

Chapter V

A New Approach And Its Deflection From The Classical Vedanta.

Section - I

The Concept of God..

The conception of God as eternal, omniscient and omnipresent being is as old as the Rg-Veda and the old Testament. Man is incurably religious and God is generally assumed as the fundamental concept of religion. God is the object of religious consciousness and concerns man's attitude of worship, love and devotion. Man has, as Descartes had argued, an innate notion of some power, which is also the supreme good and wisdom. This satisfies man's emotional nature and his faith in the supreme personality. The idea of God has been variously interpreted and formulated by

different people in accordance with their historical and cultural perspective. Among the primitive people there have been many Gods, each god being regarded as a vague personal spirit, the source of some energy which brings value to man. The belief in many gods like the gods of rivers, springs, trees, the rains; of fertility, of motherhood, of fatherhood, of love, of peace, war, hunting, planting, trades and professions; of wisdom, of music, and of truth, known as polytheism is however religiously important for illustrating the uniform connection of the idea of God as each was worshipped for a particular value it imparted and a tendency to think of the gods as conscious persons. This polytheistic idea has been developed to that of a nation god when people had a better experience of their national life more efficiently organized under one supreme monarch e.g. The Gita has it that God is the King among men, naranam ca naradhipam (X.27). The

hierarchy of all gods becomes more clearly organised under one supreme God and God has been taken as a personified national spirit.

Again God in modern age has been taken and interpreted not as a metaphysical or theological concept as was conceived before. Humanists like August Comte rejected all speculations about the ultimate nature of reality are devoted to ideal values and their religion was mainly concerned with the reverence of human personality and as a result God to him was regarded as humanity itself.

There is a difference between the Comtean type of humanism and its formulation by Ramakrishna, Comtean humanism is atheistic or even materialistic, where as Ramakrishna's humanism had never been so. Against the Comtean type of humanism the Christians propounds that

Ramakrishna's contemporary Bankim Chandra was under the spell of Comtean thought, and Vivekananda might have imbibed a great deal Comtean humanism in his formative years.

God is not found in human experience at all except in so far as He chooses to reveal Himself. God reveals Himself with all the qualities radically different from a human being and God is thus taken here as a superhuman and supernatural revealer of values.

Again there is another group of thinkers who define God as the system of ideal values. To identify God with human aspiration is to deny the objective reference at religious experience and also there is no adequate evidence of uttering God as supernatural according to these thinkers. They think God as eternal forms or ideas purely impersonal in nature and their view may well be called impersonal idealism.⁽¹⁾

Thus regarding innumerable opinions concerning idea of God as have been expressed up-to-date there is a problem as it is rationally impossible to accept all

1. Edgar Sheffield Brightman. A Philosophy of Religion.
pp. 81-92.

of them as true and therefore it needs a philosophical investigation. Again the idea of God has become a good empirical starting point as religious conception of God is now regarded as a summation of the highest aspiration of values instead of being considered as a mere theological theory and therefore, it needs a philosophical (1) investigation of experience.

In fact if God be taken as the object of religious consciousness becomes less problematic as it is based on man's faith or belief on some supreme personality, but it needs a philosophical investigation in order to be accepted by scientific modern mind. To a philosophy there must be a rational ground for supposing that a truth is more clearly grasped. Philosophy always seeks ultimate reality behind the world of appearance which becomes the only principle from which the world of finite spirits and physical objects are manifested, but it finds

1. Brightman: A Philosophy of Religion. P.-80.

difficulty to react with the supreme reality emotionally. It feels intellectual necessity of explaining and understanding the world process with the help of an all comprehensive principle which is conceived as the ultimate reality or Absolute. This Absolute is purely philosophical concept as it is the Infinite principle and involves no personal relation with the finite and here arises a great problem regarding the reconciliation of the idea of the Absolute with the unavoidable concept of God. The question has been raised by the philosophers whether these two are completely identical or are they totally different concepts and in this respect many attempts have been made by the philosophers though they are not successfully awarded with the solution.

It is said that emotionally when we adore the Highest and try to establish a personal relationship with the Infinite, the Absolute of Philosophy turns out to be the God of religion. According to Hegel religion is not a

feeling of piety but thought of the Absolute expressed emotionally and in a Symbolic form which is different from philosophical speculative approach. Religion and philosophy are materially the same as both have the conception of God but they differ regarding their approach. So he suggests that it is better to say God of religion and Absolute of philosophy, in order to avoid the confusion regarding reconciliation of the two. (1)

The absolutists like Bradley and Sāṅkara believe that the Absolute of Philosophy is the highest reality and God is only a phenomenal manifestation of the Absolute to the religious consciousness. In Bradley's philosophy there is a sharp contrast between God and the Absolute which leads a distinction between religion and philosophy and therefore between practical and ultimate truth. To him Absolute is not God because It is related to nothing. Any relation implies limitation and causes imperfection.

1. Falckenberg. History of Modern Philosophy. P.-502.

God as regarded by him as phenomenal manifestation can never satisfy philosophy whose goal is the Absolute truth or Reality.

Again problem arises when God is usually interpreted as a creator of the world as we find in the Philosophy of Descartes who proves the existence of God as the First cause (causa sui) of the world or an uncaused cause. His conception of God is based on universal assumption of causation that every event in this world is caused and again a cause is an effect of a more general cause. In this way in order to avoid infinite regress existence of God has been proved by him as a first cause which is the unifying principle or ground of the world. Here he faces the problem that conception of God as 'Causa Sui' can not be scientifically verified for every cause of our experience is an effect of a still higher cause. God therefore, as the

First cause is not cause in the scientific sense of the term. Besides, as soon as the power of creativity is attributed to God it causes a limitation to Him due to which He no longer remains perfect. Because whenever it is said that God is a creator it means that He has a will to create and such a will begins only due to his imperfection. No perfect being may have any will or deficiency to be filled up and so different from the imperfect being. God is no God if he is not the all; if He is all He must be perfect. Thus to conceive God as a creator is to destroy His perfection and here problem of God remains unsolved.

