India was blessed with the advent of an outstanding spiritual giant and world teacher Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Sri Ramakrishna in his turn groomed and nurtured an outstanding disciple Swami Vivekananda. The life and teachings of this duo of the Master and his disciple has been instrumental in India regaining its self respect and its awareness about its inherent strength. When one reads about the life of Shri Ramakrishna, it appears that he motivated, blessed and spiritually empowered Swami Vivekananda to serve India and awaken it. The mission of the spiritual duo started in the 19th century. But Swami Vivekananda’s dream of creating an order of spiritually oriented renunciates and servants of humanity started taking a shape in the 20th century. Swamiji was perhaps the first Hindu Sannyasi who adopted a mission of serving the needy millions of India through a well-organized body. This body was named as Shri Ramakrishna Mission. This mission was formally launched on May 1, 1897 and it has by now served the country and humanity for more than 100 years.

Though the Ramakrishna Mission follows the Vedantic philosophy as enunciated in the Upanishads, the Mission also holds other great religions in high esteem. In fact one of the outstanding teachings of Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa is that there is only one God and different religions are different paths to reach the divine. His famous quotation is, “As many faiths so many paths”. Through the remarkable forms of Sadhana that Sri Ramakrishna practised, he realized the essential teaching of great religions of the world by turn and practised them in his day-to-day life. Although born as a man he also practised to live like a woman in all respects as a part of his sadhana. At the end of all these experiments, he came to the conclusion “as many faiths so many paths”, in other words, the paths may be different, but the destination is common to all the different faiths. Different religions are merely different paths of realizing the supreme truth. The motto of the Ramakrishna Mission is Atmano mokshartham jagad hitaya cha, “For one’s own salvation and for the welfare of the world”. It was formulated by Swami Vivekananda. The ideals of Ramakrishna Mission as officially announced in their literature are:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Work as worship,} \\
\text{Potential divinity of the soul, and} \\
\text{Harmony of religions.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is this ideal of service to man as service to God that sustains the large number of hospitals, dispensaries, mobile medical units, schools, colleges, rural development centres and many other social service institutions run by the organization.

Ramakrishna Mission by now is spread worldwide, although its main concentration is within India. Some relevant details are as follows:

Headquarters: The headquarters of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are situated at an area named Belur in the district of Howrah, West Bengal, India. The entire campus of the headquarters is popularly known as ‘Belur Math’. Sprawling over forty acres of land on the western bank of the river Hooghly (Ganga), the place is an hour’s drive from Kolkata.

Branch Centres: The Math and Mission have 166 centres all over the world: 124 in India, 13 in USA, 12 in Bangladesh, and one each in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Fiji, France, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Netherlands, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, and UK. Besides, there are 33 sub-centres attached to some of these centres.
Besides these branch centres, there are about one thousand unaffiliated centres (popularly called ‘private centres’) all over the world started by the devotees and followers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

The main activities of the Ramakrishna Mission are:

(a) Running educational institutions.
(b) Rendering medical service through hospitals, mobile units etc.
(c) Rural development and agriculture development training as well as extension.
(d) Providing relief during calamities.
(e) Publishing books and periodicals mainly on religion, philosophy and spiritual topics.

It is heartening to note that Ramakrishna Mission’s presence in the North-east is of significant proportions. It has 9 centres in all. The distribution is as follows:

(a) Assam – 3, (b) Meghalaya – 2, (c) Arunachal – 3, (d) Tripura – 1.

The main activities covered by these nine centres are:

(a) Educational institutions, (b) Medical services, (c) Spiritual orientation, (d) Sale of spiritual literature.

Ishani would be happy to introduce the good work of these centres in the North-east. It would have been helpful if we present activities and special features of all the centres put together in a single article. But that will involve considerable work. However, we are beginning with introducing a remarkable school run by Ramakrishna Mission at Narottam Nagar in Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh.

Ramakrishna Mission is a worldwide, non-political, non-sectarian spiritual organization which has been engaged in various forms of humanitarian, social service activities for more than a century. Its centre at far-flung Narottam Nagar in Arunachal Pradesh, which is in the form of a fully residential English Medium School having all modern amenities and affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi, is a huge establishment like a small township spread over 250 acres having 135 members of staff, 675 family members, and 598 students in hostel. Besides the maintenance of the schools and hostel buildings, drinking water plants, electricity generating machines, good number of vehicles, workshop, campus road maintenance, etc., all the needs of the students and staff are being taken care of directly by the Institution. It is thus a self-contained, self-reliant community. The Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar is working and serving for more than three decades (since 1972) in that far-off area carrying out its activities on various levels. It has emerged to be a blessing for the nearby villages and towns and for Arunachal Pradesh as a whole. The ex-students who have passed out from this Institution are now holding important positions in the State and outside and serving the society in different fields.

