

# HISTORY OF RAMAKRISHNA MATH

## RAJAHMUNDRY

Gangecha, Yamune chaiva, Godavari, Saraswathi, Narmade, Sindhu Kaveri Jalesmin Sannidhim kuru (May the Holy waters of Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswathi, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri be pleased to be present here).

Every Indian devotee invokes and invites the above seven rivers. Rajahmundry is a place of piety, since the sacred river Godavari in its last stretch before merging into the sea flows by it. The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, consort of Sri Ramakrishna has made Rajahmundry more pious by her visit to this place and taking her bath in the river Godavari in about the middle of April, 1911. Her visit here may have spelt out and as may be as well have been the indication for the establishment of a Math in the years that followed.

In our State, the Ramakrishna movement was started first in Visakhapatnam. During the Second World War the Government advised the Ramakrishna Math there to vacate from its premises situated on the Beach road. On the invitation of the devotees of West Godavari District, Swami Nisreyasanandaji shifted the centre from Visakhapatnam to Tanuku. During this period the Swami used to visit Rajahmundry for giving discourses and lectures. Sri Duvvuri Ramakrishna Rao became acquainted with the Swami and in a prayerful way requested the Swami to help him in the establishment of a centre here in Rajahmundry promising to gift a large portion of his properties for the purpose.

Detailing his own feelings and particulars of the gifts he intended to give, Sri R.K. Rao sent his appeal to the Head quarters of the R.K.Math at Belur Math. On 26-10-1949 the Belur authorities advised Sri Rao that his request cannot be complied with. Without being disappointed Sri Rao renewed his appeal. Even then, by their letter dated 14-9-1949 the Belur Math expressed their helplessness. Even after this refusal, Sri Rao persisted in his approach and at long last on 5-4-1950 the Belur Math authorities agreed to establish a centre at Rajahmundry. The Belur Math authorities stated that they had heard from Sri Rao's friends that Sri Rao was even prepared to undertake Satyagraha and hence agreed for the establishment of the Math centre here and officially intimated Sri Rao by their letter dated 6-9-1950 to accept the gifts for establishing the centre.

On 5-10-1950 Swami Chirantanandaji was appointed as the first President but altering their decision appointed Swami Nityabodhanandaji as the first President.

Sri Rao donated his ancestral house, mango grove, grazing land in Rajahmundry and cultivable land in the village Munagala. Sri Rao along with 30 devotees received Swami Nityabodhanandaji on his arrival from Calcutta by Mail in the evening on 7-10-1950. Earlier with the consent and encouragement of Swami Saswathanandaji some of the local devotees obtained on lease an extent of Ac. 0-80 cents of land abutting the Godavari river bund from the Maharajah of Vizianagaram and established Sri Ramakrishna Samithi and were conducting the same. On learning that Belur Math authorities were establishing a centre of R.K.Math, the samithi people offered to amalgamate the same with the centre. After a lot of discussion and debate as to whether the centre here was to be located in the Samithi premises or in Veerabhadrapuram the Swami advised the centre be established in Veerabhadrapuram.

The ancestors of Sri Rao had three tiled houses with high pials adjoining the roads. This road running from east to west divided the Math with the three houses on the one side and the vacant site lying on the other side. On request by Swami Nityabodhanandaji to utilise one of the three houses for the shrine, the second for quarters for residence of monks and the third for housing the library, the

authorities agreed on 5-12-1950 and lent a sum of Rs. 3,000/-. With that amount the Swami got the thorny fence and partition walls removed and converted one of the houses into bigger one for locating the shrine removing the tiles and repairing the loft. Lavatories were also constructed. Since the money for these alterations was not sufficient, at the request of the Swami the Belur Math Headquarters sent Rs. 3,000/- on 25-1-1951 and another sum of Rs. 2,000/- on 20-2-1951. By these changes and additions the Math centre came to be established at Rajahmundry.

For the opening ceremony of the Math Srimat Swami Madhavanandaji then the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was invited. At 9 a.m. on 8-2-1951 the new Math was inaugurated by placing a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa on the pedestal in the shrine. Special pooja and homam were performed on that day. About 3000 devotees partook of the Prasad. At the public meeting held at 5.30 p.m. on that day Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj detailed the devotion, dedication and perseverance of Sri Rao as being responsible for the establishment of the Math centre here. Sri Madhavanandaji advised the gathering to follow the universally accepted tenets of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Besides the Swami, Sri G.Narasimha Rao, Sri K.V.Punnayya, Principal Government Arts College, Rajahmundry and Sri Bhamidipati Kameswara Rao addressed the gathering. After the evening Aratrikam and Bhajan.

