



A critical analysis on role of Ramakrishna mission in relief activities

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Abstract

The Ramakrishna Mission has contributed significantly to Indian civilization in education, humanity, literature and spirituality. Although they are not politically involved, their contribution remains significant in shaping a free-thinking, self-respecting and fearless citizen towards British colonial in India. With deep insight into the rapidly changing social scenario, he realized the necessity of a humanist religious practice. Therefore, adopting a modern perspective, this paper attempts to highlight the contribution of Sri Ramakrishna mission in India towards relief activities. The history of the Ramakrishna Order's relief services is as old as that of the Mission itself. Besides their multifarious permanent constructive works, from their very inception, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have been ever ready to promptly organize ameliorative and healing services whenever the nation has been faced with sudden calamities caused by freaks of nature, follies of men, or scourges of epidemics. Its relief activities have also extended well beyond Indian borders. Qualitative methods through a systematic sociohistorical analysis that summarized the literature based on documents, books and journals are used in this paper.

Keywords: Ramakrishna Mission, Qualitative methods, sociohistorical analysis

Introduction

As a direct response to the growing sense of nationalism among Indians in the 19th century, a variety of organizations, such as the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and the Ramakrishna Mission, were established with the goal of reviving Hinduism. On February 18, 1836, in the Hoogly District of Bengal, Sri Ramakrishna, also known by the name Gadadhar Chatterjee, was born. This event corresponded with the beginning of the Ramakrishna Mission Movement. Gadadhar Chatterjee was another name for Sri Ramakrishna. He came from a typical Brahmin family that was struggling financially. He did not obtain a formal education because he did not go to school. He began his life by working as a priest in the Dakshineswar Temple, where he was responsible for leading worship services to the revered deity Kali. Tota Puri, a devotee of Sankaracharya, was the one who first bestowed upon him the name Ramakrishna. Young men started approaching Sri Ramakrishna and talking to him about their problems and asking him questions about their own lives. A holy man by the name of Ramakrishna Paramahansa is credited with establishing the Ramakrishna Order of monks in the 19th century. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is considered to be the spiritual founder of the organization. The spiritual experiences of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who had enlightening realizations in the religions of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity in addition to Bhakti, Tantra, and Advaita Vedanta, served as the impetus for the establishment of the Rama Krishna Mission. On the basis of these experiences, he came to the conclusion that all religions ultimately lead to the same divine realization. Keshab Chandra Sen and the other Brahmans disseminated Ramakrishna's teachings to the people of Bengal through the use of public speaking and written works. One of the most important things that the Brahmans contributed to the Bengali intellectual community in the nineteenth century was the identification of Sri Ramakrishna. On March 15,

1875, Keshab Chandra Sen had his first encounter with Sri Ramakrishna, and he was left astounded by the man's profound simplicity. In his report of the meeting, he said, "We encountered one (a real Hindu devotee) not long ago, and were struck by the depth, penetration, and simplicity of his spirit." Keshab Chandra Sen was profoundly influenced by Sri Ramakrishna. Despite the fact that there have been a number of studies on the Ramakrishna Order, the majority of them concentrate on the philosophical doctrines and epistemological foundations of the Mission.

Literature review

The establishment of the Ramakrishna mission

The Hindu religious and spiritual organization known as the Ramakrishna Mission serves as the foundation for the Ramakrishna Movement, also known as the Vedanta Movement, which is a global spiritual movement. Being one of the most well-known and inspiring spiritual leaders, Sri Rama Krishna sparked a quiet revolution in the spiritual community by encouraging millions of individuals to engage in spiritual sadhana. Swami Vivekananda, a devout disciple of Ramakrishna, established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 with the twin objectives of fostering both individual and global freedom. In particular, they altered many of the essential tenets of Hinduism found in the Vedic literature.

The Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj movements had an impact on the Ramakrishna Mission's core following Hinduism's modernisation in the 19th century. The close relationships Ramakrishna had with supporters of the Brahma Samaj movement provide as evidence of this. As a result of their association, he was affected by their perspectives on morality and religion. Thus, it may be said that the Brahma movement in general served as the impetus for the Ramakrishna Mission movement in India's 1870s. The Ramakrishna Mission movement was started by Sri Ramakrishna. It started in the 1870s, after he had been in

contact with the spiritual realm for 12 years. The quotes from Swami Shivananda, a close friend of Swami Vivekananda, that follow illustrate this:

This order went undetected. The maestro made it in the midst of his illness. He then issued directions on how to set up and carry out this order to Swamiji (Vivekananda) and others. According to Locklin 2017, Ramakrishna's final command to his followers, "Keep my guys together and teach them," is where the Ramakrishna Mission movement originated and how it came to be. After Sri Ramakrishna's death, Swami Vivekananda took over as the movement's leader, managing it until it grew and became well-known on a global basis. At first, the Ramakrishna Mission was an unofficial movement. It was founded in September 1886 in Barahanagar, Calcutta, India. In November 1891, it moved to Alambazar, and on December 9, 1898, it moved once more to Belur, a community on the Ganges River. The Ramakrishna Mission Movement was officially started in 1897, upon Swami Vivekananda's return from the United States. On May 1, 1897, a gathering in Calcutta led to the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission movement. S.P. Sen (1978: 374–375) mentions the following resolutions as some of those adopted at the meeting:

i. The movement would have the names Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

ii. The objective is to spread awareness of Ramakrishna's teachings throughout the entire world. They also support helping the poor since it benefits everyone.

This movement's goal is to make friends with and bring together people from all religions as they strive toward a shared goal (in their beliefs).

iv. The movement's members are being trained as part of the implementation strategy to share with society their practical knowledge (both spiritual and material).

• Promotes commerce and the arts; • Exemplifies the vedanta teachings of Ramakrishna.

v. Building Indian maths (monasteries) and ashramas (hostels) all throughout India is one way to accomplish this. Another is by sending members of this movement abroad to establish spiritual hubs and subsequently forge close ties with the outside world.

vi. The main objective of this movement is to advance spirituality and society without interfering with domestic politics or government.

Givish Chandra Gosh, Swami Akhandananda, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda, and many others were among the movement's founding figures who made a great impact. Another Swami Vivekananda companion who made a significant contribution was Swami Brahmananda, who succeeded him as the movement's leader after Vivekananda's death. Sri Ramakrishna refers to him as the king of the spiritual world.

ii. Swami Shivananda, the second president of the movement and a role model for many Ramakrishna Mission devotees.

iii. Swami Saradanda served as Swami Vivekananda's secretary for the Ramakrishna Mission movement up until the end of his life.

The Ramakrishna Mission disagrees with the teachings of Hinduism. As a result of his firsthand encounters with the various world religions, Sri Ramakrishna came to the opinion that all faiths pursue the same ultimate goal through various means. He thought that Kali (God Mother) and

Brahman were two sides of the same reality (2 in 1). He had researched Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. He thinks all religions are sincere. Despite the fact that God has many names, one is still not very many. At this moment, Sri Ramakrishna seems to have absorbed the core concepts of Islamic monotheism. Sri Ramakrishna practiced meditation or asceticism. Women and gold might hinder a person's spiritual development. Both represent wealth in the form of gold and lust (for women) (worldly greed). Human avarice cannot be suppressed until all worldly and worldly attractions are removed from a person's perception, and human lust cannot be subdued unless all women are seen as manifestations of Kali (God Mother). The world, which is an illusion, deceives man. They lose sight of their own reality, and the only way to regain it is to depart from this reality and journey to the reality of unchanging truth. The Ramakrishna Mission rejects the social caste system that is now in place. According to Sri Ramakrishna, the rejection of the caste system is proof that God still values humanity.

Objective of the study

There are some objectives as follow as

- To Study the history of the Ramakrishna Order's relief services.
- To study the philosophy of services.
- To explain the growth and extension of relief services
- To outline the philosophy of service
- To analysis relief services during natural disasters
- To study the relief services during man-made disasters

Methodology

Writings on philosophical ideas of Swami Vivekananda; Interviews of the teachers, students and associated personalities of the educational institutions of the Ramakrishna Mission, Writings on the historical and philosophical background of educational centres of the Ramakrishna Mission. Data interpretation is made by statistical techniques.