Again in the philosophy of Spinoza there is an attempt to reconcile the two concepts as we understand from his conception of substance that God is identical with the Absolute. Because substance as conceived by him as the only reality, the pure being, primal being, the cause of itself and of all. As the cause of all things spinoza calls it God, although God according to him is not a transcendent personal spirit but only essential

heart of things. He is the inner Indwelling cause but not a transcendent creator.

But Spinoza's attempt also is not a successful work for reconciling God with Absolute because asserting attributes of substance he violates his principle 'determinatio negatio est.' Once he says that substance should not be thought of possessing quality or attribute on the principle that to determine is to limit Him and again he raises a contradiction when he says that substance does not affect us by its mere existence but through attributes. Among the innumerable divine attributes the human mind knows those only which it finds in itself thought and extension. Here we find that Spinoza's approach is not universal as he says about two attributes only. There is no sufficient proof that the attributes should be two in number as the ways knowing Reality.

Overcoming such limitations Ramakrishna begins a new philosophy with an universal concept of God which

claims his most original approach to be a pioneer in modern age. One of the philosophical achievements of Ramakrishna may be said to be his solution of the problem of God. God and the Absolute are no more conceived as distinct from each other but reconciliation of the two has been attempted by his intuitive and integral experience of Truth. Ramakrishna has pointed out that in whatever way may Truth be conceived, either as the Absolute or as God, it is but the one and only Reality. In his words, "God the Absolute and God the personal are one and the same. A belief in the one (1) implies belief in other." The relation between God and the Absolute is not precariously conceived by Ramakrishna like Saṅkara. Neither is God an illusory appearance of Brahman from transcendental point of view and real from the empirical stand point, nor is the devotion and worship of God to be given up on spiritual maturity as Saṅkara holds. God in Ramakrishna's philosophy is as

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1. Sayings of Ramakrishna. P.-266.

real as the Absolute. Brahman according to him is no doubt the Infinite, the Pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, but it is also the Reality with many forms and facets. The same Reality is manifested in different states and with different names. God is not the unreal appearance of the Absolute. He is the Absolute itself as moving, acting and creating the world without number, sustaining and finally destroying them all. He used to say, "He who is Saccidananda is Saccidanandamayee."⁽¹⁾

According to Sankara, Brahman in relation to the world is God when creative activity is attributed to it. Here Brahman is conceived as God only when being limited by the attributes. But in the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna creative activity is the very nature of God. Creativity is only the sportive activity of the Absolute which may be given up freely as it is began. As an attribute it is absolute in character and we know that if the

1. Kathamrta. Vol.1. P.-100

attributes of God are absolute in character they do
 not limit him. ⁽¹⁾ On this ground God is the Absolute
 from real and transcendental point of view. God is thus
 the highest object of worship and not a precarious
 hypothesis as in Śāṅkara's philosophy.

According to Ramakrishna's conception of Reality
 therefore, absolutism and theism are reconcilable. It
 is the most fundamental contribution of Ramakrishna needed
 to the age because a synthesis between the two is more
 admirable than the two extreme views taken separately.
 The speculations of a philosopher inspite of being
 logical and methodical as regards arguments and ways of
 expression, if fails to justify the fundamental human
 instincts and interpret the deeper spirit of religion,
 becomes mere intellectual diversion and unrelated to
 man's practical needs. If the Absolute is only rigid,
 motionless and totally lacking in initiative or influence
 as we find in Śāṅkara's philosophy, it can not be related

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Indian Philosophy. Vol.2. P.-742.

to man, and then there will be Truth only, but Truth will have no value as it will remain — uninterpreted, unknown and unreached by man. Further, the Absolute, can not call forth our worship. On the other hand, if God is not conceived as the Absolute, value ceases to be true. Ramakrishna has argued for the combination of truth and value in his notion of Reality which is one though manifested in different ways.

God alone, according to Ramakrishna, is real while all the rest are unreal. ⁽¹⁾ He says that the līlā, though temporal by nature is not unreal, but real in the sense that it is a manifestation of Brahman. The earth, planets, animals and men are all forms of the divine Sakti, and on this ground they are all real. Yet they possess a relative reality as their reality lies in the fact of their being expressions of Sakti; and hence they are not independently real. On the other hand, God the

1. Kathamṛta. Vol.1 P.-47.

Absolute is the independent reality. That is why Ramakrishna says that the world is unsubstantial (avastu) while God is only reality (vastu), meaning thereby that the world as we see it now is unsubstantial for we see it without Divine ⁽¹⁾ Sakti. God in his philosophy is thus the Absolute Truth which becomes the meaning and essence of everything. In his words, "All things apart from God are like zeros, while God is like the number one, taken by themselves the zeros are valueless, but add the number one in front and you get 1,000,000,000 It is God that gives value and reality to the world. God is the meaning, realization of Him is the purpose; against this central principle all aspects of man's existence find their proper ⁽²⁾ evaluation."

Again Ramakrishna points out that God, the essence, the meaning of everything is conceived as the all pervading

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1. Ramakrishna Matha and Ramakrishna Mission Convention. Souvenir. 1980. P.-64.
 2. Ibid. P.-67.