Sri B. Kurangeswara Rao performed a Harikatha on Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa at 9 p.m. The inaugural celebrations of the Math were held from 8-2-1951 to 11-2-1951. On Friday 9-2-1951 at 8 a.m. Avadhani Sri K.Rama Murthy's Veda Veena and a public meeting at 5.30 p.m. were held. Swami Kailasanandaji, president of Madras Math presided over the meeting. Sri Avvari Hanumayya and Sri N. Bangarayya spoke. After the evening Arathi and Bhajan, at 7.30 p.m. Sri B. Kurangeswara Rao gave a Harikatha recital on Sri Tyagaraja. At 8 a.m. on Saturday, 10-2-1951 a musical performance was given by Sri Jandhyala Satyanarayana. At 5.30 p.m. in the evening a public meeting presided over by Swami Nisreyasanandaji of Mauritius was held when Sri K.Lingaraju (M.L.A.) and Sri S.Lingayya spoke. After the evening Arathi and Bhajan there was a musical performance by Sri Dokka Sriramamurthy. At 9.30 pm. Sri Yallabandi Tatarao gave Harikatha performance. On Sunday, 11-2-1951 at 8 a.m. Sri Malladi Sriramamurthy garu gave a music performance. At the public meeting held at 4.30 p.m. on that day, Sri S.V. Ramamurthy, I.C.S. Regional Advisor for Food, Government of India, presided. Swami Madhavanandaji, Sri Ivaturi Nagabhushana Rao, Sri Chinta Deekshitulu and Swami Nisreyasanandaji addressed the gathering. At 8 p.m. Sri P. Deekthitha Dasu gave Harikatha performance on Bhaktha Meera. Vote of thanks was proposed by Swami Nityabodhanandaji. Thus with enthusiasm the inaugural functions were held on the four days.

Just after the expiry of the first year of the inauguration of the Math this centre took up famine relief work in Rayalaseema and conducted it from 16-3-1952 to February 1953. This relief work was conducted in 27 centres in the Districts of Cuddapah, Kurnool, Chittoor and Anantapuram and a sum of Rs. 45,40,491/- was spent for this relief (details may be gathered from the specific article in this magazine).

After the above works were improving the activities of the Math, Swami Nityabodhananda requested the permission of the Belur Math Headquarters to permit the acquisition of the road adjacent to the Math which divides the vacant site of the Math on its other side, in exchange of a similar area out of the vacant site adjoining the parallel road, for which permission was granted on 17-4-1951. Accordingly the Municipality accepted the proposal and the separated properties were made contiguous.

Without confining the activities of the Math merely to Pooja, Bhajans and lectures an idea to expand the activities permission was sought from the Headquarters to run a students' home. Since there was not sufficient accommodation in the Math premises, an attempt was made to purchase a house nearby which did not materialise and a proposal to start a students' home in the nearby mango grove was rejected by the Headquarters. The letter dated 9-6-1953 from this Math requesting the permission was rejected by the Headquarters stating that it will involve great difficulties. Hence 2

rooms in the library house were allotted for the purpose and 2 students were admitted on 13-7-1953. By 18-8-1955 four students were accommodated.

While Swami Nityabodhanandaji was striving for the growth of the Math, the Godavari inspite flooded the entire low lying areas of Rajahmundry on 16-8-1953 and also inundated the Math in Veerabhadra puram. The same night itself the Swamiji shifted to the Mango garden with whatever articles and equipment they could. On the Headquarters being informed by telegram on 18-8-1953 of the flood situation a reply was received by telegram from the Headquarters to start relief work. By the Godavari floods an area of 2000 sq.miles was under water. Soon as the permission was granted Swami Nityabodhananda started service of free food in the mango garden itself. What was initially started with feeding of about 400 persons gradually reached the figure of 5000 persons. With the aid received from the Government, feeding centres were opened in the various places in the town. This relief work was carried out not merely at Rajahmundry but was undertaken in 339 villages in the East and West Godavari Districts. The buildings of the Math at Veerabhadrapuram were damaged by the floods. Expending an amount of Rs. 2,000/the damage was repaired by 2-11-1953. The relief work continued upto April 1955.

