

The Culmination of the Guru-Shishya Parampara: Ramakrishna and Vivekananda

Aishwarya Singh

Assistant Professor

Dept. of Education

Navyug Kanya Mahavidyalaya,

Rajendra Nagar, Lucknow, U.P.

Email: aishwarya.ballia@gmail.com

Abstract

Six chariots are described in Vedic literature. Sitting in the chariot, the soul travels to attain God. The first of these chariots is the chariot of the Rigveda. At one place in the Rigveda, Indra is mentioned as the lord of the divine world. Indra refers to the power of divine knowledge which incarnates to help the human soul who tries to attain truth, light and immortality and fights with untruth and darkness to achieve them. Kutsa is the human soul who is the son of Shvetra or Shvetmata. The white mother here means beyond pure nature, and her son means the human soul whose inner being has become pure and who has become entitled to divine knowledge and is striving for it. When the chariot reaches the destination – the divine world, the soul (Kutsa) becomes so similar to his friend Indra that only Indra's wife Shachi is able to recognize him. Shachi means true consciousness (Ritachit). This means that as the human soul acquires knowledge, it acquires the resemblance to God ('Mam sadharmyamagatah' – Gita 14/2). Indra and Kutsa described in this Vedic anecdote are not historical persons and their struggle for knowledge is also not a historical event. This Vedic truth has become a historical truth by materializing in the first meeting of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda at Dakshineswar. In the present study, the unique Guru-disciple relationship between Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciple Vivekananda has been described.

Keywords

Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Guru-shishya relationship.

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Received: 10.06.2025

Approved: 25.06.2025

Aishwarya Singh

The Culmination of the
Guru-Shishya Parampara:
Ramakrishna and
Vivekananda

Vol. XVI, No.1

Article No. 26,

pp. 233-240

Similarity Check: 19%

Online available at

[https://anubooks.com/
journal-volume/jgv-vol-
xvi-no1-jan-june-2025](https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/jgv-vol-xvi-no1-jan-june-2025)

DOI: [https://doi.org/
10.31995/
jgv.2025.v16i01.026](https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2025.v16i01.026)

**This article has been peer-reviewed by the Review Committee of JGV.*

Introduction

According to my opinion, education means- “living in Guru’s house”. There can be no education without the personal life of the teacher i.e. Guru. From childhood, the disciple should live with such a person (Guru) whose character is like a blazing fire, so that the disciple has a living ideal of the highest education. In our country, the donation of knowledge has always been done by renunciant men. The burden of imparting knowledge should again fall on the shoulders of renunciants.” Education, Swami Vivekananda, Page No. 26

The relationship between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda started in November 1881, when Vivekananda met Ramakrishna at Surendranath’s friend’s house. Ramakrishna asked Narendranath to sing, Vivekananda’s singing talent was unique, impressed by which Ramakrishna invited Vivekananda to Dakshineswar, whose invitation Swamiji accepted. And this meeting proved to be a turning point in Narendra Nath’s life. In the beginning, it was very difficult for Vivekananda to accept Ramakrishna Paramhansa as his Guru. He thought of him as a “lonely madman” but eventually he became one of the closest people in his life. It is said that it was Ramakrishna who shaped the personality of Narendra Nath and prepared him to devote himself to the service of humanity. After Ramakrishna’s death Narendra and other monastic disciples established their first monastery at Baranagar.

Ramakrishna was a supporter and propagator of Vedanta philosophy. As a disciple of Ramakrishna, when Vivekananda presented his ideology for the first time at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11 September 1893, it was completely inspired by the ideology of his guru Ramakrishna. Vivekananda presented the reinterpretation of Vedanta and the principles of Indian Hinduism before the world for the first time. After this, the influence of the Ramakrishna movement began in a very impressive manner in the entire United States. After the Chicago World Parliament of Religions, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda together laid the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission in India. The Ramakrishna Math was established to preserve and propagate the message of Ramakrishna. The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have been working together for many years. These two organizations are popularly known as the Ramakrishna Order. This legacy continues to be popular among the common people in India and the world at the present time. Before the Chicago World Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda was working as an unknown monk, but after his impressive speech at this conference, he became a star overnight in the United States. After this Vivekananda travelled all over America and England and stayed there giving lectures and also conducting classes. In 1901, Vivekananda gave two lectures on Ramakrishna in New York and

England. These lectures were compiled in a book “My Master”. In this Vivekananda has also said – ‘Whatever I am, whatever the world will be one day, it is all the gift of my Guru Shri Ramakrishna.’