Divine Sakti. In his words, "God is the Divine energy which manifests itself more or less everywhere." (1) To recognize the manifestation of God through everything in the universe both living and non-living in different degrees — is, in effect, to conceive God as the root, the basis and the ground of the universe. And the whole world is therefore, the manifestation of energy or spirit of which even the material world is regarded as a dim manifestation. Swami Vishadananda has rightly observed about Ramakrishna's conception of God, "His conception of God was that of Power that is the source, sustaining power and attainable goal of everything in this universe." (2)

God creates and destroys the world and is regarded as transcendent to as well as immanent in the world, and He is the inner ruler of all souls. He is the self of ourself, the supreme self, the Infinite, realising whom

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1. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. (Acc. to 'M'). Part I. PP. 170-171.
 2. Swami Vishadananda. Conversations on Spirit Divine. Part I P.-194.

within, a man becomes emancipated. The finitudes and limitations of man will cease to exist and he becomes one with the Infinite if God, the supreme self, is revealed to him at the highest stage of spiritual upliftment. The finite selves which are but the manifestations of the supreme self are ultimately destined to be reunited with the same, and God thus is the destiny of man and hence called the permanent abode of peace. The point has been interpreted by Ramakrishna by the following parable : "A man comes to a big city. First he fixes a place to deposit his baggage and then he goes about to see the town. After going about all day, at night fall he goes to rest in the lodging that he has fixed. If he had not done this before hand, he would suffer for want of a shelter in the night after his gay wandering during day. Even so, God is the rest house for the soul wandering in the world."⁽¹⁾

1. C. Rajagopalachari. Sri Ramakrishna Upaniṣad. P.-2.

Further the ultimate reality is conceived as containing both good and bad, virtue and vice. In the words of Ramakrishna, God is both the ^{good} as well as the evil, ~~and~~ honesty and dishonesty; He himself possesses the sleeping stage and awakening stage; Again He is beyond all these conditions. (1) It is evident from this utterance that God is regarded as all inclusive totality including everything evil, vice, dishonesty along with whatever is good, virtue and honest. Nothing is apart from Him as He is the centre of all attracting everything towards Him. "All things are God. God is in all things. He is the shadow as well as in the light. Inspired by the English Moralists of the seventeenth century, Hugo said that the sun is only the shadow of God. Ramakrishna would have said that the shadow is also light." (2)

As has been experienced and analysed by Ramakrishna the idea of God as purely transcendent and as a superna-

1. Kathamṛta. Vol.2. P.-56.

2. Romain Rolland. The Life of Ramakrishna. Vol.1 P.-79.

tural being becomes transformed into the idea that God is the embodiment of those ideals which appeal to us as of supreme worth. God is conceived as the highest reality as well as supreme value. The values like Truth, Beauty and Goodness if they are not experienced by a subject are meaningless. In Sankara's type of Advaita personal values are subordinated to impersonal ones but Ramakrishna says that God himself is the highest value.

Thus in this modern conception of God we find that it neither means a purely determinate whole, a person only, nor an impersonal being which, in the words of Radhakrishnan 'Stares at us with frozen eyes (1) regardless of our selfless devotion and silent suffering. But a beautiful synthesis of the two proves that impersonal and personal are two aspects of the same reality.

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Indian Philosophy. Vol.2 P.-683.

We have already seen in the previous chapter that Ramakrishna's view that the Reality both as personal and impersonal his position is very similar to Rāmanuja. In spite of that his way of interpreting the nature of Reality both as saguna and nirguna was based on the spontaneous expression of his intuitive experience of Truth. It may be claimed to be his most fundamental work. Like Rāmanuja he would never say that Brahman is nirguna, being devoid of prākṛita gunas. But Brahman is nirguna or impersonal as It is beyond any description or predication. On this, point his case may be said to be similar to Sankara. In the words of Ramakrishna, "The Absolute again is like the unfathomable ocean. Nothing can be predicated of it." (1) The Impersonal or nirguna Brahman which is Infinite can never be reached by the finite. But we have already seen that man, though a finite being has always a hankering for the Infinite and his inner urge inspires him to

1. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-73.

proceed to the Infinite. In this process of spiritual journey the Infinite is comprehended by the finite if it is conditioned by attributes and qualities. Thus Impersonal Brahman becomes personal when It is attributed by qualities. The Impersonal and personal therefore, are not regarded as separate, rather they are inseparable and two essential aspects of the same Reality. Ramakrishna says, "The Impersonal and personal are one and the same Being, even fire and its burning property are one."⁽¹⁾ The qualities like creation, destruction and preservation of the world when attributed to the Reality, it is known as God the personal. In the words of Ramakrishna, "When the supreme Being is thought of as inactive, neither creating, sustaining nor destroying, I call Him by the name Brahman or Purusha the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active, creating, sustaining, destroying I call Him by the name Sakti or Māyā or Prakriti or personal God."⁽²⁾ Thus the

1. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-83

2. Ibid. P.-82.

idea of the personal God does not mean what God meant in traditional religions. Ramakrishna's God is personal as unlimited becomes limited for coming close to the finite. This what Tagore puts as follows : "Limitation of the Unlimited is personality. God is personal where He creates."⁽¹⁾ This statement may be taken to mean that creativity implies a choice out of limitless possibilities, and choice implies personality. Thus a creator God is necessarily a person. Without personality there cannot be any choice, and without choice of possibilities there cannot be any creation. Of course the nature of choice in God's case would be different from that of a human being. But that is another story.

