

Chapter VII

Universal Religion of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Ramakrishna's religious thought can be best appreciated as giving expression to the essentials of universal religion. It was maintained in the last chapter that 'religion' as Ramakrishna understands, it is not a mere theoretical speculation but is spelt in terms of actual experience of Truth established on a strong foundation of spiritual strength. The blazing sun of the great Spiritual genius that Ramakrishna was, dissolved all the mists of dogmas and blind thoughts in the name of religion. It was indeed a great discovery of the essential harmony of all religions. It was never his intention to found any new religion. The phrase 'universal religion' is not used here to designate a type of religion in its historical development as Galloway and others have done. According

to Galloway universal religion is a kind of religion which carries within it powers of renewal and development than any other religion and which emphasises on spiritualistic aspect of man. On this ground he pointed out Christianity as the greatest of universal religions, because it fulfils the conditions of a Universal religion apart from the dogmatic assumptions. But in Ramakrishna's case the expression 'universal religion' points to the quality of a developed religious consciousness. Religion as realised by Ramakrishna neither means celebration of ceremonies and rituals, nor the acceptance of academic abstractions, rather it is a way of life or experience of Reality (anubhava). It is the perception of soul by a soul which depends on the growth of Spirituality in man. Religion is more behaviour oriented than belief, or it is the operative force to actualise the inner impulse to reach the Eternal. It is the common urge of man irrespective of Caste or Creed to proceed to Truth and the urge originates from religious consci-

ousness. It is the essential core of Ramakrishna's thought that Truth always manifests to an enlightened religious consciousness and religion is the endeavour for a Spiritual growth along with social and moral aspects of man. So any particular type of religion should not be called universal because Truth can never be limited by any view, prophet or sect but it is spontaneously manifested in a fulfilled way. In his interpretation of religious experience Ramakrishna presents those essential elements of Truth which are accepted by the religious heritage of mankind. We shall now propose to discuss the main tenets of religion to be universal at first and then let us see how they are present in Ramakrishna's religious philosophy.

The first and the foremost characteristic of religion to be universal is that it should be humanistic. A philosophy of man, his place in the universe and his relation with the Ultimate Reality will be a significant

feature of universal religion. It will be a study of the humanistic life in a scientific spirit and obviously it will be an attempt of awakening man from slumber who sleeps in spiritual unconsciousness. So it is more a living concept regarding spiritual aspect of man than a mere notion of God. Religion can exist without a definite conception of Deity but not without a man. Man is taken as a spiritual being and on this ground universal religion is idealistic in character. The only identity of man is that he is a spiritual being, and humanity therefore, is composed of souls and not composed of minds — scientific, artistic, philosophic, political and not of bodies — black and white, yellow and brown, male and female. "In each being dwells a light which no power can extinguish, an immortal spirit, benign and tolerant, the silent witness in his heart."⁽¹⁾ Religion if envisages man as spirit as such and frees him from all his limitations to establish him on equal status of divinity, can be said universal because it is the attempt

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Eastern Religion and Western Thought. 1975. P.-25.

which is welcomed by all cultures, ancient and modern.

For the existence of man in the divination he may not live by bread alone. He feels his limitations, imperfections and incompleteness acutely and at the same time yearns for the Perfect, the Eternal. He has the impulse towards perfection and immortality because he inevitably searches after Pure Truth and Unmixed Bliss. He has a glimpse for something Greater and Higher and has a constant aspiration for reaching it. This psychological state of man is attested by every religion. In favour of his aspiration for the Ideal and the feeling of the Holy man has a dissatisfaction with the actual and the mundane. All these are summed up in man's yearning for Truth. The yearning for Truth in man is one of the important facts of universal religion.

