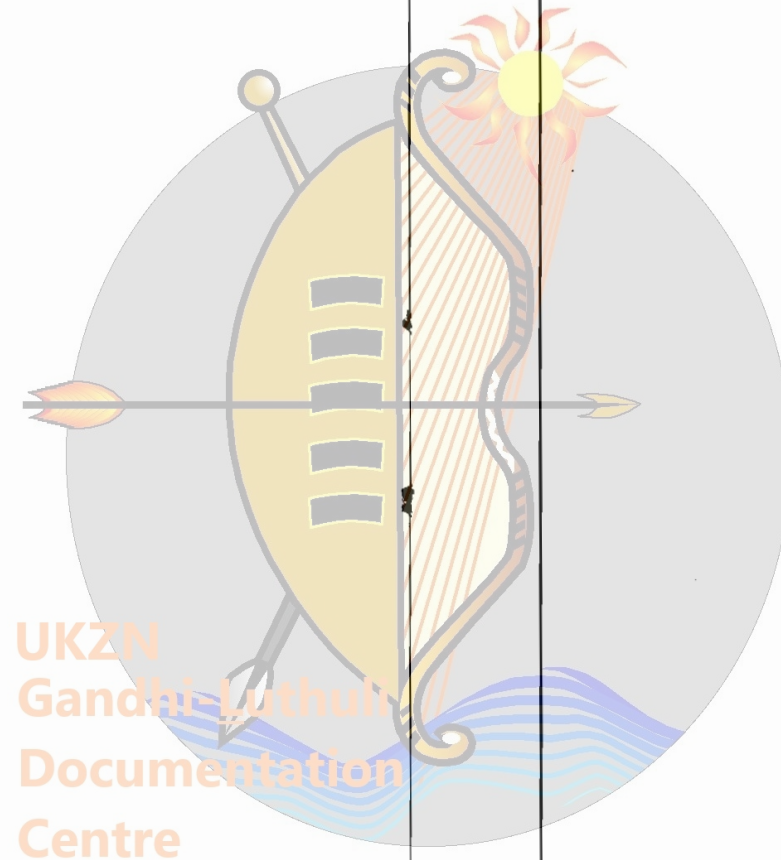


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The Ramakrishna Centre

THE Ramakrishna Centre was founded on the 27th March, 1947, at Sea View. The centre held the first of its Sunday Prayer Services in August, 1947, at the Sea View Indian School and later shifted the venue to the Shri Vishnu Temple. This was followed by the distribution of religious tracts and the imparting of weekly lectures on Hindu Religion and Philosophy.

A new chapter in the religious history of the Hindus of this country began with the courageous decision of a young man who ventured out to the Motherland to equip himself for the work ahead and to dedicate his life to religion and community service. After six years this vision was realised with the return of Swami Nischalananda, the spiritual head of the Ramakrishna Movement in Southern Africa.

After the arrival of the Swamiji on 30th September, 1953, from India, the Centre was put on a firm footing and a definite plan was followed in propagating the ideals of Hindu Religion and Culture. Yoga and meditation classes were started in Durban and other centres, and a cultural and spiritual revival was organised throughout the country by the holding of lectures, talks, cultural and religious functions and Yoga camps, the showing of lantern slides and the distribution of literature.

The newly-acquired headquarters of the Ramakrishna Centre is situated on a magnificent site of 14 acres of beautifully wooded land at Avoca. A 4½-acre site has been acquired at Tongaat Beach to serve as a Yoga Retreat and a Children's Seaside Holiday Camp. On this site a primary school will be erected. The Centre proposes to establish a Residential College on the forty-acre site donated to it at Welbedacht. A further eight acres have been donated to the Centre at Drummond for the establishment of an institution for cripples, palsied and handicapped children. In the Springfield Housing Scheme area, the City Council has allocated to the Centre a site

which will be used for a multi-purpose community centre.

The strength of the Centre's congregation numbers several thousands. The Children's Club alone, which was started in June 1954, has an enrolment of over 15,000. The fostering of religious and cultural ideals has been emphasised and a new generation is in the making.

The Children's Club Mass Prayer Rally is of great spiritual significance and is one of the annual highlights of the Centre's activities. This year about ten thousand children participated in the Rally.