In the case of traditional religions God as a person is regarded completely different from the worshipper as an object of worship, an external deity. The personal God is usually viewed from a worshipful distance. In Ramakrishna's

1. S. Radhakrishnan and Mumirhead. Contemporary Indian Philosophy. P.-37.

philosophy the personal God is conceived not as an object of worship, utterly transcendent, but as a dynamic subjectivity inspiring the finite to be elevated to attain Truth or to be absorbed into the Infinite. As Dr. Beatrice Brutean, has said, "When we address a person, we must enter right into the dynamic, out-pouring subjectivity of that life. My 'I am' must flow into your 'I am' and permit your 'I am' to flow into mine. Only when I, as transcendent of all my predicates, converse with you, as transcendent of all your predicates, does person contact person."⁽¹⁾ The relation between two persons will be established at the higher level of spiritual realisation of Truth which is the basic principle of all men, if their limitations caused from 'I-consciousness' transcended. In modern age personality as a melted form of subjectivity instead of being an object purely external is conceived as a flow of consciousness relating and binding all human beings together. When God

1. Dr. Beatrice Brutean. "Humanity in the Image of the Trinitarian God." Prabuddha Bharat. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta. March, 1979. P.-152.

is conceived by Ramakrishna as a person it signifies therefore, that man is related to it being the spiritual unit of the same flow of consciousness common to the Infinite, only person as a form of the Infinite stands before him to be loved and worshipped to develop the emotional side of man so long he remains with his individuality of his own. With the veil of ego the barrier is created in between the finite and the Infinite due to which God the Impersonal may not be attained. In the words of Ramakrishna, "So long as you are a person with an individuality of your own, God will, if it so (1) pleases Him, manifests Himself to you as a person."

According to Advaita Vedanta a total annihilation of the conditioned ego is required for experiencing the Unconditioned Brahman. But for Ramakrishna, with the majority of mankind the 'ego' is a thing which can not be shaken off in this life or, any other life in the near future. Thus so long they can not attain samadhi, they

1. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Part I. P.-92.

(1)
can meditate upon and commune with the personal God.

On one occasion he said, "In the ocean of Saccidānanda there is a pitcher of 'ego'. So the water is divided into two — that is, water inside the pot and water outside the pot. When the pitcher is broken the preserved water inside the pot gets mixed with the water in the ocean. Similarly at the extinction of ego, finite is

absorbed into the Infinite and personal God becomes one with the Infinite." (2) This analogy should remind one of

a similar metaphor by Kabir : the pitcher is immersed in water, "The water - filled pitcher is placed upon water, it has water within and without." (3) In this way God the Impersonal and God the personal are one and same. Their difference is without any distinction as they are different manifestations of the same Reality.

Reality as has been interpreted in the Upaniṣad is not only pure existence or sat but it is also āviḥ or

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1. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Part I P.-92.
 2. Kathamṛta. Vol. 3 P.-156.
 3. Poems of Kabir. No.XLVI, tr. Rabindranath Tagore.

(1)
 self manifesting Reality. In other words, Brahman is not something existing passively but an active agent responsible for creating, sustaining and destroying the world. Because creation is nothing but self-manifestation of the Brahman. The Upaniṣads point out that everything comes out of the bliss of Brahman, is sustained by it and again merges in it. This ancient thought of the Upaniṣads is more elaborately explained by Ramakrishna when he says that Brahman (passive) and Sakti (Active) or Kālī are not two different realities unrelated to each other. Nor are they two different realities existing inseparably related to each other as substance or quality but they are the two aspects of one and the same reality or they are the two states of the something. Therefore, they are regarded as non-different or rather advaya.
 Ramakrishna says, "Just as the same water of the sea is sometimes moving and sometimes motionless, or the same serpent sometimes crawls and sometimes remains coiled up

1. Mundaka Upaniṣad (2.2.1)

and motionless, so the same reality is called Kālī or
 Brahman according as it does or does not create, maintain
 (1)
 and destroy the world."

On this ground Ramakrishna has further maintained
 that God with form and God without form are of equal
 value. He is the first man in religious history who expe-
 riences and proclaims that the supreme being by Itself is
 formless and without attributes and at the same time is
 (2)
 having form. He emphatically points out that "It is
 the same reality that is nameless and formless Brahman
 for the jñāni or the man of philosophic insight, the
 ātman or pure self for the Yogi or the man absorbed in
 meditation, and Bhagavan or personal God for the Bhakta
 or the man of devotion. Just as the same water of the
 ocean is congealed into the form of ice by extreme cold
 and is dissolved into formless water by the heat of the

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1. Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume. ed. R. C. Majumdar . P. 266.
 2. Hidden Treasures of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-69.

sun, so reality takes on form and shape for the devotee but is formless for the jñāni and the Yogi." (1) Thus in whichever way the Reality be manifested none is false but all are equally real on the same background of Truth. Ramakrishna often used the metaphor of the chameleon which wears different colours of different times and sometimes has no colour at all.

It should now be evident that Truth or Reality in Ramakrishna's philosophy is not a synthetic Reality but a Reality which expresses itself in alternative forms. Form, formless, personal, impersonal, active and passive all are alternative expressions of the same Reality. Reality is manifested to a man according to his nature, choice and outlook. So neither expressions of Reality is here regarded as false. (2)

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1. Vivekananda Centenary Volume. ed. R. C. Majumdar. P.-266.
 2. Nirod Baran Chakraborty. Sri Ramakrishner Sadhana. (Bengali). P.-100.

Again having considered Ramakrishna's conception of God we may notice a harmonisation of monism and monotheism in his religious thought. Monism is the ontological theory which asserts that self-subsistent Absolute Reality behind the world of appearance is one and that the diversified finite things possess no independent reality of their own. According to monism the finite things can be real only as members of this unitary whole and the world is a system of plurality of substance acting and reacting on each other. In comparison to monism, Theism is a theological theory which believes in a supreme Power and Infinite Being who is the Creator, preserver and moral governor of the world holding personal relation to mankind. Monotheism which believes in one God should be the satisfactory view on all grounds because the conception of the highest and the Supreme Reality as two or many is a contradiction in terms. If there are many Gods, each becomes finite and limited by others, but nothing short of an Infinite Supreme Being can be worshipped by us.

In course of religious evolution it has been marked that the religious idea is everchanging though the content remains the same always. Religion runs through different stages of animism, totemism, polytheism and monotheism. It has been assumed that monotheism was developed from polytheism. The first step towards monotheism has been noticed when one deity is conceived to be supreme over all the others and the rest are but his vassals, his ministers or angels. This idea developed from the man's tendency to suppose a king God over others. The next step is the result of the constant tendency of the ancients to identify one God with another.

