Sarada Devi

*‘Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger . . . the whole world is your own’*

- Sarada Devi

Endearingly known as ‘Holy Mother’, Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, was born on 22 December 1853 in a poor Brahmin family in Jayrambati, a village adjoining Kamarpukur in West Bengal. Her original name was Saradamani Mukhopadhyay. Since childhood Sarada Devi was devoted to God, and helped her mother in household chores, looked after the cattle and carried food to her father in the field. According to the custom then prevalent in India, she was betrothed to Sri Ramakrishna at the age of six.

Throughout her life, she was sweet and gentle, hardworking, diligent, and spiritual. Her formal schooling was limited to simple reading and writing, but eight years after the arranged marriage, Ramakrishna tutored her in meditation, prayer, the moral virtues needed for a spiritual life, and simple household matters.

At the age of eighteen, Holy Mother came to Dkashineshwar to live with her husband Shri Ramakrishna who asked her whether she had come to pull him down toa a worldly life. Without hesitation she said, “No, I am here to help you realize your Chosen Ideal.”

From then on, Holy Mother lived with Shri Ramakrishna as his first disciple, spiritual companion, devoted wife, disciple, and always the nun. She was the embodiment of purity. Her mind was never sullied by the faintest breath of worldliness, though she lived with Sri Ramakrishna for the greater part of fourteen years. She never missed communion with God, whom she described as lying in the palm of her hand, though she was engaged day and night in various activities.

But why was she regarded as the Holy Mother? Ramakrishna regarded Sarada Devi as an incarnation of the Divine Mother and his disciples looked up to her as if to the Master himself, and addressed her as Holy Mother—a role that came naturally to her. she gave spiritual support to great numbers of seekers who made the pilgrimage to her village. With her disciples she served as teacher, dissolving their doubts, as mother, who through love and compassion won their hearts, and as the Divinity, who assured them of liberation. She was herself nearly illiterate though her simple words taught them the most profound truths.

For many years Sri Ramakrishna practiced great austerities and formally renounced the world, but Holy Mother lived as a simple householder. After Ramakrishna’s death, she carried on his religious ministry, serving as guide and inspiration of the new spiritual movement. Within the ambiance of her natural simplicity and modesty, she set a unique example of an ideal disciple, nun, wife, teacher, and also mother to her countless spiritual children. All were her children irrespective of nationality, religious affiliation, or social position. No one was ever turned away. She accepted all.

She taught that, “The purpose of one’s life is fulfilled only when one is able to give joy to another.”

Under the strain of constant physical work and self-denial and repeated attacks of malaria, her health deteriorated in the closing years of her life, and she left the mortal world on 21 July 1920.

On account of her immaculate purity, extraordinary forbearance, selfless service, unconditional love, wisdom and spiritual illumination, Swami Vivekananda regarded Sri Sarada Devi as the ideal for women in the modern age. He believed that with the advent of Holy Mother, the spiritual awakening of women in modern times had begun.

* Shruti Goel