Since 1953 regular discourses on Hindu Religion and Yoga have been held at the Stree Vaithianatha Easperar Temple in Umgeni Road, Durban. On an average, two hundred members attend these classes. As from the beginning of this year Saturday classes were started at the Ashram at Avoca. These are well attended. Every year the Centre holds its Easter and Christmas Yoga Camps at the Tongaat Beach and approximately a hundred members attend these camps which provide opportunities for serious sadhana and a deeper understanding of the Hindu Religion and Yoga. Besides Indians, European and African members attend the various classes, especially the Yoga Camps.

The Ramakrishna Centre does not confine itself to the worship of any particular deity. As a universal movement the Ramakrishna Centre propagates the principles of the Vedanta as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna. The rational philosophy of the Vedanta can make a Christian a better Christian, a Moslem a better Moslem, a Buddhist a better Buddhist, a Hindu a better Hindu and a man a better man. All the paths leading to the goal—action, devotion, meditation, knowledge—have their due place in its scheme of religious life. Guidance is therefore given to all kinds of aspirants at all stages of growth. The Centre does not

foster a creed but a way of life. There is room in the movement for all classes of men, from the lowest man having the crudest conception of God to the highest mystic.

The portrait of the Master and the Holy Mother (Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Saradama Devi) represent the lofty ideals of spiritual consciousness and the universal principles of purusha and prakriti. They are used merely to assist the aspirants to concentrate and to inspire them to the high ideals of the Master and the Mother. The universal symbol, AUM and a light are also in the shrine. In the panels on both sides of the shrine are placed statuettes of Christ, Buddha, Zoroaster, Guru Nanak, Saraswati, Radha-Krishna, Shiva-Parvati and Ganesha.

The members have complete freedom in the choice of their own deity and the form of their worship. This universal approach in fostering religion has brought within the Ramakrishna Movement, Hindus and non-Hindus, Aryans and Dravidians, Saivites and Vaishnavites alike, thus levelling its followers to a Universal Brotherhood.

The aims and ideals of the Centre are purely spiritual and humanitarian and are universal and non-political. They are:—

- (a) To promote the study of philosophy and religion in accordance with the principles of the Vedanta;
- (b) To train men and women so as to make them competent to disseminate knowledge conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;
- (c) To work for the establishment of fellowship amongst religious workers in order to realise the one eternal and universal Truth;
- (d) To organise lectures and to impart philosophical, cultural and spiritual knowledge;
- (e) To open branches, establish temples and shrines of the Centre for the dissemination of philosophical, cultural and spiritual knowledge;
- (g) To invite preachers and teachers to assist in furthering the objects of the Centre;
- (h) To establish or assist in the establishment of hospitals, clinics, schools, libraries, orphanages, homes, hostels and charitable institutes and generally to

work or conduct any relief work for advancement of the masses and perform all such acts as are incidental to and desirable for the achievement of the aforesaid objects.

In the field of social work the Centre has tried to be of assistance and its many services have been appreciated throughout the country. Over a dozen welfare organisations direct cases to the Centre for help. Food and clothing are distributed to the poor and the Centre extends this service to the African as well. It also engages in relief work of the type that was undertaken to help the people affected by floods on the South Coast and at Merebank last year and the cyclone in Mauritius.

The Centre has its own press and besides printing other literature brings out a quarterly—*The Jyoti*. The Ramakrishna Dispensary and Clinic gives free medical aid to hundreds of sick people.

The Ramakrishna Movement has aroused considerable interest among the youth. The Ramakrishna Youth League organised a spiritual campaign throughout the Union of South Africa in 1956, and another in the Rhodesias in July 1960.

In the Ramakrishna Women's Circle are a band of women who have dedicated themselves to the Movement. Their services range over a wide field and include the collection and distribution of food and clothing to the poor, relief work, bazaars, street collections, conducting branch services and running classes on Yoga.

In commemoration of the Indian Centenary the Ramakrishna Centre will start its project to set up an Indian Museum and Art Gallery. The donation of a very large range of exhibits from India was finalised during the recent visit of Swamiji to India.

