Paramahansa Yogananda

(JANUARY 5, 1893 – MARCH 7, 1952)

Paramahansa Yogananda, author of the spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi* and widely revered as one of the preeminent spiritual figures of our time, contributed in far-reaching ways to a greater awareness and appreciation in the West of the spiritual wisdom of India. Regarded as the “Father of Yoga in the West,” Paramahansa Yogananda left an indelible impression on the spiritual landscape of the world.

Paramahansa Yogananda was born Mukunda Lal Ghosh on January 5, 1893, in the sacred city of Gorakhpur, into a prosperous and devout Bengali family. From his earliest years, it was evident to those around him that his awareness and experience of the spiritual was far beyond the ordinary. As a youth he sought out many of India’s saints and philosophers, hoping to find an illumined teacher to guide him in his spiritual quest.

In 1910, at the age of 17, he met the revered sage Swami Sri Yukteswar, in whose hermitage he spent the better part of the next ten years. After graduating from Calcutta University in 1915, he became a monk of India’s venerable monastic Swami Order, at which time he received the name Yogananda (signifying bliss, amanda, through divine union, yoga).

Sri Yogananda began his life’s work with the founding, in 1917, of a “How-to-Live” school, where modern educational methods were combined with yoga training and instruction in spiritual ideals. Visiting the school in 1925, the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi wrote: “This institution has greatly impressed my mind.”

Gandhiji and Paramahansa Yogananda met a decade afterwards when the latter made a return visit to India in 1935–36, after first touring parts of Europe and the Middle East. At the Mahatma’s request, Paramahansaji instructed him and several of his followers in the spiritual science of Kriya Yoga.

Paramahansa Yogananda founded Yogoda Satsanga Society of India (YSS) in 1917, and in 1920, he carried India’s sacred, soul-liberating science of Raja Yoga to the West where, in Los Angeles, California (USA), he established the sister organization Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF).

The non-sectarian and scientific yoga teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda have a universal appeal to people of all faiths and walks of life. Sri Yogananda founded YSS/SRF for the purpose of fostering a spirit of greater understanding and goodwill among the diverse peoples and religions of our global family by demonstrating the underlying unity of all humankind under the one God, and to provide peoples of all nations—irrespective of nationality,
On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Paramahansa Yogananda’s passing, his far-reaching contributions to the spiritual upliftment of humanity were given formal recognition by the Government of India. A special commemorative stamp was issued in his honour, together with a tribute that read, in part:

“The ideal of love for God and service to humanity found full expression in the life of Paramahansa Yogananda. Though the major part of his life was spent outside of India, still he takes his place among our great saints. His work continues to grow and shine ever more brightly, drawing people everywhere on the path of the pilgrimage of the Spirit.”

Yogananda’s long-awaited interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita (God Talks With Arjuna)—a profoundly enriching journey into the deeper meaning of Bhagavan Krishna’s counsel to aspiring yogis—was released in 1995.

Among Paramahansa Yogananda’s other writings are acclaimed interpretations of Jesus’ universal teachings (The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You) and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (Wine of the Mystic: A Spiritual Interpretation), a multi-volume anthology series (Collected Talks and Essays on Realizing God in Daily Life), two collections of poetry and prayer, and numerous volumes of spiritual counsel. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India also publishes a series of rare audio recordings of talks given by the great guru during the latter years of his life.

An award-winning documentary feature film chronicling the extraordinary life of Paramahansa, AWAKE: The Life of Yogananda, was released in 2014 and shown worldwide.

Today, 125 years after his advent on earth, Paramahansa Yogananda is being increasingly recognised as one of the great spiritual sons of Mother India, a harbinger of Yoga to the West, and an incarnation of Divine Love who embraced the whole world.