But there are some difficulties of apprehending this hypothesis that monotheism has been evolved out of polytheism. First of all, it will be better to think both monotheism and polytheism to be manifested from a common religious cult than to admit the former to be

evolved out of the latter. Besides, like an animal organism religion never evolves. Evolution of monotheism from the polytheism should be considered from the point of view of religious history and here we will notice that polytheism either passed in fetishism, as in the case with most African tribes, or pantheism, as in Egypt, but never to monotheism. The tendencies of polytheism if supposed to make for monotheism, has always been purely pantheistic — speculative rather than practical, metaphysical rather than religious. The belief in a supreme God over all the other members of the pantheon is very different from the one and only God of even the lowest form of monotheism. In fact the idea of monotheism is borrowed from politics and is scarcely religious. So emphasis is given on unifying the multiplicity of Gods on an intelligible and permanent basis and it is not drawn from the spiritual depth of man's nature.

Further, in religious history we mark that at the result of the amalgamation of different clans monotheism sometimes was found to be evolved out of polytheism as with the fusion of the cults of different Gods worshipped by different clans now become transformed into one ritual. And again polytheism is also found to be evolved from monotheism as we see the tribes which before amalgamation had but its own one God will after the amalgamation worship two or more Gods. In fact there is no hard and fast rule that evolution should always move in one direction that is, from lower to the higher only. In religion, evolution has a wavering course — first advance then retrogression. As we see Totemism, which is at least the worship of one God declines into the worship of many Gods and polytheism may be in some few civilized peoples rise towards pantheism. But in most cases it degenerates into fetishism. Thus in course of religious evolution there is no uniform upward movement and so we

see Totemism as a degeneration from some simple faith and higher form of monotheism as had been evolved at the stage of religious development.

Progress always is due to the minority to the individual thinkers, discoverers, reformers. Religious progress moves wholly on one time, that of personality and monotheism was disclosed to the eye of religious reformers as it is the very tendency of mankind of all ages to approach to monotheism. So we see such a revelation of monotheistic belief have been made by the primitives too. (1) The Vedas are often said to be polytheistic as they believe in many Gods. A peculiarity of the Vedic thought is that each of the many Gods when praised, is extolled by the hymn as the supreme God, the creator of the universe and the lord of all Gods. This proves that the Vedas have a tendency to recognise the

1. Frank Byron Zevons. An Introduction to the History of Religion. pp. 382-397.

ontology of the one in many. For this reason Max Muller had suggested the word 'Henotheism' in place of polytheism. In the Rgveda we come across passages where it is explicitly stated that the different Gods are manifestations of one underlying Reality. 'Ekam Sat viprā bahudhā vadanti'. The monothestic tendency of the Vedas has been developed into monism of the Upaniṣads. Because the Upaniṣads believe in one ultimate reality. (1) According to Ramakrishna the Ultimate Reality is one Infinite Eternal and he calls the Reality God. It manifests itself in and through, the cosmos. The divine Reality as we have already seen is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe as everything of this universe is originated and sustained by it and everything is again absorbed in it.

Reality as has been pictured in the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna is not the one which is abstracted

1. S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. D²utta. An Introduction to Indian Philosophy. P.-387.

from the many, but the one which includes the many or rather which has become the many. Here we find his originality consisting in the new interpretation of relation between God and the world deviating from both Śaṅkara and Rāmanuja's approach in some respects. So far Śaṅkara's philosophy is concerned with the nature of Brahman (Saccidānanda) being manifested to all it is similar to the conception of Ramakrishna. As a real existence (sat) Brahman is manifested to the material world, as consciousness as such Brahman is present in self and as Bliss as such is manifested through all human beings as all human bliss. ⁽¹⁾ But while Śaṅkara says that there is no manyhood or diversity but only Brahman, Ramakrishna would say that all are Brahman in different forms. Reality is not one but one in many which manifests itself in and through many forms. The world, in stead of being an illusory appearance of Brahman, is the real manifestation of Brahman. On this

1. Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad. iv. 3.32.

point he resembles Rāmanuja as we have already seen in the previous chapter. In Rāmanuja's philosophy jīva is not identical with Brahman and there is a relation of difference, svagatabheda between the two. Rāmanuja believes in a true identity of Brahma and the world but not Brahman with Jīva. On this point Ramakrishna differs from him pointing out that Brahman as an all inclusive Reality includes everything and Brahman thus is the Reality one with Jīva and Jagat.

In a sense Ramakrishna derives Reality to this world but it is followed by an affirmation of the world in a new light. On the realisation of Brahman one will find that the same Brahman is present everywhere in the world. It has become everything in the world. Thus Ramakrishna not only accepts that the Reality is one but also he argues for the oneness or unity present in all. Realisation of the presence of God in all objects inanimate and animate, in animals as well as in men, has been

a living experience with Ramakrishna. He perceived the presence of God in such articles as tables and chairs, even in the saint as in the sinner. He saw God even in fallen women. He said, "Mother in one form thou art in the street and in another form thou art in the universe."⁽¹⁾ The realisation of God in everything gave a distinctive quality to his religious philosophy in so far as it propounded a universal notion of Reality, equally real from all its aspects. Indeed it is a new approach that Reality has been depicted as both with form and without form; both as a transcendent and an immanent principle.

