
UNIT 27 MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS II : RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Founding of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.2.1 Beginnings
 - 27.2.2 Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi
 - 27.2.3 Swami Vivekananda
- 27.3 Ideology of the Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.3.1 Ideology and Objects
 - 27.3.2 Activities of the Mission
- 27.4 Organisational Structure of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.4.1 Math and Mission
 - 27.4.2 Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission
 - 27.4.3 The Governing Body
- 27.5 Financial Support and Activities
 - 27.5.1 Financing the Activities
 - 27.5.2 Social Welfare Activities
 - 27.5.3 Participation of People
 - 27.5.4 Cultural Activities
- 27.6 Birthday Celebrations
 - 27.6.1 Concept of Trinity
 - 27.6.2 Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna
 - 27.6.3 Birthday Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi
 - 27.6.4 Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda
 - 27.6.5 How are the Birthdays Celebrated ?
- 27.7 Other Activities of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.7.1 Other Celebrations
 - 27.7.2 Bhak a Sammelan
 - 27.7.3 Challenges that Confront the Mission
- 27.8 Ramakrishna Mission as a Modern Movement
 - 27.8.1 History of the Mission
 - 27.8.2 The Present Position
- 27.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.10 Key Words
- 27.11 Further Readings
- 27.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have gone through this unit we hope you will be able to

- get a clear idea of how the Ramakrishna Mission began
- identify the prominent personalities who contributed to the development of the Ramakrishna Mission
- form a general idea of The Ramakrishna Mission's various socio-religious-cultural activities
- know clearly about the organisational structure of the Ramakrishna Mission — its headquarters organisation and sub-organisations
- see the utility of such organisations for the betterment of the living conditions of our people and the suffering humanity of the world

- get an awareness of the challenges that confront this religious organisation; and its problems and prospects as a religious movement of the modern times in our strife torn world.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we are going to discuss the Ramakrishna Mission — a modern religious movement. Its inspirer Sri Ramakrishna was unique, so was its founder Swami Vivekananda.

From your study of the earlier units (17, 23, 24, 25, 26) we hope you are aware of the nature of religious pluralism, and the rise of religious movements in India. After a study of the religious movements in the medieval age, you would have grasped the essence of the medieval movements of Bhaktism and Sufism.

You would have also been able to grasp how the religious movements came to develop under various organisations, as medieval religious movements, like, Veerashaivism in the Karnataka region of the South; and Sikhism in Punjab in the North; and the modern religious movements like the Arya Samaj in the Punjab in the North, and the Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal in the East. By and by, these modern religious movements spread far and wide, and covered various parts of India and the world.

In this unit we will deal with the Ramakrishna Mission: the founding of the Mission, its ideology and organisational structure; and the various activities of Ramakrishna Mission. We also deal with the symbolic significance of birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Finally we touch upon Bhakti Sammelan and other sundry activities. It is pointed out here that the unit is based on the further reading listed at the end.

27.2 FOUNDING OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

You will be interested to know how and when the Ramakrishna Mission was founded; by whom it was founded, and how it gradually spread.

27.2.1 Beginnings

Sri Ramakrishna, a householder saint of Bengal was born at Kamarpukur in 1836. He died in the early hours of August 16, 1886.

Shortly after he had left his mortal frame, a monastic order bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna was organised in 1886, at the Math, Baranagore, about three kilometers North of Calcutta. This monastic order was organised by his Sannyasin disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda. In fact, no one really “founded” this order. It was the master Ramakrishna himself who brought it into being during his illness. He instructed Swami Vivekananda as to how this order was to be organised and conducted.

27.2.2 Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi

The spiritual inspiration of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna was a great inspiration behind the Math and the Mission.

In 1899, the Math was transferred to its present home at Belur across the Ganga, about six kilometers north of Calcutta.

27.2.3 Swami Vivekananda

However, the year 1897, the month of May, will go down in the history of modern religious movements in India as the year when the Ramakrishna Mission was started by Swami Vivekananda and his handful of associates. It was registered on the 4th of May in 1909 under Act XXI of 1860, with registration no. S/1917 of 1909-10 in the name of Ramakrishna Mission. For the link between Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, see Box 27.01.

Box 27.01

By 180 Sri Ramakrishna had a few followers. He himself, initially the priest of Dakshineswar Temple, went far beyond the priestly role and indicated the attributes of a yogi and sanyasi. Although married to Sarada Devi, the marriage was never consummated. For Ramakrishna, the God of every religion was the same, but could be worshipped in different ways, as prescribed by the religions themselves.

Sri Ramakrishna's message was that God can be realized only by renunciation of "women and God". Ramakrishna monism reduced all other views and paths into the experience of the unity of truth. Sri Ramakrishna converted Swami Vivekananda to his views by giving him many experiences of truth.

27.3 IDEOLOGY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

The Ramakrishna Mission was established with some basic ideas which are now discussed.

