

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY:
A GLIMPSE OF KATHAMRITA
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Sri Ramakrishna was such a spiritual teacher per excellence who had realized the actual truth through his spiritual practices over long years that all religious path lead ultimately to the transcendental experience of the ultimate reality. Now, before analyzing the implication of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual and religious ideas, it is essential to talk about the contemporary background.

Nineteenth century in the cultural history of Bengal as well as of India is recorded as an important period whose main characteristic was the gradual transition from middle ages to modern age. Settlement of British colonial rule in India, New Land rules as well as economical transformation, and most importantly, spreading of English education and the emergence of the middle class exerted a profound impact upon the social and political atmosphere of this country. A new awareness was evolving in the mental horizon of middle and elite class people through the English medium education system, in the light of which they venture to evaluate the prevailing religious and social conventions. It is better to mention here that two ideas were strongly felt in that new awakening: (i) the then European liberal and rational ideas and (ii) the idealistic preaching of Christian missionaries, which resulted in religious and social reform movement, based on rationalism. Literature was also tinged with the color of nationalism and patriotism. A section of educated society, rejecting the complicated, intolerable and completely ritualistic state of conservative Hindu community, adopted the Christian religion. Jnanendramohan Thakur, Krishnamohon Bandopadhyaya, Madhusudan Dutta and Lalbehari Dey are some of the leading figures deserving mention. On the other hand, Raja Rammohan Roy vowed to actively engage himself to reconstruct the Indian society by freeing the perennial Hindu religion from the clutches of its orthodoxy. Like voluntary burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, polygamy, child-marriage and caste division. He devoted himself to reform society and religion through rationalism based on the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, and discarding polytheism and *guruvāda* engaged in

worshipping the qualified and formless Supreme Being (Brahman) and thus *Brāhmasabhā* is formed, which in the later stage came to be known as *Brāhma Samāj*. At the same time the iconoclastic attitude of 'Young Bengal' founded by Derozio, created a huge commotional movement among the nation. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, originator of *Ārya Samāj* also denied the *Purāṇa*, *Smṛti*, *Tantra*, idolatory, beast-offering, child marriage of the post vedic era by introducing Vedic Hindu religion and monotheism.

At that time during Rammohan, an aggressive movement, known as 'Middle-Hindu movement', directed against *Brāhma Samāj* and 'Christianity' was organized as strong protestation in which Radhakanta Dev, Pandit Sashadhar Tarkachuramoni and Krishnaprasanna Sen took part. In this restless state of National life, appeared a poor Brahmin priest, devoid of so-called academic qualifications and etiquettes. His life, work, devotion and personality was organically harmonized the Indian protest against the intellectual and materialistic mentality of western civilization. To prove the existence of Religion and God, from the inner core of his heart sounded – "Yes, I have seen God just as I am looking at you, but more intimately than this," He uttered – "God comes to our vision. He can be witnessed one can speak to him just like I am speaking to you ...".¹ What an extraordinary, simple and clear confession. He is none other than, the master, Sri Ramakrishna. Modern India, as well as the whole universe is afflicted with countless severe problems. Man's personal, social and political life is enveloped with the dense darkness collecting wealth from nature and multiplying the material of earthly enjoyment is always attempting to grasp the climax of self-indulgence. But there is no tranquility in their troubled minds. Forgiveness, love, affection, modesty, non-violence, honesty, sympathy etc. the qualities of moral uprightness that symbolizes true humanity is veiled with lust, hatred, obsession, jealousy, malice etc, qualities of grossness that has transformed him or her into a demon. Therefore, in carnation of the divine power by defeating the demonic qualities within us together with the conquest of nature is the urgent need of this critical situation, illumination of the dormant divine power within us is also required. The Supreme Being Sri Ramakrishna's ideas as well as his philosophy of life may serve as a mirror in this attempt where the ultramodern explication of Religion, illumined with the splendor of truth, is reflected, and which liberated from the false formality of conventions, is based on the realization of the feeling produced in the inner soul. In fact, man should perceive that one cannot attain the serenity of life without the involvement of religiousness in his life, unless he consecrates his life through

the principle of self sacrificing. In this religion self-mortification originates when one ceases to believe in the existence of God, when man, deviating from the path of renunciation and plunging totally in the sea of self-indulgence, searches the real significance of life in it and secondly, when violence and enmity erupts the ideology and the practice of religion.