Like the sages of the Upanisads Ramakrishna believes that God is in all that moves. He fills the universe as He is the soul of all souls, of all beings manifesting in all forms. If God be taken as an immanent principle He is proved the sumtotal of the universe, and on this ground, the view that the world is an

1. Swami Vivekananda Centenary Volume. ed. R.C.Majumdar.
P.-267.

illusion seems to be meaningless. But it will be improper to think that God is exhausted by the world. Because the world is the manifestation of God no doubt, but as a principle of manifestation He is over and above the world, He transcends the world as His power of manifestation is Infinite. As a principle of manifestation He is more than manifestation. Therefore, He transcends his manifestation.

In this respect the relation between God and the world Ramakrishna's philosophy may be categorised as a sort of panentheism according to which God is both immanent in and transcendent over the world of things and minds with which He is completely identified. The philosophy of Ramakrishna represents a concrete picture of the ultimate, the absolute Reality evolving into things and events, the living objects and selves of men out of its own nature and giving reality of

different degrees to all the contents of itself and allowing freedom and personality to human selves.

The universe according to modern science is a manifestation of cosmic energy and the whole universe is dynamic or moving. According to Ramakrishna this energy is not blind or unconscious, material energy as modern scientists consider it. Rather it is a divine or spiritual energy which vibrates in the heart of everything. The immanence of this spiritual energy as the soul of everything gives us a new conception of man interpreting the meaning and value of human life in a new light. The Spirit which is dynamic in nature is also the essence of man is an inspiring message, and sustains us with an inner strength for soul culture.

Section - II.

Relation between God and man.

We have already seen that God according to Ramakrishna is both Brahman and Isvara. The relation between Brahman and man is a relation of identity. Man realises Brahman as pure consciousness in nirvikalpa Samādhi when the limitations of the external world, his sense of ego or self composed of body, mind and senses are transcended. He finds his identity with the supreme consciousness as his individual self merges into the universal self. Man realises his true self after losing his individuality completely. Reality is Impersonal and relation between God and man is also impersonal. Man's approach to God the Impersonal in this way is called, jñāna mārga or path of knowledge.

But there are also other paths of realising the Infinite Spirit. According to Ramakrishna God is not only

Impersonal but also personal, and man has a personal relationship with God. When God is conceived as a person man feels very intimate relation with God and realises His omnipresence in the universe as also as his most innermost self. God in this case becomes his lord, master, protector, the guide, the great lover and man surrenders himself to God. Man surrenders himself to his God with devotion and love. It is the characteristic of Bhakti mārga that God as a person is loved and worshipped by man.

Sometimes the concept of the personal God as has been accepted by religions other than Hinduism is completely transcendent to man. Because God as the creator and man as the creature can not be identical as the watch maker is not the same as the watch. The relation between God and man is made out to be so external as God is pictured as all perfection, man as a miserable sinner, God as the Infinite and man as finite, God is all powerful and man is weak. Obviously there is

a wide gulf between God and man if God be taken as personal in this sense. This may be described as a vertical relationship between God and man. But in Hinduism God is not only the efficient cause but also the material cause of the universe. Creation means self-manifestation of the Infinite in and through all the finite objects of the world. Human self is also the manifestation of the same Infinite spirit which underlies all existence. Man is thus potentially divine though actually he is finite. He has infinite possibilities in him as he is the best manifestation of the Infinite. (1) We find the Katha Upaniṣad (2.3.17) saying that the supreme self exists within us.

Āṅguṣṭhamātra puruṣo' natarātma sadā
janānam hrdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ.

"The Purusha, not longer than a thumb, the inner self, always dwells in the hearts of men." (2)

1. Kathāmṛta. Vol. 5 P.-122.

2. The Upaniṣads P.-37. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-82.

Anorāṇīyaṅ mahato mahīyaṅ, ātmasya jantorni-
hito guhāyaṃ Tamakratuḥ pasyati vītośoko
dhatuprasā dānmahimānamatmanāḥ. (1)

"Atman smaller than the small, greater than the
great is hidden in the hearts of all living creatures." (2)

Again the Mundaka (2/1) says,

Āviḥ sannihitaṃ guhācaram nāma mohat
padamatraitat samarpitamejat prānanni-
miśacca yadetad jñānatha sadāsadvareṇyaṃ param
vijñānād Yadvarīṣṭhaṃ prajānāṃ.

Hiranmaye pare kose virajaṃ brahma niṣkalam
Tacchubhram jyotiṣāṃ jyotistad Yadātmanavido viduḥ. (3)

Further,

Eko devo sarvabhūteṣu gūraḥ Sarvavyapī
Sarvabhūtāntarātma. (4)

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1. Kathaponiṣad. 1.2.20.
 2. The Upaniṣads. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-73.
 3. Mundaka Upaniṣad. 2.10.
 4. Svetāsvatara. 6.11.

"The non-dual and resplendent Lord is hidden
in all beings. All pervading, the inmost self of all
creatures"⁽¹⁾

Similarly,

Agniryathaiko bhuvanam Praviṣṭo rūpam rūpam
pratirūpo babhuva.

Ekostatha Sarvabhūtāntarātmā rūpam rūpam
pratirūpo vahiṣca.⁽²⁾

"As the same non-dual fire, after it has entered
the world becomes different according to whatever it
burns, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in
all beings, becomes different according to whatever it
enters. And it exists also without."⁽³⁾

Eko vaṣī sarvabhūtāntarātmā ekaṃ rūpam vahudhā
yaḥ Karoti, Tamātmānthaṃ yehanupasyanti
dhirāsteṣāṃ sukhaṃ netareṣāsu.⁽⁴⁾

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1. The Upaniṣads. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-140.
 2. Kathaponiṣad. 2.2.9.
 3. The Upaniṣads. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-80.
 4. Kathaponiṣad. 2.2.12.

