

Sri Ramakrishna and Our Stranded Freudian Writers

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Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj is the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. A world-renowned scholar and spiritual leader, with numerous books to his credit, Revered Maharaj has been a harbinger of peace in this trouble-torn world. Here are some of his thoughts about a controversial work, written by one of a tiny group of malicious persons.

The Calcutta daily, *The Statesman*, of 5 June 2000, has published in its editorial page itself, along with a photo of Sri Ramakrishna, a review by Rajat Kanti Ray of a book by Nrisingha P. Sil, titled *Ramakrishna Revisited: A New Biography*. The writer and a few other psychoanalysts like Jeffry K. Kripal, the author of *Kali's Child: The Mystical and Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, are followers of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, who peeped a little into the human psyche while studying the dreams of his mentally disturbed patients, and discovered that the human psyche is full of sexuality and violence. The above writers have remained stagnant at that level, though later western psychologists and psychoanalysts have gone deeper into the human psyche and discovered many other dimensions.

Freud's own co-worker Carl Jung has severely criticised Freud in his famous book, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (pp. 12-3):

The view that dreams are merely imaginary fulfilments of suppressed wishes has long ago been superseded. It is certainly true that there are dreams which embody suppressed wishes and fears, but what is there which the dream cannot on occasion embody? Dreams may give expression to ineluctable truths, to philosophical pronouncements, illusions, wild fantasies, memories, plans, anticipations, irrational experiences, even telepathic visions, and

heaven knows what besides. One thing we ought never to forget: almost the half of our lives is passed in a more or less unconscious state. The dream is specifically the utterance of the unconscious.

Pleading for the recognition of the presence of something higher than mere instincts in the unconscious, Jung says (*ibid*, pp. 136-7):

I do not doubt that the natural instincts of drives are forces of propulsion in human life, whether we call them sexuality or the will to power, but I also do not doubt that these instincts come into collision with the spirit, for they are continually colliding with something, and why should not this something be called spirit? I am far from knowing what spirit is in itself, and equally far from knowing what instincts are. The one is as mysterious to me as the other, yet I am unable to dismiss the one by explaining it in terms of the other. ... They are terms that we allow to stand for powerful forces whose nature we do not know.

And protesting against Freud's view of the sexuality of the human psyche, Jung says (*ibid*, pp. 138-41):

I hold that psychic energy involves the play of opposites in much the same way as physical energy involves a difference of potential. ... What I seek is to set bounds to the rampant terminology of sex which threatens to vitiate all discussion of the human psyche; I wish to put sexuality itself

in its proper place. Common sense will always return to the fact that sexuality is only one of the life-instincts—only one of the psycho-physiological functions—though one that is without doubt very far-reaching and important.

There is nothing that can free us from this bond except that opposite urge of life, the spirit. It is not the children of the flesh, but the 'Children of God' who know freedom. ... That is what Freud would never learn, and what all those who share his outlook forbid themselves to learn. At least they never find the key to this knowledge. ... We moderns are faced with the necessity of rediscovering the life of the spirit; we must experience it anew for ourselves. It is the only way in which we can break the spell that binds us to the cycle of biological events.

... As for Freud's idea of 'super-ego', it is a furtive attempt to smuggle in his time-honoured image of Jehovah in the dress of psychological theory. When one does things like that, it is better to say so openly.

Explaining the proper scientific approach to the study of the human psyche, Jung continues (ibid, p. 141):

It is permissible for science to divide its field of enquiry and to set up limited hypotheses, for science must work in that way; but the human psyche may not be parcelled out. It is a whole which embraces consciousness, and is the mother of consciousness. Scientific thought, being only one of its functions, can never exhaust all the possibilities of life. The psychotherapist must not allow his vision to be coloured by the glasses of pathology; he must never allow himself to forget that the ailing mind is a human mind, and that, for all its ailments, it shares in the whole of the psychic life of man.