There was a sacred relationship of Guru and disciple between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Both had completely different backgrounds. Ramakrishna belonged to a rural environment. He was born in a Brahmin family of Bengal. Ramakrishna’s dialect was also rustic, but from childhood, extraordinary talent and his extraordinary behavior started reflecting in him. When Ramakrishna was 16 years old, he came to Dakshineswar with his elder brother, where his brother worked as a priest in a temple. After his brother’s death, Ramakrishna started working as a priest in the temple in his place. Vivekananda’s childhood name was Narendra Nath Dutt and he was born on 12 January 1863. Vivekananda was born in an elite Kayastha family in Calcutta. In his youth, Narendra joined a separate faction of Brahma Samaj which was led by Keshav Chandra Sen and Devendra Nath Tagore. Initially, Vivekananda was highly influenced by the beliefs of Brahma Samaj. The belief of Brahma Samaj was to refute idol worship and believe in formless God. Thus, if we see, the background of both Vivekananda and Ramakrishna was completely different. Ramakrishna was working as a priest in the Kali temple and had immense faith in God, while Vivekananda was a follower of Brahma Samaj and was against idol worship..

Surendranath Mitra was a famous household devotee of Ramakrishna where Ramakrishna used to go to deliver spiritual lectures. Narendra Nath met Ramakrishna for the first time at a spiritual festival in Mitra’s house. The singer appointed for the festival could not attend due to some reason, so the young Narendra Nath, who was a talented , was requested to sing a song. Narendra was deeply spiritually thirsty and was not keen to marry despite his father’s wishes. His mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi’s maternal uncle, Ramchandra Dutt, when heard about Narendra’s spiritual thirst, he advised him to go to Dakshineswar and meet Ramakrishna. He said that if he wanted to know about God, why were he roaming around with the Brahma Samaj. He would achieve success in his efforts only by going to Dakshineswar. But due to the pressure of his upcoming FA examination, he forgot Ramchandra’s proposal.

Vivekananda was gradually leaning towards spirituality. His spiritual curiosity was increasing. Similarly, once in the General Assembly Institution, Professor William Hastie, who was the professor of literature class, was giving a lecture on a poem. The title of the poem was ‘The Excursion’. A word ‘trans’ came in this poem. The professor presented the word ‘trans’ as the meaning of the poet’s experience and emotion. But Narendra could not understand the meaning of the

word 'trans'. Professor Hastie inspired Narendra to meet Ramakrishna to understand the meaning of the word 'trans'. He told that Ramakrishna is a person who has experienced trance himself. Therefore, Vivekananda should go to Dakshineswar and meet Ramakrishna.

First meeting of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda at Dakshineswar-

To understand trance, Vivekananda followed the advice of Ramchandra and Professor Hastie and went to meet Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Vivekananda met Ramakrishna for the first time here. Recalling the meeting, Ramakrishna said, "When Narendra entered the room from the western door facing the Ganges, I realized that he did not care about his attire and physical appearance. Narendra's clothes were also not clean and neat. I realized that Narendra did not have any attachment to external things. Looking into Narendra's eyes, it was evident that a very large part of his mind was turned towards himself. I was surprised to see Narendra, how is it possible that such a great Seeker could live in Calcutta, which is known as a house of worldly thoughts."

What kind of relationship should exist between a Guru and a disciple can be understood by looking at Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The main task of a Guru is to recognize the hidden powers within the disciple and try to bring them out. As soon as he saw Vivekananda, Ramakrishna understood the feelings hidden within him. The curiosity that Vivekananda had about God was pacified after meeting Ramakrishna. Vivekananda had full faith in Ramakrishna that he would solve all his doubts. What could be a sweeter and more trust-filled relationship between a Guru and a disciple than this?

Second meeting at Dakshineswar

After meeting Ramakrishna for the first time, Narendra's young mind was so impressed and Narendra's mother was so confused by his words that Narendra was desperate to meet Ramakrishna again and he went to meet him for the second time on a weekday. In this way, the relationship between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda gradually started to grow stronger. Narendra was becoming mesmerized by Ramakrishna and was unable to stop him from influencing him.

