

ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL STUDY OF ŚRĪ RAMAKRISHNA'S PHILOSOPHY OF SAMANVAYĪ VEDĀNTA

Statement of the Problem:

India witnessed the emergence of Śrī Ramakrishna in the 19th century who is one of the religious figures of that period. At that time, the relation between any two religious sects or communities was embittered by intolerance, jealousy and contempt of each other. Besides this, conflict of creeds and cultures, dogmas and doctrines, theologies and philosophies also became very much prevalent. To end these conflicts and to bring about reconciliation between them is the mission of Śrī Ramakrishna's life.

He lived a life of diverse spiritual realization. He approached Reality along several paths and had varied experiences of It. He found that though these experiences differ in their specific forms and characters, yet they all refer to the same Reality and reveal only different aspects of It. In his opinion, image worship and meditation of the pure, formless Brahman both are true; and these enable men to reach the highest end of their lives, that is, God. Unlike the rationalists, he has not condemned image worship because in this form of worship what is really worshipped is not the clay or stone image; rather, the conscious, intelligent Deity as invoked and manifested in the image. Being omnipresent, God is as much present in the image as in anything else.¹ The images of *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu*, *Kāli*, *Krishna* etc. are only different forms and names of the same Supreme God. The reason behind this is that God manifests Himself in different forms according as His devotees like to see Him in this or that form. Therefore, Śrī Ramakrishna resolved the quarrel between the

worshippers of *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu*, *Kālī*, and *Krishna* etc. by stating that these are only different forms of the same reality.²

Again, there exists a great disagreement between the schools of *Advaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* and *Dvaita*. Śrī Ramakrishna made reconciliation among these from two sides – from the side of Brahman and from the side of the individual self (*jīva*). He said that Brahman is both without form and quality (*nirākāra and nirguṇa*) and with form and quality (*sākāra and saguṇa*). The same reality in its state of inactivity (*nitya-rūpa*) is formless and qualityless; and in its sportive creative activity (*līlā-rūpa*) has form and quality. Therefore, we realize the same Brahman when we experience Him as *saguṇa* or as *nirguṇa* just as we know the same man when we see him sleeping as when we see him acting. From the standpoint of the individual self, as long as the ‘I’ or ego endures in man, there must also be the ‘you’; and thereby there is no denial of the reality of God as a personal being and as the creator of the world. This implies that so long as the individual self dwells in a dualistic level of consciousness, as in waking and even in *savikalpaka samādhi*, his experience of God is in the form of subject-predicate relation. However, when the ‘I’ or ego in man vanishes as in *nirvikalpaka samādhi*, both the world and its creator, God will disappear. Then, God will not be regarded as a subject of consciousness, but as subject-objectless consciousness, that is, as the pure self or Brahman. It is noteworthy that the *Advaita Vedānta* has its origin in *nirvikalpaka samādhi*, while *Dvaita* and *Viśiṣṭādvaita* have their basis in *savikalpaka samādhi*. In both the kinds of *samādhi*, there is the revelation of the same Reality in its different aspects. That is, *Advaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* and *Dvaita* are all true as these are different revelations of the same Reality. This is Śrī Ramakrishna’s distinctive way of uniting *Advaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* and *Dvaita*. Again, the different paths of *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti* are, according to Śrī Ramakrishna,

the different ways of approaching and realizing the same Reality called by the different names of *Ātman*, *Brahman* and *Bhagavān*.

