

Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore — 100 Years/

Sri Suresh Moona

Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Basavanagudi a prestigious locality of South Bangalore has a great spiritual, religious, cultural and historical background. Anyone who enters the Math premises, experiences a great relief from the mundane life. After entering the serene prayer hall, he or she feels like sitting at least for a few minutes to meditate. In the main shrine here, is the portrait of Guru Maharaj Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa with everlasting divine grace. To the right of this shrine is the room where Holy Mother Sri Sharada Devi's portrait has been bestowing bliss of eternal love to her everpouring devotees. In spite of the heavy noise due to traffic on Bull Temple Road from early morning till late night, the premises of the Math has calm, quiet and serene atmosphere with tall trees and colourful flowering plants.

This centre, which has completed **Hundred Years** of its useful existence, has an interesting and glorious past.

Inspired by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the prophet of religious harmony and universalism, in 1886, the Ramakrishna Order was organized by his sanyasin disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda with twofold objectives:

- Creation of a band of monks devoted to self-realization and spreading of

the universal principles of Vedanta among people.

- Carrying on, in co-operation with lay disciples and workers of service in various fields—spiritual, moral, cultural, educational and social—looking upon all men and women, irrespective of caste or class, creed or colour, as veritable manifestations of the divine.

For fulfilling these objectives, Swami Vivekananda started in 1897 the Ramakrishna Mission Association and in 1899, the Ramakrishna Math at Belur on the bank of the holy river Ganga near Kolkata. For the last one hundred years the Ramakrishna Mission through its hundreds of Centres in India and abroad has been engaged in the sacred task of showing the right path of life to the general public.

A few admirers of Swami Vivekananda in Bangalore, who had met and had contact with him, desirous of having a religious institution under the guidance of the Ramakrishna Mission, started an organization called VEDANTA SOCIETY with Swamiji's direct permission and blessings.

The objectives of the society were as follows:

- Study the Vedanta philosophy in its various aspects and free from sectarian differences

- Popularize its fundamental tenets among the public by the delivery of lectures, holding classes, publication of books in English and vernacular etc.
- Undertake charitable works such as helping the poor, relieving the sick etc.
- Try to live up to the high ideals of philosophy and as far as possible, put into practice the percepts taught therein.
- Adopt such other measures as may be deemed conducive to the realization of the objects of the society.

The following were the promoters of the society:

Patrons

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Sr. Councillor to the Govt. of Mysore and subsequently Ex-Dewan of Mysore, Baroda & Travancore

Lt. Col. Desraj Urs

Chief Commandant, Mysore State Troops

President

M. A. Narayana Iyengar, Esq., B.A., B.L.,
Tutor of His Highness, the Yuvaraja of Mysore
(Later became Swami Srivasananda of the Ramakrishna Mission)

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Health Officer, Bangalore City, and
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In 1903, when Swami Ramakrishnanda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, came to Bangalore, it was decided to open a centre of the Ramakrishna Mission at Bangalore. Again when he came in 1904, with the help of the members of the Vedanta Society and others, Ramakrishna Mission Institution was started. In the beginning it was located in a rented house of the bungalow of Veeraswami Mudaliar in the Fort region. A little later, the Mysore Government gave a big piece of land on Bull Temple Road for the building to be constructed.

On the 29th July 1906, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda, came to Bangalore from America. He stayed till the 21st August as State-guest at Maharaja's palace at Bangalore and took part in various programmes, both at Bangalore and Mysore. On the 20th August, he laid the foundation for the building of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute. A box containing one inch size Sanskrit Bhagavad-Gita book, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's pictures and five kinds of metals (Pancha Loha) and some sacred Hindu symbols were laid beneath the foundation stone.

One more disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first president of the Ramakrishna Math, Swami Brahma-nanda, came to Bangalore and inaugurated the new building on the 20th of January 1909 by establishing the picture

of Sri Ramakrishna. The name was also changed from Ramakrishna Mission Institute to Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama.

