

Chapter VI

Ramakrishna's spiritual Experiences In
course of His Different Religious practices.

Ramakrishna's name can be creditably mentioned for having established the essential unity of religions by his lived experiences of different religious practices. The main point realised by him was that Truth is one though its facets are many. Truth is beyond any kind of conflicts and limitation and never be exhausted by any set of doctrines beliefs and creeds. It is manifested to all in different ways and hence innumerable ways of approaching the Truth could be regarded equally true. We have already seen that God is the only Truth in the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna and his view that 'the only purpose of life is to realise God' (1) points to the sole Truth of all religions. Religions as realised by him as nothing but the ways of attaining Truth. To attain the

1. The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna. tr. Swami Nikhilananda.
P.-213.

goal different ways are followed by different people as Truth itself manifests to the devotee in different ways according to their choice and capacity. We can understand this point from the analogy Ramakrishna gives, in which he says, "As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, sago and arrowroot to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out for different men different paths suitable to the natures."⁽¹⁾ Regarding paths there should not be any conflict, because paths as religious disciplines will meet at a common point of perfection. In spite of their differences regarding their forms and characters Ramakrishna realises that they are all of equal value and neither of them is false nor meaningless. All these he proved more by his life than by his words. His utterances and teachings to his disciples are based on his living experiences of the Truth in his life. He realised that it is the same Intelligent Principle which is variously known

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-152.

and taken by different religions as God, Allāh, Buddha, Siva, Vishnu and Brahman. He not only experimented with different forms of religious practices involved in Hinduism but also practised the rituals of some other major religions like Islam and Christianity in his life. It is significant that before he proclaimed the oneness of the truth of all religions, Ramakrishna surrendered himself to the Islamic and the Christian ways of religious lives. All the important forms of spiritual practices that we find in Hinduism have also been proved by him to be spiritually potent when he practised the Tantra, the Vaishnavic discipline and the Advaita path of nirvikalpa samādhi.

Under the guidance of his preceptress Bhairavi Yogesvari Devi, Sri Ramakrishna mastered the details of the Tantrik Sādhanā. Tantra is ancient spiritual practice for awakening the inner potential power in man to be united with the supreme. It believes in a liberation which

is based on the principle of complete identity of the finite with the Infinite. As to the nature of the state of moksa the Tantrik would say, "Water mingles with water."⁽¹⁾ Since man is spiritual by nature his consciousness will essentially intermingle with the consciousness of the supreme and for this reason he should be remoulded into a form of divine. It is said that unless a man becomes divine, he can not reach the divine, even his worship of God will be regarded as fruitless. So Tantra teaches us how to make ourselves divine by spiritual practice of reawakening our inner power though after enjoyment of the nature. "The identity of hidden nature of the worshipper with the God worshipped is the first principle of the Tantric philosophy of devotion."⁽²⁾

Tantricism is an important aspect of Hindu theism which arose of a ferment of philosophico-religious ideas

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1. Heinrich Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-560.
 2. Ibid. P.-581.

and practices at some pre-Christian period. It is a body of religious practice, with a deep philosophy tailored it reaches the finite spirit to the Infinite. In fact, Tantra is the combination of philosophy and rituals, meditation and ceremonies, renunciation and enjoyments. (1) It has an esoteric aspect. It is usually practised secretly and for this reason a Tantrik often may not be detected observing his external mode of life. Actually it is a practice to uplift the inner spiritual power to a pyramidal hierarchy overcoming different planes of mind. So it is an internal practice in an esoteric way and has no external expressions like other religious practices. (2)

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1. Ramakrishna : Prophet of New India. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-34.
 2. S. Shankaranarayana. Glory of the Divine Mother. P.-38.

The Tantriks subscribe to the authority of the Vedas. (1) Because Sakti in Tantra which is the source of all, the cause of creation is known as Aditi in the Vedas. She is the Prime Mover, Supreme Sakti, the Divine Mother who gives birth to the Gods and Goddesses. So instead of excluding or refuting the orthodox tradition they try to assimilate their cult with it. As a result of the intermixture of the Tantrik and the Vedantic traits here we find a co-presence of ritual and thought. (2)

But the Tantriks do not believe in acosmism.

Their scriptures show that the world is real. They accept the truth contained in Advaita Vedanta teachings but shift

1. (a) Ahañ rudremirvasubhī srarāmyahamāditairuta

Visvadevaiḥ

Ahañ mitrāvarunobhā vibhāmyarha mindrāgnī

ahumasvinobhā

Rg Veda X. 125. quoted from Devi Sūktam, Glory of the Divine Mother. (Devi Mahatmyam). By S. Shankaranarayanam. P.-281.

(b) The myth of Haimavati Umā in Kenopaniṣad. The Upanishads (Translations from the Sanskrit with an introduction by Juan Mascaro). The Penguin classics. ed. E. V. Rieu (founder editor). Betty Radice and Robert Baldick (Present editors). PP. 52-53.

2. Heinrich Zimmer. Philosophies of India. PP. 569-570.

the accent to the positive aspect of māyā. As it is a religion based on the conception of realisation of the supreme Being both transcendent and immanent the Tantriks believe in one ultimate reality, infinite and eternal. Siva, in this system, is regarded as of the nature of omnipresent, pure-consciousness, impersonal and inactive. It is same as the nirguna brahman in advaita philosophy. It is a distinctive feature of Tantra that its theistic attitude obliterates the mere realisation of formless Reality (nirguna) and favours the worship of a personal God instead. The personal God is represented here preferably taken in the female aspect as Sakti or Kālī. The tantrik discipline welcomes the return of the Goodnesses to power which though rooted in the Neolithic past had been overshadowed by the male divinities of the patriarchal Aryan pantheon for a period about a thousand years. From the time of the later Upanisads the Goodness began to reassert herself and she is today the chief divinity again.

Because all consorts of the various God are the manifestation of Mahāmāyā, the Goddess is conceived as personifying the world illusion. "She is the primary embodiment of the transcendent principle, and as such the mother of (1) all names and forms."