Result and discussion

The Ramakrishna Order's humanitarian endeavors have a lengthy history that is almost as old as the Mission itself. In addition to their numerous ongoing constructive efforts, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have always been ready to swiftly organize ameliorative and healing services whenever the nation has faced sudden calamities brought on by freaks of nature, errors of men, or scourges of epidemics. Furthermore, its humanitarian initiatives have extended well beyond Indian borders. Relief has been one of the fundamental tenets of the Ramakrishna Mission's humanitarian assistance initiatives. Practically every year, relief operations are started in one area of the nation or another in response to catastrophes of all sizes and types, both natural and man-made. Flood relief is the most common type of relief activity, and over time, about 30 different sorts of aid have been provided. Regardless of caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, or political views, the Mission assists victims in accordance with their immediate and long-term needs. These immediate requirements are met through primary relief, which comprises providing supplies like food, clothing, medication, and other necessities along with building temporary shelters. On the other hand, long-term needs include a wide range, from creating homes and shelters to offering follow-up and recovery programs for the

economy. The Ramakrishna Mission's relief efforts were first focused primarily in Bengal, with a few minor actions taking place elsewhere. Following that, relief efforts were extended beyond Bengal's borders to include famine relief in Puri in 1908–1909, Benaras in 1916–17, Amherst in 1920–21, Akyab (now Myanmar) in 1926–27, as well as in the South in places like Coimbatore, Tanjore, Salem, and

Travancore and the North in places like Vrindaban, Mathura, and Dehradun. At the same time, the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission expanded their charitable work through their local branches across India. International relief operations have been carried out during the past 20 years in places including Russia, Brazil, Fiji, Sri Lanka, and others



Plate1: A (Swami Akhandananda-Relief works in Khetri and Murshidabad), B (Plague relief in Kolkata 1899)

The philosophy of service

Sri Ramakrishna said that Man is Narayana Himself. If God can reveal Himself through an image, why not through man as well? He made it clear that realizing God is the ultimate purpose of human existence.

Yet, there are a number of ways to do this. If one closes their eyes, does God only exist then disappear when they are opened? he observed. Nonetheless, he cautioned that "religion is not good on an empty stomach," and he personally took steps to curb such urges. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a well-known educator and humanitarian, was taught by him that although rajās are responsible for effort done for the benefit of others, this rajās is not detrimental because it is based on sattva. He warned against the desire for fame and notoriety demeaning benevolence, but praised altruistic deeds as being "quite noble." Suka and other sages emphasized the importance of educating others about religion and God out of compassion. You are learning as you serve the food. Also favorable. If these deeds are done in a selfless way, they lead to God.

Another time, Sri Ramakrishna highlighted that the primary principle of Vaishnava faith is compassion for all living things. Swami Vivekananda developed his social service ideology on this idea. On July 3, 1897, Swamiji said in a letter to his student Sharat Chandra Chakraborty, "... No, no, it is not compassion to the jiva, but service to the jiva as Shiva."

Strangely, when you serve a Jiva with the conviction that he is a Jiva, Daya (compassion) replaces Prema (love); nevertheless, when you do so with the conviction that he is the Self, Prema is displayed. It is evident from Shruti, Smriti, and direct perception that the Atman is the only thing capable of loving. Hence, rather than compassion, love should be our driving principle. We're not here to feel sorry for them; we're here to help. Instead of feeling compassion, we experience love and self-awareness.

As he introduced the idea of daridra- narayana, or God in the shape of the poor, he asked us, "Where should you go to seek God—are not all the destitute, the miserable, and the weak Gods?" Why not first offer them worship? The Ramakrishna Order's philosophy, which is "service as devotion," guides all of its humanitarian initiatives.

Even for famine assistance, he had a full "developmental viewpoint." "The gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest, the next gift is secular knowledge. the next is the saving of life, and... the fourth is the gift of food," said Swami Vivekananda.

On Swami Akhandananda's involvement in the Mission's initial famine relief effort, Swamiji wrote, "Akhandananda is working well at Mahula, but the approach is not excellent." They seem to be squandering their time and money on a small hamlet that grows only rice. As far as I can tell, no preaching has been done in conjunction with this aid. No amount of wealth in the world can help one small Indian hamlet if the people there aren't taught how to take

care of themselves. The Order's guiding philosophy is still the idea of comprehensive empowerment. "Our main goal should be to educate people, both morally and academically."