Sri Ramakrishna was highly respected by his prominent contemporaries in Calcutta, like Keshab Chandra Sen, Shibnath Sastri, and Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Within

ten years of his passing away, Professor Max Muller of the Oxford University wrote an article on him in a London journal, and four years later, Romain Rolland of France, a Nobel Prize winner, wrote a life of Sri Ramakrishna and a life of Swami Vivekananda; in the first book he presented both as the *splendid symphony of the Universal Soul*.

TRIBUTES OF SOME WORLD THINKERS TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Romain Rolland

'I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. ... The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years, his soul animates modern India. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and Gods. ... "I am more ancient than the radiant Gods. I am the first-born of the Being. I am the artery of Immortality." It is my desire to bring the sound of the beating of that artery to the ears of fever-stricken Europe, which has murdered sleep. I wish to wet its lips with the blood of Immortality.'

Nicholas de Roerich

'We are in the desert of Mongolia.... Thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India—Sri Ramakrishna. Around this glorious name there are so many respectful definitions. Sri, Bhagavan, Paramahansa—all best offerings through which the people wish to express their esteem and reverence. The consciousness of a nation knows how to bestow names of honour. And after all, above all most venerable

titles, there remains over the whole world the one great name—Ramakrishna. The personal name has already changed into a great all-national, universal concept. Who has not heard the Blessed Name!’

Mahatma Gandhi

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face.’

Richard Schiffman

(In his *Sri Ramakrishna—A Prophet for the New Age*, published by Paragon House, USA.)

‘Over a century since his passing, the great prophet Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa remains one of the most profoundly beloved figures in India. Of all the nations of the world, India alone seems to possess the ripened wisdom to honour him above all other men. And what exactly did India see in this unformed son of a peasant and heedless madman of God? In our efforts to understand Sri Ramakrishna, we must try to understand India.’

Lex Hixon

(In his *Great Swan—Meetings with Ramakrishna*, published by Shambhala Publications Inc, Boston, USA.)

‘By meeting Ramakrishna, which is possible here and now, we enter a unique realm of experience where the wisdom Goddess reigns—the one Ramakrishna calls *my blissful Mother*. The wonderful nature of this realm cannot be analysed, yet it describes itself. The present volume contains that mysterious description—not only in words, which are merely instruments, but as the living presence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Great

Swan, the God-intoxicated sage of Bengal.’

Rabindranath Tagore

‘To the Paramahansa Deva’

*Diverse courses of worship
from varied springs of fulfilment
have mingled in your meditation.*

*The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite
has given form to a shrine of unity in your life
where from far and near arrive salutations
to which I join mine own.*

Against this background, these psycho-analytic writers appear like, as one of Sri Ramakrishna’s parables says, ‘brinjal sellers appraising a diamond.’

The study of human nature in the light of physics and physiology in the nineteenth century had yielded the psychology of behaviourism. That was human psyche viewed from the *outside*. Through the study of dreams, initiated by Freud and his school, the study of human nature in its depths began to be undertaken, blazing the trail for a study of the psyche from the *inside*. The first impact of this penetration into the unconscious through the study of dreams was, however, unfortunate, from the point of view of the growth of reason. For it resulted in the submergence of reason in unreason and the presentation of human nature in the darkest colours. The unconscious was presented by Freud as shot through with sexuality and violence. The outlook and temper so generated infected literature and art, politics and social life for several decades. The apotheosis of the irrational man led to the lowering of morals due to the weakening of the will to check innate impulses and drives. □

The Power of the Incarnations

Prophets preach, but the Incarnations like Jesus, Buddha, Ramakrishna, can give religion; one glance, one touch is enough. That is the power of the Holy Ghost, the ‘laying on of hands’; the power was actually transmitted to the disciples by the Master—the ‘chain of Guru-power’. That, the real baptism, has been handed down for untold ages.

—Swami Vivekananda