Śrī Ramakrishna's teachings also resolved the contradiction centering round the religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. In the light of his experiments with Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, he declared that all these religions, if followed and practiced sincerely, would lead to the realization of the same God. These religions may differ in respect of creed, doctrine, ways, means and methods; but these do not constitute the essence of religion. The essence of religion is the direct experience of God; and to get an experience of God, purification of the mind is necessary. Along with self-purification, we should also acquire the virtues of discrimination and detachment (*viveka* and *vairāgya*). It is worth mentioning that though in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam the same reality is called by the different names of *Bhagavān*, God and Allah; yet there is an essential unity among these religions. The Hindus, Christians and Muslims reach the same goal (God) by travelling along the different paths; just as they drink the same water of a tank from different sides and give it the different names of *jala*, *acqua* and *pāni*. Therefore, all religions lead to the same God and are true.³ This reminds us of Śrī Krishna's teaching of harmony in the *Gītā*. The same idea has been expressed in the *Śivamahimnaḥ Stotram* as: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."⁴

In fact, whatever Śrī Ramakrishna taught is nothing but the preaching of the old gospel of harmony of Hindu faith with a new fragrance. His philosophy is *samanvayī Vedānta* since it brings about a reconciliation (*samanvaya*) of all the schools of *Vedānta*. In other words, it reconciles the salient features of all the *Vedāntic* schools.⁵ It can also be

called '*Neo-Vedānta*' or a new kind of *Vedānta* in the sense that it has brought all the sects of the Hindus as well as of all other religions together in a golden bond of understanding, love and sympathy. It gives a new life, a new fragrance to *Vedānta* without rejecting its basic truth. It is a new spirit though it is a *Vedāntic* spirit. *Bhakti* is the essence of Śrī Ramakrishna's *Vedānta*.⁶

Justification of the problem:

We live in an age of outgrowing violence, hatred and terrorism. These cannot be proscribed by merely providing arms to defense groups, making laws and holding peace meets. What is required is the upliftment of our spiritual nature so that peace and harmony can be reinstated. In this context, Śrī Ramakrishna's teaching of harmony is very much relevant because he lived a spiritually vibrant life; and became a living example of religious harmony. The present study is an attempt to delve into Śrī Ramakrishna's philosophy of *samanvayī Vedānta* and its contribution to bring about world peace and harmony.

Objectives of the study:

1. To explore Śrī Ramakrishna's philosophy of *samanvayī Vedānta*.
2. To show how peace and unity can be achieved by following the path of Śrī Ramakrishna.
3. To understand and highlight Śrī Ramakrishna's message of the harmony of all religions.
4. To bring out Śrī Ramakrishna's concept of Brahman as *S'aktior Kālī*, the Divine Mother as the Ultimate Reality.

5. To show the difference of Śrī Ramakrishna's view of Reality from the views of Śaṅkara and some Western Philosophers – Bradley, Spinoza, Hegel, Whitehead and Lotze.

Organization of chapters:

The proposed research work has been organized into five chapters:

Chapter –1: Introduction.

This chapter looks into the religious, cultural and social situation of India during the 18th and 19th centuries, and highlights the necessity of Śrī Ramakrishna's emergence.

Chapter –2: Śrī Ramakrishna's doctrine of Brahman: *Kāli*– The Divine Mother.

This chapter does explore Śrī Ramakrishna's doctrine of Brahman as *kāli*, and gives an account of the comparative study of Śrī Ramakrishna's view of the Absolute (Ultimate Reality) with Western as well as Śaṅkara's view.

Chapter –3: Reality, levels of Consciousness (in Indian context) and the World.

This chapter lays emphasis on the fact that Śrī Ramakrishna admits different levels of consciousness which result in different experiences and revelations of Reality, and describes his concept of world as a relative reality.

Chapter –4: Śrī Ramakrishna's doctrine of *Dharma- Samanvaya* or Harmony of Religion.

This chapter concentrates on Śrī Ramakrishna's idea of religion with special reference to the ancient Indian religion. It also focuses on Śrī Ramakrishna's way of bringing about reconciliation between different religions, creeds and cultures, dogmas and doctrines; the

preaching of his message of harmony of all religions by Swami Vivekananda and its contribution to establish world peace and harmony.

Chapter –5: Conclusion.

Here, an attempt has been made to establish Śrī Ramakrishna's Philosophy as *Samanvayī Vedānta* by pointing out its similarities and differences from *various schools of Vedānta*.