It is the function of religion to build up the personality in a pattern of growing more and more spiritual for the manifestation of the Truth in him. Thus

religion is a process of self-realisation. It is an unending process of approaching Truth as Infinite can never be reached fully by the finite. In the words of Vivekananda, "Man has wanted to look beyond, wanted to expand himself" ⁽¹⁾ He always proceeds from lesser Truth to a Greater Truth and his prayer is "From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to the light, from death lead me to immortality." ⁽²⁾ It is the universal prayer of man because along with his sense of limitations, imperfections and finitude he too is conscious of the potential divinity in him and therefore is ever trying to transcend his limitations to realise the Infinite Spirit which is his true self. Religion is nothing but man's ever attempt of self-realisation. It is an attempt to be recreated and purified in the light of the higher Truth. It is a process by means of which he wants to realise

1. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.2.
P.- 359.

2. Swami Ranganathananda. The Message of the Upanishads.
1971. P.-43.

his true self or he wants to realise to be a man in the true sense of the term. From the very beginning of history we find man's attempt to overcome his limitations as he is always inspired by new horizons, new perspectives and moves on and on by his thirst for something greater and nobler. This is the keynote of the progress of civilization that he wants to know more, he wants to do more and he wants to be more. In the language of Indian spiritualism, religion is a process by means of which man is searching for Immortality. Here we find a synthesis of man's aspiration and achievement. Man is never satisfied with his achievement, because what he achieves is finite, limited and imperfect and what he aspires for is the infinite, the eternal and the perfect. As long as he is a man of the earth religion will be the essential quality. He will never be satisfied with his actual life but the voice of the sages of the Upaniṣadas will be ever ringing in the ears of man, 'Uttisthata Jāgrata Prāpya varān nibodhata.'

Religion thus is a dynamic process. Galloway rightly points out that the marked characteristic of universal religion is dynamic and Huxley also describes it as a dynamic process. In the words of Vivekananda religion is a process of being and becoming. It is a process of self-development through self-transcendence. In this process one merges into the spiritual poise within and overcomes his materialistic needs of the lower self.

Hence another important characteristic of religion to be universal is that it should be an evolutionary process of soul's growth. Due to the primary divine necessity in man his humanity consists in a constant struggle to achieve the eternal, the permanent and immortal. In and through the constant struggle for the Eternal and the Imperishable man gradually evolves into divinity. He takes the mould of God if he realises in himself the presence of the

Infinite. As religion is man's search for his greater self, it is evermoving onward.

The universal element in religion is a search for God, search for something Great. God is no more regarded as a super-natural Being but is the central Truth of the universe which underlies all existing things including man. The divine spark is present in each man and it is not by theoretical discussion but through living vision of it in the deepest depth of his intuitive consciousness that man becomes aware of it. This also is basic to all religions. The source of idealism in man as we have already seen is his awareness of the divinity in him and God is nothing but the Ideal about which he is conscious in his spiritual realisation. Man's religion is therefore, nothing but the realisation of his potential divinity. So ultimately religion is value centric. It is the universal feature of religion that it is concerned with values.

In religion the ultimate cause of this universe is regarded as the Infinite, Eternal, Omnipotent, Super-natural, Spiritual Being which is called God, while in Science the cause of the universe is matter which at bottom is nothing but energy. The universe is nothing but the manifestation of that cosmic energy which is immanent in this matter and which is the constituent of the universe. The scientists like Huxley do not believe in any God as super-natural Being; but as the cause of the universe they accept the Infinite, eternal and cosmic energy which is inherent in matter. In the west therefore, there is a wide gap between religion and science. But universal religion has no contrast with science because it believes in a cause of the universe both as transcendent and immanent.

Universal religion aims at the salvation of total human race. Salvation is conceived as the fulfil-

ment of spirit in us or realisation of oneness with the Infinite. Liberation of the individual soul means complete self-manifestation. In a state of recognition of the divine presence in oneself the liberated soul extends its perception of unity with the cosmic many. Salvation means the entrance to a completeness from the incompleteness. "One is incomplete without its unity with the cosmic many."⁽¹⁾ For this reason the liberated soul extends itself to other individual souls and inspires to outburst them into the same divine self-consciousness. This notion of salvation is universal as it is concerned with the common urge of mankind. It is clearly pictured in the interpretation of theistic humanism which believes in salvation as the attainment of the true status of the individual. Religion is nothing but a process of self-discovery and the manifestation of divine in man is ^Kreconciled in respect of our

1. Sri Aurobindo. The Life Divine. Vol.1 P.-40.

longing for perfection, our sense of lack, our striving to attain consciousness of Infinity, our urge to the ideal. (1) Huxley is quite right when he says that

religion is a natural growth of the innerself of man.