27.3.1 Ideology and Objects

The ideology and objectives of the Ramakrishna Mission were:

- i) **to impart and promote the study of the Vedanta** and its principles as propounded by Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of comparative ideology in its widest form. Vedanta is a Hindu philosophy which teaches that there is Oneness of all Truth. That all evolves from Truth and returns to Truth. Thus all appearances are deceptive, unless apprehended through the Truth.



Shri Sarada ma the consort of Sri Ramakrishna.

- ii) to impart and promote the study of the arts, science and industries;
- iii) to train teachers in all the branches of knowledge mentioned above and enable them to reach the masses;
- iv) to carry on educational work among the masses;
- v) to establish, maintain, carry on and assist schools, colleges, universities, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid, and the afflicted, famine relief works, and other educational and/or charitable works and institutions of a like nature;
- vi) to print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books or leaflets that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects;
- vii) to carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on, in connection with the calculated and directly or indirectly to promote any of the before mentioned objects.

You may put these ideas of the Ramakrishna Mission under the following heads:

- i) **Ideal** : Freedom of the self and service of mankind.
- ii) **Aim** : Preaching and practice of **Sanatana Dharma**, the eternal religion as embodied in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.
- iii) **Motto** : Renunciation and Service; Harmony of all religion.
- iv) **Method** : Work and worship.

27.3.2 Activities of the Mission

By providing an idea of the practices which the Mission is engaged in we hope to indicate its wide range of activities.

- i) **Worship**: This includes specialized training of monastic aspirants and religious preachings.
- ii) **General and technical education with an ethical and spiritual background; other general services include:**
- iii) **medical service;**
- iv) **famine and distress relief work;**
- v) **rural upliftment;**
- vi) **work among the toiling and emerging people of all classes; and**
- vii) **other cultural activities.**

Now that we have listed the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, you would be curious to know how these various activities of the Mission are being organised. This list makes it clear that the Mission has a comprehensive plan of activities ranging from the transcendental to the practical.

Box 27.02

This box indicates that it was a holy man (Sri Ramakrishna) and his followers who were responsible for creating the Mission. Ramakrishna inspired the movement for a Mission and Vivekananda and his fellow disciples founded it and spread its teachings.

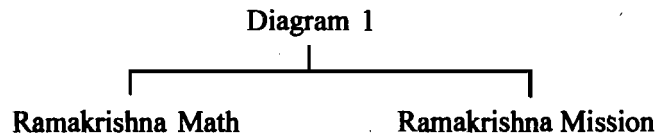
Sri Ramakrishna died in 1886 after appointing Vivekananda as his successor. **Bhakti** had been the main ritual during the lifetime of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna puja was added to Kalipuja. The **bhaktas** were therefore dedicated to guru and kali. Vivekananda did not approve of this and a split developed between him and most of the disciples. The principles upon which Vivekananda rested his faith were **monism, monasticism, universalism, toleration, liberalism, humanitarianism, progressiveness, and the scientific world view**. Vivekananda believed vedanta was the only scientific religion and that it was completely compatible with science.

27.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

There is an elaborate organisational structure to organise and regulate the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

27.4.1 Math and Mission

Let us now turn to a description of this. The following diagram will illustrate the organizational structure:



It should be understood that the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are closely connected in the following ways:

- i) both have their headquarters at Belur Math in Calcutta.
- ii) the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math.
- iii) the administrative work of the Mission is carried on by the monks of the Ramakrishna Math.

Yet, Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are distinct legal entities having their own branches.

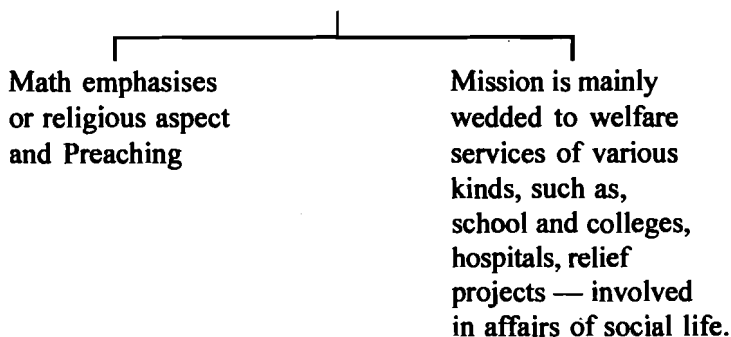
You may like to know how the Mission and the Math are distinct entities. As a matter of fact, the Math and Mission are distinct entities in the following manner:

- i) The Math organisation is Constituted under a Trust with well-defined rules of procedure.

The Mission on the other hand is a registered society.

- ii) While both the Math and the Mission take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the Math lays emphasis on religious aspect and preaching, while the Mission is wedded mainly to the welfare services of numerous types.

Diagram 2
Activities of Math and Mission
(Charitable and Philanthropic)



To distinguish the Math from the Mission, Christopher Isherwood very aptly used the terms '**Contemplative Math**', and '**Socially Active Mission**'. The Math is oriented to religion and preaching through contemplation, while the Mission is oriented to various types of social welfare activities.