Applied or practical Vedanta serves as the foundation for Swamiji's notion of empowerment. The Upanishads, in Swamiji's opinion, are a powerhouse because they reveal the Atman, the source of all strength. These Vedanta ideas "must come out," he insisted, "must work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit and in the cottage of the poor man. [For] if the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better student. We must help others because we share in their suffering. The only way we can make ourselves happy is to

The Ramakrishna Order's slogan, "Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha," or "For personal spiritual liberation and social well-being," captures this fundamental philosophy, which blends enormous idealism with enormous

pragmatism. The Vedanta philosophy, which maintains that all beings are one and that man is divine, combines enormous idealism with enormous practicality in its emphasis on social well-being.

Growth and extension of relief services

The Ramakrishna Mission has continually provided relief since May 1897 for over a century. Exhibit 1 depicts the growth in the average number of primary relief operations that were conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission between 1897 and 2009 in the different states of India in ten year intervals.

According to Exhibit 1 there has been a distinct rise in the average number of relief operations between 1917 and 1926. This was mainly on account of the flood relief operations that were undertaken in South India over this period. The most sustained rise in the average number of primary relief operations was from the late 1950s—a rise that has continued to the present. Another steep rise is noticeable in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

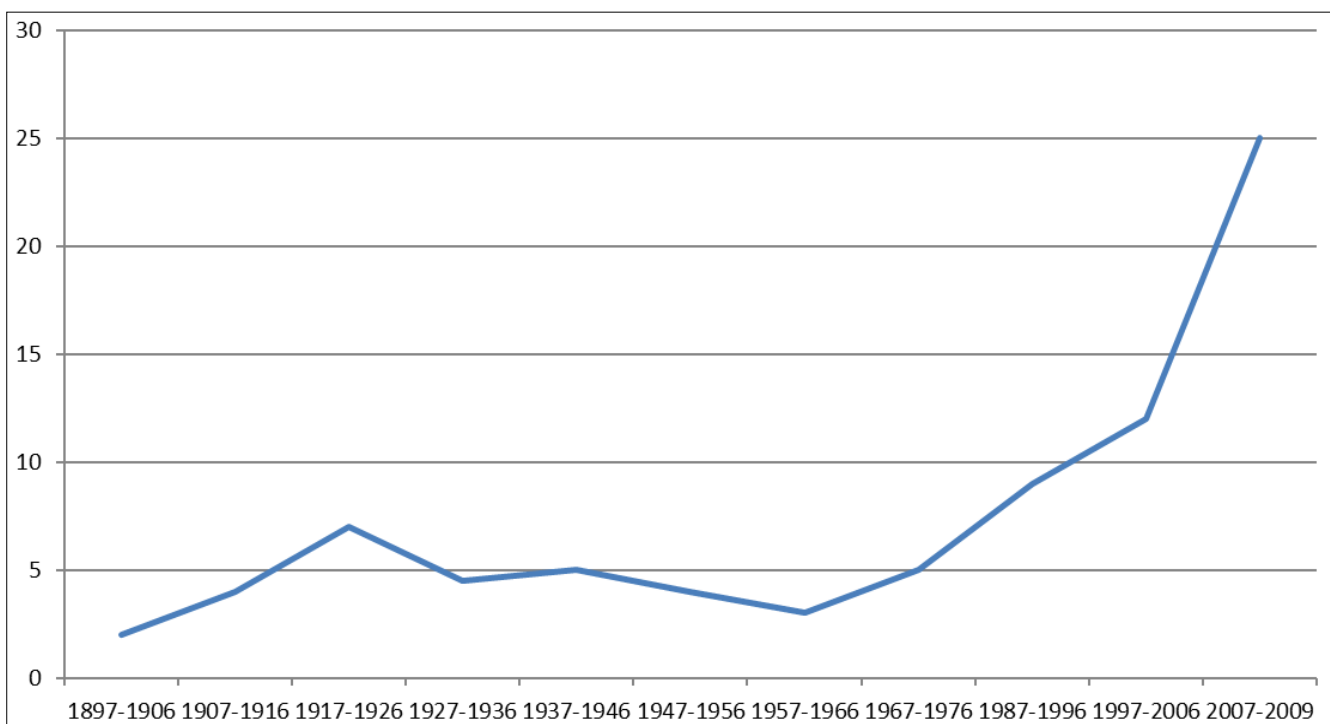


Fig1: Growth and extension of relief services

Source: Ramkrishna Mission Relief service 1968-1988 and the bulletin data relief department, Ramkrishna Mission Thus in the post-independence period there has been a marked and sustained growth in the number of primary relief operations. Over the past century certain trends have emerged with respect to the types of relief. Flood relief has been a regular phenomenon since 1899 when the first flood relief operation was carried out at Bhagalpur. Cyclones and earthquakes strike every few years and the Ramakrishna Mission has almost always provided relief, whenever and wherever these have struck in India or its surrounding regions. In the pre-independence period, famine and medical relief, apart from floods, were the common types of relief operations. Medical relief included plague, cholera and small pox. In the post-independence period, there were no famine relief operations conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission, even though drought relief was conducted from the

1960s. Drought is a major cause of famine, and it is interesting that drought relief is only a post-independence phenomenon in the Ramakrishna Mission. Medical relief, in the post-independence period, tended to become a component of other relief operations. Evacuee, refugee and riot relief were mainly provided from the early 1940s to the early 1970s, especially during the period preceding and following independence. These are some of the trends that emerge over the past century and beyond.

Natural Diasters

Natural disasters in India mainly take the form of earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides, tornadoes, Tsunami, etc. Man-made disasters include arson, civil disorder, riots, etc. The main types of relief that the Ramakrishna Mission has provided in response to natural disasters over the last 50 years is summarized in Exhibit 3.