The root of religion does not lie in man's consciousness of something that is the spirituality which is already present in man. But the spirit though inherent in man is not something finite or limited like man. It has its root in the Infinite which lies also beyond man. Hence man is always aware of the inner spirituality which inspires him to go beyond his actual limited finite self. But atheistic humanism can not explain why man wants to go beyond his self. The reply is clearly given by theistic humanism.

Universal religion asks us to believe in one universal spirit which pervades all sects, all tenets and all religious systems. In spite of differences regarding time and space, rituals and ceremonies,

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Eastern Religion and Western Thought. P.-25.

religions and practices, the spirit of religion is one and universal as it consists no distinction and no conflict. As the universal spirit is manifested to all, religions are nothing but the fragmentary expressions of this one Truth. They are the reflections of the same Truth in different ways. (1)

Truth, which is ineffable in character can be realised from the depths of intuitive consciousness and hence mysticism is an important factor of religion to be universal as it believes in the revelation of Truth in a direct vision of the seer. A mystic has the vision of whole Truth in his realisation of identity of finite self and Infinite being merged into the ocean of Infinite consciousness. Mysticism is never a reproach to the world irrational or a flight to unreason but is penetration into the deepest level where our spirit can refresh ourselves to have a direct contact with

1. Thakur Sambhunath Chakraborty. Universal Religion.
PP. 12-14.

the supreme at ease. It is the function of an open religion to save humanity from the horror of creeds and rituals. Mysticism is the basis of this open religion and is an effective spiritual insight which assumes indivisible oneness of human life. Religion in the mystic sense is something which our entire self is, feels and does. ⁽¹⁾ If religion is the quest of Truth, mysticism claims its universal character since in this way of 'seeing' Reality there remains no conflict and hence it is beyond dogmas and creeds.

Truth is not mere theoretical conviction but it is realised in living experience. The satisfaction of spiritual hunger is more important than any other theoretical discussion regarding nature of Truth and the ways of approaching it. It is better to taste the Truth with life and experience than to waste time in useless disputes and arguments. Religion is thus a living experience of Truth.

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Eastern Religion and Western Thought. PP. 61-63.

In the universal religion there is a blending of sacred and secular. As long as religion is concerned only with the supernatural God or the kingdom of heaven or with the spirit whose reality negates the reality of the worlds, there remains a distinction between sacred and secular. Material world would be regarded as unreal and the bodily existence as the root cause of all evils and immorality. The kingdom of heaven is supposed to be away from the world. But universal religion considers the material world real because it is the manifestation of the spiritual principle. The body is sacred as it is the temple of God and the kingdom of heaven is within us because divinity is present in each man. Mere secularism can not strengthen religion but it should be based on some spiritualistic ideals which come from the deepest level of man's regard for sacredness inherent in him.

Feeling of sacredness relates a man to something higher than some external principles on which secularism depends.⁽¹⁾ Here external decorum will be guided by the inner world.