Methodology used:

The methodology of the present study is qualitative in nature and its approach is theoretical. The parameters of observation, comparison and analysis have been used in the present research work.

Hypothesis, if any:

The present study develops a strategy to resolve conflict among different sects, religions and philosophies of the world in the light of Śrī Ramakrishna's teachings. A critical study of Śrī Ramakrishna's philosophy makes a lasting contribution to establish peace and happiness in the world.

Summary of chapters:

The first chapter, i.e. the introductory chapter describes the religious, cultural and social situation of India during the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time, Western materialism and ascetism massively attacked the glory of ancient India's heritage and culture; the sense of respect and the rites and customs of common people.⁷ The chapter shows that the reform movements of the 19th century apparently changed the visage of society; and resulted in never-ending doubts and a whirlpool of controversies threatening the individual and society with dis-integration. To resolve the controversies the guidance of a man having

direct perception of the Absolute Truth became necessary; and such a man is Śrī Ramakrishna.

It has also been portrayed in the chapter that Śrī Ramakrishna played a very important role in the rejuvenation of Indian spirituality starting from the *Vedic* period to the present times. His contribution to Indian Renaissance is the revitalization of three beliefs, such as, the philosophy of non-attachment, religion as realization and the truth of all religions.⁸ The chapter proposes that Śrī Ramakrishna's life and message influenced both the conservative and radical wings of India. The orthodox society of the 19th century found an outstanding seer in Śrī Ramakrishna who had the power of bringing about a mighty awakening of the old religion of the Hindus. The radicals also found a remarkable solution of their intellectual doubts in his realizations.⁹ His ideas are relevant not only for the age in which he lived, but also for the present age. To be more specific, the present age has set the hearts of men adrift in regard to God and the ultimate Reality; and here we find Śrī Ramakrishna rising like a star of hope in the midst of confusion and uncertainty.¹⁰

The second chapter is primarily concerned with Śrī Ramakrishna's doctrine of Brahman or the Absolute in comparison with the views of *Śaṅkara* and some Western philosophers. This chapter reveals the difference of opinion prevalent in the ancient and medieval period regarding the nature of God. Being a very reasonable person, Śrī Ramakrishna tried to resolve this difference on the experiential ground. He stated that God is both formless and has a form; and is both personal and impersonal. God assumes form for the devotees (*bhaktas*), but He is formless for the *jñāni*. The *jñāni*, *yogi* and the *bhakta* all are seeking the same God; only the names used by them are different.¹¹ The chapter also highlights different philosophical views about the relation between God and the Absolute. In this regard, the British philosopher F.H. Bradley said that God is not same as

the Absolute. He is an aspect or appearance of the Absolute; and is, therefore, different from the Absolute. On the contrary, other philosophers like Spinoza, Hegel, Lotze and Whitehead hold that God and the Absolute are not two different realities. For them, God Himself is the Absolute. In a like manner, Śaṅkara maintained that God and the Absolute are not two different realities; rather, these are the same reality conceived from two different standpoints. Śaṅkara's view is rich and adequate than other views. On the other side, Śrī Ramakrishna stated that the Absolute (Brahman) and God (Śakti or Kālī) are non-different. They are the same reality in different states and with different names. The same reality in its essential immutable being (*nitya-rūpa*) is called Brahman or the Absolute; and in its sportive creative activity (*līlā-rūpa*) is called Kālī, Śakti, or the personal God. This view helps us reach towards infiniteness and completeness of thought.

The above-mentioned view of Śrī Ramakrishna resembles *Tantra* that states that Brahman and Śakti are nothing but the two aspects of the same reality; and hence, both are real. In contrast with *Tantra*, *Vedānta* states that Brahman alone is real and everything else, including Śakti is unreal. Śrī Ramakrishna tried to realize God by practicing the disciplines of both *Tantra* and *Vedānta*; and recognized the ultimate non-difference between the two. For this reason, his *Advaita* is called *Śāktādvaita*. He experienced the presence of God (Kālī or the Divine Mother) in everything especially in women. He also worshipped the *Shoḍaśī* (literally means 'maiden sixteen years old') as his mother. The attitude of regarding God as mother was prevalent in the ancient world also.

