

Introduction

The spirit of religion may be said to lie in the unity of mankind based on the constant effort of the individual in the pursuit of Truth. Religion in some of its developed manifestations is universal in nature and aims at the union of the finite with the Infinite. The failure of realising this true meaning and significance of term 'religion' and its practical applicationⁱⁿ life of man gives birth to dogmatism and encourages sectarianism in Society. Conflict among people in respect of their different religious beliefs arises due to overemphasis on the superficial aspects of their religions such as dogmas, creeds, doctrines, rituals, manner of worship etc. and destroys the basic unity of mankind.

Among the world's living religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam aim to be universal while other eight like Confucianism, Hinduism, Taoism, Shintoism, Judaism, Sikhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism are hereditary or national, being satisfied with their own following. Buddhism, Christianity and Mohammedanism which aim to be universal are actually based on human love and they are developed through the ages. Growth of religion according to the needs of man and humanistic approach is an eminent feature of the phenomenon no doubt, but religion in the true sense of the term, it is argued to

be one and universal. Truth is one though manifested in different forms and all the ways of approaching truth are valid. Religion which is conceived as universal must be one possessing all the features suitable for man of all ages and all places. It can never remain confined within particular scriptures, prophets or country or sect. Books and prophets can teach a man to mould his spirituality to know the Truth, but they are not the only factors on which religion depends. Religion, if realised to be universal will have no limitation. In the pursuit of Truth each individual is free to choose the way he likes. No approach to Truth, if sincere and honest, is false and thus equal regard of all religions is another important principle due to which it claims to be universal.

A universal message of Ramakrishna regarding harmony of all faiths ushered in an era of abiding peace and good will among mankind. He was a Mahātman to MaxMuller, 'the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people' in the words of Romain Rolland, avatāravariṣṭha (the foremost of divine incarnations) in the eye of Vivekananda and Aurobindo knew him as 'God manifest in a human being.' Ramakrishna was not born a prince like Rāma, nor he had the beauty and power of Kṛṣṇa, nor did he possess the intellectual acumen of Buddha, yet he raised to spiritual eminence all by his yearning and exertions guided by his innermost self. He had the direct

experience (aparokṣānubhūti) of Truth from the beginning of his spiritual life and his spiritual teachers came later to initiate him into different kinds of spiritual discipline though these were no more than a formal recognition of his previous experience. His spiritual practices in sāstric manner were the experiments to test the validity of what he had already known. In this concern his approach resembles to that of a scientist who usually does formation of a hypothesis and then tests its validity through experiment. Dr. Amal Tripathi addresses Ramakrishna as 'the scientist of spirit par excellence'. His constant struggle for Truth and his intimate contact with Reality in all phases of his life and his life of complete self dedication at the alter of humanity began a new chapter in the history of religious achievements. His lofty spirit of renunciation, his child like simplicity and oceanlike depth of having a living experience of God intoxication nourished in the Hindu spiritual traditions with a revolutionary spirit of establishing one Universal religion from practical point of view. He opened the eye of the orthodox thinkers that how reform movements in religion may be welcomed along with the traditional sense of values in Hinduism. He could be said to have shown that Hinduism is a finer metaphysical discipline in it capable of evoking spiritual powers and extensive visions in man.

It is said that 'the Saint must be a man of the world'. As a Saint of the world Ramakrishna is seen to teach man the non-rigorous, non-ascetic ways of attaining God in this life. His liberated soul after repeated attainment of Samādhi chose to pass his days to convince people about Truth and to ^{get them} renounce their craze for material goods he tried to fill their emptiness with love of God. He proved by his life that a man can easily attain God if he has a hankering for Truth and has a simple faith. Faith is beyond knowledge. It is the volitional repositing of the human mind in the Divine Mind to acquire the power to transform its nature to a stage of purity. He believes that less a man is burdened with book learning and complex question-ing of the whys and wherefores of the universe, the more he has a chance to recognise and enjoy the savory of religious fruits.

Though he was not a man of formal education and accustomed to sophisticated urban culture, he was such a spiritual genius that many intellectuals of that age were attracted to him. His speciality lies in his excellent use of metaphors and analogies for teaching the profoundest truth of man and God. Keshab Chandra Sen published an article about Ramakrishna in 'The Indian Mirror' under the title 'A Hindu Saint' on 28th March, 1875, "We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and

were charmed by the depth penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful⁽¹⁾ Ramakrishna's metaphorical use of religious statements, his belief in God and his conviction on faith than reason prove that he presents a religious philosophy instead of philosophy of religion. While different thinkers are seen to present different kinds of religious philosophies, Philosophy of religion is one which finds out the significance and value of religious concepts so that we become more acutely aware of the puzzling aspects of them. It justifies or examines the fundamental religious beliefs, particularly the existence of God with the consideration of reason. Here is an intellectual interest to produce the philosophical thought or philosophical reflection about religion. Its style of expression is more logical and methodical as we find in advaita philosophy of Sankara. Even the notion of God is here taken as more a philosophical concept than that of religion. But the way of expression that we find in most of the religious philosophies is not logical. Even the religious statements here are applied more carelessly that make us often confused

