

BELUR MATH

Headquarters of
Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission



BELUR MATH, sprawling over forty acres of land on the western bank of the River Hooghly (Ganga), in Howrah district, is a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world professing different religious faiths. Even people not interested in religion come here for the peace it exudes.

The serene campus of Belur Math includes temples dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, in which their relics are enshrined, and the main monastery of the Ramakrishna Order. The place has been sanctified by the stay of Swami Vivekananda and most of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who spent several years here. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi also visited this place on several occasions. The room in which Swami Vivekananda attained Mahasamadhi has been preserved here. The headquarters of the worldwide twin organizations known as Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are also situated here. An added attraction is the Ramakrishna Sangraha Mandira, a museum where several articles connected with Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples are exhibited. The green lawns and lush growth of trees and bushes everywhere add to the serenity and beauty of the place.

Sri Ramakrishna, the Prophet of Modern Age

The source of inspiration, the sustaining power, the guiding force and the supreme ideal of the Ramakrishna Movement is Sri Ramakrishna, who is regarded by millions of people as the Avatar or Prophet of the modern age. Born on 18 February 1836 in Kamarpukur, a village about 100 kilometres to the north-west of Kolkata, Sri Ramakrishna had only the rudiments of school education. Owing to poverty at home, he became at a young age the priest of the Kali temple at Dakshineshwar newly built by Rani Rasmani, but could not continue priestly duties for long. Possessed as he was by an intense longing for God from his childhood, Sri Ramakrishna plunged into intense spiritual practice. After attaining realization of God as the Divine Mother of the Universe, he followed the spiritual paths of different sects of Hinduism and of other religions like Islam and Christianity, and realized the Ultimate Reality through all of them. His spotless holiness, utter simplicity, extraordinary spiritual wisdom and love of God drew people to him like a magnet, and a number of sincere seekers gathered around him as his disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna trained a group of young men, the chief of whom was Narendranath (later, Swami Vivekananda), to carry on his mission of spiritual regeneration of humanity. He passed away on 16 August 1886.



Sri Sarada Devi, the Mother of All

Sri Sarada Devi, known to millions as Sri Sri Ma or Holy Mother, was born on 22 December 1853 in the village of Jayrambati which is situated at a distance of 7 km from Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna. She was married to Sri Ramakrishna at the age of six, according to the custom prevalent in India in those days. At the age of eighteen she went to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped her as the Divine Mother and taught her how to discharge the duties of life and at the same time lead an intensely spiritual life. After the Master's passing away, she played a significant role as a spiritual teacher and universal Mother in the development of the Ramakrishna Movement. By her life of sacrifice, forbearance, service and motherly love, which knew no distinctions of caste, creed, race or wealth, she has set a shining ideal for women all over the world. She left the mortal world on 21 July 1920.



Swami Vivekananda, the World Teacher

Swami Vivekananda was born on 12 January 1863 in a well-to-do family in Kolkata. At the age of eighteen, when he was studying in college, he came under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, who moulded his life to become a great religious leader. After the Master's passing away, Swamiji (as Swami Vivekananda is respectfully addressed) travelled all over India as a mendicant monk, and was moved by the sight of appalling poverty and backwardness of the common masses. He understood that the way to uplift the country was to spread both secular education and religious education among the masses. Swamiji went to the USA in 1893 and the speeches he delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago that year from 11 September onwards made him world-famous. After spreading India's ancient wisdom in America and England for three-and-a-half years, he returned to India in 1897. Soon after his arrival in India, he inaugurated the Ramakrishna Mission in which monks of the Ramakrishna Order join hands with lay devotees to serve people, especially the poor and the afflicted, in a spirit of worship following the ideal 'service to man is service to God' given by Sri Ramakrishna.



Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

The Ramakrishna Math, which began as a monastic brotherhood of disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in a dilapidated house at Baranagar, Kolkata, in 1886, was

shifted to another building at Alambazar in 1891, and was finally moved to the present site at Belur in January 1899. Ramakrishna Mission was originally started as the special service wing of Ramakrishna Math. Ramakrishna Math was registered in 1901 and the Ramakrishna Mission in 1909. The headquarters of both Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are located at Belur Math. The twin organizations, although legally two distinct entities, share a common ideology.

Emblem

The common emblem of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission is a symbolic representation of their ideology. It was designed by Swami Vivekananda himself. The wavy waters represent Karma Yoga, the lotus flower represents Bhakti Yoga, the rising sun represents Jnana Yoga, the coiled serpent represents Raja Yoga, and the swan represents the Supreme Self. The meaning of the ensemble is: by the combined practice of all four Yogas, the Supreme Self is realized.



Motto

The motto of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission is: *ātmano mokṣārtham jagad hitāya cha*, For the attainment of one's own liberation, and for the welfare of the world.