Finally yet importantly, the chapter emphasizes that Śrī Ramakrishna is a Kālī-worshipper and his Kālī is his God and Brahman. He used the terms --- 'Ādyāśakti', 'Brahman', 'Īśvara' and 'Bhagavān' to denote the Supreme Being or the Ultimate Reality or God. He has a veritable personality and wanted to enjoy God in many ways. He has

never spoken in theological terms and has no sectarian approach to God. The striking variety of his spiritual personality has been expressed in *Paricharika* in August 1886 -- “*tini Hari baliten, Kālī -o-baliten ebang āpan upāsyake Satchidānda-o-baliten*” [He invoked *Hari*, he invoked *Kālī* and he also invoked *Satchidānanda*].¹²

The third chapter is about Reality, levels of consciousness (in Indian context) and the world. The chapter puts forward that reality is the state of things, as they actually exist; rather than as they appear or are imagined.¹³ It is responsive to all human interests and purposes; and is not the immobile and insentient matter. Different systems of Indian philosophy attributed different characters to reality. The *Upaniṣadic* texts have considered reality to be one in essence, but a plurality in appearance. *Vedānta* stated that Brahman is the highest Reality that transcends all words and language.

In this chapter, a comparative study has been made among *Śaṅkara's*, Bradley's and Śrī Ramakrishna's views of reality. For *Śaṅkara*, Brahman, the highest Reality is *nirguṇa* (attributeless) from the transcendental standpoint; but from the empirical standpoint, It is *saguṇa* (possesses attributes). This Brahman becomes *Īśvara* when it reflects in *māyā*; while the reality or the Absolute of Bradley remains always absolute. Again, *Śaṅkara* asserted that being the product of *māyā*, *saguṇa* Brahman or *Īśvara* is unreal. On the contrary, Śrī Ramakrishna said that being the aspects of the same reality; *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman, both are true and real. Actually, the chapter explores that Śrī Ramakrishna's view of reality is integral, as it is not confined to Hinduism only. Rather, he accepted the views of reality in *Islam*, *Christianity* and other religions too as true. His multi-dimensional view of reality do not merely assert that the different aspects of the ultimate Reality are true; but also signifies that to understand the true nature of the ultimate Reality, it is necessary to take into consideration all the different views of it.

The chapter also deals with consciousness, which is the state or quality of awareness. In Sanskrit, consciousness is called 'cit' or 'chaitanya'. Consciousness culminates in *yoga* that denotes union of the individual self with the supreme self. *Yoga* is impossible without the purification of mind; and 'woman and gold' act as barriers to *yoga*. Perfection in *yoga* is called *samādhi*.¹⁴ Generally, the body does not remain alive after the attainment of *samādhi* except in case of great souls; and mainly, there are two kinds of *samādhi*, such as, *jaḍa samādhi* and *bhāva samādhi*.

The chapter shows that in *Vedānta*, there is the reference of the seven planes of the mind located in the navel, organs of generation and evacuation, the heart, throat, forehead and head respectively. These seven planes have resemblance to the six centers of *yoga*, namely, *mulādhāra*, *svādhīsthāna*, *manipura*, *anāhata*, *viśuddha* and *ājñā*. All these centers are like the 'lotuses' in the subtle body; and *Satchidānanda* dwells in the lotus called 'sahasrāra'. In addition, the chapter accentuates that there are four levels of consciousness, such as, waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and *Samādhi*. Besides recognizing these, Śrī Ramakrishna has accepted seven more levels of consciousness; of which the last or seventh level is the super-conscious level where Reality is revealed as pure subject-objectless consciousness, that is, as indeterminate Brahman; and his consciousness always hovered about the borderline of the absolute and the relative existence, the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Brahman.