The world is the manifestation of the dynamic aspect of Reality, Sakti and on this ground the world should not be discarded as illusion or should not be devaluated for suffering and imperfection, but the world should be established on positive ground being enjoyed, celebrated and penetrated by enlightening insight. Sakti is a dynamic spiritual personality, the Creatrix of the world, but is not exhausted by the act of creation. Siva and Sakti are one, Sakti, being the formative energy of the consciousness, may be at rest or in motion. The potentiality of the whole object world exists as the Sakti of Siva and Sakti is the determinate Brahman endowed with

1. Heinrich Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-570.

will, knowledge and action. Tantricism is essentially monistic as it believes in one ultimate reality. The speciality of this system lies in the fact that it believes the supreme Being in the form of the Mother. The word 'mother' here symbolizes creativity itself as well as purest love. Further the word 'mother' is conceived as the supreme Being and by Her grace alone man can attain the highest knowledge. Tantra teaches a man to shift his attention from the worldly pleasure to the knowledge of bliss gradually, after the full enjoyment of this material world.⁽¹⁾ The way of Tantra is that it never believes in abrupt renunciation like the Advaita vedantist, but to enjoy the supreme Bliss in the sportive play is its aim. The word of a Tantrik devotee is that 'I want not to be sugar but to eat sugar.' The single point of attention of the unity of the finite and the Infinite is the aim of Tantra though it is practised to be successfully reached neither

1. A. C. Das. Modern Incarnation of God. 1958.
pp.- 132-135.

discouraging the desire of man to enjoy the material objects of the world nor totally suppressing it at the first stage of spiritual experience. Actually one establishes a personal relationship with the supreme Divine Force (Sakti) and enjoys the world of names and forms, pain and joy but they are overcome at the bliss of Her. In a holy madness and in an ecstatic love (prema) the devotee overcomes the phenomenal world. In this discipline the distinction between moksa and other puruṣārthas like artha, Kāma, dharma is transcended not in the inner realisation but in living feeling, as moksa here is not taken as abrupt renunciation. (1) Along with the usual mode of living and his worldly enjoyments a man learns how to develop his spiritual insight to attain the Truth while practising the discipline of Tantra. In a word Tantra believes in sublimation of desires to the higher level of spiritual consciousness and hence as a spiritual path of attaining Truth it is suitable for

1. Heinrich Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-571.

ordinary people who always dare to favour this external world with which their daily livings are concerned. In the words of Swami Nikhilananda, "The aim of Tantra is to sublimate bhoga, or enjoyment into yoga or union with consciousness. For according to this philosophy, the world with all its manifestations is nothing but the sport of Siva and Sakti, the Absolute and its inscrutable power."⁽¹⁾

Tantra as a spiritual discipline insists on purity and holiness of all things and so the five forbidden things like wine (madya), meat (māmsa), fish (matsya), parched grain (mūdrā) and sexual intercourse (maithuna)⁽²⁾ constitute the sacramental fire in certain Tantrik rites. The significance of the enjoyment of these enjoyable articles is that they are means to an end, the end is to reach the sublime height of unity and purity when realization of the form is annihilated, the phenomenality along

1. Ramakrishna : Prophet of New India. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-34.

2. Heinrich Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-572.

with differentiation is seen but there remains no feeling of alteration. Man must rise by means of nature and not through rejection of it. The thought behind the enjoyment is always pure which aims at some holy ideal. Even the sexual intercourse has a symbolic role that indicates how the fear of uncontrollable passions may be controlled by means of nature leading to a higher, purer and spiritual principle which is nothing but the union of Siva and Sakti. Hence the tantrik discipline accomplishes a shift of the empirical consciousness to the transcendental consciousness to successfully adhere yoga on enjoyment (bhoga). The union of the jivātma with paramātma which is the goal may be attained after the enjoyment of the nature. The tantrik ritual of wine, meat, fish, parched grain and sexual intercourse is accomplished under the cautious supervision of a preceptor in a controlled stage of 'non-dualist' (advaita) realisation. The aspirant reaches the height

of mental plane where all distinctions are transcended and no question of a desire to enjoy the benefits of illegal practices will arise. Another important thing is that the spiritual emotion of the adept is prema or ecstatic love which when develops to a subliming feeling of intense love of God, the ego which should be averted for the realization of the supreme is washed away in the tide of this passion of love.

In the practice of Tantra there are certain steps which may be followed one by one. The aspirant approaches the Goddess in worship (pūjā) through the meditative muttering of prayers, (japa, the recitation of the litany of Her names), the unrelenting verbal repetition (again japa) of sacred formulae (mantra, the word sounds which contain Her essence), the making of mental and external offering (homa), and one pointed meditation on her inner vision (dhyāna). For the experience of the final identity with the supreme one needs to set before his eyes and

mind an image (pratika, pratimā) of the deity to worship and meditate at first. The first stage of devotion consists in the function of prānapratisthā into the image by the devotee. All these are done so long as the image is regarded as the seat of a deity (pitha) but when the worshipper spontaneously learns to recognise the Infinite power present everywhere he no longer requires to worship an image. The whole world seems to him as the seat (pitha) of the universal presence of formless Infinite.

In the words of Zimmer, "The rites performed in the presence of a consecrated image are the counterparts of the secular rituals of the daily life."⁽¹⁾ Sometimes ritual gestures (mudrā) are employed in the worship which ultimately lead to a spiritual resolve. As for example, the practitioner of the Tantrik discipline says to God of his worship presenting the vessel which contains water with fish that 'this is but a small offering of water in fact, but so far as my desire to honour you is concerned

1. Zimmer. The Philosophies of India. P.-582.

regard it as if I were offering you an ocean.' Again Yoni mudrā is made when the Goddess is invited to take her place as yoni, the female organ is her pitha or seat. To a Tantrik adept it is regarded nothing but an altar only.