Narendra as Ramakrishna's trainer (1882 to 1886)

Meeting Ramakrishna proved to be a turning point in Narendra's life. Now Narendra started visiting Dakshineswar regularly and being near Ramakrishna started mesmerizing him. Swami Nikhilananda has written, 'The meeting of Narendra and Shri Ramakrishna was an important event in the life of both. When Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna, there was a storm raging in his soul, who himself had gone through a similar struggle but was now firmly grounded in peace as a result of

his intimate communion with God and the realization of Brahman as the unchanging essence of all things.

Narendra was deeply attracted to the person of Ramakrishna, though he initially did not recognize Ramakrishna and considered him a monomaniac. Narendra's views were influenced by the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj, which was against idol worship and in real life Narendra was an atheist.

Vivekananda's initial reaction to Ramakrishna-

The process of Narendra accepting Ramakrishna as his Guru was not so simple. Before accepting Ramakrishna as his Guru, he tried to study him in various ways and also asked many critical questions to test him. Ramakrishna was impressed by Narendra's way of asking questions and his enthusiasm and encouraged Narendra to do the same. Ramakrishna used to tell Narendra that before accepting me as your Guru, you should test everything, just like a goldsmith tests his coins. Ramakrishna was a spiritual man and he considered money to be an obstacle in the path of spirituality. Vivekananda came to know that Ramakrishna could not tolerate the touch of money or silver coins. Narendra thought why not test it to see how much truth there was in this. One day Narendra went to Ramakrishna's room and placed a silver coin under his bed. After some time when Ramakrishna entered the room and sat on his bed, as soon as he sat on the bed, he groaned in pain and asked his disciples to check his bed. After searching the bed, a silver coin was found. After this incident, Narendra accepted Ramakrishna as his spiritual Guru.

Narendra underwent several tests before accepting Ramakrishna as his Guru and only after that he started accepting Ramakrishna as his spiritual Guru. Narendra stayed with Ramakrishna till his death in 1886. Narendra received spiritual education from Ramakrishna by staying close to him from 1882 to 1886. Ramakrishna found Narendra to be a Dhyana-Siddha i.e. an expert in meditation. As an apprentice of Ramakrishna, Narendra learnt meditation from him, which further strengthened his expertise on meditation. Narendra desired to experience the highest state of knowledge and he wanted his spiritual Guru Ramakrishna to help him in achieving that state but Ramakrishna wanted to prepare the young Narendra for the service of mankind, and he told him that the desire to remain absorbed in Samadhi is a small desire but the service of mankind is a bigger religion than this. mankind, and he told him that the desire to remain absorbed in Samadhi is a small desire but the service of mankind is a bigger religion than this.

Once when Narendra did not come to Dakshineswar for a long time, his absence began to worry Ramakrishna greatly. Ramakrishna himself went to meet him at a meeting of the Brahmo Samaj. He also visited him at his home in Kolkata.

On this occasion Ramakrishna heard Narendra singing and became absorbed in it. Ramakrishna met Narendra in an emotionally choked state as he had not met him for a long time. He fed Narendra the Bengali sweet Sandesh with his own hands and asked him to sing a song. On hearing the song Ramakrishna went into a state of trance and became very stiff. Narendra continued singing for a long time. When he stopped singing Ramakrishna came out of his trance and asked Narendra to come to Dakshineswar, which Narendra readily accepted. Just as Narendra had tested Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna also tested Narendra. He began to ignore Narendra. After ignoring Narendra for months he noticed that Narendra still came to Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna asked him, "I have ignored you for so long and still you come?" Narendra replied that he came because he loved him and not to seek his attention.

Ramakrishna wanted to impart his supernatural powers to Narendra and teach him more tantric powers, but Narendra refused and said that he wanted to try to achieve something. First let me learn the lesson of God, only then will I know whether I need supernatural powers or not, if I accept them I may forget God and use them selfishly and thus I may fall into misery.

