77, p.263; an English monthly published from Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. A brief description is available in '*Photographs of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 20 (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 2003).

4. Shiva Temples



In the twelve Shiva temples, there are Shivalingas representing various aspects of Shiva.

One day Sri Ramakrishna entered one of these Shiva temples and began to recite the *Shivamahimna-stotra*. In the process, he lost himself in the intense experience of the glory of Shiva, and began to cry out aloud, 'O Mahadeva, how can I express your glory!' Profuse tears streamed down his eyes, cheeks, chest, and clothes, at last making the floor wet. The servants and officers of the temple came running from all sides, hearing his loud cries and half-choked exclamations like someone gone mad.

Sri Ramakrishna often used to talk to devotees, sitting on the steps leading to these temples.

5. Sri Ramakrishna's Room



What is of special interest to us is the room in the north-western part of the courtyard, just beyond the last of the Shiva temples. Sri Ramakrishna lived in this room for at least fifteen years (1871-85). This room means a lot to his devotees. We can see people sitting in the room, meditating or silently reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in which most of the conversations took place in this very room. There are two cots here; Sri Ramakrishna sat on the smaller one and talked to the devotees, and slept on the bigger cot. The other things in the room seem to be later additions.

To the west of this room is a semicircular porch overlooking the Ganga. When Swamiji as young

Narendra visited Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, he entered the room through this semicircular porch. Sri Ramakrishna used to stand in this porch and salute the Ganga.

In front of the porch runs a footpath and beyond the path is a large garden wherefrom Sri Ramakrishna plucked flowers for worship.

The northern veranda of this room is a silent witness to a number of historical incidents connected with the life of Swamiji. On many occasions Sri Ramakrishna took him alone there, poured out his love for him and also granted him various spiritual experiences. In the words of Swamiji we recall the dramatic incident that occurred on his very first visit, towards the end of 1881:

‘Sri Ramakrishna suddenly stood up, and taking me by the hand, led me to the northern veranda. ... As soon as he entered the veranda, he closed the door of the room. ... He suddenly caught hold of my hand and shed profuse tears of joy. Addressing me affectionately like one already familiar, he said: “Is it proper that you should come so late? Should you not have once thought how I was waiting for you? Hearing continually the idle talk of worldly people, my ears are about to be scorched. Not having anyone to whom to communicate my innermost feelings, I am about to burst.” And so he went on raving and weeping. The next moment he stood before me with folded palms, and showing me the regard due to a god, went on saying,

“I know, my Lord, you are that ancient Rishi Nara, a part of Narayana, who has incarnated himself this time, to remove the miseries and sufferings of humanity.”

‘I was absolutely nonplussed and thought, “Whom have I come to see? He is, I see, completely insane. Why should he otherwise speak in this strain to me, who am really the son of Viswanath Datta?” However, I kept silent and the wonderful madman went on speaking whatever he liked. The next moment he asked me to wait there and entered the room, and bringing some butter, candy and milk-sweets, began to feed me with his own hand. He never gave ear to my repeated requests to give those things to me, so that I might partake of them with my companions, saying, “They will take them later. You take these yourself.” Saying so, he fed me with all the sweets, and only after that could he rest content.’¹

Again, it was on this veranda that Mathur Babu, a son-in-law of Rani Rasmani and the caretaker of the temple, had a wonderful vision about the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was one day pacing back and forth this veranda in an indrawn mood. Mathur was then sitting in the house known as Babus’ mansion just a few feet away from the veranda and watching Sri Ramakrishna. When Sri Ramakrishna was walking in one direction, Mathur saw Mother Kali instead of Sri Ramakrishna, and when he turned around and walked in the opposite direction, it was Lord Shiva Himself!

1. *Great Master*, p.1019.

6. Rani Rasmani Memorial



In front of the northern veranda of Sri Ramakrishna's room stands a memorial to Rani Rasmani, erected in 2003. Sri Ramakrishna said about her: 'Rani Rasmani was one of the eight Nayikas (attendant goddesses) of the Divine Mother. She came down to the world to spread the worship of the Divine Mother. "Sri Rasmani Dasi desirous of realizing the feet of Kali" were the words engraved on her office seal. A steadfast devotion to the

Divine Mother was manifested in every action of the Rani.’¹

A marble image of hers is installed in the memorial.

M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, wrote: ‘Monks, saints, Hindus, Christians, Brahma devotees, Saktas, Vaishnavas, men, and women—all come here. Blessed indeed are you Rani Rasmani! This beautiful temple has come up because of the power of your merit alone!’

7. Babus' Mansion

Outside and to the north of the temple complex is the Babus’ Mansion (also known as the *kuthi-bari*). This was used by members of Rani Rasmani’s family whenever they visited the temple. For nearly 16 years Sri Ramakrishna lived in a room in the north-western corner of the ground floor in this mansion. M. said: ‘He (Sri Ramakrishna) was in this mansion for 16 years, from 1855 to 1871, in the room facing the Ganga with a veranda in front and then steps. His mother also lived with him in the same room. How much of japa and dhyana; how many visions have been seen in this room!’² Here Sri Ramakrishna

1. *Great Master*, p.597.

2. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sri Ramakrishna’s Dakshineswar*, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, New Delhi, 1986, p.20

had several significant spiritual experiences. Till his last days, whenever M. visited Dakshineswar, he never missed visiting this room and offering his respects there.

It was on the roof of this mansion that Sri Ramakrishna longingly cried for his young disciples, about whose arrival the Divine Mother had revealed to him. Later he said:

‘When the day ended and the evening came, I could no longer control that surge of anxiety by any amount of patience; the thought arose that another day had passed away and none of them had come. When the temples rang with sounds of conchs, bells, etc., I got up to the roof of the mansion of the proprietors. Being restless on account of the anguish of my heart, I called out at the top of my voice and with tears in my eyes, “Where are you, my children? Do come, one and all. I cannot rest any more without seeing you”; and I filled the quarters with loud cries. So great were my anxiety and restlessness that it is doubtful whether a mother could desire so intensely to meet her child, nor had I ever heard of a pair of lovers or friends behaving that way in order to be united with each other. A few days after this, the devotees began to come one by one.’¹

1. *Great Master*, p.426.

8. Nahabat



Nahabat means a music tower. In earlier days, music flowed from here to mark temple worship at different times of day, like sunrise, noon, and sunset. At the north-west and south-west corners of the temple complex are two nahabats. We are particularly interested in the north-west nahabat, to the north of Rani Rasmani memorial.

This *nahabat* could be said to be a wonder of the world. That someone could live in that tiny cell (in the ground floor) evokes in us a sense of wonder and admiration. Not only a young woman lived here but she could also accommodate a whole world within it. That was Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. She spent nearly thirteen years in this tiny space, from 1872 to 1885.

The ground floor of the *nahabat* is a small low-roofed octagonal room measuring less than 50 square feet area, with a 4.25 feet wide veranda surrounding it. Besides being Mother's living room, the *nahabat* served as her provision store, kitchen and reception room—a surprising combination of functions for such a small enclosure. Her patience and endurance were exemplary; what seemed impossible for others did not pose any problem to her. In later days she would tell her nieces, 'You won't be able to live in such a room even for a day.'

A marble image of Mother is now enshrined in this room.

9. Bathing Ghat



We proceed northwards to the Panchavati, the place of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices.