The Math thus established by the blessings of the senior monks of the Ramakrishna Mission has been a pilgrim centre for innumerable number of devotees. The Holy Mother Sri Sharada Devi has sanctified the Ashrama by staying here. During her South India visit, she came to Bangalore from Chennai on March 24 and stayed here for three days. In the room where she stayed, her portrait is kept and now it is a holy shrine of the Mother.

During her stay here, one day along with a few inmates of the Ashrama she came to the back of the main shrine and sat on the big rock there. Evening sun was just setting. Influenced by this divine atmosphere the Holy Mother went into a transcendental state. Swami Ramakrishnananda came to know of this. He rushed to the spot and offered prayer to Mother by singing "*sarvamangala maangalye shive sarvaartha saadhike.*" Gradually the Holy Mother came out of her divine state and blessed Swami Ramakrishnananda. When requested, she sat on the rock facing west and meditated for sometime. Since then the rock has become sacred to the devotees. Recently a Mantap has been built and Mother's picture is established inside. Many devotees who come here prefer to sit on this rock and meditate.

Other senior monks of the Order like Swami Shivananda and Swami

Vijnanananda also have graced this place through their visits.

Another aspect of the Math which is of importance is the running of Vivekananda Balaka Sangha for more than half a century. It was started in April, 1953 by the efforts of the then president, Swami Yatiswaranandaji. This unique organization has been conducting all such activities which mould the all-round personality of children and it has been an indivisible part of the Math. Swami Shastranandaji had been in charge of the Balaka Sangha from 1953 to 1964, in which year he was transferred to one of the centres abroad. From 1964 to 1966 Swami Devarupanandaji, who had been closely associated with the Sangha took charge of it. In 1966, Swami Purushottamanandaji took over the charge of running the unit. For about two and a half decades, he immensely strengthened the Sangha. Since 1989 Swami Harshanandaji, the present President of the Math has been guiding these youngsters. On the 1st January 1984 Vivekananda Yuvaka Sangha was also started. Today, both the Sanghas have been working together in coordination to carry out many activities in the Math. During May 31st, June 1st and June 2nd, 2004, the Balaka Sangha celebrated the Golden Jubilee.

During subsequent years some other structures like Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Building, Prayer Hall, Quarters for Sanyasis, Swami Vivekananda Centenary Auditorium, Sri Ramakrishna

Sabhangana have been built in the Math premises.

Regular activities are: daily puja to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Sharada Devi, Aarati, Bhajans, Spiritual discourses, birthday celebrations of great religious leaders, spiritual retreats, library for devotees and publication of religious books. This centre is also successfully running a Boys' Hostel, Sri Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram by name.

Though the centre was known as Ramakrishna Ashrama for several decades, for some administrative reasons it has been changed to Ramakrishna Math.

In addition to religious and spiritual activities, this centre also has successfully undertaken various social service activities. At a village called Shivana-halli, which is at a distance of about 30kms. from the city, facilities like housing, drinking water, bore-well, electricity, proper road and medical help have been provided to the villagers. They have also been taught about growing good crops and rearing silkworms. There is also a school with classes, from LKG up to the 7th standard. Villagers have been given vocational guidance. Since 1996, this centre is being run by the Ramakrishna Mission.

All these activities have been carried out under the able guidance of Swami Harshanandaji. Right now, the Math is celebrating the centenary year with useful programmes, planned for the whole year. The devotees of the Math, as in the past, have been taking keen interest and participating in all the developmental activities.*

List of Presidents who have rendered their services at Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore.

1904-1910	Swami Atmanandaji Swami Bodhanandaji Swami Vimalanandaji
1910-1935	Swami Nirmalanandaji
1935-1938	Swami Siddheshwaranandaji Swami Ranganathanandaji
1938-1951	Swami Thyagishanandaji
1951-1966	Swami Yathiswaranandaji
1966-1970	Swami Prabuddhanandaji
1970-1983	Swami Adidevanandaji
1983-1989	Swami Chidanandaji
1989-	Swami Harshanandaji



* Swami Vivekananda Ashrama at Ulsoor was a sub-centre of the Basavanagudi Math for many years. It was made a separate branch centre directly under the Head Quarters in the beginning of 1999. Recently its name has been changed to 'Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor'.