In fact, religion is a matter of feeling or intuition, and for it, pointless dispute or introduction of altercation is unreasonable and biased. To make this profound idea understandable Sri Ramakrishna says – to know about milk is wisdom and to become plump and fleshy by drinking it is science, that means one is the matter of ‘awareness’ and another of ‘becoming’ in the real sense.” And the bridge to weave harmony between ‘knowing’ and ‘becoming’ is worship, depending upon which man should go forward in the direction of ultimate truth. Realization of this absolute truth and religion initiates an extreme transformation within the person. Only then man can elevate himself to the infinite ‘I’ by journeying through the circuitous route of limited ‘I’.

Just as Sri Ramakrishna leads people and society towards the destination of religion by his heart-felt spiritualism, similarly he inspires people to practice religion according to one’s own intention by propagating the pious life style, initiated by sacrifice and service, and also by teaching to pay respect to diverse religious doctrines. He, in his own life, has attained divine-grace in every aspect by performing properly the practices of different religious principles and thus has set up religion as the matter of reconciliation of all religious beliefs which is not only the way to attain salvation personally by solving all spiritual conflicts around different religious sects, but also the instrument to usher peace in the whole world. On this issue Sri Ramakrishna said,” Whatever path you follow – whether you are *Hindu*, a *Mussalmān*, a *Christian*, a *Śākta*, a *Vaiṣṇava* or a *Brāhma* the vital point is aspiration.”² Venerable Swami Vivekananda therefore composed the prayer of salutation to Sri Ramakrishna in this way.

“*Sthāpakāya ca dharmasya sarvadharmasvar'upīṇe \ avatāravariṣṭhāya rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ.*”³

“I offer my salutation to thee, O Ramakrishna, who has established religion, when it was tottering, upon an unshakable foundation. Who is the living embodiment of all religions, and who is the supreme incarnation of God on earth.”

Religion does not mean a set of lifeless, formal rituals or customs of a society or country relating to God, rather the cream of religion lies in its realization. According to Sri

Ramakrishna, the ultimate goal of human life is to attain God. For this various activities like worship, meditation prayer, good association reading good books must have to be done, but these are nothing but the external necessities, the actual or real theory is the intense desire of heart for getting his blessing. He maintains in this matter – “Blessed is he who feels longing for God, though he eats pork. But shame on him whose mind dwells on ‘woman and gold’ though he eats the purest food, boiled vegetables. Rice and ghee.”⁴ Even it is not mandatory to abandon family or to resign from services in order to attain knowledge of God, what required are faith, sincerity, self-surrender. For the family man, he has suggested a very simple solution – If a man fails to pray due to intense pressure of family, making obeisance twice a day to God is fairly enough for him. In the writings of Swami Saradananda we find the advice, given by the master to a certain female devotee, which tells that if she can feed, encase and serve her nephew considering him as Gopal, she will attain beatitude – “Very good, if your mind goes to that child, think of that child as the little “Balagopala”, as the Boy Krishna, who has come to you in that form.”⁵