Just a few feet from the Nahabat on our left is Bakultala Ghat, the bathing place near bakul trees. Mother used to bathe here in the very early hours of morning. One day, it was so dark that she was about to step on a crocodile. When Sri Ramakrishna heard about this he asked her to take a lantern with her.

Sri Ramakrishna saw here for the first time Bhairavi Brahmani, his guru who taught him spiritual practices according to the Tantras.

10. Panchavati



*W*hen we proceed further northwards, within a few feet to our right we see one or two fig trees, a small cottage and a dilapidated platform in a fenced enclosure. These are the remnants of the historical

‘Panchavati’. Panchavati is a cluster of five trees—fig, vilva, amalaki, banyan, and ashoka—a place specially auspicious for spiritual practices. During the early days of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar there was a Panchavati. It was a thick jungle of gigantic banyan and other trees under which he practised unprecedented spiritual austerities. His biography records: ‘In those days the land surrounding the Panchavati was ... full of pits, ditches, lowlands, jungles, etc. ... It was a burial ground besides being a jungle. Therefore people hardly went there even in the daytime. If they went that way at all, they never entered the jungle. So, going there at night was out of the question. No one ventured there for fear of ghosts.’ Sri Ramakrishna performed limitless and unheard of spiritual practices here. However, except the banyan tree¹ this Panchavati ceased to exist even during Sri Ramakrishna’s time.

So Sri Ramakrishna planted a new Panchavati. He planted the fig, and Hriday, his nephew, the banyan and other trees. Of all those trees, what has remained now is just the fig tree. The cottage² we see is the place where Sri Ramakrishna practised Vedanta sadhana under Tota Puri and remained immersed in the state of oneness with the Supreme Reality continuously for three days, bereft of external consciousness.

1. This banyan tree was also destroyed in a fire accident much later and the tree we see now was planted later.

2. Originally this was a hut.

Sri Ramakrishna had numberless visions in this Panchavati. Let us recall the vision of Sita in his own words: 'One day I was sitting under the Panchavati—not meditating, merely sitting—when an incomparable, effulgent female figure appeared before me illumining the whole place. It was not that figure alone that I saw then, but also the trees and plants of the Panchavati, the Ganga and all other objects. I saw that the figure was that of a woman; for there were in her no signs of a goddess, such as the possession of three eyes, etc. But the extraordinary, spirited and solemn expression of that face, manifesting love, sorrow, compassion, and endurance, was not generally seen even in the figures of goddesses. Looking graciously at me, that goddess woman was advancing from north to south towards me with a slow, grave gait. I wondered who she might be, when a black faced monkey came suddenly, nobody knew whence, and fell prostrate at her feet, and someone within my mind exclaimed, "Sita, Sita who was all sorrow all her life, Sita the daughter of King Janaka, Sita to whom Rama was her very life!" Saying "Mother" repeatedly, I was then going to fling myself at her feet, when she came quickly and entered this (showing his own body). Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, I lost all consciousness and fell down.'

The pond near Panchavati known as Haans-pukur (goose pond) has been in existence since the time of Sri Ramakrishna.

11. Vilva Tree



A little further north stands a Vilva tree in a walled enclosure. Sri Ramakrishna practised Tantric sadhana here under the guidance of Bhairavi Brahmani. He used to say, 'There was no limit to my visions and experiences [I had under the vilva tree], all very extraordinary.' The original tree is no more; the present one was planted later to mark the spot.

These are the important places in Dakshineswar. While visiting these places, contemplating the incidents connected with them is a spiritual practice by itself.



III. Cossipore



Cossipore garden house is where the curtain fell on the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna. The place is about a thirty-minute drive away from Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was brought here towards the end of his life for treatment of his throat cancer. He stayed here from 11 December 1885 till his passing away on 16 August 1886.

Midway from the main gate to the house, on the left side, stands a mango tree that is significant to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. This tree was planted later to mark the spot where stood a mango tree under which Sri Ramakrishna blessed his devotees on

1 January 1886 granting them spiritual visions and bestowing fearlessness on them. This day is celebrated as Kalpataru¹ Day in many centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

As we enter the house we see a shrine for Sri Ramakrishna. This is a later addition to enable more number of devotees to witness arati and worship. In the adjacent room there is a shrine for Mother. This is the room where she lived and served Sri Ramakrishna during his last illness. In the room upstairs, Sri Ramakrishna lived the last nine months of his life. The room is now maintained as a shrine.

One can find the trunk of a date tree on exhibit at the office of the ashram. This piece of wood is a silent witness to a miraculous incident at Cossipore during Sri Ramakrishna's last days: One day some young disciples were going to tap date juice from a tree in the compound. Sri Ramakrishna was then in a very bad condition and could not even move about without help. But to her surprise, Mother noticed him running out of the room that day. She went to his room to see what the matter was. The room was empty, and she saw Sri Ramakrishna return within a short time. When she asked him about the incident the next day, he dismissed it by saying, 'Oh! It is all

1. Kalpataru is a celestial tree that is believed to fulfill the desires of anyone who stood under it and prayed for something.

your imagination! Your brain must have been heated by too much standing near the oven in the kitchen! But when Mother was persistent, he said that there was a cobra under the date tree from which the young disciples were going to tap the juice. In order to protect them, he had, by his higher powers, gone to the place in advance and driven the cobra away. His making light of the incident at first was perhaps to discourage too much stress being laid on such miraculous happenings.

This place is significant in the history of the Ramakrishna Order, as Sri Ramakrishna founded here the Ramakrishna Order with his monastic disciples. The final months of Sri Ramakrishna's life here were known for intense activity marked by significant incidents, some of which were related to Swamiji's future mission. Hence a prior study of Sri Ramakrishna's life, especially the Cossipore days, will enrich our pilgrimage to this place.

Cossipore cremation ground, where the mortal remains of Sri Ramakrishna were consigned to flames, is a fifteen-minute walk away from here. A small, inscribed tomb marks the place.



IV. Udbodhan



Our next destination is Udbodhan, or Mother's house, which is a thirty-minute drive away from Cossipore. Udbodhan House was Mother's Kolkata residence. It derived its name from *Udbodhan*, the Bengali magazine of the Ramakrishna Order, which was published from here. Mother lived here for about eleven years, from 1909 till her passing away in 1920, except for occasional visits to Jayrambati.

During the early days, when Mother visited Kolkata from Jayrambati, she stayed in the houses of the devotees when the stay was short, and in rented houses when it was longer. Swami Saradananda

wanted to have a permanent residence for her in Kolkata, and he built this house by incurring a loan for this purpose. Mother entered this house for the first time on 20 May 1909.¹ She lived with her relatives and women devotees upstairs, while her monastic attendants and other disciples lived in the ground floor.

As we enter the house, we see a small room to our left. Swami Saradananda sat here and functioned as Mother's 'gate keeper'. Besides shouldering the dual responsibility of the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order and looking after Mother and her affairs, he wrote his magnum opus *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga (Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master)* right in this small room. The commotion of the household did not affect his concentration in the least; he explained: 'I have told my ears, "Don't listen to anything that is unnecessary." So my ears are not listening to them.'² He was a great yogi with complete control over his senses.