1. Christopher Isherwood. Vedanta for modern man. 1952.

In universal religion renunciation and service go together. By renunciation we overcome our individual self so that we can serve for the Universal self which is present in humanity. Self-development depends on a development of total self. Human self is composed of two elements — the spiritual or the higher self and the bodily self or the lower self. To realise the higher self one need not annihilate the lower self, but should only sublimate and divinise it. The individual ego, body, mind, senses and the intellect should be sacrificed for the realisation of the Infinite self. Self-sacrifice is necessary for the self-development. Ego consciousness should be controlled for the attainment of supreme consciousness. But it is only an initial stage. Pure asceticism is only a means but not an end of religious goal. Because if one is enlightened with spiritual consciousness, he realises his unity in the universal consciousness which is manifested in everything and at this stage he may be inspired to serve the whole

world. In fact religion has two aspects — internal and external, contemplation and action. It is the realisation of the universal spirit in the inner world of contemplation and inspiration to act for the good of the whole universe. Hence the essential feature of universal religion will be that for its external expression love and service to mankind. In all religions we find the highest virtue lies in love and service to humanity. Christianity says God is love. The Islam preaches universal brotherhood and the Upanishads affirm the oneness of all existence.

In religious experience or in the experience of self-realisation the internal and the external aspects should be blended. True religion should comprise an integrated development of all aspects of human consciousness — mysticism, knowledge, emotion and the will. The human mind works as a whole. It has all the elements of cognition, emotion and conation. In a particular state

of inner consciousness there may be a predominance of reasoning but the other predominance of thinking and feeling must be present. In our intellectual consciousness one understands the presence of unity in diversity present in nature. He may also know the logical connection between God and man. But this knowledge is not mere rational or logical but there must be a feeling, a feeling of unity in diversity, a feeling of oneness. And this feeling also inspires man to behave in a particular way in his practical life. So the feeling and behaviour of a jñani is different from a man whose knowledge is incomplete or imperfect. Similarly in devotion or love we do not find any blind sentiment or infatuation but a rational cognition where he realises his basic relationship with the Divine and the whole of humanity. A blind infatuation causes orthodoxy, intolerance and religion in stead of enhancing spiritual progress — destroys the very purpose of religion. Thus it is said that

true devotion must have an element of rational understanding of Reality. It is said that bhakti is regarded as jñāna. Because the goal of bhakti is not a mere emotional or sentimental phantasy but a definite knowledge or understanding, the intimate relation between finite and the Infinite. The attempt when emotionally expressed is bhakti and when expressed intellectually is known as knowledge and thus both knowledge and devotion are intimately related. Again action without knowledge and love is blind and mechanical. In the Gita the Lord teaches Arjuna the metaphysical truth of the nature of the soul and its relation with the Infinite soul and on that basis he preaches niṣkāma Karma. Niṣkāma Karma can not be practised by any body mechanically but it needs some feeling, understanding, basic knowledge about man's highest Truth or highest idea and man's intense feeling and desire to realise that ideal in his actual life. In the stage of mysticism there is a feeling of oneness or identity

between the self and the God. At the same time there is a feeling of spiritual calmness and equanimity, a feeling of the joy of enlightenment and at once a will to participate the knowledge with the rest of humanity.

Now let us see how all these essential features of universal religion are maintained by Ramakrishna.

In the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna man's identity is recognised as a Spiritual unit, man is said to contain within himself a spark of the divine. Ramakrishna was highly critical of the Christian idea of man as a fallen. The idea of the original sin is alien to Hindu thought. Many contemporary Indian thinkers have protested against this dogma and Ramakrishna could be taken to have put the matter in a forcible rhetoric at the turn of this century. His idea about the dignity of man can be appreciated from citations from thinkers who have been influenced by Ramakrishna, the foremost among them is of course,

Vivekananda. The spiritual strength of man was recognised by Vivekananda because each soul to him is infinite and omnipresent. In his words, "The Real Man, the Spirit, being beyond cause and effect, not bound by time and space, must therefore be free. He was never bound, and could not be bound."⁽¹⁾ He further says that "Religion is the manifestation of the natural strength that is in man. A spring of infinite power is coiled up and is inside this little body, and that spring is spreading itself. And as it goes on spreading, body after body is found insufficient; it throws them off and takes higher bodies."⁽²⁾ Vivekananda's conception of man may be said the best expression of Ramakrishna's philosophy of man. In the words of Ramakrishna man is the owner of infinite power and is the abode of divinity. For this reason man alone can think of God, can think of Infinite which no other creatures can think.⁽³⁾ Man is regarded as the top-most creation of

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1. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.11
P.-78..
 2. Ibid. Vol. VIII. P.-185.
 3. Kathamrta. Vol.-5. P.-122.