Sri Ramakrishna has not identified any friction among different religious doctrines in the attainment of God; rather he has discovered a traditionally continuous harmony in them and to feel this ultimate truth, he, in his personal life, has followed the different paths of piety. In his own words, “I had to practice each religion for a time- Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of Saktas, Vaishnavas and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.”⁶ So these different paths of religion he has sincerely travelled and has come to the conclusion – “As much as opinions or minds so much as paths” – but the final aim is to attain God. Universality of religion does not force anyone to follow one particular doctrine, there is diversity and abundance of ways and they are all running towards one theory just as all the rivers run towards one direction and the final destination is the sea. He has formulated this theory in his own life through experiment and by this, his rational, scientific and argumentative nature of mind is manifested Sri Ramakrishna always says: “Be spiritual and realize truth for yourself.” It indicates religion never means any communal or sectarian feeling but it is a way to attain the supreme truth that is nothing but the realization of God. So truth and true religion is one and the same to him. He declares that no one can describe his feeling of his own pure consciousness because, “Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner it in the water than it

melted. Now who was to tell the depth?”⁷

The most unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna’s religious view is that he holds out the hope of salvation to everybody. He feels the living presence of God even in the worst sinner. He always advised people never to think of their sins. All people have the potential divinity and the latent power to manifest it but they must discover or to become conscious of their innate capacity and also to realize the ultimate goal, which is possible only through the spiritual struggle. It must be noted here that he meant it for every soul, not for any particular sex, race or religion.

Just as he never postulated any concept other than what he himself had felt by his own experience, similarly he had advised his followers to verify every opinion or view and vehemently protested any acceptance of anything due to excessive devotion. When he was engaged in making Swami Vivekananda out of Narendranath, he was leading him gradually to the object of trust through debate, argumentation and interrogation. Later Swamiji commented in that context, “Perhaps, no one has ever clashed with Sri Ramakrishna at every moment like me and despite of accepting defeat, there was no cessation of argumentation. He has planted the seed of propensity of accepting nothing before testing.” Inevitably there was no exception of this in the ceases of other disciples also. In the words of Swami Ramakrishnananda, an attendant of Sri Ramakrishna “We never accept anything without verifying it. Thakur Ramakrishna has taught us in this way.”⁸ Again when a certain followers of *Brāhma Samaj* advised a subordinate judge to accept his words without understanding its significance he has reproached him “what type of man you are. Accepting messages without having no faith in them is a type of hypocrisy. You are like a glass of pretence.”⁹ We may mention here an another incident that focused his spirit of reasoning. Narendra once wanted to find out whether the master’s reaction to the touch of metals or coins was real or not. So, unknown to the master, he slipped a rupee com underneath the mattress of his bed. When the master sat on that bed, he jumped up as if stung by a scorpion. The disciples were astonished to find nothing more dangerous than a rupee com under the bed. Narendra was shame faced but the master reassured him with his loving smile by conveying his satisfaction over his disciple’s attitude of testing before believing. On a occasion he said to a disciple, “You must examine a sādhu by day and by night before believing in him.”¹⁰

Coming back to the main discussion it can be said that various ways of prayer of

various stages was synthesized in Sri Ramakrishna's life style in which the reflection of unified current of eternal India perfectly noticed. In *Bhagavadgītā* the same message of harmony rings in this voice of Sri Kṛṣṇa “*Ye Yathā mām prapadyante tāms tathaiva bhājāmyaham \ mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvas'ah*”.¹¹

That means, one is bestowed reward according to his manner of prayer. Oh Partha, all men in every way follows my trodden path. The fundamental truths of Ramakrishna's religious concepts are “every religion is true” and “lack of hostility to other's creed or religion” and these are complementary to each other reflection of this theory is transparently observable not only in his percept but also in his life-style. In “Sri Ramakrishna and his unique message”, Swami Ghanananda told that in the whole of Sri Ramakrishna, the sevenfold harmony is revealed. He is the synthesizer of –

1. Religion with religion
2. Philosophical community with philosophical community
3. Different ways of meditation
4. God with Brahman
5. Diverse ways of divine attainment
6. Various sects of the same religion
7. Of different levels of *varṇāśrama dharma* and for that reason, he can be designated as coordinator.