We offer our pranams to Swami Saradananda there and then ascend the stairs leading to the shrine upstairs. Mother worshipped Sri Ramakrishna in this shrine every day. It is Mother's photo in the shrine that catches our attention first. It is placed facing us on the cot used by her. At first, some other room in the southern direction was made ready for her. But Mother

1. This day is celebrated annually in Udbodhan as '*padaarpan divas*', the day she stepped into the house.

2. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them*, p.337; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2001.

made the shrine her living quarters, saying, 'It is not possible for me to stay away from Sri Ramakrishna and that is not right also.' Below her picture are her footprints enclosed in a glass case. After evening arati, devotees offer pranams by touching her footprints.

To Mother's left is the altar where Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped regularly. Two photos of Sri Ramakrishna and one of Swamiji and Swami Saradananda are in the altar.

Why and how two photos of Sri Ramakrishna? Mother herself installed Sri Ramakrishna's photo and started the worship here. This photo was very special as she had been worshipping this since her Dakshineswar days. Not only that, Sri Ramakrishna himself worshipped this one day at Dakshineswar. During her travels she used to carry with her another photo of Sri Ramakrishna for daily worship. That is the photo we see below the main photo. Thus there are two photos of the Master on the altar. The photos of Swamiji and Swami Saradananda were added later.

The room adjacent to Mother's shrine was Swami Saradananda's bedroom. It is now preserved as a memorial for him; his cot, shoes, and some articles he used, and also some of the articles used by Mother are preserved there.

Mayer Ghat, where Mother used to bathe in Ganga, is a ten-minute walk away from here. A memorial was erected here in 2005. Later, a white marble image of Mother was installed in it on 25 Aug 2007.

V. Balaram Mandir



A ten-minute walk away from Udbodhan is Balaram Mandir. It was the house of Balaram Bose, a famous householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. At Balaram's house Sri Ramakrishna used to meet his Kolkata devotees who could not visit him often at Dakshineswar. Mother, all monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and several other devotees of the Master stayed here on many occasions. The main shrine is the hall where Sri Ramakrishna met devotees and talked to them.



Apart from this main shrine, Balaram Mandir has two more shrines: one dedicated to Jagannath, the family deity of Balaram Bose, and the other to Mother, in the room where she stayed during her visits.

This place is significant in the history of the Ramakrishna Order, since Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission here on 1 May 1897.



VI. Shyampukur House



A fifteen-minute walk away from Balaram Mandir is Shyampukur Bati, or Shyampukur house. Sri Ramakrishna lived here for about two months in 1885. He was brought here on 2 October for medical treatment and he left for Cossipore on 11 December. Mother, Swamiji and the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna too stayed here and served him.

During Sri Ramakrishna's stay at Shyampukur, the devotees often experienced the divine power and the divine nature of the Master. We shall narrate an extraordinary incident that occurred on the Kali puja day, 6 November 1885:

It was 7 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting quietly in his room. Incense was burnt, lamps were lighted and the room became illumined, and filled with fragrance. The room was thus completely silent. Seeing him sitting thus Girishchandra Ghosh, a devotee, beside himself with joy, took a handful of flowers and sandal-paste and offered them at the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna uttering, “Jai Ma!” (Victory to Mother). At this, all the hairs of Sri Ramakrishna’s body stood on end, and he entered into profound ecstasy—his face radiating effulgence, his lips adorned with a divine smile and both his hands assuming *vara-abhaya mudra* (the gesture of granting boons and freedom from fear). All this indicated the manifestation of the Divine Mother in him. There was no limit to the joy of the devotees. All took flowers and sandal-paste and uttering a mantra according to their liking, worshipped the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna and filled the room with the repeated chants of “Jai”. The devotees experienced a joy that they had never felt before, the memory of which remained fresh in their minds ever after. And whenever sorrows and miseries came and they became dejected, that serene face of the Master, brightened with a divine smile and his hands promising boons and freedom from fear, appeared before them and reminded them that they were all under the protection of the Divine.¹

1. *Great Master*, p.1219-1220.

Sri Ramakrishna with hands showing *vara-abhaya mudra* is a wonderful object of meditation for his devotees.

The room where Sri Ramakrishna lived is now maintained as a shrine.



The tiny space in the terrace where Mother lived is also preserved with a photograph of hers installed on the spot.

Some of the things used by Sri Ramakrishna are on display.

This house is a sub-centre of Balaram Mandir.



VII. Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House



Swamiji's ancestral house is about an hour's drive away from Belur Math. This large house was built by Swamiji's great grandfather Ram Mohan Dutta. As Swamiji's two younger brothers did not marry, after their time this house went to its then occupants. In 1963 the property came under the legal possession of Belur Math. However, vacating the tenants and settling the legal issues took another thirty years. When it finally came under the full possession of Belur Math, the building was utterly dilapidated. It was progressively restored without changing any of its original architectural features. The extensively restored structure was dedicated on 26 September 2004 and declared open to visitors.

There are three main places to visit in this ancestral house:

1. ***Shrine***: An impressive picture of Swamiji in meditation pose is installed in an elegant altar in the



shrine, which stands on the terrace of the house on the actual spot where Swamiji was born. Like followers of some religions, Hindus too consider a few days after child birth to be a kind of defilement. Swamiji's mother was, therefore, confined in a shed on the terrace, where the child was born. One can see pictures of bamboo poles engraved on the pillars of the altar. These are symbolic representation of the shed.

2. *Meditation hall* on the first floor.

3. *Museum* on the ground floor and part of the first floor. Some articles used by Swamiji, his mother and brothers are preserved here. A brief, informative video recording explains the restoration process of Swamiji's house.

VIII. Kali Temple, Kolkata



Kali is the presiding deity of Bengal. About an hour's drive away from Belur Math, the Kali temple at Kalighat, Kolkata, is an ancient temple revered as a Shakti-pitha, one of the abodes of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna, Mother, Swamiji and other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna visited there.

Once Sri Ramakrishna visited this temple with Hriday. He had a vision of Kali in the form of a young girl on the northern bank of the pond lying east of the

temple. She was wearing a red-bordered sari. Surrounded by a few other girls She was playing with grasshoppers. Seeing this, Sri Ramakrishna uttered 'Mother', 'Mother' and lost all external consciousness. After regaining normal consciousness he went into the temple and, to his surprise, saw Kali wearing the same sari that he had seen in his vision. Later, hearing this from Sri Ramakrishna, Hriday said, 'Uncle! Why you didn't tell me then? I would have run to Her and caught Her!' With a smile Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Is it ever possible? If Mother does not allow Herself to be caught, who can catch Her? Without Her grace none can have Her vision.'

Swamiji visited this temple in 1901 in order to fulfil his mother's vow made during his childhood. He went to the temple, bathed in the Adi-Ganga flowing nearby, came all the way to the temple in wet clothes and rolled thrice on the ground before Kali. After offering worship, he circumambulated the temple seven times; and then performed Homa in front of Mother Kali in the open compound on the western side of the prayer hall.

Sister Nivedita, an Irish disciple of Swamiji, spoke on 'Kali Worship' in the prayer hall, in front of Mother Kali, on 28 May 1899.