1. Ādi Kathāmṛta, ed. Shyamal Basu, P.-115.

to determine the very particular method contained in the system. In a word, it has no clear philosophical expression. For this reason religious statements used by Ramakrishna to express the inner truths of his philosophy often seem to be confusing. As for example once he said to Vivekananda, "As I see this fan directly before me, in exactly the same manner have I seen God." (1) Here the verb 'see' used by him neither means external perception as pointed out by the Nyayayikas because he does not mean a physical object with forms. Again it is not the extraordinary perception of Yogaja pratyaksa. Because Yogaja pratyaksa does not mean the perception of any formless. The Yogins can perceive the most distant objects directly by their mind. Then it may be said that Ramakrishna used the word metaphorically.

Metaphors enable a man to be articulate and they are found to be born in insight. A good metaphor yields many possibilities of articulation. (2) The mystic has the vision of whole Truth when he merges fully in the Infinite Consciousness and realises the identity of Atman and Brahman. This realisation is really ineffable in character and for this

(1) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. 1942. P.-949.

2. IAN T. - Ramsey. Models and Mystery. P. - 46.

reason they are expressed by some terminologies which are symbolical and philosophy therefore investigates their source or ground and the reason why they are used. Instead of taking refuge in a holy silence a mystic can express his experience in terms of models and metaphors. Models and metaphors are in a way symbolical representation of what is mysterious making compatible with human experience. A symbol is a visible sign of an invisible

(1) entity. To worship a symbol as God is idolatry, but to worship God through a symbol is a legitimate means of divine communion. Ramakrishna worshipped God through a symbol of Goddess Kāli. Kāli in his philosophy is conceived not an image of clay but is the same as absolute all pervading consciousness. In this respect he was the worshipper of an ideal but not of idol, a symbol of Sakti here is taken as the cosmic dynamic energy.

Models as if gives form to the formless to be understood. "... Mystery is articulated in models" (2) On this ground it may be said that Ramakrishna's use of the word 'mother' is not unphilosophical, rather it is the model where mystery of unlimited divine cosmic energy has been articulated.

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1. The Upanisads. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-52.
 2. IAN T. Ramsey. Models and Mystery. P.-70.

Further his originality lies in his new interpretation of Reality, relation between God and man and his discovery of new significance in his spiritual disciplines of Tantra and Vaishnavism. On his realization he derived from Tantra that all women should be taken as mother. In fact, Vivekananda pointed out the significance of his mātr-sādhana (worship of God as Mother) as uplifting the weaker sex in society. Again regarding his practice of Vaishnavic discipline though he may be categorised under the model of Chaitanya, he also differs from him. Because ecstatic devotion and supreme devotion in which Chaitanya was immersed in the last phase of his life was considered by him very much painful and unfit for people. In the words of Dr. Amales Tripathi, "If Chaitanya is cātaka, ever yearning, Ramakrishna is Wordsworth's, (1) 'true to the kindered points of heaven and home'."

Teachings of Ramakrishna are not mere scriptural exigesis but are the results of the lived experience of the Godhead in his life. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The Story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face."

1. Amales Tripathi. "Sri Ramakrishna and the religious thought in the nineteenth century." Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. Vol. XXXV. No.6 June, 1984. Gol Park Calcutta. P.-125.

A seer of Truth that he was he discovered and realised it in his life and hence his 'sayings are the pages from the books of life'. Yet the problem arises regarding the authenticity of the sources of his teachings as they are not put down by himself. In this respect we find his case to be similar to Jesus Christ's or Buddha's though Ramakrishna is more a contemporary of ours than they are. Just as the teachings of Jesus Christ or Buddha can be known from the interpretations of their followers in different ways, similarly the philosophy of Ramakrishna can be known from his disciples, and contemporary thinkers of that age who came close to him. Keshab Chandra Sen was the first person in nineteenth century to broadcast the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the educated Indians sometimes translating his teachings in English. (1) Another book 'Srimat Ramakrishna Paramahansera Ukti' was published by Brahma Samaj in 1878. (2) At the inspiration of Keshab Sen, Sayings of Ramakrishna were published in the religious papers from 15th March, 1875 to 1878 as answers to the questions raised by the people. (3) All these, we can say, are contemporary documents or authentic sources of Ramakrishna's teachings.