God. Not only that but also he is potentially divine and contains within himself all the power and majesty implied in the concept of God head. Man is basically different from an animal due to the fact that he is the manifestation of Supreme spirit in the highest degree and for this reason he can not rest satisfied with ordinary way of living, with bare existence and with the instinct of self-preservation. Man does not live by bread alone but wants to live nobly. The desire for a higher and nobler life is the first step of religion and all religious teachers have hold that there should be higher and nobler life which is qualitatively superior to mere material life and existence. From this it is evident that philosophy of Ramakrishna is established on the idealistic back ground of man, because man is conceived as an embodiment of spirit. Ramakrishna's idea of religion is man-centred, he emphatically points to the inner spirituality in man.

The yearning for Truth in man which is one of the important facts of the universal religion, is clearly

spelt out in the religious thought of Ramakrishna. According to him man's thirst for the Infinite, his spiritual hunger is the point from which religion begins. This spiritual hunger is common to man of all ages and hence is the universal element in all religions. An unquenching spiritual thirst in man is the sole condition of attaining Truth and Truth according to Ramakrishna is God. In the words of Ramakrishna, "He finds God quickest, whose concentration and yearning are strongest." ⁽¹⁾ Further, "As the drowning man pants hard for breath, so must one's heart yearn for the Lord, before one can find Him." ⁽²⁾ He used the homely metaphor and said that restlessness for God should be like a restless clerk who has lost his job and every day asked for any vacancy in the office. ⁽³⁾ Again describing how the intensity of our longing for the Lord should be, he

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1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-190.
 2. Ibid. P.-188.
 3. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. 1942. P.-225

uses another analogy, "The love that a devoted wife possesses for her beloved husband, the attachment that a miser feels for his hoarded wealth, and the clinging desire that the worldly minded people foster for the things of the world — when the intensity of your heart's longing for the Lord is equal to the sum⁽¹⁾ of these three, then you will attain Him."

The significance of Ramakrishna's utterances quoted above and of his emphasis on spiritual thirst or intense longing for Truth is that it is the only feature in man regarding which he has no time for deliberating concerning the means of attaining Truth. In our attempt to quench the Spiritual thirst our goal is more important than the means. In this situation he who feels real spiritual thirst does not discard the religion near at hand, or the Church to which one is born. Just as he who feels thirsty does not discard the water of the river merely because it is muddy, nor

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-188.

does he begin to dig a well to find clear water. (1)

Again spiritual thirst in man is the precondition for attaining Truth. In his words, "Longing is like a rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes sun. Longing is followed (2) by the vision of God."

Ramakrishna said more than once that the only purpose of life is to attain God. God in Ramakrishna's philosophy is the all pervading divine energy manifesting in the universe including man. Due to the presence of Infinite Spirit in man he ever aspires for an unfoldment of his true nature. His endeavour for unfoldment of his nature if be sincere, causes a spiritual upliftment. Man's intense longing for Truth begins his religious approach but his sincere attempt helps him to reach the Eternal in a process of realising his self. In Ramakrishna's philosophy attainment of God means the realisation

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. PP. 187-188.

2. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. tr. Swami Nikhilananda.
P.-83.

of self and thus religion as realised by Ramakrishna is a dynamic process of self realisation.

Ramakrishna says that man has the infinite possibilities ahead of him and on this ground it may be said that man's spiritual progress continues along with his social, political and moral progress in a process of evolution. Regarding this point Ramakrishna's religious philosophy resembles modern scientific view of evolution according to which the world was not created all at once in the form in which it now exists. The present state of the world with all its infinite variety of organic and inorganic forms has been slowly evolved through a long period of time. It is believed that the process has been, on the whole, from lower to higher, from simple to complex, from undifferentiated to differentiated states. According to evolutionary humanism which is regarded by Huxley as the 'religion of the Scientists — the process of evolution has not been stopped with man. The humanistic religion of

Huxley puts man in the highest status of existence.