For rendering medical aid to the public in Rajahmundry Swami Nityabodhananda desired to start a dispensary and requested the Social Welfare Board to sanction a grant. At this juncture itself, Swami Nityabodhananda left Rajahmundry on 1-12-1955 and reached the Headquarters at Belur Math since the Headquarters wanted him to proceed to France to help Swami Siddheswaranandaji.

On 2-11-1955 Belur Math appointed Swami Nirvikalpanandaji as President who arrived in Rajahmundry on 4-11-1955 and took charge of his duties on 25-11-1955. By this time there were 12 students in the premises. Adult Educational centres were started in 6 villages. Worship, Library and discourses were the activities conducted as usual. Nirvikalpanandaji started building of houses for the flood victims.

With the grant of Rs. 8,000/- from the Government and Rs. 4,000/- collected by donations, totaling Rs. 12,000/- the students home was built and made ready by 22-2-1956. From now on the students were shifted from the library to the student's home.

The Ramakrishna Samithi was started in the year 1938 at the behest and encouragement of Swami Saswathanandaji. By letter dated 1-4-1956 the committee was informed by the Maharaja of Vizianagaram that an annual rent of Rs. 101- was payable under the lease granted. About the same time Sri S. V. Subbarao advocate, one of the devotees running Ramakrishna Samithi, by letter dated 25-4-1956 requested the Assistant Secretary of the Belur Math, Swami Saswathanandaji to take over Samithi. The Dewan of Vizianagaram, Sri C.L.Narayana Sastry also wrote a letter dated 6-4-1956 requesting the Belur Math Headquarters to take the premises on lease for 99 years imposing two conditions, the first one being that the site should be used for the benefit of the public and the other that the existing memorial should be protected. On 22-6-1957 the Belur Math authorities accepted the offer with the conditions and the Maharajah of Vizianagaram got a registered document executed on 11 ~7-1957 in favor of the Math. The activities of the Math of running a Homoeopathic Dispensary, discourses and worship were continued. The Samithi spent Rs. 218/- and constructed a compound wall on 12-11-1957. In 1958 Swami Nirvikalpanandaji expended Rs. 8,5001 - and got a lecture hall constructed. On 25-4-1961 the land given on lease was gifted with absolute rights by the Maharaja of Vizianagarm to Belur Math.

In the year 1958 Sri Duwuri Rama krishna Rao filed a suit against the Math. On 13-9-1960 Sri V.N. Sarma, advocate for the Math informed the Belur Math authorities to the success in the litigation ending in favor of the Math. Sri Duwuri Ramakrishna Rao filed an appeal in the High court at Hyderabad on 16-9-1961. The High Court rejected the appeal on 11-7-1965. Even during the pendency of the litigation expending a sum of Rs. 6,000/- the lecture hall was expanded into a larger area by 10-3-1962.

The flood victims of Cheerala were rendered relief and rehabilitation facilities to the tune of constructing 60 houses for them which was completed by March 1970, a work undertaken on 21-7-1969.

On 17-11-1969 the Belur Math authorities appointed Swami Nageshanandaji and he came to Rajahmundry on 20-1-1970 from Calcutta and took charge on 23-1-1970. He obtained their permission for improvement of the Math by constructing of a temple expending rupees 5 lakhs. Fearing troubles from the Tenancy Act, they got the tenant surrender the land in his occupation by paying a sum of Rs. 9,500/-. At the same time the crop-yielding land of an extent of 18 acres in Munagala village and the small vacant site opposite the Math were also sold. The grazing land had also to be sold on 6-5-1970. On 12-5-1970 Swami Nagesha nandaji advised the Headquarters that it would be good to transfer the Math complex to the wide area of the mango grove. The Belur authorities took no decision for reasons not known. Swami Nageshanandaji Informed Belur Math on 30-4-1971 about the demise of Sri Ramakrishnarao. The Chandra guest house near the Math became the property of Ramakrishna Math. In their letter dated 8-6.1'972 Belur Math stated that they were against the proposal for construction of the temple.