IX. Yogodyan



Yogodyan (*yoga+udyan*) means ‘A garden fit for the practice of yoga’. This was originally a garden house belonging to Ramchandra Dutta, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna visited this house on Wednesday, 26 December 1883 and said, ‘It is a fine place. You can easily meditate on God here.’ Mother, Swamiji and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna visited here several times. Yogodyan is at Kankurgachi, which is about an hour’s drive away from Belur Math.

Arriving at the garden accompanied by Ramchandra Dutta and the other devotees, Sri Ramakrishna went to the sacred Tulsi-grove and saluted the Tulsi plant that grew at its centre. He sat for a while there and asked Ramchandra Dutta to make a Panchavati¹ in the northeast corner.

There was a pond in the garden, and on its southern side there was a small room. Sri Ramakrishna went inside the room, sat there on a seat and exclaimed, 'Ah! The atmosphere in this room is just like that in a shrine.' Then he partook of some refreshments and drank water from the tank inside the garden.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, part of his mortal remains was interred in this garden at the same spot where he sat during his visit, that is, in the Tulsi grove. The present temple stands right on that spot. In front of the temple is Ramakrishna Kund, or 'Ramakrishna Pond'. The room where he had refreshments is maintained as Vedi Ghar, or the 'Altar house'.

We see a Panchavati here, but this is a new one, though Ramchandra had planted a Panchavati as directed by Sri Ramakrishna.

1. See p.61 for an explanation of Panchavati.

Antpur, Kamarpukur, Jayrambati

We are now in the last phase of our pilgrimage, during which we will be visiting the rustic villages of Bengal away from the the bustle of Kolkata city. The following route map gives an idea about the locality of three major pilgrim centres: Antpur, Kamarpukur, and Jayrambati.



X. Antpur



Antpur, the birthplace of Swami Premananda, is about a two-hour drive away from Belur Math on the way to Kamarpukur. This is a place sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna, Mother, Swamiji, all the monastic disciples and some of the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

On his way to Kamarpukur from Kolkata, Sri Ramakrishna visited Antpur and stayed there for a few days when he was about 19 years old. The place where he stayed is now preserved as a holy spot.

Matangini Ghosh, Swami Premananda's mother, was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. On her invitation,

Mother, Swamiji and the young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna visited this place on different occasions. The rooms where Mother and Swamiji stayed are now maintained as shrine.

The present temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna stands on the spot where Swami Premananda was born.

Antpur is an important place in the history of the Ramakrishna Order, for it was here that the young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna made a firm resolve to renounce the world. In December 1886, Matangini invited the young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to Antpur to spend the Christmas holidays. Nine of them, including Swamiji and Swami Premananda, went to Antpur and spent their time in spiritual practices. During their stay they seemed to grow into one body, one mind and one soul. To his brother disciples Swamiji spoke glowingly of Christ's renunciation. There seemed to descend upon them all a spirit of renunciation, and they all resolved to become monks before a huge Dhuni (sacred fire). Only the next day they discovered that the previous day was Christmas Eve. In later years, Swami Shivananda, who was also present then, said: 'Our resolve to become organized became firm at Antpur. The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] had already made us sannyasins. That attitude was strengthened at Antpur.'

A small and beautiful hall called Dhuni Mandap stands on the place where the dhuni fire



was lit. Inside the Mandap we see a marble relief depicting this historical incident.

There are several other places of interest to visit here, which may require a whole day.

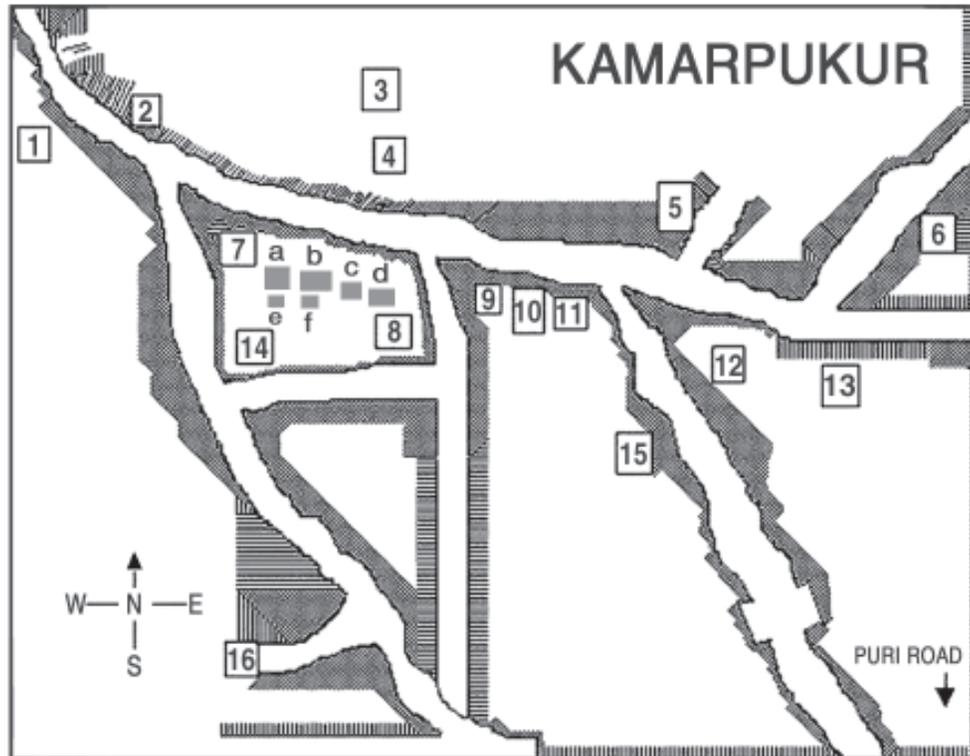


XI. Kamarpukur



*K*amarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, is about a three-hour drive away from Belur Math. M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, had a wonderful vision revealing the glory of Kamarpukur. He visited Kamarpukur in 1886 while Sri Ramakrishna was still alive. M. writes: ‘I perceived light everywhere in Kamarpukur. I saw trees, plants, birds, beasts, human beings—all as luminous forms and I bowed down to them.’¹

1. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishana as We Saw Him*, p.299; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata; 1992.



1. Bhuti canal; 2. Bhutirkhal Cremation Ground; 3. Haldarpukur; 4. Jugi's Shiva Temple; 5. Chinu Shankhari's House; 6. Budhui-moral Cremation Ground; 7. Sri Ramakrishna's Birthplace: a. Living Room; b. Middle Room; c. Parlour; d. Mango Tree Planted by Sri Ramakrishna; e. Raghuvir Temple; f. Sri Ramakrishna Temple; 8. Laha's House; 9. Laha's Vishnu Temple; 10. Laha's Durga Temple; 11. Laha's School; 12. Gopeshwar Shiva Temple; 13. Kamarpukur (Pond); 14. Sitanath Pyne's House; 15. Dhani's Temple; 16. Mukundapur Shiva Temple.

The main places to visit here are:

1. Sri Ramakrishna Temple: The temple, dedicated in 1951, marks the spot where Sri Ramakrishna was born. The birthplace was actually a shed that housed a husking machine and an oven. Pictures of a

husking machine, an oven and a lamp, representing the place of his birth, are engraved in the altar, on which is a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna.