But this theory of man is established on science and the mechanistic evolution takes place. The very fact that man has evolved from lower form of existence accepted by science shows that evolution is a process from lower to higher form of existence. But why it is so it can not be explained by mechanistic evolution.

The Indian view point is that it is spirit and not matter is the basic principle of the universe. Matter has energy inherent in it no doubt but the cosmic energy of which the universe is the manifestation, is regarded by science as blind and mechanical. Hence it can not explain why there is an evolution from the

lower to the higher state of existence. On the other

hand, according to the Indian thinkers, evolution is

that of a Spiritual principle. Evolution is conceived

as the manifestation of a self-conscious spirit unfolding itself from lower to the higher grades of existence.

Thus matter is also the manifestation of Brahman and

man is the highest manifestation of spirit. Because man has the unique quality of self-consciousness by means of which he is aware of the Infinite Spirit present in him and which underlies the whole universe as the basic principle. Thus evolutionary humanism of Huxley makes man the crown of all existing things by describing unique qualities of man by a mechanical explanation of facts, but it can not explain why man is so. The spiritualism of the Upaniṣads and vedanta scores a point on this issue. Vedantic religion of Ramakrishna is humanistic to the core, and it believes in the divinity of man, his educability and perfectibility and in the oneness of human spirit. It thus explains why man is a unique creature. This religion is nothing but the expression of man's eternal search for his inner divinity, a search for the Infinite spirit.

Another characteristic of universal religion that it must be value-centric, has also been proved by

Ramakrishna. He realises the existence of God as inherent and the essential principle in man and on this ground the identity of Ātman and Brahman is established by him. Regarding the point that religion is nothing but realisation of value in life, Ramakrishna's universal religion has a basic agreement with that of Huxley. Huxley did not accept God as something supernatural and away from heaven. For him value is the divinity. Ramakrishna's conception of the immanence of divinity in man is only a more enriched form of humanism where man is regarded as potential God.

Regarding the cause of the universe we find in Ramakrishna's religious thought a wonderful blending of the religious and scientific views when he says that Śakti and Śiva are inseparable. Brahman is here regarded as both transcendent and immanent, impersonal and personal, passive and active, the unique

reality whose two aspects are Siva and Sakti. It is an improvement on both scientism and religion in that the supernatural and the natural, the spiritual and the material, the transcendent and the immanent, the impersonal and the personal are regarded as two aspects of one and same reality. Reality is one and one only — the one which synthesises in it all contradictions.

Religion of Ramakrishna is universal as it aims at the salvation of total human race, salvation where conceived as the fulfilment of the spirit in us or realisation of oneness with the Infinite. Theistic humanism of Ramakrishna argues that something more in man than is apparent in his ordinary consciousness, something which frames ideals and thoughts, a finer spiritual presence (1) which makes him dissatisfied with mere earthly pursuits. Philosophy of Ramakrishna points out that God is life and recognition of this fact depends on the manifestation of spiritual consciousness in man.

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Eastern Religion and Western Thought.

In the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna God is conceived as the universal spirit manifesting through everything in the universe and it covers the whole gamut of life including the external and the internal. God is the only Truth, the goal of life in Ramakrishna's philosophy as we have already seen. As regards the nature of Truth which is one and universal it is unity, and all religions are different ways or spiritual approaches to this Truth of oneness, "Unity in variety is the plan of the universe. If it is true that God is the centre of all religions, and that each of us is moving towards Him along one of these radii, then it is certain that all of us must reach that centre. And at the centre, where all the radii meet all our differences will cease."⁽¹⁾

In the quest of Truth all religions are nothing but mere approaches in different ways. In Ramakrishna's words, "Different creeds are but different paths to