"There is one supreme Ruler, the inmost self of all beings, who makes his one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves — not to others."⁽¹⁾

Hence God and man are not poles apart, God is the inherent essential principle of man. In the words of Ramakrishna, "As a lamp can not be without oil, so a man can not live without God."⁽²⁾

The relation between God and man in the philosophy of Ramakrishna is based on the principle that man is the manifestation of the supreme self in the highest degree. This lays the foundation of a humanistic philosophy too. His main teaching concerning the inner truth in man is summed up as 'Jīva' is Sīva' and accordingly he used to say that the best form of worshipping God is to worship man. It is a message for humanity and the sole ground of

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1. The Upaniṣads. ~~tr.~~ tr. Swami Nikhilananda. P.-80.
 2. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. P.-32.

this view was his own spiritual vision of God present in man. It was centered to his living experience of the complete identity of Brahman and ātman, and as a result of which he emphatically pointed to the divinity in man. Ramakrishna used to say, "Seekest thou God ? Then seek Him in man. Divinity is more manifest in man than in any other object." ⁽¹⁾ So we shall not find out God in temples and churches but we will find Him in man. Love of man is love of God and service to man is the best form of worshipping God. Service of man is a privilege. If we get any chance of serving man we should deem ourselves blessed because thereby we get the opportunity of serving God. From all this it may be said that Ramakrishna shows the presence of God in each of us and points out that by loving man one will be close to God. As this truth was realised by Ramakrishna every moment of his life, he could never remain indifferent to the sufferings of mankind. Several times he wept for the poor.

1. Nanda Mukherjee. Sri Ramakrishna in the eyes of Brahmo and Christian admirers. P.-XIII.

Sometimes he is seen to take an active part in ameliorating the sufferings of man even though he lived constantly in his spiritual mode of consciousness. On meeting the suffering people in Deoghar he asked his benefactor to give them food and clothing. He wept for them and his heart was so distressed by their agony that he is said to promise sharing equal grief with them.

Ramkrishna's feeling for the suffering humanity which grew from his unique feeling of oneness with all teaches us another important lesson that the work of love should be regarded as an act of worship. This is the basic principle of Karma Yoga. Actions if performed for the sake of the supreme self will bring God and men in a closer relationship than is possible by any other path. The practice of Karma thus formulated is called Karma Yoga. In the words of Vivekananda, "Karma Yoga is the attaining through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature."⁽¹⁾ It is the inherent nature of man that he always

1. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.1 P.-110.

seeks freedom. A Saint seeks freedom from bondage of his existence and a thief also steals in order to get rid of his wants. Freedom may be attained through work also if it be purely unselfish in character. Every unselfish action takes us towards the goal, because with it one may overcome his little personality and expands himself towards the Infinite. A Karma Yogi, therefore, needs not believe in any doctrine, soul or God but he should aim at realising selflessness and he will have to work it out himself. Works should be without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else. It is possible only if the idea of doing good to others becomes a part of his very being. Then he will not seek for any motive out side. (1)

Ramakrishna points out that it is very difficult for an ordinary man to practise niskama karma. Often people mistakenly think that they are doing social work

1. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol.1.PP.-108-118.

for the sake of God but unconsciously they might have been prompted by self-interest, complete dependence on God and renunciation of the fruit of action alone make a man competent to be a Karma Yogi. According to Ramakrishna a man can not be a Karma Yogi unless he practises meditation on God in solitude for a long time. At this he will learn how to control desires and to perform any duty for God's sake. (1)

After realising God a man will get direction from Him to perform any responsible deed or social service. (2)

Swami Vivekananda sought to show how Vedantic ideals could be applied to human life and discover the principle which made Vedanta practical. In the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna asceticism has been converted into active service. Pure asceticism means escapism, inactivism and negativism. Ramakrishna was not a mere ascetic but an exponent of humanistic religion. He knew

1. Kathamrta. Vol.5. P.-117.

2. Ibid. P.-155.

the joys of Samadhi but he resisted the temptation to be lost in it. He cried out "Oh mother, let me remain in contact with man; do not make me a dried up ascetic."⁽¹⁾ Mere asceticism is not the aim of religion. To acquire divinity within us we will have to expand ourselves to others through love and compassion. Union with God will best be realised in and through love and service to humanity. Work or service is not the end but it is the means of God realisation.

It may be pointed out that the Christian plan of 'service to humanity' is the part of total programme of spiritual practice having moral value. But to Ramakrishna 'service to suffering humanity' is not only part but is the total plan. In the words of Swami Nirvedananda, "Service of suffering humanity with the subjective outlook and attitude of worshipping Divinity is by itself an entire programme of a new form of spiritual practice that

1. Vivekananda Centenary Volume. ed. R. C. Majumdar. P.-253.

can independently lead, as has been observed, an aspirant upto the goal of God realisation. Surely this is an innovation and a precious acquisition (1) in the world's store house of religious sādhanās."

Here we remember the words of Kabir, "The Purana and the Koran are mere words, lifting up the curtain, (2) I have seen."

In the context of Hindus culture, it may be worth discussing what could be Ramakrishna's view on the concept of adhikāri. If Jīva is shiva, then how could one go by the notion of adhikaribheda? It is true that as a manifestation of one supreme power all men have equal right to acquire knowledge of Brahman. Yet we can not ignore different kinds adhikāriēs regarding different capacities of the aspirants. The word 'atha' in the sūtra 'athatto Brahma jijnāsa' means the desire for knowledge of Brahman follows upon something

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1. Swami Nirvedananda. Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance. P.-127.
 2. Poems of Kabir. No.XLIII. tr. Rabindranath Tagore.

else which one must have already accomplished in order to qualify oneself for this enquiry. (1) There are certain pre-conditions overcoming which enquiry about Brahman may be raised. As a precondition we may say the qualifications of the aspirant which are needed for knowledge of Brahman. "First comes discrimination between what is eternal and what is not eternal. Secondly, one must give up all desires for objective or sensuous enjoyment, whether in this world or in the next. Thirdly, one must have self-control, control over the sense as well as the mind. Lastly one must have a real desire for absolute freedom or liberation. Having acquired these qualifications one may very well enquire about Brahman and know it." (2)

Again people belonging to different kinds of mental platforms may never be said that all of them are

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1. Rasvihary Das. Introduction to Shankara. P.-1.
 2. Ibid. P.-2.

equally competent for acquiring knowledge of Brahman. Some due to fertility of mind may directly approach to Truth as we find the adhikārī like Vivekananda who already transcended the preconditions of Brahma jijñāsa (atha) and approached to Ramakrishna with an inquisitive mind not only to know but to test the reality. But others are seen belonging to a lower mental platform try to overcome the preconditions of Brahma jijñāsa one by one.