2. Raghuvir Temple: To the left of the Sri Ramakrishna temple is the temple dedicated to Raghuvir (Sri Rama), the family deity of Sri Ramakrishna. Three deities used to be worshipped here: a *salagram* (a round stone emblem) representing Raghuvir, a jar representing Sitala Devi, and a Rameswara Shivalinga. Later an image of Gopala, and a *salagram* representing Narayana which had been worshipped by Lakshmi Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's niece, were added to the shrine. During his younger days Sri Ramakrishna worshipped here for several years. Now the descendants of his family conduct the worship.

3. Huts: Behind Sri Ramakrishna's temple are the huts where Sri Ramakrishna spent his boyhood days. The first hut (marked 'a' in the map) was where Sri Ramakrishna lived till he was 16 years old. Later, between the age of 22 and 44 he stayed here during his visits from Dakshineswar. The room is now preserved as Sri Ramakrishna's bedroom.

The second hut (b) has two-storeys. The ground floor existed during Sri Ramakrishna's time and it was a part of his homestead. After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, his nephew Ramlal built the first floor with financial help from Mother. Now this house is used as the temple store.

The third hut (c) was the parlour, where Sri Ramakrishna met visitors.

At the end of the hut-complex and to the right of the temple stands a mango tree (d) that was planted by Sri Ramakrishna himself.

4. Shiva Temple: Beyond the mango tree is the Jugi's Shiva temple.¹ Before Sri Ramakrishna was born, one day his mother Chandramani Devi was talking with her friend Dhani in front of this temple. Suddenly she saw a divine effulgence emerge from the Shivalinga inside the temple, fill the temple, rush towards her, engulf her and enter into her body. After this incident she felt she was pregnant with a child.

In and around Kamarpukur there are several other important places connected with the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Here are some of them:

1. Haldarpukur: This is the pond in which Sri Ramakrishna used to bathe. Situated across his house, Haldarpukur is associated with many sweet and sacred memories of the boyhood days of Gadadhar (The boyhood name of Sri Ramakrishna).

2. The School of Lahas: The school that Sri Ramakrishna attended when he was five years old. This is close to his house, about a five-minute walk away from it. This belonged to the rich Lahas (a particular caste), the ruins of whose palatial buildings could be seen nearby. The school, Vishnu temple and the Durga mandap alone stand now.

3. Gopeshwar Shiva Temple: Unable to understand the ecstatic moods of Sri Ramakrishna,

1. Jugi is a particular caste, to whom this temple belonged.

people spread the rumour that he had gone mad. News reached Chandramani, his mother. In order to get Shiva's grace, she took up fasting penance (*hatya vrata*) in this Gopeshwar Shiva Temple. Here a voice told her that she would have her desire fulfilled if she undertook that vow in the Mukundapur Shiva temple nearby.

Gopeshwar Shiva temple is situated towards the east of Sri Ramakrishna's house, about a ten-minute walk away from it.

The tank towards the east of this temple is Kamarpukur, or 'the tank of the people belonging to the Kamar (blacksmith) caste.' The village derives its name from this tank.

4. Sitanath Pyne's house: Sri Ramakrishna used to visit this house when he was 12 or 13 years old. While singing devotional songs he went into ecstatic trances. They had a Krishna Temple in front of their house. Once during Shivaratri celebration in this temple, Sri Ramakrishna played the part of Shiva in a drama, but fell into a deep trance as he entered the stage. Eventually, the drama had to be called off.

This house is located towards the south of Sri Ramakrishna's house. The ruins of the Krishna Temple are also visible. Recently a small mandap was erected near the temple ruins to commemorate the drama on Shiva.

5. Dhani's Temple: The birthplace of Dhani Kamarini has a small temple in her memory. Dhani, who belonged to the blacksmith caste, was the

midwife during Gadadhar's birth and later served him in his childhood. Once she got a promise from the boy that he would accept alms from her on his investiture with the sacred thread (*upanayana*). Gadadhar kept his promise in deference to the affection of Dhani, even as it was not in line with tradition. The temple is situated to the south of Gopeshwar Shiva temple.

6. Chinu Shankari's birthplace: At present we find nothing but the site of his house. It is located towards the north-east of Sri Ramakrishna's house and is a five-minute walk away from it. Chinu had a strong faith and belief that Gadadhar was a divine being. One day he worshipped and fed the young Gadadhar with sweets, and prayed for his divine grace.

7. Mukundapur Shiva Temple: Guided by Gopeshwar Shiva, Chandramani came to this temple and continued her fast. Hardly two or three days had passed when she dreamt that Shiva, more silvery in complexion than silver itself, bedecked with glowing matted hair and clad in a tiger skin, appeared before her and consoled her saying, 'Don't be afraid; your son is not mad; he is in that state on account of a tremendous awakening of the divine spirit in him.'

This temple is situated to the west of Sri Ramakrishna's house.

8. Budhui-moral / Bhutirkhal cremation grounds: Sri Ramakrishna would go now and then to these places at night and spend long hours in spiritual practice. From Sri Ramakrishna's house

Budhui-moral is a ten-minute drive away in the north-western direction, and Bhutirkhal is a five-minute walk away on the way to Jayrambati.

9. Derepur: Derepur, or Deregram, is a small village to the west of Kamarpukur and is a 30-minute drive away from Kamarpukur. Sri Ramakrishna's father, Kshudiram, originally lived here. He had to leave the village on a false charge foisted by the village landlord when he refused to give false evidence in a court in favour of the landlord. Some years ago, through the efforts of the local people a temple was built for Sri Ramakrishna in that village. One can reach this place by a car or a rickshaw.

10. Anur Visalakshi Temple: About a twenty-minute drive away from Kamarpukur, towards north, is the temple of goddess Visalakshi, a very popular deity. As a young boy of 8 years, Sri Ramakrishna once went to the temple along with some women devotees. While on the way he sang beautiful songs on the Devi, experienced a divine ecstasy and lost external consciousness. He regained consciousness only when someone repeated the Divine Mother's name in his ears.

More information about these places and how they are related to Sri Ramakrishna's life can be found in the early chapters of *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*. To enrich our pilgrimage to Kamarpukur, it is a good idea to be familiar with these details beforehand.