God has created multifarious religion according to the diversity of nature in space, time and character. But all creeds are paths, and no creed is God. However pursuit of one particular path with utmost devotion leads to God. Though he accepts that all religions are true, he differentiates them depending upon their dignity and merit. Just like a house or building is structured with front door and back door in order to enter it, similarly, paths to attain God may be simple and beautiful or may it be dangerous. Just as he has told to abandon the second path for the possibility of transgression, similarly he has advised his followers to remain alert from *Hathayoga*, a kind of mental discipline by practicing different postures and controlling breathing or from the doctrine of *Kartābhajā*.

Depending upon embodied – disembodied, qualified-non qualified, God-Brahman in philosophical canvas, intense dispute has been marked among the doctrine of dualism, qualified monism and monotheism etc. Ramakrishna has offered a plain solution, which maintains that

one has to respect living organism, the universe and God till he is alive; and it denotes the acknowledgement of the doctrine of dualism but it is only a stepping-stone to attain the true ideal of monotheism.

To make it more simple, it can be said that there is huge gap between ideal and the real. Accepting realism on the path of the actuality. We have to go forward in the direction to the ideal and that this going forward to the ideal and the attainment of the ideal are not the same thing must have to be realized. In fact, both the concept formless and embodied are true concept and one should accept it depending upon his belief (*tenet*). In *adhikāurveda*, the eternal God sometimes become evident to his devotees like crystal, and again sometimes he manifests himself like the transparent water and this can be perceived through the inward eye only. Just as a devotee may follow the doctrine of dualism in order to enjoy the bliss of God's company, similarly the learned may comprehend that the universe is false and Brahman is the only truth and the creatures of the world are no one but "He" –

“*Brahma satya jagamithyā Jīva Brahmaiva nāparaḥ.*” And He himself has arranged all the forms for different persons just like “The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook , she prepares various dishes from it- pilau, pickled fish, fried fish and so on- to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion.”¹²

Again some thinks that weight of a wood-apple depends on the substance, seeds and its cover, and to deduct anything will reduce its weight. This signifies that just as Brahman is true, similarly the universe is also true. The selection of the theory totally depends upon the worshipper's method of prayer.

Moreover synthesizing the diverse ways of contemplation or realization of God, Sri Ramakrishna has prohibited to contrive opposition among different yogic paths like knowledge, self-less action, devotion etc. One can realize him by following any route; the only requirement is the sincerity of the heart. However, Ramakrishna has alluded to the communion with God through devotion as the spirit of this age since it is the easiest way for the attainment of God in the present day world.

That spiritually there is no scope of opposition among the diverse sects of the same religion can be at best illustrated by the sacred place, the temple of Dakshineswar where Goddess of power *Kālī* co-exists with *Śhiva*, *Bālgopāl* and the idols of *Rādhā-Kṛīshna*.

This signifies that the continuation of harmony which he has created among *śākto*, *śaiba* and *Vaiṣṇava* is still following smoothly.

Among the four-orders of a Hindu life, especially between householder and religious mendicancy, the presence of a sense of opposition in generally and popularly admitted, one is the ocean of earthly enjoyment and the other is illumined with the glory of renunciation. However, Ramakrishna has given the solution regarding the attainment of divine grace despite leading the family life, but with a warning that this is not possible by plunging in the ocean of earthly enjoyment. With utmost affection he has told his followers that both temporal and eternal dwelling in the world – it is like the mixture of sugar and sand. Man should pick up only the sugar like the ants do. Like the duck man should accept the milk from the mixture of milk and water, leaving the water behind. Despite remaining in the mud, man should remain clean and upright like the eel fish. In spite of leading the family life man should remain engrossed in the bliss of consciousness by abandoning the attraction of material benefits. Not only he has propagated this formula in his words, his life-style is an instance of this where a perfect combination of householder's life and religious mendicancy is clearly noticeable. If we thoroughly analyze his message, we can observe that he has, quite unknowingly, unified the four objects of human pursuit.