1. What Religion is in the words of Swami Vivekananda.
ed. Swami Vidyatmananda. 1972. P.-25.

(1)
 reach the one God." Here we notice an equal regard to all religions which is the important element in universal religion. All religions are true, neither of them is false. He left every religion undisturbed, neither did he start a new religion. He realised that all religions are at bottom one, they all teach the same truth and lead to the same goal. In his words, "Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Mohammedan should follow Mohammedanism. For the Hindu the ancient path, the path of the Aryan rishis, is the best. A truly religious man should think of other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions." (2)
 The principle on which Ramakrishna's universal religion based is, "If one religion is true, then by the very same logic all other religions are also true, the veri-

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-149.

2. Ibid. P.-156.

fication of which is found in the fact that holiness, purity and charity are not exclusive possessions of any church men and women of the most exalted character." (1) From all these we note that in Ramakrishna's view, not only that the existence of many sects and religions is not obstacle in the way but actually helps the realisation of universal religion also. Regarding taste, outlook and capacity of individual one religion differs from another and for this reason no one religion can perfectly satisfy the needs of all. Thus religion is universal which gives rise to no new sect to stop sectarianism but which finds out truth in every sect and sympathises with and appreciates every sincere longing to the human heart, knowing it to be an urge towards light and truth. (2)

Mysticism, as we have seen, is the important characteristic of universal religion as it assumes

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1. The complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.1, P.-24.
 2. Swami Ranganathananda. "Sri Ramakrishna and Universal Religion." The 44th Foundation Day Souvenir, 1982. Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta. PP. 4-5.

indivisible oneness of finite self and the Infinite. It is vividly expressed in the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna himself was a mystic and his advice was to dive deep into the ocean of immortality. (1) Truth is beyond thought, words and speech and so it can never be attained by mere intellectual pursuits. Intellectual approach can help a man before realisation of Truth which has been expressed by Ramakrishna in an analogy, "water poured into an empty vessel makes a bubbling noise, but when the vessel is full, no sound is heard. Similarly, a man who has not found God is full of vain disputation about His existence and nature. But he who has seen Him, silently enjoys (2) the bliss Divine."

Ramakrishna proves that religion is the living experience of Truth. In his words, "Two friends went into an orchard. One of them possessing much worldly wisdom, immediately began to count the mango trees there

1. Kathamṛta. Vol. 1. P.-130.

2. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-65.

and the number of mangoes each tree bore, and to estimate what might be the approximate value of the whole orchard. His companion went to the owner, made friends with him and then, quietly going to a tree, began at his host's desire to pluck the fruits and eat them. Whom do you consider to be the wiser of the two ? Eat mangoes ! It will satisfy your hunger. What is the good of counting the trees and leaves and making calculations ? The vain man of intellect busies himself uselessly with finding out the 'why' and 'wherefore' of creation, while the humble man of wisdom makes friends with the creator and enjoys His gifts of Supreme Bliss." ⁽¹⁾ Thus if Truth, which is beyond thought, words and speech, be realised in the profoundest level of intuitive consciousness — there will be a pure enjoyment of drinking the nectar of Absolute — everlasting knowledge and bliss. In this case truth is revealed in a flash of inner vision of the seer. No particular theology can describe fully the essence of religious consciousness, and at the same

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. PP. 68-69.

time no particular theology is absolutely false because it testifies man's glimpse or vision of the Infinite Truth. Ramakrishna puts an end to the conflicts, quarrels among all religions because all of them according to him are valid as ways of attaining Truth. Temples, churches, images and books are useful even they may be necessary, though they are not end of religion. They are as Vivekananda describes, the kindergarden schools which are necessary as the means to attain religious knowledge. All the different forms of worship are valid as means, but as ends they are not. They are important only when they are regarded as means of reaching the ultimate end of religion — the realisation of the spirit or the True self in man. So there should not be any conflict among religions. Ramakrishna says, "one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or the staircase or a rope, so too diverse are the ways of approaching God and each

religion in the world shows one of the ways." (1)