Hearing that the Urban Ceiling Act has come into force Belur Math advised the sale of the mango grove. A layout was prepared on 9-6-1972. Swami Nageshanandaji attracted people by his vedantic lectures. He not merely celebrated the birthday functions on a large scale but carried out extensive propaganda in the neighbouring towns. On 29-10-1973 Swami Nandanandaji succeeded Swami Nageshanandaji as President of the Math. Retaining about 3 acres of land the rest of the layout plots were sold. Belur Math agreed for the construction of a temple expending a sum of Rs. 3,18,000/- Appeals were issued for donations. Swami Nandanandaji visited the Ramakrishna Samithis being run by house-holder devotees and extended encouragement to them for improving their institutions. The birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna were observed on a big scale by Swami Nandanandaji. On invitation by Swami Nandanandaji, Swami Vireswaranandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Belur Math, visited Rajahmundry and gave initiations to the devotees.

The Rajahmundry Mission distributed rice, dhal, salt, clothes and medicines on a large scale in the tidal wave disaster that affected Divi Seema on 19-11-1977. In the rehabilitation work of construction of houses, the branch Mission extended help to the Belur Math. 1004 houses, 3 community halls, one church and 3 temples were constructed. This work continued till the end of the year 1979. When a fire disaster occurred in the nearby village Muggalla, besides distributing food and clothes, Palmyrah leaves, rafters and beams were supplied for the reconstruction of the houses which were destroyed in the fire.

The Government invited the Ramakrishna Mission along with several other institutions to serve the pilgrims attending the Pushkarams which started on 17 -9-1979. The R.K.Mission undertook to supply milk to the young children of the pilgrims and opened centres for distribution in the Town centre of the Mission, timber yard at the road-cum-rail bridge junction and the bus complex and each child was given half a litre of milk and 1,02,600 children were thus provided.

On 5-12-1979 Swami Swatmanandaji was appointed President of the Math and he took over charge on 1-1-1980. When a proposal was made to construct the temple in the town centre, the Belur Math sent Assistant Secretaries, Swami Gahananandaji and Swami Atmasthanandaji to examine the proposal personally. They visited Rajahmundry on 19-8-1980 and gave the following advices.

They opined that the Math centre at Veerabhadrapuram was liable. to inundation, unhealthy and disturbing noises around and hence unfit for the proposed construction of the temple and that to build the temple in the town centre was not advisable though it was in the centre of the town, but

inhibits any expansion and that the temple should be constructed in the mango grove. They advised the Belur Math that the Math complex in Veerabhadrapuram, the guest house and the Mission Town centre may be sold and with the proceeds the new temple should be constructed in all its fullness. On 2-9-1980 their advice was accepted by the Belur Math.

The Vamsadhara River in Srikakulam district flooded and caused damage and Rajahmundry centre rendered relief and by way of rehabilitation constructed 200 houses for the affected victims, a community centre and a Ramalaya temple and handed them over in the year 1982.

Active steps were set a foot for shifting the centre to the new place. A loan of Rs. 50,000- was obtained from the Belur Math on 4-6-1985 and started construction of the building Swami Sarvajnanandaji, Head of Nattarampally Math laid the foundation stone for the new building at 8.30 a.m. on 25-6-1983. Another loan of Rs. 50,000- was obtained on 18-3-1984 and construction of other buildings was taken up. The Math was shifted to the new area in July 1984 by which time monks' quarters were ready for occupation. The construction of the library, office complex and the dining hall was completed by 1985. The Math complex in Veerabhadrapuram was sold to the Income Tax Department under a registered sale deed dated 23-7 -1984.

In 1984 the Nellore District was affected by floods. This centre carried on relief work in Naidupeta and Vakadu areas till the year 1985. Even as this relief was being carried on a Mobile Medical Relief Scheme was launched for Tribals in the Agency areas. Initially the camp was located in Busigudem about 10 miles from Rampachodavaram. This service of the Mobile dispensary was extended to cover Bandapalli and Davanapalli under Rampachodavaram and to Vedurnagar, Dutchurti and Mohanapuram in Addateegala area. For four days in a week Medical relief is rendered in the agency area for the tribals. Swami Gambhiranandaji President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur Math arrived in Rajahmundry on 7-9-1985 and inaugurated the new complex. In the same visit, Swami Gambhiranandaji laid the foundation stone for the new temple at 7.27 a.m. on 8-9-1985. Sri G.V. Reddy drew the plan for the temple and construction was started in January 1986 which was completed by the year 1988. Rupees 10 lakhs were expended for the construction of the temple. On 25.1-1988 at 9.02 am. Swami Gambhiranandaji consecrated the temple. Above 5000 devotees from various parts of the country including 108 Revered Monks of the order attended the celebrations.