1. Adi Kathāmṛta. ed. Shyamal Basu.P.-115.

2. Ibid. P.-113.

3. Ibid. P.-113.

"Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga" by Swami Saradananda and "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" by 'M' are the authentic sources for knowing his life and teachings too. Sri Mahendranath Gupta who came close to Ramakrishna between 1882 to 1886, used to write down the Master's sayings and teachings in his diary. These were the most important data from which he composed 'The Gospel of Ramakrishna'.⁽¹⁾

Vivekananda's writings are also the most important source concerning Ramakrishna's views. We generally see Ramakrishna through the eyes of Vivekananda. The Swami began his religious life with a skeptical attitude and he never followed his Master blindly. He tested his Master many times till he realised that Ramakrishna was the greatest of avatāras, and that his teachings are living truths for the entire world. Vivekananda was amazed to hear his Master say that he could see God just as he saw Vivekananda. Vivekananda never before had heard such a bold statement regarding direct experience of God. In his words, Ramakrishna is the founder of religion; he himself is all religions as such.⁽²⁾ All religions are taken by him as the

1. Ādi Kathāmṛta. ed. Shyamal Basu. P.-113.

2. "Om Sṭhāpakāya ca dharmasya Sarbadharma Svarupine."
Stabakusumānjali Ed. Swami Gambhīrānanda. P.-374.

expressions of one eternal religion and in this sense all
 (1)
 are intimately related.

Ramakrishna embodied such catholicity of outlook and
 humility that he was against the traditional system of priest-
 hood. We find a revolutionary spirit in him; he never thought
 himself as a master of his disciples, but for his equal regard
 to all religions he became known to the world as a great
 personality for teaching tolerance which is the most essential
 need of this age. He realised that we proceed from truths to
 higher truths and as even the lowest religious form contains
 a grain of Truth, it has possibility of further evolution.
 Ramakrishna's religious universalism was so unique a feature
 of his thought that his disciples always made it a point to
 live up to this ideal. From a contemporary religious document
 published in the year 1886, we learn that at the funeral of
 Ramakrishna, his mortal frame was carried alongwith the flags
 of different faiths like Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism
 and Christianity. (2) It is an important document from which
 we can know that his teachings of religious synthesis were not
 only understood but also warmly welcomed by the people at large.

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1. Swami Śiṣya Saṁbāda. Sri Sarat Chandra Chakraborty. P.-56.
 2. Ādikathamṛta. ed. Shyamal Basu. PP.-109-110.

They had realised that Ramakrishna was the originator of one universal religion, that religion was not a matter of dogma, doctrine and creed, but spontaneous flowering of the soul to God. Religion is harmony, a basic unity based on the quest of the oneness of Truth.

Ramakrishna's has been an attempt to show how religion is one and universal. We shall discuss the matter in the first chapter in a fuller manner with a view to show that the anti-religious views in the modern age have developed due to the misconception about religion as mere dogma or creed. Man is essentially religious in the sense that his religious life is the pursuit of Truth in a process of self-transcendence. It is the way of remarking man in the form of spirituality to realise the Truth within. Here there is no conflict between religion and no-religion.

Religion has forever been on the move, it developed from primitive to national and national to universal religion. In the second chapter it will be shown how the essential features of universal religion were already present in primitive religion in a rudimentary form. Religion transcends the old naturalistic

limitations in national religion as the nation is a closely unified whole and tends to wear a common character. The great stress was laid on the uniformity of worship. But the need of a religion was realised by man for deepening his personality and to develop his spiritual consciousness to remould himself to reach perfection as he was no more satisfied with a national religion he had. Thus the change of outlook gave birth to universal religion which aims at a process of upliftment of soul to reach the Truth. In this modern universal concept of religion man is the centre of religious consciousness and religion therefore is essentially humanistic containing the features of universalism.

Religion in contemporary Indian philosophy is marked by the gradual approach towards humanism. The universal outlook of modern Indian thinkers is that the world is more compact today than it was before. The germ of universal religion has also been found from the very beginning in Indian philosophical thoughts right from the Vedas and the Upanisads. In the third chapter I propose to discuss how universal elements of religion are present in the Upanisads. And also that religious reformation movement began in the nineteenth century with Rammohan Roy,

Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen etc. All of them provided Ramakrishna the necessary historical background for formulating his universalism. Appearance of Sri Ramakrishna ~~was~~ ushered in a new era of neo-vedantic thought at once practical and universal.

The next two chapters will be devoted to a detailed study of the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna as a reflection of classical vedanta and as a new approach regarding his view point about reality and relation between God and man.

Ramakrishna's spiritual practices of different disciplines one by one are his living experiments throughout his life to prove the oneness of Truth. So in the last two chapters there will be an attempt to point out his originality even in his spiritual practices and on this ground his religious tolerance and the essential features of universal religion as has been realised by Ramakrishna will be pointed out.

Not only Ramakrishna revitalised the traditional spirit in India but he was also the man of originality who proved how vedantic ideals may be practically applied in this

life. One ultimate reality, spiritual in nature, was conceived by him, included the many and it is the point he establishes about the harmony of science and religion, sacred and secular and harmony of all faiths in the world. He points to such a religion which sanctifies the obscured real nature of man and helps him to be free from the sense of ego.

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