Further, another important characteristic of universal religion that there should be a blending of sacred and secular, is also maintained by Ramakrishna. God in his philosophy, as we have seen, is not a Supernatural being and the kingdom of heaven is not here supposed to be away from the world. The world is the manifestation of all pervading consciousness which Ramakrishna realised in his living experience. It is the spiritual principle that manifests the material world too and on this ground material world would never be regarded as unreal. Ramakrishna supposed each individual as the abode of divinity and therefore, body is sacred as it is the temple of God. It is also proved that kingdom of heaven is within us as divinity is present in each man.

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-149.

Ramakrishna's religion is a great inspiration for service to humanity. It never supports mere asceticism or renunciation. Asceticism is needed at the initial stage of spiritual realisation. One should practise devotion in solitude for sometime — if he desires to live in the world unattached. Because, "The best curd is formed when the milk is left quite still; shaking, or even changing the pot, spoils it." (1)

In Vedantic religion the material world and our physical existence are to be negated only to have the affirmation in the light of Brahman. In Ramakrishna's ease asceticism of this sort has no place. One should be involved with everything necessary for life but with the consciousness of Brahman, the Supreme Reality inherent in everything. In his words, "Always perform your duties unattached with your mind fixed on God." (2)

Ramakrishna says, "If you first fortify yourself with the true knowledge of the universal self, and then live in the midst of wealth and worldliness, surely they will in no way affect you." (3) He further says, "So

1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-100.

2. Ibid. P.-99.

3. Ibid. P.-101.

long as the heart of man is directed towards God, he can not be lost in the ocean of worldliness." ⁽¹⁾ Thus religious philosophy of Ramakrishna is a noble inspiration to act along with contemplation. Throughout his life Ramakrishna resorted to God-knowledge which alone can make the sacred plan and purpose of the phenomena living and practical. His quest for God within soul aims at the regeneration of mankind. He says, "Love you must, because God dwells in all beings." ⁽²⁾ On this principle he bridges the gulf between God and man and points out that service to humanity is the best way of attaining God. His teaching 'love of man is love of God' leads us to establish a universal brotherhood based on the principle of 'Sameness to all.' As spiritual-divine beings all men are one irrespective of caste, creed and complexion, and realisation of his truth is culminated to an outward expression of love and brotherhood in man.

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1. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-101.
 2. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. Newyork, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre. 1942. P.-572.

The religious philosophy of Ramakrishna is a synthesis of knowledge, devotion action and mysticism. The difference between knowledge and devotion remains in the preliminary stage of attaining God according to Ramakrishna. The difference is only the knowledge of the knower and the knowledge of the lover. ⁽¹⁾ Pure knowledge and pure love are one and the same as both of them destroy the ego consciousness in man for attaining Truth. Knowledge burns into ashes and devotion fills it up with God consciousness. Again action should be practised by any body with some feeling, understanding and basic knowledge about man's highest truth. His lesson for niskāma Karma is possible only if one is enlightened with the knowledge of God. Because then and then will he can sacrifice any fruits of action at the name of God. Further, he will be the best man to serve mankind if he becomes the devotee of action. His feeling of love to mankind will help him to follow the path of action through service to humanity.

1. V. S. Naravane. Modern Indian Thought. 1964. P.-73.

Ramakrishna emphatically pointed out the practical aspect of religion and accordingly it has been proved that intense feeling and desire to realise that ideal should be actualised in his practical life. In mysticism when there is a feeling of oneness with the God, there arises a hankering to participate the knowledge with the rest of humanity. Ramakrishna was a Sannyasin. He knew the joys of Samādhi as the union with God. At the same time he was conscious that he had something to teach the world. He rediscovered the meaning of Brahman as the Universal and Ultimate Reality but he was very much eagerly waiting for the right person who would carry the message to humanity. Thus in the spiritual experience of Ramakrishna we find a blending of four elements of consciousness — cognitive, affective, conative and mystic.