Swami Ishatmananda, the present secretary of this centre, has beautifully delineated the history and activities of this centre in this article.
It all began with a thought about NEFA that crossed the mind of a venerable lady, high & mighty, sympathetic & visionary. She was none other than Srimati Indira Gandhi.

“Since my first visit to NEFA (Present Arunachal) and Nagaland,” She wrote in her letter dated 21st July 1965 to a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, “I have felt the need for some missionary work to be done there (at Arunachal & Nagaland) by non-interested persons.” Her next sentence proved her tremendous faith in the Ramakrishna Mission, “In this context the Ramakrishna Mission naturally came to my mind.”

Not only Smt. Indira Gandhi but also Shri Vishnu Sahay, the then Governor of Assam was greatly interested in inviting Ramakrishna Mission to the North-east, particularly in NEFA for the development of the tribal people there through educational and medical services.

Ramakrishna Mission, by the way, is a unique religio-philanthropic organization established by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 in the hallowed name of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Echoing the idea of his Guru he said, “After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth – God is present in every jiva; there is no other God besides that.” Further, “who serves jiva, (man) serves God (Shiva) indeed.” (C.W.S.V. – VII. Page 247)

Attracted by the clarion call of Swami Vivekananda, thousands of men and women dedicated their lives to the ideal, ‘For one’s own liberation and for the good of the world,’ and within only hundred years, Ramakrishna Mission Ashramas came up in various parts of the world.

**Ramakrishna Mission comes to N.E.F.A.**

The citizens of Arunachal Pradesh realized early in their history that the need of the hour for them was education. Accordingly, the Government and the people in general made representations to the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math to open institutions for imparting the right type of education for the children of Arunachal Pradesh.
The Mission, accordingly, started two educational institutions in Arunachal Pradesh: one at Along in Siang District in July 1966 and the other at Narottam Nagar in Tirap District in July, 1971. And also one up-to-date modern hospital at Itanagar in 1979.

In this article, we shall tell about the service-based educational institution set up by the Ramakrishna Mission in Narottam Nagar.

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**Our salutations go to all the past Prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever might have been their race, clime, or creed! Our salutations go to all those Godlike men and women who are working to help humanity, whatever be their birth, colour, or race! Our salutations to those who are coming in the future – living Gods – to work unselfishly for our descendants.**

— Swami Vivekananda

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Tucked away in the foothills of Mopaya of the Namsangmukh Range of Tirap District and far from the maddening crowd, amidst picturesque sylvan surroundings inside the deep forest of Arunachal Pradesh is a beautiful Ashrama Vidyalaya. The school reminds one of the ancient Gurukul System. The charm is heightened by the Buridihing river which skirts the northern boundary of the campus. It is on the Deomali-Margherita road and about 35 kms away from Naharkatia or from Margherita, Assam. The main Rail Station and market, Tinsukia in Assam is 80 km away and Airport, Dibrugarh, also in Assam, is 110 km away.

Why Ramakrishna Mission, of all the places of Arunachal Pradesh, came to Tirap is not clear. There may be two reasons, firstly, Shri KAA Raja, the then Adviser to the Governor of Assam was himself very much interested about the development of Tirap district. It is said that he was a lover of Tirap. Secondly, even in those days, as early as the seventies when modern education and thought were unknown in this remote part, Shri Dangwang Lowangdong, Chief of Namsang correctly understood the importance of modern education, which will make his people at par with others without changing their faith and customs and donated 250 acres of land from Namsang forest area to Ramakrishna Mission.

**Tirap, the land and the people**

Tirap Frontier Division now known as Tirap district is the southernmost district of North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) or Arunachal Pradesh as it is known at present. The Patkai mountain range, in the North-east frontier of India, bordering Myanmar, is spread over the Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Tirap district encompasses 2362 sq. km. area of hilly terrain, and shares its border with Myanmar in the south, Nagaland in the west, Assam in the north & Changlang district in the east. The altitude ranges from 150 to 1500 metres approximately.

There are a good number of spring-heads in the Tirap district which are a great boon to the people, being the source of salt water. The local people collect the spring water and manufacture salt from this spring water. Such salt springs are very common in the Nocte area of the district and the inhabitants use the salt not only for their own consumption but get many things of daily necessity in exchange for this commodity. Before the advent of British administration, salt was an important item of trade with them and for this, people from the plains used to visit their villages with various trade goods to be offered in exchange of salt. Thus so far as trade was concerned they were in an advantageous position because of the
availability of salt in their locality, which gave them a unique position to dictate terms to others.