Further, the chapter depicts the world as the manifestation of the Unmanifest. The world, according to *Vedānta*, is a 'framework of illusion'. That is, it is illusory like a dream because it is not eternal and imperishable. The world is unreal (*asat*) because it is not eternally real and immutable. The theory of evolution propounded by *Vedānta* is cyclic in nature. The theory avows that the universe is not absolutely created or destroyed; rather, it

undergoes a series of transformation from the non-manifest to the manifest state through different stages of periodic expansions and contractions.¹⁵ Corresponding to the Vedāntic theory, scientific theory (i.e., cyclic model of creation) developed by Paul J Steinhardt and Neil Turok in 2002 states that the evolution of the universe is cyclic in time; and the universe goes through infinite cycles of expansion and contraction in which density and temperature remain finite.¹⁶

The chapter also proposes that Swami Vivekananda is the first *Vedāntist* who tried to co-relate *Vedānta* cosmogony and scientific cosmology. He, by recapitulating the cyclic theory of the universe said that the universe goes through a series of expansion and contraction during its evolution.¹⁷ He brought about the great syncretisation of *Vedānta* and science on the basis of '*bhāvamukha*' experience of his master Śrī Ramakrishna. For Śrī Ramakrishna, world with all its wonderful objects is the sportive creative activity of Brahman (the Absolute). The world has no permanent and eternal reality like Brahman; but has a relative reality only. It is called '*saṃsāra*' for it is always changing and moving.¹⁸ Narrating the impermanence of the world Śrī Ramakrishna stated that though the world is like a 'thorny bush'; yet one can live in it keeping the mind towards God. In his opinion, worldliness and liberation both depend on the will of God. Until a man feels that God is the Master, he will have to come to the world repeatedly; and consequently, there will be no liberation.

The fourth chapter explores that religion (*dharma*) is the very soul of India; and attempts to analyze the doctrine of harmony of religion from Śrī Ramakrishna's standpoint. Religion includes the entire gamut of living beings, the entire universe. It is not rigid; rather changes with the needs of the time. The essence of religion practiced in India is that it unites all dualities or differences into the one Reality that sustains everything.¹⁹ That is,

‘unity in religion’ formed the very characteristic of India starting from the ancient to the modern period. However, it does not mean denial of the diversity of religion because diversity is the plan of Nature, and enriches a culture. Just as each man needs a coat of his own size; likewise, every human being needs a specific religion of his own, which may resemble that of another man, but will necessarily be different from it. The chapter uncovers that sometimes religion is used interchangeably with faith; and there need not be any conflict between religion and science as these are concerned with two different realities. The basic difference between science and religion is that the former one is reductionist, while the latter one is holistic in its approach. Both science and religion are necessary for human beings to integrate themselves with their own self and the society.

The chapter also shows that for Śrī Ramakrishna religion is realization; and what he did is nothing but the revival of the ancient belief that there is truth in all religions. Sticking to one’s own religion without showing disrespect to any other religion is the noticeable characteristic of Śrī Ramakrishna’s religion. It has been expressed in the chapter that God has made different religions in order to suit different aspirants of different temperaments. To quote Śrī Ramakrishna, “Just as a mother prepares fish in different ways for her children– pilau, pickled fish, fried fish and so on – depending on their taste and power of digestion, so has the Divine Mother provided different paths to suit the spiritual taste and power of assimilation of her children”.²⁰ He recognized the differences, but at the same time, acknowledged the common unity between religions, also. He is the only person who traversed the spiritual paths of different religions and attained transcendental experiences through all of them. He not only practiced the different paths of Hinduism, *Yoga, Tantra* and so on; but his insatiable desire to realize God through different religions led him to practice the disciplines of Islam and Christianity also. Though he himself followed different spiritual paths, yet, he never suggested that everyone should follow

several paths because this will hinder one-pointed attention and passion that are necessary for reaching the goal. He also vehemently criticized pure dogmatism, religious sectarianism, fanaticism and bigotry.