In course of practising Tantra the aspirant realises the divine power Sakti as being asleep within him like a sleeping serpent (Kundalini) at the root of his spine. The deep place where the power is imagined as sleeping being coiled up is known as mūlādhāra. The sādhaka usually pronounces mantra to awaken it and with the practice of yoga when he controls carefully his inhalations, breathing deeply first through one nostril then the other (prāṇāyāma) to clear the way through the spiritual channel (suṣumṇā) the inner power (Kundalini Sakti) if thinks to be aroused, lifts her head and begins to move up the suṣumṇā. In course of its upward movement it touches in her passage a number of 'centres'

or 'lotuses' (cakras, padmas), which are regarded as the seats of the elements of the body. With the movement of the Kundalini Sakti to the upward Cakras one by one the Tantrik worshipper imagines himself as being purified by suffusing all the lotuses with the awakened Sakti. When Kundalini Sakti reaches to Sahasrāra, the top-most centre, the unity is realised in nirvikalpa samadhi. Thus ritualistic operations are transubstantiated to a mystic experience of identity. (1)

It is the basic principle of Indian psychology that people may be grouped under the categorical principles of raja, tama and sattva according to their temperament. Hence rites and grades of service are found to be governed differently by different types of persons. In Tantrik vocabulary these three types of aspirants of different attitudes are known as 'animal', 'heroic' and 'divine'. The mind of the man of 'animal' nature is

1. Zimmer. The Philosophies of India. PP. 582-584.

generally found to remain clouded with 'tamas' which obscures the reflection of Divine in man. Again the man of heroic nature or the 'vira' is specified with the quality of Rajas. Being mixed up with sattva guna one can overcome tamas fully. With the people of 'heroic' nature we find that there is a provision of enjoyment of five enjoyable articles including sexual intercourse and these are taken as means but not as ends. The enjoyment of all these articles in rituals would ultimately lead to a state of spiritual union with the Infinite. It is a fact that the essence of Tantra sādhana lies not in the rituals, but rituals are means to an end i.e., to realise the presence of all pervading consciousness. It is believed that the persons of the type of divine nature are innately enlightened owing to the predominance of sattva in their personality and their spiritual power spontaneously develops to realise the presence of God within themselves. They need not go by the way of rituals as is required by the

'viras'. Ramakrishna cannot be said to have been a Tantrik in the full sense of the term. Rather, much of his tantrik practices were performed only to ignite, as it were, his spiritual potentials.

Ramakrishna practised Tantra in his own way. On the belief that Siva is covered by Sakti, a tantrik generally aims to attain Siva after overcoming the stages of formal worship of Sakti. But Sakti was more important to Ramakrishna as we find himself as a worshipper of Sakti throughout his life, although his worship meant the direct approach to Reality from the deepest depth of his intuitive consciousness. Like other tantriks he never attained Siva after removing the screen of Sakti. In stead Sakti has been realised by him as a manifesting cosmic dynamic energy of one Reality of which Siva is the passive aspect. At the highest stage of realisation (nirvikalpa samadhi) there remains no more distinction between Siva and Sakti. For this reason he did not realise

that worship of Sakti should be ceased for the attainment of Siva. He worshipped Sakti in vātsalya bhāva.

Here also lies his originality that in his practice of Tantra he stands to a relation to Sakti in a vaishnavic way. Because he used to say that he worshipped Sakti as a mother. His attitude to Her was that of a child. (1) Besides Ramakrishna did not follow the Tantrik order of life being categorised under any particular group of either heroic or pasu or man-God (Sāttic). There are three kinds of disciplines as one may regard woman as one's mistress or look as oneself as her handmaid or as her child. Ramakrishna believed that the way of the heroic persons taking woman as mistress is very difficult. He said to Girish Ghosh, "The attitude of a 'hero' is not good. Some people cherish it. They regard themselves as Purusa and woman as Prakriti; they want to propitiate woman through their intercourse with her. But this method often causes disaster." (2) Ramakrishna looked upon woman

1. Kathamṛta. Vol.3 P.-50.

2. Heinrich Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-589.

always as the mother. He said that he spent two years as the handmaid and companion of divine Mother while practising Tantra, but his natural attitude was that of a child towards its mother. It is usually found that the man of animal nature (pasu) worships Goddess standing in relation of handmaid to Her and the relation of child and mother is established by a person belonging to sattic group (man-God). But in Ramakrishna's experiment on Tantra a combination of the two has been marked.

Ramakrishna's free attitude to practice Tantra independently may be said a great advantage for his successors. Aurobindo interpreted Tantra in a free way and as his source of inspiration the name of Ramakrishna may never be ignored. Aurobindo combined Tantra and Yoga. The Yogis talk about certain centres in the subtle body and springs of consciousness which normally lie dormant in man. In the practice of yoga the dormant power becomes/

manifest as the play of consciousness is increasingly felt in these centres. Mulādhāra is the lower-most centre and sahasrāra is the top-most centre in head. Like Tantra, Yoga also aims at the full manifestation of the inner spiritual power gradually passing over the centres one by one to be united with the supreme self at last. Similar attempt has been made in Vivekananda's Philosophy where he said, ".... to raise this Kundalini is the whole object of Raja-Yoga." (1) Both Yoga and Tantra help us to reach to a higher level of consciousness through a concentration made after psychic control which enables us to get beyond the limits of ordinary human experience. Both have a tendency to be merged in nirvikalpa samādhi. According to Vivekananda in the practice of Yoga also the inner spiritual power (Kundalini Sakti) tries to force a passage through the hollow canal and as it rises step by step as it were, layer after layer of the mind becomes open and all the different visions and wonderful powers come to the Yogi. The Yogi becomes free being perfectly detached from

1. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.VIII.P.-46.

the body and mind when Kundalini Sakti reaches the brain. (1)