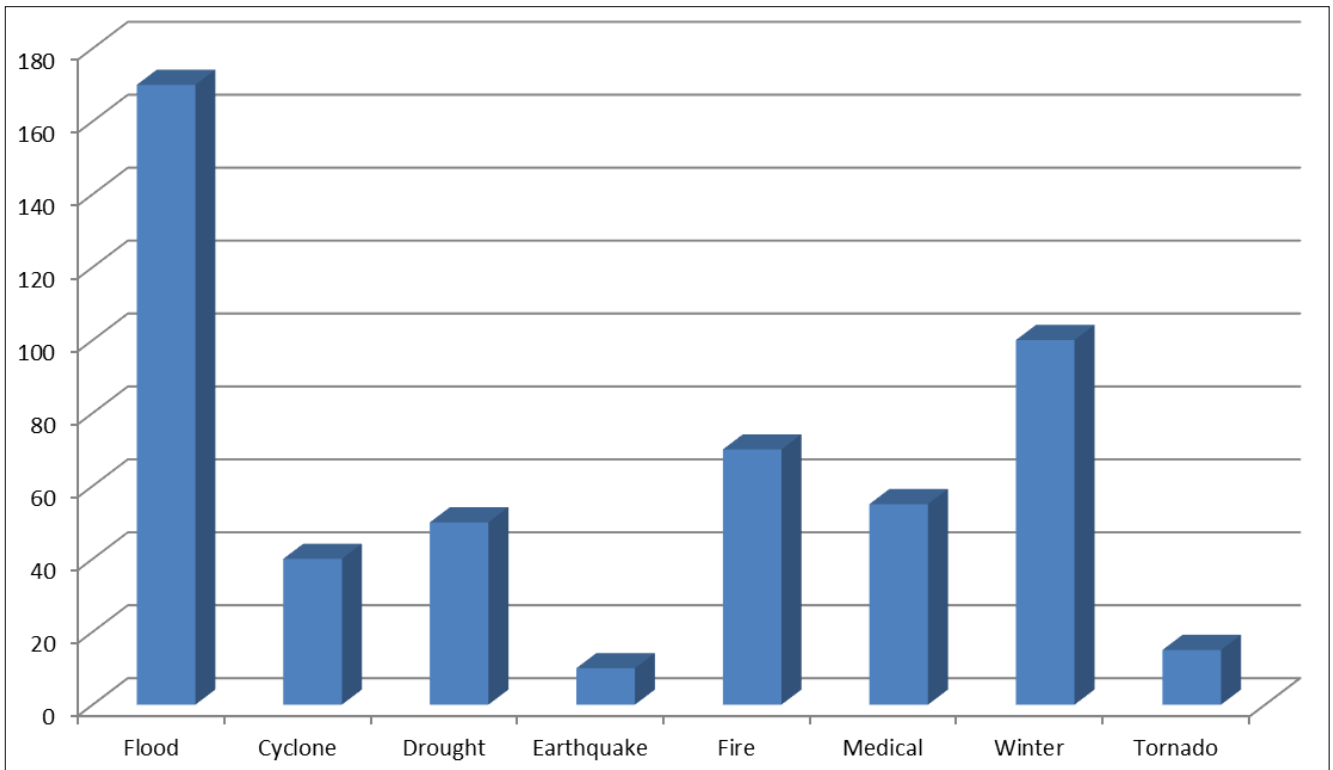


Fig 2: Primary Relief operations conducted in response to natural disasters in India (1958-59 to 2008-09). Source: General reports of the Ramkrishna Math and the Ramkrishna Mission

grown in the recent past and has taken the form of distributing blankets and garments to those from the lower socio-economic strata of society. In interpreting this graph, however, it should be borne in mind that it cannot differentiate between the scales of different relief operations. For example, it cannot differentiate between relief that is provided in 1 district or 12 districts, neither can it distinguish between different relief operations like between an earthquake relief and a winter relief operation. Still, even in view of these limitations, one gets a general idea of the most common types of primary relief operations.

Earthquake

ANUARY 15, 1934, BIHAR: An earthquake, measuring 8.4 on the Richter scale, that rocked northern Bihar, was one of the worst in India’s history. The death toll was estimated at about 10,000 people, while another 10,000 were made homeless. The Ramkrishna Mission conducted primary relief through 14 centres and rehabilitation included the erection of 1993 temporary and 1428 semi-permanent huts, supplying cash or distributing materials for the erection of another 944 semi-permanent shelters etc.



Fig 2: B and C (Bihar Earthquake, 1934: extensive destruction of life and property) A-Reliefs in Gujrat

The Mission also repaired and cleaned houses and drinking water wells. September 30, 1993, LATUR, MAHARASHTRA: The Latur earthquake took the lives of about 12,000 people and caused property damage that was estimated at Rs. 900 crores. Relief and rehabilitation were conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission between October 1993 and April 1999. Primary relief was