We hope you will bear this point of distinction in mind although people often loosely associate Ramakrishna Mission with Math activities also.

It is equally necessary for you to bear in mind that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not imply that it is affiliated to either Ramakrishna Math or Ramakrishna Mission which have their headquarters at the Belur Math.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Name the three main inspirations for the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

- a)
- b)
- c)

2) Mention the objects of the Ramakrishna Mission.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

27.4.2 Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission

As in the case of other religious organisations, there is a new tendency of divisiveness in the Ramakrishna Mission. Owing to some ideological differences in the main Ramakrishna Mission, a breakaway group known as Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission emerged, laying its main emphasis on ideals as contained in the following words of Swami Vivekananda:

“Ye, I be born again and again and suffer a thousand miseries, if I can worship the only God I dream of, my God the afflicted and my God, the poor of all Races, of all Nations”.

Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission inspired by the ideals of '**Serve God in Man**' and '**Work and Worship**' came to emerge as a separate organisation and was registered, under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961, with registration

No. 5/18606 of 1976-1977, with its headquarters at 7, Riverside Road, Barrackpore, District 24-Parganas in West Bengal, about 25 kms North from Calcutta city, and 24 kms North-West of Calcutta Airport. Its Governing Body was made up of 14 members with Swami Nityananda as its founder-Secretary. There are several such institutions in India and abroad appropriating the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Activity 1

Go to the Ramakrishna Mission closest to your residence and ask the people the difference between 'Math' and 'Mission'. Write a note in your notebook outlining your findings.

These Missions are not to be confused with Ramakrishna Mission having its headquarters at Belur Math. Even these organisations, particularly the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission of Barrackpore, having its own branches in various places, are dedicated to numerous types of Welfare services, particularly in areas of general education, non-formal education, vocational training, rural development work, medical services etc. for the poor, underprivileged, destitute children and women in distress irrespective of their caste or religion.

Like Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, they have established Vivekananda Math and Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission which are inseparably connected. While the Vivekananda Math provided the field for spiritual preparation, the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission created the venue for "liberation from bondage through selfless service to the suffering humanity irrespective of any distinction in their caste, creed, religion and region".

The Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission is a philanthropic public charitable organisation registered on 1st November, 1976 under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961. It is both legally and constitutionally different from the main organisation, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Belur on the one hand, and Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission at Dakshineswar on the other.

27.4.3 The Governing Body

The Ramakrishna Mission which was registered as an Association on the 4th of May 1909, under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1909 had its headquarters at Belur. Apart from the headquarters organisation at Belur, Ramakrishna Mission has now more than 127 branches in all, spread over the whole world, in countries like, India, Argentina (South America), Bangladesh, Canada, England, Fiji, France, Japan, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, United States of America, etc.

It is an international organisation having 127 branches (as on 31 March, 1989), with 96 centres in India and 31 centres outside India. Out of these 127 Branches, 54 are Ramakrishna Mission Centres, 50 are Ramakrishna Math Centres, and 23 are both Mission and Math centres.

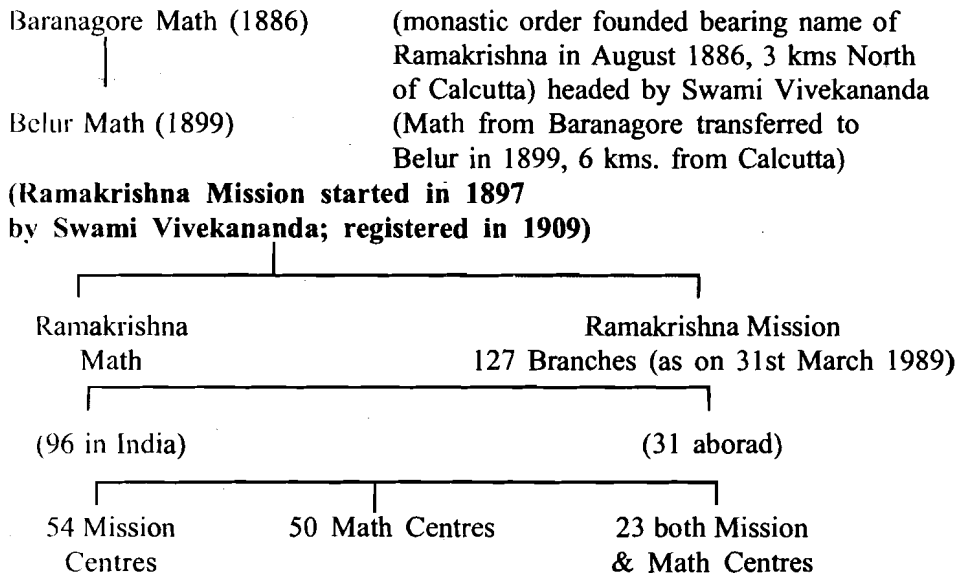
In India, these centres are spread far and wide over the various regions of Andhra Pradesh; Arunachal Pradesh; Assam; Bihar; Delhi; Gujarat; Haryana and Punjab; Karnataka; Kerala; Madhya Pradesh; Maharashtra; Meghalaya; Orissa; Rajasthan; Tamil Nadu; Tripura; Uttar Pradesh; and West Bengal.