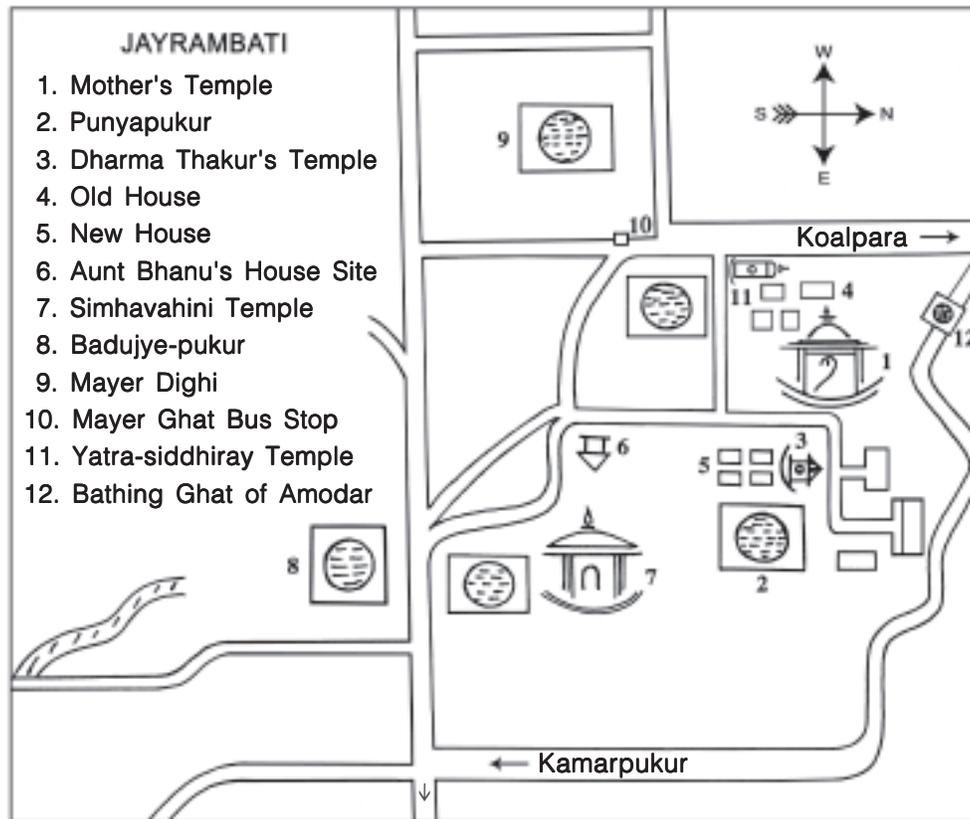


XII. Jayrambati



Jayrambati is the birthplace of Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Kamarpukur to Jayrambati is a twenty-minute drive. Mother used to say that Jayrambati is Shiva-bhumi, the abode of Shiva. She said: ‘A three nights’ stay [in Jayrambati] will purify their [devotees’] bodies; for verily this [Jayrambati] is Shiva’s domain.’¹ Incidentally, a small, black Shivalinga was unearthed while digging the foundation for Mother’s temple. This Shivalinga is being worshipped in the shrine every day.

1. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p.423; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.



The main places to visit here are:

1. Mother's Temple: The temple stands on the holy place where Mother was born. Here stood her original house, where she lived till she was nine years old. Her marriage to Sri Ramakrishna took place here. Mother's temple was consecrated by Swami Saradananda on 19 April 1923. She was first worshipped in a picture.¹ Later, the present, beautiful

1. The original picture installed was an oil painting that Lalit Chatterjee, a disciple of Mother, got painted in London and installed in his house. Mother herself had worshipped this painting. This is now on display at the Ramakrishna Museum at Belur Math.

marble image of Mother was installed in 1954, during her birth centenary. The sacred relics of Mother are enshrined in the altar below her image.



The present prayer hall was also dedicated during Mother's birth centenary.

We can see a metal flag embossed with 'Ma' (Mother) in Bengali adorning the crest of the temple dome. Swami Nikhilananda, an initiated disciple of Mother, writes about the metal flag:

'From the top of this temple flutters a flag emblazoned with the simple word "Ma" [Mother], reminding her devotees from far and near of her repeated assurance that she would stand by them till their hour of liberation, and recalling to them her

words of benediction: “I am the Mother of the virtuous, I am the Mother of the wicked. Whenever you are in distress, say to yourself: ‘I have a Mother.’ ”¹

2. Mother’s Old House: When we enter the main gate of the Jayrambati centre, the huts to our left form Mother’s Old House. Mother lived in the first hut to our left for almost 52 years, until 1915. She blessed many people here with mantra diksha, brahmacharya and sannyasa.

3. Mother’s New House: Before the main gate to Jayrambati centre, there is a small door on the right leading to a group of small houses. This is Mother’s New House. As we enter the door, the first room to our left is where Mother lived between May 1915 and February 1920. Here too she blessed many people with mantra diksha, brahmacharya and sannyasa. The adjoining room was used by Mother’s niece Nalini. During Mother’s time Jagaddhatri Puja used to be held in the room opposite to Nalini’s room.

4. Punyapukur, Temple of Family Deity: In front of the Mother’s temple lies Punyapukur (Holy Pond). It is so called because Mother used its water.

On its western bank is situated a small house-like structure. This is the temple of Sundara Narayana Dharma Thakur, Mother’s family deity. Sitala Devi and Narayana salagram (stone emblem of Narayana) used

1. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p.345; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.

to be worshipped here. Other pictures and images of deities that we see here are later additions.

In and around Jayrambati there are several other important places connected with Mother's life. Here are some:

1. The site of Bhanu-pishi's house: Bhanu-pishi (aunt Bhanu) was a companion of the Mother in her younger days and was fortunate to receive the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna. Mother would very often go to her house to get peace and solace when the villagers hurt her by their indiscrete remarks about Sri Ramakrishna calling him a lunatic. Sri Ramakrishna is also said to have visited this house. Even when Mother was still very young, Bhanu-pishi could recognize the divinity in her. It is said that Bhanu-pishi saw in Mother a goddess with four arms.

However, what we see now is just the site where once stood the house. The site close to Mother's new house. It has a marble relief depicting the vision of Bhanu-pishi.

2. Simhavahini Temple: The temple is dedicated to Durga Devi, the deity of Jayrambati. Among the three small images in the temple, the one in the middle represents Simhavahini Devi (Durga), to Her right is Chandi and to the left is Mahamaya; both are companions of Simhavahini Devi. To the far left is Manasa Devi, the serpent goddess. There are several incidents in Mother's life that vouch for the living presence of the Devi.

The soil from this temple is believed to have medicinal properties; we see devotees collecting some of it as prasad.

This temple is a ten-minute walk away from Mother's house.

3. Yatra-siddhiray Temple: This deity is worshipped particularly when someone goes out of Jayrambati on some work. The person is believed to accomplish the purpose of the journey, which is what the name Yatra-siddhiray means. Mother also offered worship at this temple whenever she went out of Jayrambati. This is the family deity of Ghosh family and is a 10-minute walk away from Mother's house.

4. Badujye-pukur: This tank (pukur) is a 10-minute walk away from Mother's house in the southern part of the village. Mother occasionally bathed here and used its water for cooking. When her children took leave of her after a few days of stay with her, she accompanied them up to this tank and stood staring at them till they disappeared from her sight.

5. Mayer Ghat: The bus-stop at the Mother's temple in Jayrambati is known as Mayer-ghat (Mother's Ghat). It lies on the banks of a tank called Mayer Dighi (Mother's pond). During her younger days Mother used to cut grass from this tank to feed cows.

6. Amodar River: Amodar is a small canal where Mother used to bathe. She used to mention the canal as 'my Ganga'. This canal is a 15-minute walk away from Mother's house. The bank of the river serves as a cremation site.

If we walk a little further along the bank from Mother's ghat towards east, we will find an amalaki tree. This was planted to mark the place of an earlier amalaki tree. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Anyone who meditates under an amalaki tree, with whatever desire in his mind, gets it fulfilled.'¹ Yogin-ma, Golap-ma, Gauri-ma—all women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna— Swami Saradananda and several monks of the later generation performed spiritual practices here.

7. Koalpara Ashram: This ashram is deeply associated with Mother's life. Koalpara is about a 25-minute drive away from Jayrambati. Mother travelled between Jayrambati and Kolkata mainly by bullock cart. During the three days that the journey lasted, she halted at several places on the way. Between 1909 and 1919 she invariably stopped at Koalpara, which she called as her 'parlour.'