provided in Haregaon and neighbouring villages to about 3000 families. Rehabilitation concentrated on three villages where 646 houses, 3 school shelters, 3 community prayer halls, and 6 children's parks were constructed. The supply of water and electricity was also restored. A special feature of this project was a follow-up program for long-term socio-economic development. The total expenditure amounted to Rs. 5.25 crore.

JANUARY 26, 2001, GUJARAT: An earthquake, measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale, affected 21 of the 25 districts in Gujarat. In Gujarat, relief began on the very day of the disaster and extended until March 2003. Thousands of victims benefited from the distribution of essential items in 281 villages in 5 of the 21 affected districts. Rehabilitation was provided in Porbandar, Rajkot, Surendranagar and Kutch districts. Here 390 quake-proof houses, 81 quake-

proof schools, 5 community centres and 7 water reservoirs were built. Another 190 houses were made available under the 'Build your own house scheme'. The total cost amounted to Rs. 20 crores.

APRIL 25, 2015, NEPAL and INDIA: An earthquake struck Nepal and some parts of India with a magnitude of 7.8, followed by aftershocks including a large magnitude 7.3 quake on 12 May. The initial earthquake struck with an epicentre in the mountains to the northwest of Kathmandu, and aftershocks around the city of Kathmandu. The later 7.3 earthquake struck to the northeast of Kathmandu towards Mount Everest and affecting regions in Southern China. The quakes killed at least 8000 people and left many in desperate need of shelter, medical help, food and other aid. Primary relief was provided to 26, 598 families in 12 districts of Nepal and 2 districts of India from April 27, 2015, to Mar 2016. Medical assistance was provided to 3417 patients in this period.