The chapter also states that Śrī Ramakrishna believed that if a person follows his religion with faith, sincerity and purity of mind, he would definitely attain direct spiritual experience. He wanted everyone to follow his own religion and attain the highest fulfillment that it assures. This is what he meant by harmony of religion. The dogma of harmony of religion as preached by Śrī Ramakrishna is the outcome of his own personal revelation; and is the Indian version of religious pluralism. Pluralistic outlook is the common and distinctive religious attitude of the people in ancient India. In modern times, Swami Vivekananda re-interpreted the ancient scriptures in the light of Śrī Ramakrishna's experiences; and it is he who spread the message of harmony of religion of his master in abroad. Besides, he took pluralism one-step further and maintained that pluralism must culminate in universalism, which declares that all religions are equal.

Actually, harmony and peace are the crying need of the present time that is overwhelmed by narrow nationalism, religious fanaticism, political tension, violence and hatred. Harmony of religion is something, which we have to create. A way of creating it in the light of Śrī Ramakrishna's teaching is to engage ourselves in the effort of trying to understand other religions; and understanding seems to be the result of a very difficult process of dialogue and conversation. Śrī Ramakrishna foresaw that dialogue plays an important role in establishing religious harmony; and that is why, he made repeated use of it in all his teaching and preaching.

Conclusion of the study:

Śrī Ramakrishna's philosophy of *samanvayī vedānta* is the new *Vedāntic* Philosophy that the world and humanity needs today. It also serves best the necessities of modern time with all its confounding sophistication and obstacles.

Śrī Ramakrishna's intense urge to realize God has broken the age-old convention that God-realisation is a post-retirement plan. His ideas on God paves the way to unlock the nuggets of wisdom lying hidden in the ancient religious texts like the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads* and so on due to the language used therein; and helps us to practise them in our lives in a methodical way. He saw the expression of the Divine Mother in all women, whether noble or fallen. So, he calls every women 'mother'--- 'an invocation with devotion'. This shows his respect for womenfolk and contradicts the long-standing male-dominated structure of society. He has taught us through his divine ideas that endless possibilities of life will open up if we are aware of the true personality of ourselves; and realise that man cannot be limited by anything. It is at this summit that our life begins.

Śrī Ramakrishna has given us the gospel of spirit instead of any theological creed or a philosophical theory. For him, spirit takes possession of every organ of the human being as in the case of his *mahā-samādhi*. Every chord of his being vibrated with spiritual currents; and he opened the flood-gate of spiritual currents for the future generations who are enjoying today the fruits of his *sādhana*.

Spirituality is the search for our true nature; and this searching had been done by Śrī Ramakrishna throughout his life. He attained that state of spirituality which helped him to go beyond the gross body and beyond all orientations. He established his life in such a state of peace, self control and radiant joy that could not be affected by any sort of material

gains. Contrary to popular perception, Śrī Ramakrishna has shown that spirituality is something we need when we are at a loss what to do; when we want to take a road, but are still standing perplexed at the cross-roads. His life is a lesson for all the spiritual aspirants who do not want to be caught up by the pulls of the flesh; but want to surpass themselves to realise the transcendental nature. This transcendental state of mind may be described in the words of Śrī Ramakrishna as '*bhāvamukha*' in which the mind dwells in the Divine (Supreme Reality) both in its absolute and relative aspects. It is the meeting place of Being and becoming, *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*.

The '*bhāvamukha*' state of consciousness could be philosophically understood in the light of the *Tantra* and *Vedānta* paradigms. Śrī Ramakrishna is quite at home with both the *Tantra* and the *Vedānta*. Śrī Ramakrishna introduced into Indian spiritual tradition the concept of *Vijñāna*. A *Vijñāni* is a person who, having realised *purṇa jñāna* (complete knowledge) in the form of complete merger into Brahman, emerges therefrom, mysteriously as it were by the Divine Will for the good of the world, to liberate others in bondage, out of great unconditional compassion and love for all beings. For a *vijñāni*, the world is not *mithyā*, but *līlā*. Thus, the *satya-mithyā* paradigm of *Vedānta* in '*Brahma satya jagat mithyā*' gets transformed into the *nitya-līlā* as '*Brahma nitya jagat līlā*', which is a kind of *Vedāntic-Tantra* paradigm, rather than a conventional *Tantra* paradigm.