Mother is known to have installed and worshipped her own photo in a few places; Koalpara is one such place where she installed her photo along with that of Sri Ramakrishna in November 1911. She took both the pictures in her hands, touched them with her head for a while, kept them on the altar and offered flowers.

8. Jagadamba Ashram: This is a small solitary house, a 10-minute walk away from Koalpara ashram. Mother stayed here on a few occasions with her niece Radhu. Kedar (later Swami Kesavananda) was a disciple of Mother and the founder of Koalpara ashram. His

1. *Great Master*, p.185.

mother's name was Jagadamba, who too was a devotee of Mother. Since this house belonged to Jagadamba, it came to be known as Jagadamba ashram.

9. Telo-bhelo: In this extensive field Mother encountered a dacoit couple at dusk and won their heart by her simple love. Not only they proved to be harmless but they took her to a nearby shop and had kept vigil while she rested.¹

A temple dedicated to Mother marks the place where she met the dacoit couple. The adjacent room has a life-size image of a dacoit, which is also offered worship. A Kali temple stands a few feet away from the Mother's temple. The Kali is known as Dakat-Kali, or the Kali of dacoits.

This field is an hour's drive away from Mother's house. It is easy to visit this place on our way to Kamarpukur/Jayarambati from Belur Math, or during our return to Belur Math. We need to take a diversion at Arambag to reach Telo-bhelo, which is a 25-minute drive away from Arambagh. Buses are also available from Arambag.

More information on these places and how they are related to Mother's life can be had from *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother* and other biographies of hers.



1. For a detailed account of this incident see *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p.70-71; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.

Epilogue

1. There are a few other places which are associated with Sri Ramakrishna, Mother, Swamiji or direct disciples.

i. M.'s Thakurbari: The house (known as Kathamrita Bhavan) of M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Sri Ramakrishna visited this place more than once. Mother visited several times. Sri Ramakrishna's holy sandals, clothes, etc. are preserved here. From Belur Math to this place is an hour's drive.

ii. Birthplaces of four monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, where there are accredited centres of Ramakrishna Mission:

- a. Ichapur, the birthplace of Swami Ramakrishnananda
- b. Barasat, the birthplace of Swami Shivananda
- c. Sikra-kulingram, the birthplace of Swami Brahmananda
- d. Rajarhat, the birthplace of Swami Niranjanananda

These places are about a 3-hour drive away from Belur Math.

2. Generally, the temples in the Centres of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are open between 4.30 and 11.30 a.m. and 3.30 and 8.30 p.m.

The timings of Kolkata Kali temple and M.'s Thakurbari (Kathamrita Bhavan) are available on their websites.

3. Prior written permission from proper authorities is required to stay in all these places and have prasad (food).

4. As we have pointed out in the prologue, this pilgrimage will become spiritually fruitful only when we visit these places with prior knowledge about their significance. Familiarity with the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Mother, and Swamiji will be a great help.

We conclude here by recalling the words of Swami Shivananda once again: 'If you want to achieve anything substantial in spiritual life, visit Belur Math, stay there and do spiritual practices. It is for this purpose alone that Swamiji dedicated his life and founded this Math.'



Appendix 1

How to Reach?

The following table details the preferred mode of transport and the time taken to visit the pilgrim centres mentioned in the book.

1. The travel duration indicated is approximate and could vary depending upon factors like what time of the day we begin the journey, and the varying traffic conditions of festival days.

2. With a car or a taxi at our disposal, it could take at least five days to cover all the places mentioned in this booklet; it could still prove to be hectic. A full week will make the pilgrimage more comfortable.

3. Journey by bus or train is less preferable in view of the uncertainties and discomfort involved. And, in the absence of a local guide, such a journey could prove frustrating.

I. Table of Distances to Main Pilgrim Centres

1. By private vehicle

Place	Travel duration	Transport
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i. Dakshineswar, Cossipore, Udbodhan, Balaram Mandir, Shyampukur House, Swamiji's House

From Belur Math to Dakshineswar	30 minutes	By car or taxi
From Dakshineswar to Cossipore	30 minutes	
From Cossipore to Udbodhan, Balaram Mandir, Shyampukur House	30 minutes	
From Shyampukur House to Swamiji's House	45 minutes	
Return to Belur Math	1 hour	

ii. Yogodyan, Kalighat

From Belur Math to Yogodyan	1.5 hours	By car or taxi
From Yogodyan to Kalighat	1.5 hours	
Return to Belur Math	1.5 hours	

iii. Antpur, Kamarpukur

Place	Travel duration	Transport
From Belur Math to Antpur	2 hours	By car or taxi
From Antpur to Kamarpukur	1.5 hours	

iv. Jayrambati, Koalpara

From Kamarpukur to Jayrambati	20 minutes	By car or taxi
From Jayrambati to Koalpara	20 minutes	
Return to Belur Math	4 hours	

2. By bus & other means

i. Dakshineswar, Cossipore, Udbodhan, Balaram Mandir, Shyampukur House, Swamiji's House

From Belur Math to Dakshineswar	30 minutes	By bus, or boat
From Dakshineswar to Cossipore	30 minutes	
From Cossipore to Udbodhan, Balaram Mandir, Shyampukur House	30 minutes	
From Shyampukur House to Swamiji's House	15 minutes	
From Swamiji's House to Dunlop	1 hour	
Return to Belur Math	20 minutes	

From Udbodhan one can return by boat thus:

Place	Travel duration	Transport
From Udbodhan to Baghbazar Ferry Ghat	10 minutes	On foot
From Baghbazar Ferry Ghat to Kuti Ferry Ghat	30 minutes	By boat
Return to Belur Math	20 minutes	

ii. Yogodyan, Kalighat, Shyambazar

From Belur Math to Yogodyan	1.5 hours	By bus
From Yogodyan to Kalighat	1.5 hours	
From Kalighat to Shyambazar	30 minutes	By metro train
Return to Belur Math	1 hour	By bus

iii. Tarakeswar, Champa Danga, Antpur, Kamarpukur

From Belur Math to Belur Station	15 minutes	By rikshaw
From Belur Station to Tarakeswar	2 hours	By train
From Tarakeswar to Champa Danga	20 minutes	By bus

Place	Travel duration	Transport
From Champa Danga to Antpur	1 hour	By bus
From Antpur to Gajar Mode	30 minutes	
From Gajar Mode to Kamarpukur	2.5 hours	

iv. Jayrambati, Koalpara, Tarakeswar

From Kamarpukur to Jayrambati	20 minutes	By bus
From Jayrambati to Koalpara	20 minutes	
From Koalpara to Tarakeswar	2 hours	
From Tarakeswar to Belur Station	2 hours	By train
Return to Belur Math	15 minutes	By rikshaw



II. Table of Distances to Other Pilgrim Centres

1. By private vehicle

Place	Travel duration	Transport
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i. M.'s Thakurbati (Kathamrita Bhavan):

From Swamiji's House to Kathamrita Bhavan (Near Thanthania Kali Temple)	10 minutes	By car or taxi
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ii. Ichapur:

From Belur Math to Ichapur	3.5 hours	By car or taxi
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Ichapur can be reached from Kamarpukur / Jayrambati thus:

From Kamarpukur / Jayrambati to Ichapur	1.5 hours	By car or taxi
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iii. Sikra-Kulingram, Barasat, Rajarhat

From Belur Math to Sikra-Kulingram	2.5 hours	By car or taxi
From Sikra Kulingram to Barasat	45 minutes	
From Barasat to Rajarhat	1.5 hours	
Return to Belur Math	1.5 hours	

2. By bus & other means

Place	Travel duration	Transport
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i. M.'s Thakurbati (Kathamrita Bhavan):

From Swamiji's House to Kathamrita Bhavan (Near Thanthania Kali Temple)	20 minutes	On foot
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ii. Ichapur:

From Belur Math to Bally Khal	20 minutes	By bus
From Bally Khal to Arambag	2.5 hours	
From Arambag to Ichapur	1 hour	

Or

From Belur Math to Howrah	1 hour	By bus
From Howrah to Ramprasad (take the bus to Bandar, get down at Ramprasad)	3 hours	
From Ramprasad to Ichapur	20 minutes	By rikshaw

Ichapur can be reached from Kamarpukur / Jayrambati thus:

Place	Travel duration	Transport
From Kamarpukur / Jayrambati to Arambag	45 minutes / 1 Hour	By bus
From Arambag to Ichapur	1 hour	

iii. Barasat, Sikra-Kulingram, Rajarhat

From Belur Math to Dakshineswar	30 minutes	By bus
From Dakshineswar to Barasat	2 hours	
From Barasat to Sikra-Kulingram	45 minutes	
From Sikra-Kulingram to Dum Dum	1.5 hours	
From Dum Dum to Rajarhat	1 hour	
From Rajarhat to Shyambazar	1 hour	
Return to Belur Math	1 hour	



Appendix 2

Address of the Pilgrim Centres

1. Belur Math

Ramakrishna Math
P.O. Belur Math
Dt. Howrah 711 202
West Bengal, India
E-mail: belurmath@vsnl.com
Website: www.belurmath.org

2. Cossipore

Ramakrishna Math
90 Cossipore Road
Cossipore
Kolkata 700 002
West Bengal

3. Udbodhan

Ramakrishna Math
1 Udbodhan Lane
Baghbazar
Kolkata 700 003
West Bengal

4. Balaram Mandir

Ramakrishna Math
7 Girish Avenue
Kolkata 700 003
West Bengal

5. Swamiji's House

Ramakrishna Mission
Swami Vivekananda's
Ancestral House and
Cultural Centre
3 Gour Mohan Mukherjee
Street
Kolkata 700006
West Bengal

**6. Kankurgachhi
(Yogodyan)**

Ramakrishna Math
7 Yogodyan Lane
Kankurgachhi
Kolkata 700 054
West Bengal

7. Antpur

Ramakrishna Math
Antpur
Dt. Hooghly 712 424
West Bengal

8. Kamarpukur

Ramakrishna Math and
Ramakrishna Mission
P.O. Kamarpukur
Dt. Hooghly 712 612
West Bengal

9. Jayrambati

Matri Mandir and
Ramakrishna Mission
Sarada Sevashrama
P.O. Jayrambati
Dt. Bankura 722 161
West Bengal

Sub-centre:

Ramakrishna Yogashrama
Koalpara
P.O. Dehuapara
Dt. Bankura 722 141
West Bengal

10. Ichapur

Ramakrishna Math
Ichapur
P.O. Mayal Bandipur
Dt. Hooghly 712 617
West Bengal

11. Barasat

Ramakrishna Math
P.O. Barasat
Kolkata 700 124
North 24 pgs
West Bengal

12. Sikra-Kulingram

Ramakrishna Math and
Ramakrishna Mission
Sikra-Kulingram
Dt. North 24 Pgs 743 428
West Bengal

13. Rajarhat

Ramakrishna Math
Rajarhat Vishnupur
Vishnupur
Kolkata 700 135
West Bengal

Private Centre**M.'s House**

M.'s Thakurbati (Kathamrita
Bhavan),
13/2 Guruprasad
Choudury lane,
Kolkata 700 006
West Bengal

Note: The caption 'Branch Centres' at the Belur Math's website may be referred to for the current changes in the address, if any. Phone numbers and e-mail address too are available there.

Appendix 3

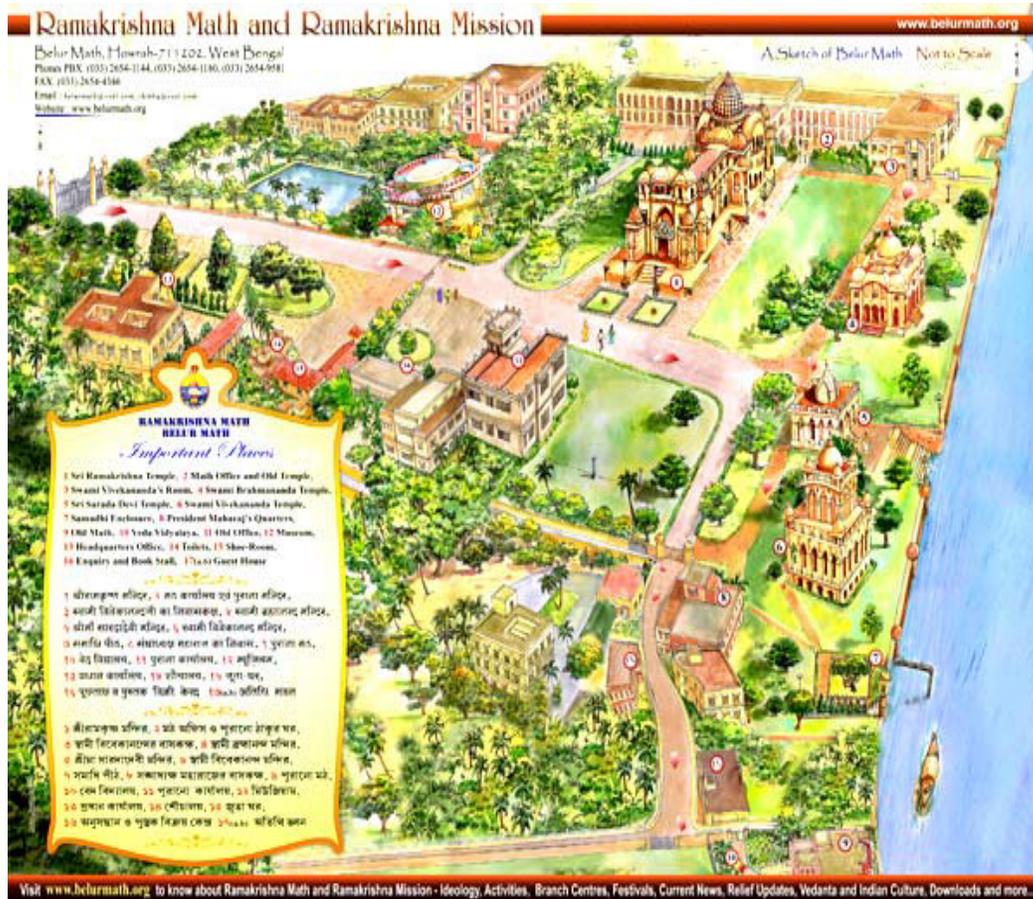
Suggested Reading

1. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai
2. Swami Tapasyananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai
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