From the earliest days, people from the east were coming to Assam crossing the Patkai range and then passing through the present district of Tirap. This is how the area was familiar to the people living both to the east and west of the Patkai range. The Ahoms who ruled over the Brahmaputra valley for more than six hundred years from the beginning of the 13th century to the beginning of the 19th century as well as the Khamptis, Singphos, Phakials and the Burmese invading army entered Assam following routes running through this district.

There are many tribes inhabiting the district who were known by the names of the passes through which they visit the plains such as Borduries, Namsangias, Paniduarias, Mithonias, Banpheras, Jobokas, etc.

**The Ramakrishna Order does not believe in conversion, nor does it indulge in the occult or the sensational. The Order places utmost importance on personal spiritual unfoldment and selfless service. Inspired by the idea of the harmony of all faiths, its centres encourage adherents of different faiths to meet in a spirit of friendship and mutual appreciation, and to learn from one another without having to give up one's own faith. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: “God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, lives and countries ... all doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion.”**

An attempt in 1878 to survey the eastern part of the district led to disastrous results. On 2nd February, Lieutenant Holcombe, Assistant Commissioner of Jaipur along with a survey party was attacked at Ninu, a village four days march from the plains. Lieutenant Holcombe and eighty men were butchered and fifty were wounded. Immediately upon coming to know about the incident, a military expedition was sent to the hills, which destroyed the offending village and recovered the heads of the murdered men along with the arms and plunder taken by them.

During the year 1942-43 a Control Area comprising the Namsang Borduaria area was constituted.

With the recruitment of Indian Frontier Administrative Officers in 1953, the Administration started taking more interest in matters relating to the Divisions. Col. P N Luthra, IFAS went to Tirap as the Political Officer and was in charge of the Division from 25.1.54 to 23.3.55. For the sake of better Administration it was decided as early as 1951 that the Headquarters of the Divisions should be shifted from the plains to the respective Divisions and in accordance with that decision the Headquarters of the Tirap Frontier Division was shifted from Margherita to Khela with effect from 2.8.55 when Sri Wagray was holding charge of the Division. After Sri Wagray, Col. KAA Raja went to Khela as Political Officer and was in charge of the Division upto 26.9.69. During this period the Division made rapid progress toward all-round development with special attention given for removing the communication difficulties.

The Headquarters were again shifted with effect from 17.8.59 from Khela to Khonsa, a site considered better in almost all respects.
The Noctes, totalling about 35,000, live in 63 villages, occupying half of the Tirap district. The other half of the district beyond the river Tissa is the home of the Wangchos. Noctes are a combination of several groups of people that came from different directions and settled together in the present habitat.

Nok means group of people; te – that reside. Nokte is now known as Nocte, a major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

A group of Noctes migrated from the Hukong Valley in Burma. It is said that they came trekking down the hills, through Pangsau pass, down to the plain area, along the river Dihing, and then came up the hill and settled in the present Namsang-Borduria habitat.

Bamboo, Hollong, Mekahi, Nahar, orchids, herbs and flowers and various kinds of birds, butterflies, animals such as bears, dears, hogs, elephants, monkeys etc., are in plenty in the district.

**The beginning of a new era**

Narottam Nagar – the history behind the name:

Khunbao’s descendent was Lotha Khunbao, whom the Nocte people still remember with respect. He was the noblest Nocte chief and was deeply religious. Khunbao was very keen to have a guru, who could impart to him religious teachings. One night he dreamt a dream in which he saw his guru.
He then worked out a plan. He prepared two bamboo pipes (chunga). One of the pipes was filled with gold and the other with silver. He then took the pipes to Namsang river and floated them so that the pipes would be carried downstream by the current.

The tubes floated down for miles. At last on the eleventh day, the tubes drifted towards the bank and stopped at a spot known as *Merbil*. Near that place on the bank of the river was a Satra, called Bali Satra. People who saw the two bamboo tubes were curious. Many of them tried to pick up the tubes. But the moment one went near the tubes something strange happened. The frightened villager went to Sri Ram Ata and narrated this unusual occurrence.

Shri Ram Ata hurriedly came to the river bank and as soon as he arrived, the tubes floated towards the bank. Shri Ram Ata lifted the tubes. He then carried the same to the Satra. Khunbao quietly followed Shri Ram Ata. On reaching the Satra, Khunbao told Shri Ram Ata about his mission.