In course of his tantrik practices Ramakrishna realised the movement of his inner spiritual power or serpent power (Kundalini Sakti) which remains asleep at the bottom of the spinal cord. Being awakened it begins to move upward coursing through seven levels of the mind. He is reported to have spoken of his experiences through the seven psychic centres from mulādhāra to sahasrādhāra. He said that when the mind rises to the sixth level one has the experience of the forms of God but when it comes up to the seventh level, the experience of God in forms no more remains. The complete union of the Infinite takes place in nirvikalpa samādhi. It is a stage when sakti is completely unified with the Siva, the personal God with the Impersonal Brahman, the active with the passive and hence one ultimate reality as pure consciousness as such comes to be realised. At this point of realisation physical and mental states no more exist. All the forms and different aspects of reality

1. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.I. P.-160.

with which we are concerned in our different levels of experience cease to be there at the stage of highest knowledge (1) About the experience of the movement of Kundalini Sakti Ramakrishna told a circle of his close friends, "Sometimes, in samādhi, the soul swims joyfully in the ocean of divine ecstasy, like a fish. Sometimes, when I lie down on my side, I feel the spiritual current pushing me like a monkey and playing with me joyfully, I remain still. That current like a monkey, suddenly with one jump reaches the sahasrāra. That is why you see me jump up with a start.

"Sometimes, again, the spiritual current rises like a bird hopping from one branch to another. The place where it rests feels like fire. It may hop from Mulādhāra to Svādhiṣṭhāna, from Svādhiṣṭhāna to the heart, and thus gradually to the head. Sometimes the spiritual current moves up like a snake. Going in a zigzag way, at last it

1. Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume. ed. R.C. Majumdar. P.-266.

reaches the head and I go into samādhi." (1)

The Tantra may be characterised as the spiritual science which finds out the way of realisation of the all pervading consciousness. (2) While practising Tantra, Ramakrishna realised the direct presence of consciousness everywhere and he observed that his life in the external world was mere sports of Sakti. He realised in an inner vision the anahata sabda, the great sound Aum, from which countless sounds have been originated. He gained some supernatural powers of Yoga in this period which after all were refused by him. (3) He realised that the primal Energy has two aspects Vidyā and avidyā. Avidyā deludes, conjures up women and gold which is the obstacle to the path of the spiritual progress and vidyā is concerned with devotion, kindness, wisdom and love which leads one to God. This avidyā, must be propitiated because men though

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1. Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-593.
 2. Mohendranath Sarkar. Eastern lights. P.-69.
 3. Solange Lemaitre. Ramakrishna and the vitality of Hinduism. PP. 86-88.

is spirit as such he has a bodily self also. The bodily self instead of being annihilated may be sublimated by a gradual control of it and it is the purpose of the rites of Sakti worship according to Ramakrishna. (1)

For his successful pursuit of Tantrik discipline under the guidance of Bhairavi Yogesvari, Ramakrishna was convinced that the ultimate reality in the form of the divine Mother is one in Her diverse aspects, passive and active, impersonal and personal. Moreover he achieved the great purity of his mind and a flowering of his innate spiritual genius. And from this discipline of 'Mother worship' he realised further that every woman is a manifestation and a symbol of the Divine Mother in a special sense. (2)

Another important thing is that the seed of universalism is rooted in the Tantrik cult as it includes all

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1. Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-590.
 2. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. PP. 7-8.

human beings as a member of a single mystic family and there is therefore, no thought of caste within the tantrik circles. Sudras out-casts and Brāhmanas are considered as equally eligible for spiritual practice. (1) We find this influence upon Ramakrishna when he proclaimed a universal religion considering men as the manifestation of spirit where there arises no more question regarding caste and creed.

Ramakrishna's experiments with different spiritual truths and experiences led him to practise another spiritual path of attaining truth followed by the Vaishnavas. In fact the same. Reality is interpreted by the thinkers of the ages differently according to their choice regarding the way of approaching it. The Saccidananda in advaita philosophy has been interpreted by the tantriks as Siva, the impersonal and inactive and again by the vaishnavas as Saccidananda Krishna. Ramakrishna

1. Zimmer. Philosophies of India. P.-572.

was firmly determined to prove this truth that the approach of the Vaishnavas remained quite valid to reach the Reality through love and devotion. Vaishnavism which is generally known as a mere sect of Hinduism without any logical and metaphysical enquiry, is actually based on knowledge that produces feeling of absolute dependence on God and love for Him. It is the religion of love and devotion and a passionate attachment of the devotee to the Lord is here regarded as primary importance. It upholds the conception of a personal God and seeks to establish a relationship between man and God as one between the worshipper and the worshipped. Regarding its approach and interpretation of Reality, Vaishnavism was developed as a reaction against advaitavāda, because it did not favour the non-dualistic idea of complete absorption of the finite into the Infinite in case of liberation. In Vaishnavism we find that a close attachment to personal God is established by way of love and devotion. The Vaishnava God is

personified. He is regarded as the supreme person
and not the intangible Absolute as conceived by
(1)
Advaita Vedanta.

In course of the development of Vaishnavism
the age after the Ārvaras (the vaishnavas who inhabited
in South India) is very important. Because the bhakti-
vāda of Vaishnavism, in-⁷stead of being purely emotional
began to be further evolved with a philosophy at this
period. It was a time when two-fold reactions were seen
side by side. On the one hand Śāṅkara was firmly establi-
shing his advaita view against bhaktivāda and on the other
hand attempts had been made by different sects of Vaishnava
School (Sri Brahma, Sanakādi, Rudra and Gaurīya) to spread
their view based on love and devotion of Viṣṇu. It had ~~been~~
felt by the Vaishnavas that their view may well be accep-
ted by the people if it was based on a philosophy in-
stead of being a mere emotional out-burst, because they

1. Solange Lemaitre. Ramakrishna and the vitality of
Hinduism. PP. 88-93.

noticed that Śāṅkara's advaitavāda was highly accepted by the intellectuals on the ground that it had a deep philosophy. And they realised also that in order to spread bhaktivāda refuting Śāṅkara's advaitavada they would have to go by commenting on the Brahma sūtras. It is not for nothing that we find in the philosophies of the Gita and the Upaniṣad, Rāmaṇuja, Madhvacārya and Nimbārka there was an attempt to establish their views on criticism of advaitavāda.

