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RK Mission renovates the palatial home where Swami was born and raised

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Like many, I was drawn to vedanta by the eloquence and inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. As I have sought a deeper understanding of the metaphysical world, I have tried to learn more about its most curious and charismatic student, Naren - Swami Vivekananda's pre-monastic name. We have extensive records of Swami's speeches and travels through America, but what type of childhood did young Naren have? I wanted to walk through the streets he walked, visit the pond where he bathed, and most of all, see the home where he spent 18 years of his early life. And so I made a pilgrimage to Calcutta, now Kolkotta, to learn more.

In Kolkotta, we stopped at Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. They graciously gave us permission to visit Swami Vivekananda's ancestral home, which they had recently purchased. As our car squeezed through the narrow streets that Naren once walked, we came to his old home covered in scaffolding, with stacks of bricks everywhere. Underneath was the enormous 28-room, 21,600-square-foot mansion built by Naren's wealthy great-grandfather, Rammohan Dutta. It stands tall in the midst of a

43,200-square-foot lot, its beautiful rose-colored brick walls interspersed with several arched windows and doorways. During Naren's time, the building was divided down the middle by his father and his uncle, with each family occupying a side. When the RK Mission took the house and lot over, it was home to 75 families and 45 small businesses—an indication of its immense size! The Mission relocated every person free of charge, making sure all were satisfied with their new place.

Swami Parthamaharaj, the monk in charge of the reconstruction, gave us a tour of the historic home. He showed us the balcony from which the young Naren fell, leaving a permanent scar on his forehead. Across the courtyard and up the stairs is the room where baby Naren was born. Unfortunately, because of the construction, only one of us could go inside. We all agreed my father should be the one. As he returned we smiled at the look of joy and contentment on his face. He said, "It was inspiring to realize that I was standing in the very room where 138 years ago the voice of modern Vedanta sounded its first cry to the world."

Swami Parthamaharaj told us that the reconstruction will be finished by 2003. Once the museum exhibits on Swami Vivekananda are installed, classes on Swami's teachings will be held for all who are interested.