“Khunbao, I initiate you and accept you as my disciple,” said Shri Ram Ata, the Vaishnava saint, “Not only that, I will henceforth call you as Norottam – Best among men.” After some days Norottam returned to his own village.

In his village he taught his people the new faith. The people accepted that faith voluntarily with great enthusiasm, and it is still alive. So that is how Narottam Nagar got its name.

**Ramakrishna Mission School: Initial Days**

Ramakrishna Mission School, Narottam Nagar began with 25 girls and 83 boys. The girls were shifted to *Khonsa* when Ramakrishna Sarada Mission School came up in 1975. At that time the literacy rate of Arunachal Pradesh was 11.27 per cent (1971 census).

The foundation stone of the present Ramakrishna Mission school building was laid by *Shri V V Giri, the then President of India* on April 21st, 1974 was later inaugurated by *Shri Morarji Desai, the then Prime Minister*, on November 4th, 1978.

Higher Secondary School was inaugurated on 30th March 1986 by Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, 11th president of Ramakrishna Math & Mission. In course of time new buildings came up as the work expanded.

This is a fully residential school, preparing boys for the All India Secondary Examination and Senior Secondary School Examination of the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi. The medium of instruction is English. Hindi too is taught right from Class – Preparatory. Sanskrit is the third language. The School has experienced and qualified staff, supervised by monks of the monastic order.

The founder Secretary was Swami Bhavaharanandaji Maharaj,

The second Secretary, Swami Pramathanandaji Maharaj

The third Secretary, Swami Gokulanandaji Maharaj

The fourth Secretary, Swami Sukhatmanandaji Maharaj

The fifth Secretary, Swami Girijeshanandaji Maharaj

The sixth and the present Secretary is Swami Ishatmananda.

**Students of Early Years: Anecdotes**

An ex-student of our school, who is now a public leader and holding high posts, narrated his experiences. “In the evening the teacher used to put his finger on the wall and the whole room used to be lighted.” He was telling of an experience that was very unique for him. “I must take the light to my village home”, he thought. And in vacation time he took out the bulb from his hostel room and after reaching his village
home, where there was no electricity, placed it on the bamboo wall of their hut and went on beating the whole wall but light never came!

“One afternoon I was taking rest,” One Swamiji recounts. “Some boys shook me awake and said in Assamese: Alapaman Jhalakia Piiyaj Tel Diyok (Give us a small quantity of onions, chillies and oil). I opened the store. They took materials to their satisfaction and were gone. After sometime they came to me. By then they had already prepared some dish with, what I came to know later, red-ant-egg.”

“Maharajee, do you love us?” the boys asked.

“Why not?” I replied.

“Then why don’t you take our food?” they said.

“Okay, Give me.”

To please them, I tasted the preparation – with them watching my reactions!!

Swami Sukhatmanandaji tells us another interesting incident – “once a baby elephant came into the campus, having perhaps lost his way, at a time when the boys were out for the morning P.T. Some of the boys caught it and put a nylon noose around its neck and started playing with it. The baby elephant also happily rejoiced in the company of the boys. Little did the boys realize that had it continued for long, the wrath of the searching mother-elephant would be upon the campus. After great persuasion, the boys were made to release the baby which was allowed to go free and join its herd.”

A modern school in a frontier land. Its amenities and activities:
The Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar is working and serving for more than three decades (since 1972) in this far-off area carrying out its activities on various levels. It has become a blessing for the nearby villages and towns and on the whole for Arunachal Pradesh. The students who have passed out from this Institution are now holding important positions and serving the society in various fields.

The school at Narottam Nagar, is a fully residential English Medium School affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi with four sections, and all modern amenities, such as three computer training centres, a Natural History Museum, a Viswakarma Vidyalaya – A Vocational Training Unit for rural tribal youths, “Rishi Charak” Medicinal Plant Park, just to mention a few.

Students’ Home:
The students’ home was started in 1971-72 on the lines of the ‘Ancient Gurukula system,’ with a monastic set-up where students live under the care & guidance of dedicated monks. At present there are 3 separate hostel buildings for Primary, Secondary & Higher Secondary students.

Total number of boarders in hostels are more than 598. The students staying in the hostel follow a carefully planned routine to develop good character in the formative period of their lives.

Achievements:
A. Educational: 100 per cent pass results in A.I.S.S.E. and A.I.S.S.C.E. examinations held by CBSE, New Delhi from 1979-80 to 2006-07.

B. National Teachers’ Award Received for 2000-01 and 2006-07 from the Hon’ble President of India by two teachers of our school.