The earliest of the five Vaishnava sects is known as Sri Vaishnava Sampradāya. Nathmuni or Ranganathacārya was the founder of this school. He founded the basic philosophy of Visistādvaitavāda though he accepted the emotional value of devotion to the Lord Viṣṇu as a ground of his religion. Actually he gave a new life to Vaishnavism and it grew into a strong religious view at the effort of Sri Rāmaṇuja after him. In Rāmaṇuja's vaishnavic religion however there was no place of 'Gopal Krishna',

the conception of the deity which is common to other Vaishnavic cult. His bhaktivāda followed the method of Upāsana along with ceremonial activities.

After Rāmanuja Vaishnavism was divided into two — one emphasising on bhakti mārga and other on prapattimārga. The former believes in Path of devotion for the attainment of mokṣa, the effort of the individual is the only factor emphatically pointed out by these thinkers to reach Gods while the latter has it that liberation depends not only on the effort of the devotee but on God's grace or Karuna also.

The dualistic philosophy of Madhvācārya begins as a protest against advaitavada upholding the distinction between God and the individual self, God and the world, jīva and the world, between one individual and the other and a material object and the other. His basic point to prove this dualistic philosophy is reasoned as

follows : that a son though related to his father has an individual independent existence of his own apart from his father, similarly God is different from the jīva and the world though they are created by Him. In this case God, soul and the world are regarded as eternal and fundamental realities. Though all the three are real, the latter two are subordinate to God and dependent on Him. Brahman is independent reality, the absolute creator of the universe and possesses every-kind of perfection. He is identified with Viṣṇu and is said to create, sustain and destroy the world according to His will. He is endowed with a supernatural body and is both transcendent to and as immanent in the world. Viṣṇu is the inner ruler of all souls. Lakṣmi by the side of Viṣṇu is imagined as being capable of assuming various forms though without a material body, coeternal with Him and all-pervading. Lakṣmi is conceived here as the personification of God's creative energy. She is

intelligent prakṛti, though God is greater than Her in point of subtlety and the extent of qualities. The followers of the Madhva School had more religious practices and less emotional expression. They had their God of worship named Viṣṇu or Narāyana.

Another school named Sanakādi was founded by Nimbārka or Nimbāditya may be said to present a philosophy of a particular kind called dvaitādvaita. It supports both the monistic philosophy of Śankara and the pluralistic way of approach. The relation of the God with the jīva and the world is not one of absolute identity nor can it be said that these three are absolutely distinct. If they are regarded as to be in absolute identity that would contradict passages of the Upaniṣads which insist on difference and will also involve confusions between the nature and attributes of the different principles. Again if the supreme spirit be absolutely distinct from the individual soul and the world, it could not be omnipresent.

It would be as limited as the individual soul or the world, and could not therefore be regarded as their governor. Further if it be said that non-difference is the reality while difference is due to limitations (upādhis) can not be accepted, since it would be to subject Brahman to conditions. Then Brahman would cease to be pure and become subject to faults. So Nimbārka concludes that both difference and non-difference are real.

In this school Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā take the place of Narāyaṇa and his consort. The worship of other gods is forbidden. Bhakti is not meditation but love and devotion and it is regarded that the grace of God is ever-ready to lift up the helpless and make them see the truth of things. Ethical rules prescribed in the Śāstras are insisted by these thinkers and Karma is said to be the means for the acquisition of Brahmajñāna.

Vallabhacarya was the founder of the Rudra School, and offered a theistic interpretation of the Vedanta. It differs from those of Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja. His view is called Suddhādvaita, or pure non-dualism and declares that the whole world is real, and is subtly Brahman. Though the difference between the individual soul and Brahman is subordinated by vallabha, non-difference is here conceived along to be real. God in this philosophy is regarded as whole and the individuals as parts. As the individual is of identical essence with God, there is no real difference between the two, just as the sparks of fire come out of it. God is personified as Kṛṣṇa when He is endowed with the qualities of wisdom (jñāna) and action (kriyā). He is the creator of the world and does not possess a physical body as worldly agents do. Bhakti is the chief means of salvation, though jñāna is also useful. All sins are put away if we have true faith in God. The highest goal is not mukti or libera-

tion, rather eternal service to Kṛṣṇa and participation in his sports.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century Gaurīya Vaishnavism is found to be spread in Bengal and Mithila which was based on the love of God and had for its objects Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as the Lord's consort. The personality and character of Sri Kṛṣṇa Chaitanya gave a new form of this particular kind of vaishnavism. Kṛṣṇa is conceived as parama brāhman and his Sakti covers the world as māyā Sakti. The power is known as vilās sakti with which He is manifested to many forms. Vilās Sakti as has been described by the Vaishnava is of two kinds — prabhava Vilās and Vaibhana Vilās. According to the former, Kṛṣṇa manifests himself as many with the Braja Gopies in Rasalīlā and according to the second He manifests himself in the four-fold form like Vāsudeva, Saṅkaraṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. Vāsudeva is the symbol of intelligence, saṅkaraṣaṇa is the symbol of consciousness, pradyumna is

of Prema and Aniruddha is of līlā. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the source of all these powers. Srikṛṣṇa manifests as Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Mahādeva according to the dominance of Sattva, raja and tama gunas. Līlā of Srikṛṣṇa is permanent, his main power is love (prema). The highest manifestation of the cit power of Kṛṣṇa is the power of delight (hlāḍini) and Rādhā is the essence of this delight giving power. As paramātmā Srikṛṣṇa is infinite and consciousness as such, God is omnipresent while the soul is of atomic size. The relation between jīvātma and paramātmā as amsā and amsi is eternal. The jīva is dependent on God. It believes that an incomprehensible difference - non-difference is the truth of things (acintyabhedābheda). Jīva is both identical with, and different from paramātmā and the relation is incomprehensive. The Gaurīya School considers devotion and the way of prapatti as the means of attaining Mokṣa.
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However the common feature of the Vaishnavic cult

1. Sri Jitendranath Bandyopadhyay. Pancopāsana. (Bengali).

which seems to be the most important is that it never believes in abrupt renunciation but to enjoy the līlā or sportive play of God is the aim of life. So the Vaishnavas generally divinize common human love and their intimate relation with God as father, master, friend, child or husband is established according to their own choice and in through all these relations they seek to become very close to God. More clearly, they worship God through invoking emotional patterns such as Sānta, Dāsyā, Sakhya, Vātsalya and Madhurya. The significance of these forms of spiritual experience is that the worship of God through a personalized relationship is vital and quite helpful at the beginning of religious practice, though it might become dispensable when one grows in maturity and is enriched with realisations of the spiritual communion with the Infinite.