Activities

The work of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, which was put on a firm foundation by Swami Vivekananda, has steadily grown over the years and the number of branch centres has multiplied. They have now more than 200 branches in different parts of India and abroad, devoted to the twin ideals of contemplative life and service of God in man. Their service activities cover different areas of human need and social welfare such as education, healthcare, rural development, self-employment, women's welfare, interfaith understanding, moral life, spiritual guidance, and relief and rehabilitation work for victims of calamities. The branch centres of the Math and the Mission run hospitals, dispensaries, mobile medical units, colleges, schools, polytechnics, hostels, orphanages, libraries, publication houses, rural development centres, etc catering to the needs of thousands of people. The twin organizations have also been ever vigilant and intensely active in rendering relief to the victims of earthquakes, floods, famines, epidemics, cyclones, riots and such other calamities.

More details on the history, ideals and activities, along with the latest statistics, of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are available on Belur Math website <belurmath.org>.

PLACES TO SEE IN BELUR MATH

Sri Ramakrishna Temple

Originally conceived by Swami Vivekananda, this temple was dedicated on 14 January 1938. It enshrines the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna. Architecturally, this temple has an important place among the modern temples of India. It incorporates the motifs of various religions, thus symbolizing the harmony of religions taught by Sri Ramakrishna.



Old Shrine

It is situated to the north-east of Sri Ramakrishna Temple. This was the original shrine, where daily worship was conducted from January 1899 till the new temple was consecrated. This shrine awakens the hallowed memory of Swami Vivekananda and other monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who used to worship, meditate and sing devotional songs here.



Swami Vivekananda's Room

To the south-east of the old shrine stands Swami Vivekananda's room. In this room, the great Swami lived, and here he attained Mahasamadhi on 4 July 1902. Most of the articles preserved in this room were used by him at different places and times. In the courtyard in front of this room stands a **mango tree** under which Swamiji used to sit on a camp cot and meet visitors and devotees.



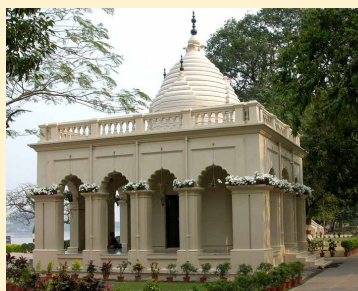
Swami Brahmananda Temple

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922), whose place among the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna is only next to that of Swami Vivekananda, was the first President of the Math and the Mission. The temple, which stands on the spot where Swami Brahmananda's body was cremated, was dedicated in 1924.



Sri Sarada Devi Temple

Overlooking the wide bathing ghat stands the temple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The temple, built on the spot where her mortal remains were consigned to flames, was consecrated on 21 December 1921.



Swami Vivekananda Temple

The temple stands on the spot where Swami Vivekananda's mortal remains were cremated. The place was chosen by Swamiji himself. Consecrated on 28 January 1924, the temple has a marble relief of Swamiji on the ground floor and an alabaster OM (in Bengali character) on the first floor.



Samadhi Enclosure

The earthly remains of seven of the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were cremated here. Their names are engraved on the marble plaque which stands on this spot.



Old Math

Situated near Ferry Ghat, this house was known as Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house. Sri Sarada Devi stayed here several times before the Belur Math came into existence. On the first floor terrace of the house, she performed Panchatapa ('five-fire austerity') in 1893. Since Ramakrishna Math was located here from 13 February 1898 to 1 January 1899, it is known as the Old Math.



Ramakrishna Sangraha Mandir

This is a museum where the various articles used by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are preserved and displayed. It also has an exhibition and a room for video show depicting the history of the Ramakrishna Movement.

The museum remains closed on Mondays and a few festival days.



OTHER IMPORTANT PLACES

President Maharaj's Quarters: The President of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission lives here. Revered Maharaj gives darshan to devotees at the appointed hours both in the mornings and afternoons.



Saradananda Bhavan: This is the global headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The General Secretary directs and controls the activities of the twin organizations from his office here.

Math Office: This office takes care of the day-to-day management of the temples in Belur Math, distribution of prasad and organizing annual festivals.

Pallimangal Showroom: Village handi-craft items produced at some of our centres as part of their rural development programme are displayed and sold here.

Bookshop: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vedanta literature and photos and laminations may be purchased from here.

Ma Sarada Sadavrata: Devotees and visitors are served lunch prasad in this large dining-hall.



Charitable Dispensary:

Patients are treated and given medicines here by qualified doctors.

FACILITIES OUTSIDE THE CAMPUS

Waiting Hall: This is located in Nivedita Cottage on G T Road, opposite the Belur Math entrance gate. Visitors may use this lounge during the afternoon hours when the Belur Math gates remain closed to the public.

Parking space is available next to this building.



VISITING HOURS

Morning : 6:30 am to 11:30 am

Afternoon : 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm (April to September)
3:30 pm to 8:30 pm (October to March)

1. The visiting hours noted above are extended on special days.
2. The inner shrine (garbha mandira) of Sri Ramakrishna Temple is closed at 11:00 am for ritualistic food offering to Sri Ramakrishna and opened at 11:40 am for about five minutes. All other temples are closed at 11:30 am.
3. At the time of sunset, when the arati (evening service) begins, a bell is rung to indicate that visitors are not allowed to loiter on the Math grounds and that they are also not permitted to visit any of the temples other than Sri Ramakrishna Temple from then on. They may join the arati in Sri Ramakrishna Temple and, after the arati, spend their time in meditation till the temple is closed for the day.



Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

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