Work on the construction of the Amphitheatre has already begun. Public lectures, demonstrations in classical Indian dancing, Indian drama, recitals of Indian music and songs will be held here.

The Museum and Art Gallery together with the proposed Vivekananda Centenary Library and Amphitheatre will foster Indian Culture and better relations among all sections of the community.

A school of Indology will be started this year to commemorate the Indian Centenary. Regular classes will be held at the ashram and

lectures by correspondence will be provided. The Benares Hindu University College of Indology has undertaken to give the necessary assistance in this direction.

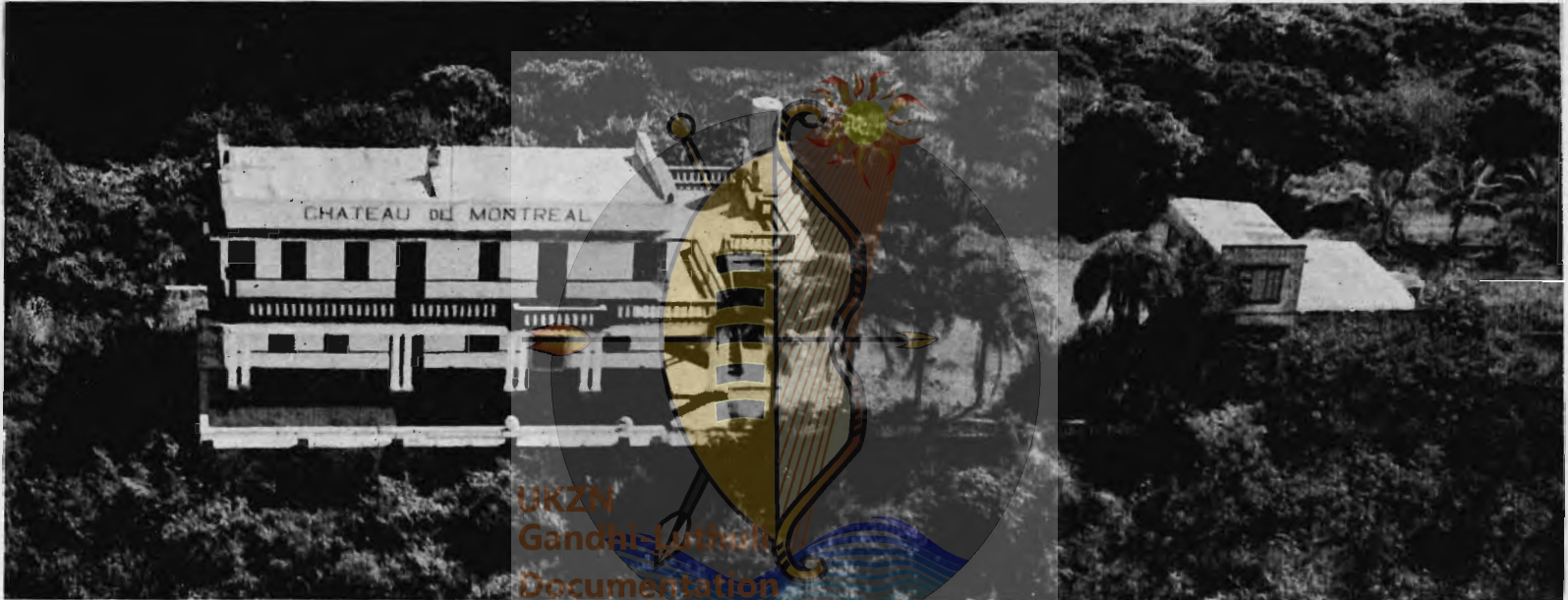
There is no gainsaying the fact that The Ramakrishna Centre came into the limelight at a time when the Hindu religion had become meaningless in various respects. Largely through the far-sighted vision of Swami Nischa-

lananda and his Trojan efforts a renaissance was started in this country. At present there are over eighty branches of the Centre and a generation with a new spiritual outlook is in the making.

The Ramakrishna Centre is still a growing organism. No year passes without new branches and activities springing up. There is an incessant call from the public for more branches to be started.



Children's Club Anniversary Festival and Mass Prayer Rally



THE RAMAKRISHNA CENTRE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
Headquarters, North Coast Road, Avoca, Durban