Ramakrishna admired and endorsed the Vaishnava form of worshipping. With the attitude of a servant

(dāsyā bhāva) he worshipped God and also practised to enjoy an intimate relation with God being possessed by the Vātsalya bhāva or the filial attitude. Once a person named Jatadhari came to Dakshineswar who used to carry with him a metal image of Ramlālā, the child Rama. At his great surprise Ramakrishna noticed the man was behaving with the metal image of Ramlālā just like a mother bears the affectionate responsibility to her son. He used to tender the image with motherly affection that is, he was found always busy for playing with, or feeding Ramlālā. At last his motherly affection and love to the image of Ramlālā became converted into the divine love and now he began to enjoy the presence of God everywhere. Being inspired by Jatadhari, Ramakrishna also devoted himself in worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the vātsalya mode. At the last stage of this particular form of spiritual practice he felt no necessity of formal worship of the image when he had the direct experience of the all pervading conscious-

ness. On this ground he was more convinced about the nature of reality which is one though manifesting in many forms, and concluded that God is both formless and is with forms.

Again with another attitude known as madhura bhava Ramakrishna practised Vaishnava religion and in this phase of his life he could be said to have been inspired by the model of Sri Chaitanya. The specific feature of this kind of Vaishnavism is that here direct relation with Lord Kṛṣṇa is not established by a man as he is not free from his ego. We find there is an attempt to establish a direct relation with Lord Kṛṣṇa in the approach of Mirabai only which may be called another form of Vaishnavism. But in the Gauriya Vaishnavism specially in the model of Sri Chaitanya, Lord Kṛṣṇa is reached by the aspirant not directly but through some stages of different kinds of attitudes. It is a gradual order of progress for the devotee to be

uplifted to the stage where Kṛṣṇa will be attained.
 So at first he will have to practise meditation in
manjaribhāva which will ultimately lead him to be
 uplifted to a stage where he can worship God think-
 ing himself as related with the eight consorts (Sakti)
 of Rādhā. Then possessing the attitude of Rādhā he
 may worship Lord Kṛṣṇa and if he acquires the grace
 of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa will be attained to him. Because
 Rādhā in Vaishnava religion, is the best example who
 reached Lord Kṛṣṇa for her intense longing. It is
 noted that during the days of his Vaishnavic way of
 practice ~~the~~ Ramakrishna went through all these stages
 and at last he worshipped Kṛṣṇa in the attitude of Rādhā.
 The result of his experiment on Vaishnavic religion was
 the same as was realised by him after practising Tantra.
 Because during this period of his practice on Vaishnavism
 he also realised that the distinction between the devotee
 and God almost disappeared and Kṛṣṇa is same as all
 pervading consciousness. Another important thing proved

by him that the stage of bhāva samādhi or ecstasy in which the devotee retains his ego and enjoys communion with the personal God is equally valid for attaining
 (1)
 Truth.

We have already seen that Vaishnavism is the religion of devotion and love. Devotion as has been clarified by Ramakrishna is the unripe stage of ecstatic love and ecstatic love is the ripe stage of devotion. In his words, "The stage of devotion called Bhava (speechless absorption in God) is like an unripe mango; Prema or
 (2)
 ecstatic love is like the ripe fruit." A devotee always begins with devotion and ultimately he develops his ecstatic love (prema) to God. So in the beginning as observed by Ramakrishna, that God is taken as if the sweetness and the devotee its enjoyer, God is the lotus and devotee is the bee who sips the honey of the lotus. At the first stage of this discipline there is a relation between

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1. Swami Nikhilananda. Ramakrishna, Prophet of New India. PP. 38-40.
 2. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-240.

I - Thou, devotee and God, lover and beloved, but at the last stage all these distinctions are blotted out at the total extinction of sense of 'ego' and devotee realises the oneness with all pervading consciousness. Ramakrishna believes that through love one can realise the non-difference and thus transcend the cycle of births. (1) Here it may be said that Ramakrishna's view of relationship between the individual self and God resembles the view known as acintya-bhedābheda.

Ramakrishna established the point that the way of bhakti is equally valid like other ways of knowledge and action. He emphatically pointed out that the way of bhakti is not only valid but is the easier path for ordinary men to attain perfection also. In his words, "The goal of human life is to love God. Bhakti is the one essential thing. To know God through jñāna and reasoning is extremely difficult." (2) It is a path where there is no chance of burning into the heat of knowledge but rather it is the

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1. Nalini Devadas. Sri Ramakrishna; PP. 17-18.
 2. Gospel of Ramakrishna. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-94.

soft intuition of grasping the Truth in an intimate relation to God. One can enter into the inner Truth directly with love. Ramakrishna here uses an useful analogy to make it clear. "The love of God is a lady and has access to the Zenana (the inner apartments), knowledge (derived by reasoning) can get only into the quarters reserved for men but can not enter into the Inner Apartments — the sanctum — the Holy of Holies." ⁽¹⁾ With love an intimate relation is established with God where there is no place of reasoning and logical disputes but in a simple and sincere attempt man discovers the secret of Truth. According to Ramakrishna the worship of God in any personal form as endorsed by bhakti is necessary at the early stage of the spiritual life of man and it ultimately leads to the realisation of oneness of all pervading consciousness.