APRIL TO JULY 1986, WESTERN INDIA: Drought relief operations were conducted in the Sourashtra region for the four months ending in July. Distribution of cooking materials, water, clothes, and cattle fodder was provided to over 36, 833 persons belonging to 5107 families.



Plate 3: Reliefs duration in drought

APRIL TO AUGUST 2000, WESTERN INDIA: The lack of rainfall in western India gave rise to a severe drought. The Ramakrishna Mission's centres in Gujarat and Rajasthan conducted a drought relief operation that not only included the distribution of cooked and dry food, utensils and clothes, but also fodder, cattle feed, drinking water and medical assistance to thousands of cattle. The total expenditure amounted to Rs. 63.29 lakh.

Floods

The Ramakrishna Mission, since its first flood relief operation in Bhagalpur (Bihar) in 1899, has been providing flood relief almost every year. Two of the significant flood relief operations before independence were in South India from July to September 1924 and in Arakan (Burma, now Myanmar) from May to November 1936. The South Indian operation was massive where 7031 huts were built. The Arakan relief was undertaken despite the dangers posed by armed and dangerous bandits

the post-independence period, there was a considerable expansion in the Ramakrishna Mission's flood relief

services, in both North and South India. Some of the major operations in North East India were undertaken in 1954 by the Mission in Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). One of the biggest flood relief operations was brought about by the torrential monsoonal rains of 1978. In West Bengal, 25 relief camps were opened in 8 of the 11 affected districts. After providing primary relief, rehabilitation involved the construction of 260 Semi-permanent houses in four colonies, a primary Girls' school, as well as tube wells and a community shelter.

Cyclones

November 20, 1977, ANDHRA PRADESH & TAMIL NADU: A cyclone, which gave rise to tidal waves 6 metre high, affected Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. It was unprecedented in a century and did unimaginable devastation, killing 15,000 to 20,000 people. The Ramakrishna Mission's primary relief included the distribution of food grains, utensils, clothes and other essentials. Rehabilitation at Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu included a housing colony with 57 permanent houses and two

community halls. In ten villages of Andhra Pradesh, 1101 hurricane-proof houses, 8 community halls and temples were built. The total cost amounted to nearly Rs. 68.5 lakhs. OCTOBER 29, 1999, ORISSA: A super cyclone, generating winds at 260 kmph and tidal waves 8 metre high ransacked the coast of Orissa. It was India's strongest cyclone, taking the lives of over 10,000 people and affecting 1/3 of Orissa's population. The Ramakrishna Mission began primary relief on November 1 1999. Primary relief was provided at 7 districts to about 10,000 families from November 1, 1999. Rehabilitation was provided at Kotang (Puri) and Kanaguli (Jagatsinghpur), where 330 cyclone-proof houses, 6 school-cum-cyclone-shelters, as well as 30 deep bore wells, were constructed. Total cost amounted to Rs. 5.5 crore.

Tsunami

DECEMBER 26, 2004, SRI LANKA, ANDAMANS & TAMIL NADU: An earthquake, which hit the west coast of Sumatra and Andaman Islands, on December 26, 2004, gave rise to a Tsunami that devastated the coastal regions of Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka. Within a few hours the Mission organized relief through its centres at Chennai, Port Blair and Colombo. Primary relief was provided to about 2.6 lakhs victims through the centres at Chennai, Port Blair and Colombo. Rehabilitation was also conducted by these centres, which included the building of 324 houses, 4 community halls, distribution of 487 motor boats, 900 kg fishing nets, etc. and the total amount spent was Rs. 26 crore.

Man-Made Disasters

Man-made disasters are intentionally or unintentionally perpetrated by human beings. The most frequent types of man-made disasters in which the Ramakrishna Mission has provided primary relief are depicted in Exhibit 4. Distress relief is the most common type of relief that is provided in response to man-made disasters, especially in the recent past, taking the form of serving slum children and expectant mothers with milk. Evacuee and refugee relief operations are similar categories that refer to displaced persons who are served at refugee or transit camps.