Festivals & Celebrations:
National festivities like Independence Day, Republic Day, Teachers’ Day, Vana-Mahotsav are observed every year.

The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Saraswati Puja and Maha Shivaratri, birthdays of Sri Shankara, Lord Buddha, Sri Krishna, Lord Jesus Christ are observed with due solemnity and joy. Students, staff members, monks speak on the life and teachings of the great personalities on these occasions.

**Admission in School:**
Admissions of the tribal children of Arunachal take place after an entrance test to the preparatory class. There is also provision for admission to Class XI through an entrance test.

**Pecuniary Help:**
Monetary and material support is extended to the economically weaker sections of the people of Tirap district in particular, from this institution. An approximate amount of Rs. 2,00,000 is spent per year.

**Agriculture:**
A large plot of land is under cultivation to supply fresh vegetables and useful garden products to meet the needs of the kitchen. Mushroom is also cultivated and grown under special care. There is separate land earmarked for tea and coffee plantation. Tea and coffee plants are treated with modern agricultural methods. The labourers from in and around backward areas get work and means for their livelihood.

**Maharshi Charak Park (Medicinal Plant Park):**
To make the people aware of the flora and its medicinal and ecological importance, a special medicinal plant park with herbs and plants having medicinal value and available in the surrounding areas has been nurtured with special care.

**Dairy and Poultry Keeping:**
The Dairy & Poultry unit has cows, broilers and layers. The unit renders great service in supplying fresh milk, eggs and meat to the kitchen, for the benefit of the students and staff.

**Medical Unit:**
The school has two dispensaries, allopathic and homeopathic, and a 20-bed Hospital ‘Swasti’ with nursing facilities. Qualified doctors assisted by qualified pharmacist and attendants attend to the needs of the students and staff. The number of patients treated per year is 3,300 (approx.).

**Free Mobile Medical Unit:**
Our mobile medical unit with qualified doctor along with the attendants and one mobile van with all modern medicines render medical service to the poor people in far-flung areas and people from nearby villages and undeveloped areas free of cost. No. of patients treated per year is 1500 (approx.).

**Vishwakarma Vidyalaya:**
A vocational training centre affiliated with the school imparts training free of charge to those tribal youths who are unable to pursue higher academic education for various reasons.

**Source of Finance:**
Being a charitable Institution, Ramakrishna Mission centre at Narottam Nagar draws finance from various sources. The centre is a huge establishment spread over 250 acres having 135 members of staff, 675 family members, and 598 students in hostel. Besides the maintenance of the schools and hostel buildings, drinking water plants, electricity generators, good
number of vehicles, workshop, campus road maintenance unit, etc., all the needs of the students and staff are being taken care of by our Institution. Therefore, substantial finance is necessary to meet the needs of the growing organization. The institution gets finance from three sources –

a. Grant-in-Aid from Govt. of India.

b. Grant-in-Aid from Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh.

c. Donations from generous people.

Anyone wishing to help these poor but simple people can donate by Demand Draft in favour of Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar. Donation to Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar is exempted from Income-Tax under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act. 1961.

We have Foreign Contribution Registration also.

**Conclusion: Man Making Education**

Swami Vivekananda defines education as ‘the life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas’. According to Swami Vivekananda the purpose of education is to develop personality of child in all aspects namely physical, intellectual and spiritual. Function of education is to bring about a harmonious development of all the aspects of human personality so that it can grow to its highest stature and serve the society at its best. The Ramakrishna Mission school at Narottamnagar precisely aims at this man-making education for the all-round development of the children.

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*Swami Ishatmananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, joined the holy monastic order in 1975 at Ramakrishna Mission, Cherrapunji, Meghalaya. He has worked in Advaita Ashram, a publication centre of Ramakrishna Order for 12 years. He was bestowed with Sannyasa in 1986. He worked in a very famous educational institution of the Ramakrishna Mission at Purulia, West Bengal.

He is the founder Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair, Andaman, where from the scrap he built a boys home for the destitute and orphans, and two huge buildings, named Gyana Mandir and Karma Mandir housing the national level competitive examinations coaching centre & vocational centre respectively. This Educational & Cultural centre was inaugurated by Shree Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then Hon’ble Prime Minister of India.

At present the Swamiji is Principal cum Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission School, Narottam Nagar, Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh.

Swami Ishatmanandaji is the ‘Vice President’ of the Uttar-Purbanchal Ramakrishna - Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad which is having around 47 centres all over Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur.

Swami is having to his credit a few articles, which were published in Ramakrishna Mission Journals. He has also written in different magazines like Bhavan’s Journal, etc. He has translated a famous book – “Mind and its Control”.*