Śrī Ramakrishna's philosophy of the *vijñāna* abiding in *Bhāvamukha* is supra-logical and mystical. *Vijñāna* is a special *jñāna* combining the *jñāna* of the seer of the Absolute, Impersonal, Transcendent Reality and the *bhakti* of the sage. *Jñāna* and *Bhakti* meet in a *Vijñāna* and fuse into *Vijñāna*. '*Bhāvamukha*' is the state of the *Vijñāna*. The state of '*bhāvamukha*' is the state of *Īśvara*. The ego of the *avatāra puruṣa* who dwells in the state of *Bhāvamukha* after the realisation of the Absolute Brahman, choosing to 'come

down' as it were for the spiritual welfare of the world, is what Śrī Ramakrishna calls the 'ripe ego' (*pākā āmi*) transformed and transfigured as the 'Cosmic I' (*Virāt āmi or Vaḍa āmi*).

Unlike his predecessors, Śrī Ramakrishna's view of Reality does not revolve round the statute of a particular attitude. It is sublime, but not ethereal. It is comprehensive; and signifies the all-round development of a human being combined with a magnanimity of heart to love others. In his opinion, the greatest conquest is the conquest of the mind. Conquest of the mind or transcendence of ego results in liberation; and merging of the individual soul in the universal soul. Disappearance of egotism gives us the power over the whole Nature through the power of love; and it is the essence of consciousness. Consciousness unlocks the real nature of humanity. Hence, there is no need for laser-guns and space-ships; rather, there is a need for contemplation to develop consciousness. This teaching of Śrī Ramakrishna envelops the whole idea about Reality; and has left an indelible mark on world's spiritual development.

Śrī Ramakrishna's view of consciousness has revived the ancient *yogic* principles and practices of life. He himself possessed some *yogic* or psychic powers, yet he hardly used them. His ideas and teachings about the high states of *yoga* are preached throughout the world later on which is an unprecedented explosion of knowledge for the sake of humanity.

To Śrī Ramakrishna, religion is always a sense-awakening or deep realization from the profound and wide universe. It is, according to him, without forms in outer shape; and so ritual-based religious practices do not carry any meaning to him. Religion is science to this unlettered village-man as it helps to know Truth which comes from the '*cetanā*'. *Cetanā* , for him, denotes sincerity, persistence and patience to get a desired goal. This

description of religion actually come from the experiences of his life which are absolutely inherent. So, to Śrī Ramakrishna, religion is not a miracle or a mesmerization. He realised that one's faith is strengthened by reasoning ; and showed us that religion needs not mere faith, but also astute reason. The need for having both faith and reason was emphasised again and again by his practising one after another religion. He assimilated the knowledge gathered from different religious paths – from Islam to the Christianity to the Hinduism. This togetherness made him a unique product of the unique land of ours.

He always upheld the religious and moral standard of our nation, which can be aptly proclaimed as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation where there is a space for each one of us to practice deeply felt religious principles. That is, one can practise any religion depending on his or her own taste or ability because the goal of each and every religion is same. If we follow the sayings of Śrī Ramakrishna, we will surely continue to survive and thrive in modern world. Śrī Ramakrishna's thought of religion is truly democratic in nature in which there is a space for individual freedom; and this democratic abode is actually the perfect nurturing place of religion, which is free from all constraints, all limiting adjuncts and from ignorance. This kind of freedom of our free religious thoughts inspires us to have a multi-faith society where people would not be questioned about their beliefs, where people would not be discriminated against because of their religion, where people would live in peace and harmony with love for all living beings, where there would not be dogmatic allegations to any particular thought; and where the great saying of Śrī Ramakrishna – '*yata mat, tata path*' would be practiced.

References:

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