West Bengal alone has over two and a half dozen centres. Almost all important metropolitan cities in India, like Hyderabad, Bangalore, Bombay, Madras, Kanpur, Lucknow, Calcutta, Jaipur, Chandigarh etc. have been covered by the branches of Ramakrishna Mission.

An illustrative organisational chart may help you to understand the elaborate organisational structure of the Ramakrishna Mission. It will also help to give you

a precise view of the impact of the Ramakrishna Mission as a religious movement of modern times.

Diagram 3
**Organisational Structure of
Ramakrishna Mission**



Note: As diagram 3 shows that initially the Baranagore Math was founded in 1886 bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna by his disciples including Swami Vivekananda.

About 12 years later this was moved to Belur Math about 6 kms from Calcutta. On the other hand Ramakrishna Mission started in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda and registered in 1909.

As of 1989 Ramakrishna Mission and Math had 127 branches of which 96 were in India and 31 abroad of these there were 54 mission centres, 50 math centres and 23 both Mission and math centres. This information can be seen at a glance from diagram 3.

27.5 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ACTIVITIES

After discussing the organisational structure, we now show how the various social welfare activities of Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are financed.

27.5.1 Financing the Activities

Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math have their own separate funds and keep their separate accounts. Their accounts are audited by qualified auditors.

To organise their various social welfare activities both Ramakrishna Mission and Math receive grants-in-aid from three sources, viz.,

- i) Central Government,
- ii) State Governments, and
- iii) Public Bodies

The other activities of the Math are financed from:

- iv) offerings, and
- v) sale of publications etc.

The Mission is also supported by

- vi) fees from the students, and
- vii) public donations etc.

As can be seen the Mission and Math do not depend totally on Central government, State government and public bodies for their finance. They are also financed by individuals who offer donations, fees from students sale of publications etc.

27.5.2 Social Welfare Activities

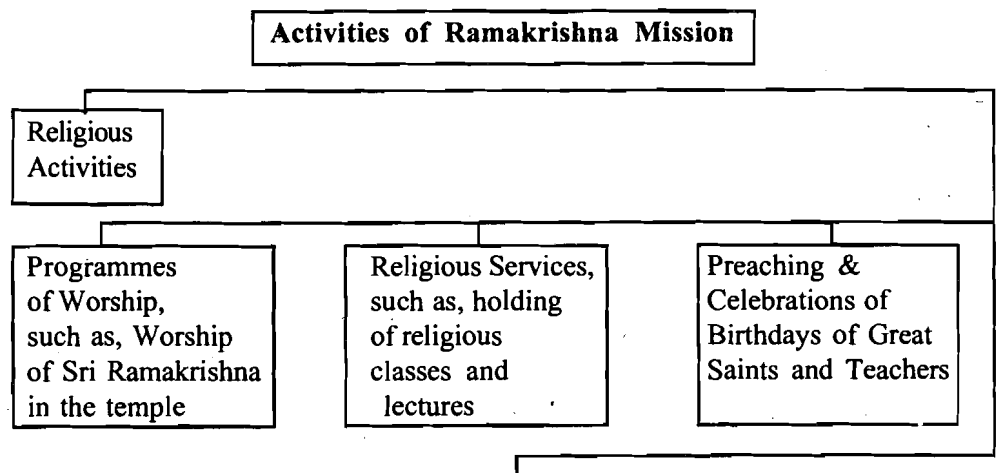
We hope you are aware of the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission related to the social welfare services. Many of you may also be associated with some of them. The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission maintain a number of Ashrams and temples with their programmes of worship, religious services, and preachings. They are also running several schools, colleges, libraries, students' homes, sevashrams (Hospitals) with indoor facilities, clinics, dispensaries, invalid homes etc.

Apart from creating a religious revival based on the principles of Vedanta as preached by Swami Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna movement has contributed a great deal for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Many of you we hope, are quite familiar with its services particularly in the field of education, running of hospitals, and undertaking relief work in the hour of need. If you take an over-all view, you will find that the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission may be classified into two broad categories, viz.,

- i) those related to the various types of religious services, such as, regular worship, preachings etc., and
- ii) those related to the various types of social welfare activities, particularly in the fields of education, health etc.