Death of Vishwanath Dutta

Along with accepting Ramakrishna as his spiritual guru, Narendra was also focusing on his studies and preparing for the BA examination. His father died in February 1984. Narendra's family was not prepared for this incident. His family went bankrupt due to the sudden death of his father. His father had taken a lot of loans, due to the excessive debt, the creditors started demanding money. Relatives also left the family and started threatening to evict them from the property. Narendra, who was a student from the most prosperous family in his college, now started being counted among the poor students. Keeping in mind the financial condition of the family, Narendra tried to work, but he did not get any work. Narendra started losing faith in God, but Ramakrishna explained to Narendra and inspired him to believe in God. Gradually Narendra started getting inclined towards the Kali temple of Dakshineswar. Once Narendra needed money for family work, so he asked his guru Ramakrishna to pray to Goddess Kali for money for him. Ramakrishna said that if he wanted wealth, he should go to the idol of Kali and ask for it. Following his Guru's advice, Narendra went to the temple and started praying but he forgot to pray for wealth. When Ramakrishna realized this, he again asked Narendra to pray to Kali for wealth, but Narendra forgot to go to Kali and pray for wealth and he prayed to Kali Maa for knowledge, sacrifice and wisdom.

Death of Ramakrishna and its aftermath-

After suffering from throat cancer in 1885, Ramakrishna's disciples helped him move out of Dakshineswar and shifted him to Kolkata and later to a garden house in Kashipur. Narendra's spiritual education continued even in his last days. Narendra along with several other members received ochre-coloured robes from Ramakrishna, thereby forming his first monastic order. They were taught that service to man is the most effective worship of God. After Ramakrishna's death in August 1886, Narendra and some other monastic disciples of Ramakrishna converted a dilapidated house in Baranagar into a new monastery. Between 1888 and 1893, Narendra Nath travelled across India as a Parivrajaka Sadhu, a wandering monk, visiting many states and holy sites.

Ramakrishna's influence on Vivekananda-

Vivekananda believed that Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God. In a letter written in 1895, he described Ramakrishna as a person of devotion, love, knowledge and compassion for all living beings. Vivekananda used to say that Ramakrishna had the heart of Ramanuja and Chaitanya and the head of Shankaracharya. Vivekananda considered himself extremely fortunate that Ramakrishna accepted him as his disciple and allowed him to stay with him. He considered himself indebted to Ramakrishna for everything he had and had. He believed that whatever his personality is now and whatever he will become in the future is all because of Ramakrishna.

Conclusion

All the above statements explain to us how true and pure was the relationship between Ramakrishna and Narendra. What could be a better example of a Guru and his disciple. If we talk from the point of view of education, Vivekananda always used to say that do not blindly follow your Guru. Accept the words of the Guru only after testing them. Vivekananda did the same in his life. Before making Ramakrishna his Guru, he tested him and only after that accepted him as his Guru. We can take an example from Ramakrishna as to how a Guru should behave in the present times. Ramakrishna recognized Narendra as soon as he saw him and saw the hidden talent in him and contributed his full efforts in shaping it. Narendra saw the image of Rama and Krishna in his Guru Ramakrishna. He learnt the ultimate service from his Guru. He was taught that service to mankind is the most effective worship of God. After the death of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda along with other disciples converted an old house in Baranagar into a new monastery and from here started touring the whole of India as a monk. It is rare to see such a pious example of father-son relationship between Guru and disciple anywhere else. Both had immense love for

each other. The absence of one would disturb the other. Together, both presented an example of service to mankind before us.

References

1. S. Shivakumar. (2014), A Study of the Contribution of Sri Ramakrishna Mission Toward Enrichment of Secondary Education in India Since Its Inception Upto 2005, Department of Education: University of Mysore.
2. Od, Laxmikant. (2010), Philosophical Background of Education, Jaipur: Rajasthan Hindi Granth Academy.
3. NCF. (2005), National Curriculum Framework, New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.
4. Sarvbhutanda, Swami. (2009), Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata: India.
5. The Vedanta Kesari. (2017), Ramakrishna Mission Math, Mylapore: Chennai.
6. Vivekananda, Swami. (2015, eighteenth reprint), Gyan Yoga, Ramakrishna Math Ramakrishna Ashram Marg Dhantoli: Nagpur.
7. Vivekananda, Swami. (2014, seventeenth reprint), Oriental and Occidental, Ramakrishna Math Ramakrishna Ashram Marg Dhantoli: Nagpur.
8. Nirvedananda, Swami. (2013, 2nd reprint), Our Education, Ramakrishna Math Ramakrishna Ashram Marg Dhantoli: Nagpur.
9. Vivekananda, Swami. (2016, sixth reprint), Ideal of Education, Ramakrishna Math Ramakrishna Ashram Marg Dhantoli, Nagpur. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relationship_between_Ramakrishna_and_Swami_Vivekanand