Bhakti has been the constant theme of the sages in India and Shandilya or Narada are known as the special

1. Gospel of Ramakrishna. (Acc. to 'M') Part I P.-318.

writers on bhakti. The concept of bhakti in Ramakrishna's philosophy may be said very similar to that of Naradiya bhakti. He emphatically said that for Kaliyuga the path of devotion as described by Nārada is indeed, the best and the easiest. Bhakti is the supreme Divine Love together with its steps leading to it. It is the intense love for God. 'Sa tasmin paramapremarūpa' (Nārada Bhakti Sūtra. 2). According to Ramakrishna God may never be attained if a man has no intense longing for Him. The intense longing is the root of love and intimate attachment. He used to say, "Let all have a yearning for this Anurāga or intense love for the Lord. This intense love is the one needful thing."⁽¹⁾

Along with the constant practice of prayer if one completely surrenders himself to God, it will be easier for him to develop intense love to God. In the

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-242.

words of Ramakrishna, "The essence of bhakti consists in unceasing prayer for light and love and self-surrender to Her (Divine Mother)."⁽¹⁾ Here we find the reflection of Nārādīya Bhakti Sūtra, 19, 'Nārastu tadarpitākhita — cārata tad, Vismaraṇe paramavyākui-ateti' in Ramakrishna's contemplation. Nārada also holds that the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all activities, by complete self-surrender to Him and extreme anguish if He were to be forgotten.

In fact if one completely surrenders himself to God he can dive deep into the ocean of Bliss and can attain immortality. God is the 'Sea of sweetness' according to Ramakrishna and if one can taste it nothing will be left to desire, left to be gloomy about, nothing will be left to be envious of and nothing will be left to be attached to.⁽²⁾ In the words of Ramakrishna, "As the

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-249.

2. Dr. R. N. Vyas. Melody of Bhakti and Enlightenment. P.-205.

tiger devours animals, devotion also swallows up all the 'arch-enemies' of man, such as lust, passion and the rest. Once the devotion to God is fully awakened, all evil passions like lust and anger are completely destroyed." ⁽¹⁾ Divine love is so vibrant that to it any other worldly attachment becomes fainter and it is so sublime that a person derives ultimate satisfaction in it. Nārada describes its nature as 'amṛtasvarūpa ca' (Sūtra. 3).

The intense longing and deepest love for God were mainly found in the Gopies of Vrindāvana and in Rādhā. So we find Ramakrishna often mentioning the name of the Gopies in order to point out that their ways should be followed by a devotee to attain divine love. Nārada also said that Bhakti should be like that of the Gopies of Vraja. "Yatha Vrajagopikānam. (Sūtra.21) If one's love becomes as pure and intense as the Gopies he may be united with the beloved God or he will be lost

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-234.

in one indivisible whole. The Gopies of Vraja became one with Lord Kṛṣṇa in their intense feeling of love. Rama-krishna said, "As Srimati (Rādhā) was nearing Sri Kṛṣṇa, she was feeling more and more the fragrance of his hallowed person. The more one approaches God, the more becomes one's love of Him; the nearer the river approaches the sea, the more is it subject to ebb and flow." (1) At the highest stage of devotion also lover and beloved are merged into oneness of Truth and on this point the way of devotion and way of knowledge meet together. (2) Parābhakti becomes one with pure knowledge. In the words of Ramakrishna, "Pure knowledge and pure love are both one and the same." (3)

Ramakrishna's Vedantic discipline was perfected under the supervision of an ascetic, called Totapuri. The path of Vedantic discipline is somehow different from others. It approaches spiritual perfection by the celebrated negative

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1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-231.
 2. Dr. R.N.Vyas. Melody of Bhakti and Enlightenment. P.-209.
 3. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-244.

method, neti neti. Everything is rejected by the advaita vedantist in favour of the sole reality of the spirit. There is neither world, nor space, nor time, nor causality in any absolute sense of the terms there is only one positive entity, Brahman. Brahman is described in Advaita vedanta as Sacchidananda, the Absolute, which alone is the positive existent, the basis of the world appearance. All logical and epistemological distinctions remain within the field of māyā. The advaita discipline as a spiritual path aims at the apprehension of Sacchidananda Brahman, the non-dual principle where no discrimination can prevail. In this approach one essentially follows the path of negation and even negates his discriminating ego for a complete absorption in the ocean of bliss or to merge into nirvikalpa Samādhi. The aim of jñāna Yoga or the path of knowledge is to realise the non-difference in a direct experience as Brahman is not only the basis of world but also is the

innermost self (Ātman) in man. At the beginning of the jñāna yoga reason plays an important part no doubt but reason alone can not help a man to reach the Absolute Brahman. Non-duality with Brahman will be realised by the individual self when he overcomes all the rational
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discourses.

The Reality in its personal aspect can be approached through love, where the Impersonal can be grasped only through knowledge. Ramakrishna experimented with this truth when he practised the advaitic discipline under the guidance Totapuri. At the time of teaching the Advaitic discipline Totapuri asked Ramakrishna to detach his mind from all its objects and to plunge it into the heart of the Ātman. In spite of several efforts, Ramakrishna could not cross the level of name and form and lead his spirit to the state of the Unconditioned. He has expressed his experiences in this concern to his disciples that he felt no difficulty in detaching his mind from all

1. Nalini Devdas. Sri Ramakrishna. P.-19.

sion that Islam too was based on the same Truth as Hinduism. He had a direct realisation of the same Truth which he experienced earlier in different forms of Hinduism. Now its manifestation was in the Islamic form only. He encountered the presence of the same all pervading consciousness, as before, and became further convinced of the oneness of universal spirit.