For a quick grasp and understanding you may also illustrate these various types of activities through the following diagram :

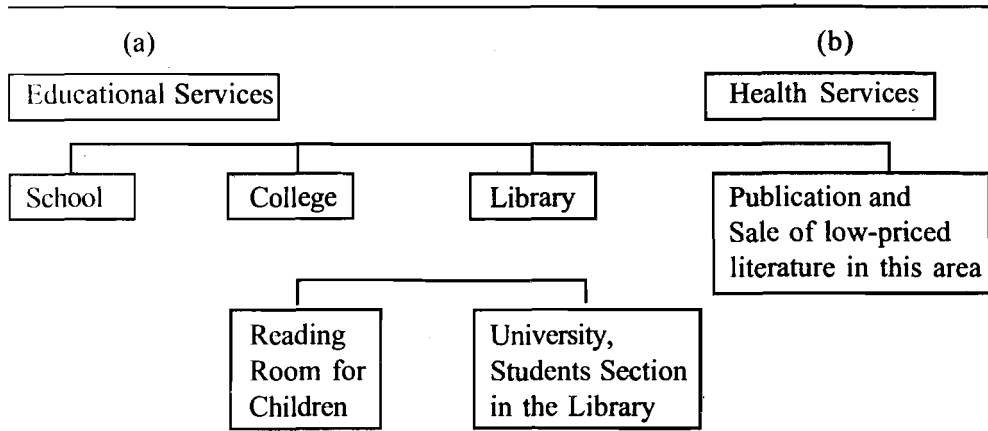
Diagram 4
(I)



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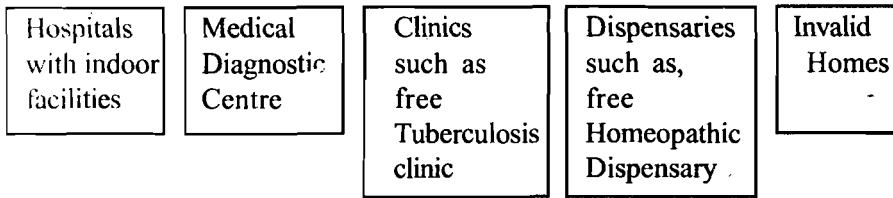
(II)

Social Welfare Services



(III)

Health Services



Check Your Progress 2

1) Write 5-7 lines on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission.

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2) Mention some of the Activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

27.5.3 Participation of People

Any movement can sustain itself only through the participation of the people. The Ramakrishna Mission is spreading their life-giving ideas of vedanta, and the inspiring

messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through regular discourses and occasional lectures which stimulate the spiritual aspirations of the people through their participation in the celebrations of Birthdays of the Great Teachers, bhajans, worship, Ramanama Sankritanam or Ekadasi days, and weekly discourses on Ramcharit Manas in Hindi, and on Vivekachudamani in Bengali and occasionally on Vedanta in English.

In all religious programmes, people of various walks of life, students, teachers, government servants, businessmen, politicians, doctors, professionals and common people, rich and poor, all participate.

Of educational and health services, people of all types are the beneficiaries. Let us enumerate a few of these services.

- a) To fight the scourge of tuberculosis in an organised way, the Ramakrishna Mission has provided some free tuberculosis centres in some areas. These clinics have the following functions:
 - i) to diagnose individual cases;
 - ii) to treat cases fit for treatment at the clinic;
 - iii) to get admitted in other hospitals, cases which require prolonged hospitalisation or special surgical treatment;
 - iv) to treat patients at home under the Domiciliary Service Scheme, prior to admission and after discharge from hospitals; and
 - v) to examine contacts of patients with a view to detecting early cases as a preventive measure.

The Tuberculosis clinic run by the Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi is a clinic fully equipped with facilities for diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis. Various medicines like anti-T.B. drugs, antibiotics, vitamins are supplied free to all patients except those covered by the Central Government Health Scheme.

The clinic is well equipped with physician, medical officer, paramedical staff, nursing staff, dispenser, laboratory assistants etc.

- b) The Domiciliary Service Scheme has the Domiciliary Service Unit having staff members deputed from the Delhi Municipal Corporation in pursuance of their tuberculosis control programme. Under this scheme, a close liaison between the patient and the institution is maintained whereby the patients and their contacts are advised on matters of isolation and disinfection at home; and they are also brought to the clinic for necessary examination, advice and treatment if necessary.
- c) The Medical Diagnostic Centre renders service to the community particularly the poor and needy, in pursuance of the spirit and ideal of the Mission.
- d) The clinical wing is in the shape of a Polyclinic providing facilities and health services of numerous types.
- e) The free Homeopathic dispensary is run by the Ramakrishna Mission to serve the people, particularly the poorer section, in the neighborhood.
- f) Special Educational Services

Free library and reading room facilities, provided by the Ramakrishna Mission in its premises in Delhi are utilized by hundreds and thousands of people every year. Facilities of reading room and separate lending section, and a separate section for the children exist in the library for use by the people.

University Students' Section Library maintained with the financial assistance from the University of Delhi which only the students of Delhi University are eligible to use, on becoming its member, is also run by the Ramakrishna Mission in its premises in Delhi.