In 1986 a small Dyana Mandir was constructed along with the Homoeo dispensary in the Town centre. Walls were also constructed to cover the open lecture hall and inside a dias for giving lectures.

On 15-8-1986 the Godavari floods again caused grave damage in the East and West Godavari Districts. Besides relief being rendered on a large scale a hundred houses were built in Yandagandi, Garagaparru and Mallavaram villages in the West Godavari District. When there was destruction by fire near Rajahmundry the victims were supplied with Palmyrah leaves and other materials. When a cyclone hit Kavali on 9-11-1989, relief works were undertaken in Kavali, Kondapuram and Varikuntapadu.

It became necessary to secure a new marble statue of Sri Ramakrishna as the one ready for the consecration day at the time had developed some defects. It took 2 years to get the new statue. At 11-29 a.m. on 15- 12-1989 Swami Ranganathanandaji, then a vice-president of the order unveiled the statue presiding over the celebrations. Several devotees attended the function. During this period another building for the monks was constructed which was also inaugurated by Swami Ranganathanandaji. By now in the new Math, Library, Office, Monks' 'quarters and the temple were fully ready.

After the establishment of the new Math complex was completed with a view to hold a gathering of Ramakrishna devotees of Andhra Pradesh, styling it "as Bhakta Sammelan" arrangements were made to hold the conference in the month of May 1990. Only 60 devotees gathered as on the

very previous day a cyclone had hit Guntur and Krishna Districts. Belur Math authorities directed the centre to gather details of damage. After inspection of the flood areas, relief was rendered to 4439 families by supplying rice and other necessary edibles, clothes and utensils. Four cyclone shelters each costing about Rs. 6,00,000/- were built at a total cost of Rs. 24,00,000/- Besides a small Rama Mandir which was damaged by the cyclone was reconstructed with a Gopuram in addition making it a nice temple expending Rs. 1,25,000/-. The Sammelana aborted as above in May 1990 was held on a grand scale in November 1990.

In the Godavari pushkarams in the year 1992 following the steps taken at the previous pushkarams young children were given Horlicks and adults were given buttermilk. Medical aid was given to the pilgrims as well for 24 hours.

Apart from the Homoeopathic dispensary opened in the Year 1972, an Allopathic dispensary was started in the year 1992 in the Math. This dispensary was working on Sunday mornings was attended by a large number of patients. With a view to open a fully fledged allopathic dispensary a new building was constructed in the Ramakrishna Mission Town Centre. This was inaugurated by Swami Gahananandaji and started functioning from December 1993.

The rendering of voluntary service by members of the Medical profession of Rajahmundry at great personal sacrifice and the dispensary having all facilities within a short time attracts several patients from East and West Godavari Districts.

Besides rendering relief to the needy the Rajahmundry centre has helped students as well. In 1992 to train students for all the examinations held by Dakshina Hindi Prachara Sabha Hindi classes were started in the Mission Town centre. From 1993 to 1997 coaching classes for 10th class students were held in the Math.

For the visiting monks two rooms were constructed above the kitchen hall in 1999.

By March, 2000 the Rajahmundry centre has reached its present form. In the Math apart from daily worships and prayers, holding festivals, conducting periodical retreats for devotees etc. are observed. In the Math Monks' Quarters for their residence, an office in charge of all other activities, a library with 8,000 books and a books sales section exist. In the mission centre Homoeopathic dispensary, allopathic dispensary with all equipments, Hindi classes and mobile dispensary for the tribals are being run. The Mobile dispensary treated 30,000 patients, 185 victims of tuberculosis and 26 persons operated for the eye troubles were attended. In the free dispensary 44453 patients were treated. 14~ students appeared for the Hindi examinations securing 92% success. By the Month 01 March 2000, for medical expense! Rs. 41, 84,845 and Rs. 2, 35,746/for Hind classes and for other services were expended, bringing the total sum to Rs. 44, 20,591.

A sum of Rs. 56,149/- were spent for the library and cultural activities. For running the Math, for Pooja expenses and related activities and festivals a sum of Rs. 6, 72,746/ was expended. With dedication to serve the people the Math has been making efforts increasingly. The Golden Jubilee Celebrations are being conducted with a conviction that fresh enthusiasm will propel more devotees towards reaching fresh and new heights and expecting encouragement from all in this endeavour.