When Ramakrishna came to know the life and teachings of Jesus from one of his contemporary follower Sambhu Charan Mallik who used to read the Bible to him, he became inspired to taste the religion of Christianity based on the ideal personality of Jesus, the image of great sacrifice for suffering humanity, the paradigm figure of human love. Breaking the barriers of creeds and religions he entered into the realm of ecstasy when he had the direct vision of Jesus. Christ possessed his soul and for three days he did not set foot in the Kali

temple. With the direct realisation of Jesus within his soul he discovered the essence of Christianity and proved that it is a great religion as it is based on human love. It is indeed an ideal which may not be contradicted by other religions and christianity is equally valid like all other religions in the world. (1)

His experiments with forms of religious life according to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity is a great challenge against the camouflage of religion in dogmas, rituals and ceremonies. He points out the essence regarding which all religions are true. One may be a Christian, a Mohammedan or a Hindu but all will meet at a point of perfection. In his words, "There are several bathing ghats in a large tank. Whoever goes to whichever ghat he pleases to take a bath or to fill his vessel reaches the water, and it is useless to quarrel with one another claiming one's ghat to be better than another's. Similarly, there are many ghats that lead to

1. Ramakrishna : The Prophet of New India. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. PP. 49-50.

the water of the fountain of Eternal Bliss. Every religion of the world is one ghat. Go direct with a sincere and earnest heart through any one of these ghats, and you shall reach the water of Eternal Bliss. But say not that your religion is better than that of another." (1) From these words it is very clearly seen that Ramakrishna revitalized all religions, respected each for its uniqueness and found out harmony of all religions. He not only says that all religions are ways of attaining truth but emphasises on the point that all religions are true; neither of them is false. Religious harmony as realised by Ramakrishna is somehow different from that of others. "There are several types of religious harmony. There is syncretic harmony, in which all religions are united by ignoring differences, a harmony epitomized in the now common slogans : 'all religions reach the same thing', etc. Then there is eclectic harmony, in which the 'best' parts of each religion are taken and combined into a new system.

1. Sayings of Sri Ramkrishna. PP. 148-149.

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Ramakrishna was neither of these." He did not teach the sameness of religions, but the uniqueness of each path was realised by him he gave equal respect to all religions. Universality lies in his regard of oneness of Truth. 'Truth is one though its facets are many' has been echoed by him several times. Each religion with its particular name has its own distinctive value which may not be ignored. Harmony of religions is based on the experience of oneness of Truth and for this reason it is an experimental fact more than a logical deduction. But unique individuality of each religion does not indicate that it should be exclusive in character. Rather all religions are intimately related to each other to share all growth and all learning though have their own independent existence. For this reason they all should be equally respected. It shows that each religion by itself, if followed sincerely respects the vision of the one God of many faces.

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1. Ramakrishna Matha and Ramakrishna Mission Convention.
1980. PP. 65-66.
 2. Ibid.

Such a religious tolerance of Ramakrishna though very rare is not uncommon in the eastern thought that we find the same tune in the Gītā which expresses, "There is no deity that I am not, and in case any man be truly the worshipper of any deity whatever, it is I that am the cause of his devotion and its fruit However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side in Mine." Similarly the Bhakta māla (cf. G. A. Grierson, ed., London, 1909) : "No one is ignorant of the doctrines of his own religion Therefore let everyman, so far as in him lieth, help the reading of the scriptures whether those of his own church, or those of another." (1) Here we find an universal approach in both. In the Gita the Lord says that He is the only Truth though manifesting in many forms. On this ground that each way of worshipping God is regarded true, its religious tolerance is based. Bhaktamāla

1. Coomaraswamy. Selected papers Metaphysics. ed. Roger Lipsy. P.-35.

similarly, due to its wide and open outlook encourages people to read and learn scriptures of any religion whatever they like because it believes that Truth inherent in religions is essentially one.

From all these facts it is evident that religious tolerance as we find in Asia is different from that of Europe. In this concern Europe is not founded upon the belief that all religions are true but rather founded on a growing indifference to all religious doctrines. ⁽¹⁾ The advantage of Asian thought is that here theology and the symbolic peculiarities of each faith are not suppressed. Tolerance if sought through suppression of theology leads to construct a new faith, a secular and worldly one, but it affords no genuine religious satisfaction. Religious tolerance should be spontaneous and be based on the living experience of oneness of Truth. Because Truth has no geographical boundary, has no frontier. Ramakrishna is

1. Coomaraswamy. Selected papers Metaphysics.
ed. Roger Lipsy. P.-35.

a successful thinker in this respect in modern age who realises in his life the equal validity of different religions and proclaims the truth that religions as ways to reach the goal are neither false nor inferior than others. In his words, "God is the Infinite
 Infinite are the ways."⁽¹⁾ Religions differ from each other regarding non-essentials but in essentials they are all one.⁽²⁾ Religion does not mean the doctrine, dogmas or creeds. They are of no avail in the pursuit of Truth. Truth is itself inexpressible in nature. So the concepts of God as we find in India that, "He takes the forms that are imagined by His worshippers" — are man made. Actually He should not be thought as confined by a particular form or as fully expressed in any form because He is the form of all forms or He transcends all forms. In this respect some Christian teachers rightly

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1. S. C. Chatterjee. Classical Indian Philosophies. 1963. P.-148.
 2. What Religion is in the words of Vivekananda. ed. Swami Vidyatmananda. P.-4.

If the doctrines and creeds are not to be more emphasised it is because that each religion has a soul behind it, and that alone is important. So religions may not be contradictory but they are supplementary to each other to manifest the universal Truth. The same universal Truth spreads itself in many ways which are regarded as religions of different groups. On this ground neither religion should be excluded from our consideration but Truth rather is manifested in all religions. Hence addition and not exclusion of any religion is the basis of religious tolerance of Ramakrishna. (1) Thus unity of all religions has been established by his direct and living experience of Truth in practice of Islam and Christianity as well as Hinduism and he becomes convinced about the Truth that there is no contradiction among them. All are the parts of one Eternal Religion. (2)

1. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.2.

P.- 365.

2. What Religion is ⁱⁿ the words of Swami Vivekananda.

ed. Swami Vidyatmananda. PP. 333-334.