27.5.4 Cultural Activities

The Ramakrishna Mission also organises regular discourses and exposition of scriptures and deliberations on various other allied topics. The monks of the Math and Mission are important men of the public conduct them.

Discourses are conducted in Hindi on Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, on Sri Ramcharit Manas. Classes are held in Bengali on Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, and Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasang; in English on Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, on Srimad Bhagavad Gita; on Vivek Chudamani; and on the Patanjala Yoga Sutras.

27.6 BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

While dealing with the various types of social welfare services rendered by the Mission, there is an underlying concept of Trinity which guides the whole philosophy and activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

27.6.1 Concept of Trinity

I. Sri Ramakrishna	The teacher The Preceptor the Guide	Who as father leads and illumines the path
II. Sri Sarada Devi	Holy Mother	Symbol of Motherhood Divine purity Virtue, ethereal Love and source of divine energy
III. Swami Vivekananda	The Disciple The Soul inspired and awakened	Symbol of Messenger of Love & Service Divine through the message of universal brotherhood.

The trinity is at once symbolic of the Divine and the Human. The three Great personalities inspired the spirit and ideal of this modern religious movement called the Ramakrishna Mission. Sri Ramakrishna as the Preceptor; Sri Sarada Devi as the inspirer (Holy mother); and Swami Vivekananda as the founder and messenger — lit a beacon light of Divinity, Humanity and Service through the currents of a modern religious movement led by the Ramakrishna Mission with its dedicated bands of disciples and followers — the leaders and the led.

The Birthday celebrations of the three great personalities are important occasions in the religious order of the Ramakrishna Mission. This is a tradition which is handed down from generation to generation inspiring the ideals of Divinity, Humanity and Service.

27.6.2 Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna

The 156th Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was held on the 27th of February 1991. He was born before the day-break of February 18, 1836 in a remote village named Kamarpukur in the District of Hooghly in Bengal. On this day there is much worship, prayer and celebration. He was named Sri Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya.

Since childhood, on several occasions, he gave clear evidence of Divine inspiration in his thoughts and activities. These come strongly to worshippers as also his blessings. He had an inner urge to know if the Divine Power really exists and manifests itself through everything of this creation. He practised penance and ultimately realized that God exists. Birthday worship is specially auspicious. *He followed instructions of different religious faith at different stages of his life and realised that all religions are but different paths leading to the same goal, the God.* Ramakrishna's birthday creates purity and auspiciousness for worshippers.

27.6.3 Birthday Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi

The 139th Birthday of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother was to be celebrated in December 1991. Her birthday celebrations gives strength to worshippers. She was born on December 22, 1853 at Jayrambati — a remote village of Bankura District in West Bengal. Sri Sarada Devi is an ideal of womankind who served her husband with her very life and renounced the world rather than renounce her husband. There is much joy and happiness among worshippers on her birthday. She was married to Sri Ramakrishna at the young age of six years, and ultimately became the source of strength and inspiration to Swami Vivekananda and other young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in establishing and running the Great organisation — Ramakrishna Mission. The essence of her teachings is contained in these lines:

“If you like to be happy in life do not find fault with others”.

“Remember, whatever you do and wherever you go you are always protected by God — Father in Heaven”.

Activity 2

In what way do the Birthday celebrations of Ramakrishna Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda differ from a regular birthday celebration ? Study the text and your own observations to write a note in your notebook and discuss your written views with other students at the Study Centre closest to you.

27.6.4 Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda

You are perhaps aware that the 128th Birthday celebrations of Swami Vivekananda was observed as the National Youth Day. Swami Vivekananda, the most prominent disciple and messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, the carrier of the message of Vedanta, the harbinger of the links between the East and the West, was the founder of a new monastic order.

He was the towering leader of the modern religious movement — the Ramakrishna Mission. It was on January 12, 1863, that he was born in Calcutta. At the very first sight (1881) Sri Ramakrishna discovered in him a spiritual giant. It was after his historic speech at Chicago in the Assembly of World Religions in the year 1893 that he became highly famous. **He dedicated himself to the service of the suffering humanity, and for all his life tried to raise the dignity of man.** He reconciled beautifully the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of Vedanta. Worshipers during Vivekananda's birthday celebrations experience the power of devotion and love just as Vivekananda felt towards Sri Ramakrishna.

His ideals of service are contained in these words:

“You can please God more by taking care of His Children than by offering thousand tonnes of flowers and fruits at His Holy Feet”.

“Who loves all beings —

Check Your Progress 3

1) Indicate the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna in 5-7 lines.

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2) Elaborate the Concept of the Trinity.