Besides, our scriptures say about different ways like sakama karma, niskama karma, jñāna and bhakti suitable for different kinds of aspirants according to their temperament and spiritual competency. One may prefer the way of bhakti in stead of the way of jñāna. If there was no distinction among adhikārīs we all were bound to follow a single path. Hence problem of adhikārī Veda may not be ignored. Ramakrishna also says about different ways of attaining knowledge of God like jñāna, bhakti and karma because he knows that there are

different kinds of adhikāriēs and one can follow any path whatever he likes. But this does not mean that the rules of āsramas or stages of life leading to caste distinction which prevailed in Indian religious system even at the time of Saṅkara and Rāmanuja, should be encouraged. The four varnas - Brahmana, Ksatriya, Vaisya and Sudra are creation of man. In fact they have got a Divine origin which is known from the Puruṣasukta of Rgveda where the Brahmanas are stated to be originated from the mouth of Purusa, Ksatriyas from the two hands of Him, Vaisya from His thigh and Sudras from His feet. (1) From the secondary implication of the Mantra it is known that the Brahmanas were the men of wisdom which is known from the symbol of the mouth of the Creative Deity, the Ksatriyas were the men of power (known from the symbol of hands of the Puruṣa) the Vaisyas are producers (known from the symbol

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1. "Brāhmanōsyo mukhamāsīd
 Vahu rajanyah kṛtaḥ
 Ūru tadasya Yadvaisyah
 Padbhyām 'Sudro' jāyata." Rg. Veda - 10.90.12.

of thighs of Puruṣa) and the Sūdras were the servants (known from the symbol of feet of the Puruṣa).

It is a drawback of Śāṅkara that he could not overcome the limitations of caste system prevailing at that time. He believed that the Brahmin may alone study the Veda, acquire wisdom and attain the goal of Brahma jñāna. He quoted Goutam dharma Sūtra where it is stated that if a Sūdra learned Sruti he was severely punished. "Atha asya vedam upasr̥nvataḥ trapujatu bhyāṃ Sotr̥pra-
(1)
tipūraṇam." "Then should he happen to hear the Vedas, the expiation consists in his ears being filled with
(2)
lead and lac."

Again it is also stated that "Vedaccāraṇe jihvācchedaḥ dhāraṇe sarīra bhedaḥ (Goutama Sūtra. 12.4., quoted from S. B. Sūtra. 1.3.38). "Then there is the chopping off

1. Goutama Dharma Sūtra. XII. IV. Quoted from Śāṅkara
Bhāṣya Sūtra. 1.3.38.

2. Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya. tr. Swami Gambhīrananda. P.-233.

his tongue if he should utter the vedas, and the cutting of the body to pieces if he should commit it to memory."⁽¹⁾

Ramakrishna was a man in nineteenth century who did overcome the limitations of caste system and he never said that Brahmin alone has the right to attain the knowledge of Brahman. His closest disciple Vivekananda was not a Brahmin by caste but he was an adhikārī of the top most rank. Ramakrishna believed that as a precondition of Brahmajñana hankering for truth should be the most important factor. On this ground all men irrespective of cast and creed have equal right to attain liberation. As a son of Immortal all men poor, rich, candāl, Brahmin, and sūdra are equally established on the Divine status. Ramakrishna's realisation of this Truth is indeed a new approach and a bold step to establish a humanistic

1. Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya. tr. Swami Gambhirananda. PP. 233-234.

religion. Although Advaita Vedanta is well known for a humanistic philosophy, the message of humanism could not reach from door to door before Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The humanistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta made lived and more practically applicable in the life of man by Ramakrishna whose teachings are not theoretical utterances but living experiments throughout his life. From the time of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda many social changes have also been marked. Ramakrishna liberated Hinduism from sectarianism pointing out the basic unity underlying different sects of Hinduism.

Again Sāṅkara insists that those who follow the asrama rules must be sannyāsin before they attain liberation, though people who do not adhere to the asrama rules have no such obligation. A sannyasin alone is regarded fit for attaining liberation. Because in the words of Sāṅkara, "that is not possible for people in other three stages, since the Vedas mention

that one incurs sin by giving up the duties of one's own stages of life. But the monk can incur no sin of non-performance of duties owing to his renunciation of all duties."⁽¹⁾

Ramakrishna points out that a house holder may attain Brahmavidyā too if he sincerely develops his spiritual power to be morally elevated and enlightened with knowledge of God after a practice of meditation in solitude. If a householder attains bhakti on God there will be no more possibility to be distracted from the path of Truth. Ramakrishna advised to live in Samsāra keeping mind always fixed on God.⁽²⁾ Actually Ramakrishna embraced man as a man, the manifestation of the supreme spirit in a higher degree. He represents a universal religious philosophy with an open outlook transcending all kinds of limitations regarding cast, creed and sects.⁽³⁾

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1. Śaṅkara Bhāṣya. iii. 4. 20. Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya. tr. Swami Gambhirananda. P.-776.
 2. Kathamṛta. Vol.1 P.-22, Vol.2. P.-60.
 3. Ibid. Vol.2. PP. 62-63.