The Ramakrishna Mission's landmark operations in response to man-made disasters mainly occurred in the 1940s when India was at crossroads – between political subjugation and in dependence, between division and unity. GREAT BENGAL FAMINE (1942-45): The Great Bengal Famine took the lives of about 3 to 4 million people. The British Government's 'scorched earth policy' was reactionary to the Japanese army's initial victory in Singapore and Burma and the potential threat of this to their dominion in India. This policy was intended to deprive the enemy of food and other essential infrastructure and was executed by profiteers who cut the supply of food to the bone. This resulted in the spiralling of food prices culminating in a man-made famine. The Mission conducted 'Distress relief', between June 1943 and April 1945. During the height of the operation, 75 distribution centres, spread over 19 districts, covering 1169 villages and 22 towns were conducted. The Mission also administered the Government's Destitute Centre and the Government Orphanage, where 21,000 men and women, and 1200 orphans were served.

ASTERN FRONTIER (1942-43): During World War II, when Burma was on the brink of attack, a number of

evacuees sought asylum in India. Many were physically exhausted and mentally afflicted by acts of cruelty while crossing the rugged terrain. Despite the risk of being casualties of war the Ramakrishna Mission entered the war zone in 1942. The Mission assisted about 3230 evacuees between 1942 and 1943 on the Eastern frontier of India. EAST BENGAL & WEST PAKISTAN (1946-48): The period preceding and following the partition of India in August 1947 along religious demographics – between Muslim and Non-Muslim – was plagued by bitter and bloody conflict. The Great Calcutta killing took place on August 16, 1946. It occurred when the Muslim League protested Congress's rejection of a proposal to divide India. The eruptions of communal violence in Calcutta soon spread to Noakhali, Tippera and other places. The Mission started riot relief on October 10, 1946, which continued till December 1948, over which period 140 villages in East Bengal were covered. Primary relief was complemented by rehabilitation which included agricultural assistance, restarting of schools, and the building of two students' homes.

Communal violence in Punjab in March 1947 sparked off a one-off massive exodus. Non-Muslims settled in West Pakistan retreated to India, while Muslims of East Punjab left for Pakistan. The Mission provided relief at the Government's largest refugee camp at Kurukshetra in East Punjab between October 1947 and May 1948, where it distributed fruit juice, blankets, multi-vitamin tablets, medicines, milk, garments and other goods.

EAST PAKISTAN EXODUS: In response to partition and recurrent violence in East Pakistan refugees scurried for West Bengal in fits and starts from 1946 to 1971. The Mission provided relief between 1947 and 1971. The first phase was conducted in cooperation with the West Bengal Government and took place between May 17, 1948 and March 16, 1949. The maximum number of recipients to be served in any week was 10,386.

The second phase of the relief was conducted from mid-March 1950. The Mission's initial task was to feed around 12,000 refugees daily at Sealdah railway station. Subsequently 19 centres were opened across West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Tripura and East Pakistan on the Mission's resources and in collaboration with the Government. Later refugees were rehabilitated in the states bordering East Pakistan in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. East Bengal refugees were again provided primary relief in the mid-1960s and rehabilitated at a settlement at Dandakaranya in Madhya Pradesh. In response to the 1970 exodus, 29 transit camps functioned between April 1971 and January 1972 in villages and towns bordering West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The Mission spent Rs. 27.25 lakhs to alleviate the miseries of about 2 lakh evacuees.

Concluding Remarks

The distinguishing features of the Mission's relief services are its sources of inspiration and commitment to an ideal, an organizational network and experience of providing relief continually for over a century. Its sources of inspiration are Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda and the ideal that it is committed to is '*Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha*'. Its organizational network through branch centres, monks and volunteers, suppliers of relief goods enables it to meet the immediate and long term needs of victims affected by disasters. The Mission's

approach is to meet the immediate needs of victims through primary relief and long-term needs through rehabilitation and follow up, which many other NGOs now emulate. Even though the scale of the Mission's relief operations may not be as large as some of the international NGOs, it has a wealth of experience that has been accumulated for over a century by uninterruptedly providing relief. This is in spite of not maintaining a permanent pool of monks or volunteers solely for this purpose. In dispensing relief, the Mission has won laurels in India and abroad. Rather than resting on these laurels the Ramakrishna Mission marches on and does what it does best – the service of God in man.

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