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He was a harbinger of a new chapter of relationship between the East and the West. It could be a relationship based on fair exchange and mutuality. The West should come out with its scientific and technological development, and affluence, and material prosperity to help and support the poor, depressed and suffering humanity of the East, so that they could come out of this condition of stark poverty; and in exchange, the East should provide spiritual sustenance and guide through their ancient Vedantic wisdom and knowledge to the West. **The miseries of the East arise from poverty; the miseries of the West arise from affluence. Both need each other.** The West can provide material support to the East; and the East can provide spiritual sustenance to the West. Thus, they need to move together and help each other to help the suffering humanity. For one the cause of suffering is poverty, for the other the cause of suffering is affluence.

27.6.5 How are the Birthdays Celebrated ?

You all know there are many ways of celebrating birthdays in India. The birthdays of Great Personalities bring their own flavour.

These Birthday celebrations take place in the premises of the Ramakrishna Mission and also outside, in numerous public places and institutions.

These celebrations involve two aspects viz., (i) the socio-religious and (ii) social services.

The religious component of celebration is usually marked by

i) janmatithi Puja,

- ii) mangalarati,
- iii) meditation,
- iv) vedic chanting,
- v) reading from the lives of these great men
- vi) bhajan,
- vii) special puja and haven.

The monks, the disciples, the followers and also other people participate in these.

The social component of these celebrations is marked by

- i) public meetings,
- ii) programme of service to the lepers called Narayan Seva,
- iii) service of the poor and the destitutes by distributing food, cloth etc.
- iv) various types of competitions in schools and colleges, particularly on the eve of Swami Vivekananda's birthday celebrations as National Youth Day.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India often provides funds as grant-in-aid to cover the expenditure in these celebrations by the Ramakrishna Mission.

For example, you may like to know that during 1989-90, the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India, paid a sum of Rs. 48,000/- as grant-in-aid to cover the expenditure incurred in connection with the 125th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

27.7 OTHER ACTIVITIES OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

We now turn to some other activities and celebrations.

27.7.1 Other Celebrations

The Ramakrishna Mission observes a number of other celebrations as well. These include:

- i) Guru Purnima,
- ii) Shri Krishna Janmashtami,
- iii) Shri Durga Ashtami,
- iv) Shri Kali Puja,
- v) Maha Sivaratri, and
- vi) Christmas Eve, etc.

with due solemnity, special puja, bhajan, and reading from the scriptures.

27.7.2 Bhakta Sannam

While studying the Ramakrishna Mission as a modern religious movement it is of interest to you to know that sometimes the Mission organises religious conferences known as **Bhakta Sannam**. For example, one such **Sannam** was organised on 31st December 1989 in the premise of Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi in which 336 delegates participated.

Apart from being a spiritual retreat, this sort of **Sannam** provides an opportunity to the monks and the householder devotees to come together and practise spiritual discipline to reflect on the Ramakrishna movement, and give sustenance and strength to it to keep the movement going in the right direction. The role of the householder devotees is particularly important to keep the movement going as a source of spiritual strength to this strife torn age, and as a means of service to the suffering humanity, the down-trodden, the destitute, the leper, the women and children in need of care, the victims of riots, and natural calamities. If it could help the values to prevail in wider social, professional and organisational life in India our problems would be greatly lessened.

As a religious movement of the modern age, the Ramakrishna Mission is faced with challenges of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, disease, ignorance, and corruption suffered by the teeming millions at the national level; challenges of war clouds degradation of environment, over-powering greed of materialism, loss of peace to the suffering humanity at the global level.

27.7.3 Challenges that Confront the Mission

The real challenge lies in how the modern religious movement (started through the Ramakrishna Mission by its founder Swami Vivekananda) will be able to meet the crisis to the suffering humanity. *This will mean a reawakening and revival of the values of Divinity, Humanity and Service through the wisdom and knowledge of Vedanta.*

The *Katopanishad* says,

“**Uttishthat, Jagat, Prapya; Varannibodhat**”. That is to say: Arise, Awake, Achieve, that wisdom at the holy feet of the Great man by which material and spiritual sufferings of the humanity of the East and the West might go; revive the Divinity in man through service of the suffering humanity.

It is a question more of practice and not merely preaching. The Ramakrishna Mission as a religious movement brings much of preaching and practice together. Various religions are but different paths to the same Divinity, and the Divinity becomes glorified through service to humanity.

27.8 RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AS A MODERN MOVEMENT

We will now finally turn to an important aspect of our analysis — i.e. why should the Ramakrishna movement aspire to be called a **modern** religious movement? Let us see why this happens to be a fact.