In Indian culture, the four objects that a man aims to attain, are recognized as piety, wealth, desire and emancipation, and here emancipation is the supreme bliss. Ramakrishna has propagated that attainment of God is the ultimate end of human life, and through this salvation is accomplished. This denotes that Ramakrishna is a seeker of salvation, though he is a domestic devotee. He did not instruct man to reject sexual urge totally, rather attaching importance to the process of procreation, he has expressed that there is no crime in being lustful towards wife but after the procreation, they should live dispassionately like brother and sister.

Again the utility of wealth is undeniable. Just as money is needed to maintain the family, similarly it is indispensable for the observance of religious duties. *Śāstra* also maintains that families must assume the responsibility to provide necessary wealth to the saints who has been contemplating for the welfare of all created beings. The main concern is that just as the families should earn money honestly, similarly they should spend it for the maintenance of religious rituals. But this does not imply that Sri Ramakrishna has supported the inordinate

sexual passion or the excessive attachment to material gains; rather he always instructs to give up the sexual attraction felt towards women. Perhaps, in domestic sphere, he has consented such type of wealth and lust which is regulated by a particular religion that in turn is blessed with the acquisition of salvation.

But we should keep in mind that Ramakrishna has not designed any ideal to reconcile all religion; to him, genuine ideal is sacrifice which is the corner-stone of any type of meditation for the attainment of salvation. Sometimes it may be the renunciation of the sensual desires or the attraction of material benefits, sometimes the relinquishment of the vanity of authority and sometimes, it may be the egotism. This flame of self-denial was blazing steadily pervading the whole-life of Shri Ramakrishna.

The point which is to be noted is that there is a fundamental principle among the diverse religions of the world, and this fundamental principle is to be preserved at any cost. We should not be distracted by the diversity; we should not be misguided by the notion of considering one's own opinion as being the supreme truth, and thereby instigated to reject others opinion as false, regulated by narrowness. This mean mindedness, blind orthodoxy and fanaticism create walls among men, religious and communities. Hence, the urgent need is to cherish respect, honour and tolerance to others' creeds and religions. This is the synthesis whose basis is the manifestation of unity among diversity. The attempt to limit the diversity of God is nothing but to show dishonor to Him as the boundless, infinite Supreme Being himself only knows His potency. So Ramakrishna admonishes not to show dishonor to the concept of anyone, and one have to be led forward through the doctrine which he has chosen to adhere – "so many minds, so many ways". Sri Ramakrishna reached this state of perfect reconciliation not through the gateway of intellectuality, but through following the wide path of direct realization. He is not a philosopher or metaphysician of religion; the truth of religion, to him, is a matter of perception.

In his opinion, everything in this world is to be seen as being enveloped with the light of God as God is present in fire, water, insects and also in man's life and consciousness. To witness the finite in the infinite, boundless background is the chief tenet of attaining God. The curse of class division and untouchables can be abolished by the light of this harmonizing attitude. When Ramakrishna utters – a devotee has no caste, devotion brings purification of the soul, mind and body, a *Brāhamin* is not a true *Brāhamin* if he does not possess utmost

devotion that can abate a *candāl* to the status of *Brāhmin* – a revolutionary social consciousness is revealed in him.

Even in the modern age, expansion of the thoughts and sentiments of Sri Ramakrishna in every direction have enthralled the minds of the illiterate, semi-literate, wise, scientist, philosopher, family- men and others due to their inherent rationality. Also the applicability of it is not limited by the boundary of a particular time and space, rather it can be effective by the people of all country though sometimes in a modified way. If we can go with the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna seriously then we really be humble to learn and able to accept the view that all the different paths which lead to the same ultimate goal of realization of God are equally valid and then the difference between different religions can be eliminated and all communal conflicts can be resolved. So with due respect I must say that Sri Ramakrishna's messages and voice of religious view is a voice of hope, encouragement and an immense amount of inspiration in the sphere of universal peace and human fellowship.

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