27.8.1 History of the Mission

While examining this question you should bear the following points in mind :

- i) First, the history of the Ramakrishna Mission runs into the span of this century and the last quarter of the last century which is not even a hundred years old now

- ii) In such a short span, the Mission has spread its branches globally, far and wide, and covered a large part of the materially and spiritually suffering humanity of the world.
- iii) In the religious sphere it has brought about a revival in worship and faith through the approach that all religions lead to the same Divine Force, the same God. God exists in man, man must try to realise God through service to the suffering humanity. These sufferings are physical-material; and non-physical-emotional-mental-spiritual. These sufferings afflict humanity irrespective of their narrow framework of caste, colour, creed, religion, region and ethnicity. The Ramakrishna Mission as movement is advancing to provide a succour of hope.
- iv) The Ramakrishna Mission adopted a number of activities related to social services for the poor, the downtrodden, the destitute, the women and children in need of care, and those afflicted by natural calamities.
- v) At the national level, through service oriented programmes of activities in the fields of education and health etc., the Ramakrishna Mission is trying to integrate the various people and groups through its spiritual force and faith in Divinity, service and humanity.
- vi) At the international level, the Mission is trying to bring together the multi-national, multi-religious communities through spiritual force, through service to the suffering mankind, through message of peace and service to all sections irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and region.
- vii) The Ramakrishna Mission has the strength of a well-knit organisational structure fed by both the Math and the Mission from the headquarters level to the regional and local levels. It is fed by such ideal, ideology, objective, motto which are inspired by Divinity and service to humanity. It is supported by activities which take care of the physical-material, and religious-spiritual. The force of the Trinity consists of

Sri Ramakrishna — the preceptor

Sri Sarada Devi — The Holy Mother, inspirer

Swami Vivekananda — The founder, humanist inspired by Vedantic wisdom.

27.8.2 The Present Position

The Ramakrishna movement continues to the movement through the leadership of its bands of monks, and the following of its householder disciples and devotees of all religions and regions.

The method of work and worship continues to fill it with inspiration and life-giving force.

Shri Ramakrishna was inspired by 'Bhakti' and 'renunciation'. No great thing can be done without sacrifice. The spirit of sacrifice that sustained the fiery young souls of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal), Balaram, Surendera, Mahendra and Chuni etc. (who all became monks of the order) in those early days of desolation, must continue to sustain the monks, devotees and followers of the Ramakrishna Mission in the present hours of material and spiritual crisis facing the suffering humanity today.

The spirit of renunciation that illumined the heart of Sri Ramakrishna, the spirit of sacrifice that welled up into the minds of Swami Vivekananda and his associate young monks in the beginning, the divine virtue that awakened Sri Sarada Devi; the

same spirit must continue to stir the minds and hearts of the men and women who have joined this religious movement under the Ramakrishna Mission. It is to be hoped that the spiritual lamp that was lit by Paramhans Sri Ramakrishna a century ago will always illumine and show the path to human beings.

27.9 LET US SUM UP

We started this unit indicating the beginning of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission under the aegis of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. We then went on to outline the ideology of the Mission, the objects and activities of the Mission. We then described the organisational structure of the Math, Mission and governing body. We turned finally to the financial support structure of the math and the mission. This includes the funding of social welfare and cultural activities. We have therefore dealt with the topic adequately.

27.10 KEY WORDS

Belur Math	: Headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission.
Holy Mother	: Sri Sarada Devi
Math	: Contemplative order
Mission	: Socially active order
Sanyasin	: one who renounces the world and turns of God
Sanatan Dharma	: The Eternal Religion
Vedanta	: A philosophy of Hinduism preaching monistic. Unity of all phenomena with Godhead.

27.11 FURTHER READINGS

Swami Gambhirananda, 1957. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (with a foreword by Christopher Isherwood) Advaita Ashram, Calcutta.

Ramakrishna Mission, 1990. *Ramakrishna Mission*, New Delhi.

John Yale, 1961. *A Yankee and the Swamis*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London.

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, translated by Swami Nikhilananda with a foreword by Aldous Huxley (in two volumes). Ramakrishna Math, Calcutta.

27.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Sri Ramakrishna
b) Sri Sarada Devi
c) Swami Vivekananda
- 2) a) Freedom of self, service of mankind.
b) Preaching and practice of Sanatana Dharma as exemplified in the Lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

- c) Renunciation, service and harmony of all religions should be strained towards.
- d) Work and worship should be treated at par and done with utmost seriousness.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Ramakrishna — Vivekananda Mission is a breakaway group from the main Ramakrishna Mission. It emphasized Swami Vivekananda's desire to be born repeatedly among the poor of all races and nations. This mission came to be in 1961 when it was registered and has its headquarters in Barrackpore some 25 km. North of Calcutta city.
- 2) a) Religious activities like worship, religious services; preaching and celebration of birthdays of great saints.
b) Social Welfare Services like educational and health services like hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, dispensaries and invalid homes.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls on 18 February, 1836. On this day there is much worship, prayer and celebration. Ramakrishna's thoughts and blessings are said to accrue to all worshippers.
- 2) The Ramakrishna Mission philosophy sees the Trinity as comprising Sri Ramakrishna the Father, the teacher-preceptor-guide. He illumines the path, Sri Sarada Devi is the Holy Mother a Symbol of love and purity and source of divine energy. Finally Swami Vivekananda is seen as the disciple of the awakened soul — a messenger of love and divine service.

The Trinity is held to be at once Divine and human.