

CHAPTER-2

ŚRĪ RAMAKRISHNA'S DOCTRINE OF BRAHMAN: KĀLI – THE DIVINE MOTHER

The idea of God with form is very much a religious idea as the idea of God without form. In a like manner, the ideas of Personal and Impersonal God are both religious ideas. One can renounce the world for the sake of God; or can remain in the world to seek God.

2.1. Nature of God:

In the *Vedic* period, there arises no question about the personal or impersonal, formed or formless aspect of God. There is no image or temple in the *Vedic* age. However, there are verbal icons, i.e., presentation of the divinity in quaint words. *Vedic* sages are not happy about this form of worship and so they asked a question to themselves – “*Kasmai Devāya haviṣā vidhema*”? [To what God shall we offer our oblations?] (*Rgveda*, x.121.1). The *Rg Vedic* answer to this question is – “*Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*” [The Real is one, the learned call it by various names] (*Rgveda*, I.164.46). This denotes the transition from polytheism to monotheism. Max Muller introduces ‘henotheism’ as a transitional stage from polytheism to monotheism. Henotheism means ‘belief in only one God’. However, neither polytheism nor henotheism, nor even monotheism can be regarded as the essence of the early *Vedic* philosophy. Prof. Max Muller in his ‘*Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*’ states: “Whatever is the age when the collection of our Rig-Veda Samhita was finished, it was before that age that the

conviction had been formed that there is but One, One Being, neither male nor female, a Being raised high above all the conditions and limitations of personality and of human nature.”¹ Hence, *Ṛg Veda* forestalls later monotheism and also presages *vedāntic* monism. Dr. Griswold finds traces of monism in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* of the *Ṛg-veda*. Griswold in his ‘*The Religion of the Rigveda*’ says:

“... both monism and polytheism, as in later Hinduism--the monism of the all-embracing Purusha and the polytheism of the devas. The key to the solution of the mystery of things is found in the conception of the whole of nature as a living organism, the body of an original Purusha, ‘Man’ or ‘Spirit’, involving therefore a spiritual interpretation of the universe. The line of thought found in the hymn is prophetic of the great monistic doctrine of the Upanishads and of the later Vedanta philosophy”.²

The essence of the *Vedas* is the indescribable absolutism, which holds both monism and pluralism within its bosom and ultimately transcends both, and this has been beautifully and poetically described in the *Upaniṣads*. The word ‘*upaniṣad*’ is derived from the root ‘*ṣad*’, which means to ‘sit down’, to ‘destroy’, or ‘to loose’. The word ‘*upa*’ means ‘near by’ and ‘*ni*’ means ‘devotedly’. Therefore, ‘*upaniṣad*’ literally means sitting down near a teacher or a *guru* in a devoted manner to acquire knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. *Upaniṣads* are the concluding portion as well as the cream of the *Vedas* and are therefore called ‘*Vedānta*’. In the *Upaniṣadic* period, God is regarded as the Supreme Being and a question about the true nature of God arises. That is, in the medieval period, when

the *Upaniṣads* entered in our religious life, the idea of God with form and without form; and the idea of a Personal and Impersonal God have been developed. In the *Kena Upaniṣad*, the Supreme Being (God) is described as – “*Na tatra cakṣur gacchati, na bāg gacchati, no manah...*” i.e., ‘That, up to which the eye does not go, neither the speech, nor the thought or mind’ (*Kena upaniṣad*, 1.3). This implies that the Supreme Being is beyond human comprehension and leads to the idea of an Impersonal God. The ‘*tattvamasi*’ doctrine of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* also states that there is no Personal God. In the *Śvetāśvatara upaniṣad*, on the contrary, the Supreme Being is regarded as a Person and has a form – “*Vedāhmetam puruṣam mahantam ādityavarṇam tamasaḥ parastāt...*” i.e., ‘I know that *Puruṣa*, the great one, illuminating like the sun, beyond darkness’ (*Śvetāśvatara upaniṣad*, 3.8). In the *Purāṇas*, there is the notion of God as personal. The *Purāṇic* God moves and acts in the world; and is called by the varied names, such as, *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu*, *Rāma*, *Kālī* and so on. In Brahmoism, God has no form but He is a person. Brahmo devotional songs refer to verbal icons of which a notable instance is Rabindranath Tagore’s – “*Padaprante rakho sevake* [keep the servant at Your feet].” Tagore’s verse reflects that God has a form presented in words and is Personal even in religions, which forbid image-worship. The Muslims and Christians also worship a formless but personal God.

The review of the religious history of the ancient and medieval period reflects that God is both formless and has a form; and that He is both Personal and Impersonal. Here it can be mentioned that Śrī Ramakrishna acquainted himself with the *Vedic*, *Upaniṣadic* and *Purāṇic* ideas of God. He arrived in Calcutta

along with his elder brother Ramakumar. Soon, he got himself involved in Mother (*Kāli*) worship, and gradually began to perceive the reality of the Mother in the image of *Bhavatārīṇī*. This marks the beginning of his idea of regarding the Mother as Brahman; and the basis of his integration of the *Vedic*, *Upaniṣadic* and *Purāṇic* ideas of God.³ The idea of the Motherhood of God was prevalent in the ancient world also. The religions of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and other countries had Mother Deities. But these ancient religions were swept away by the Semitic religions like Islam and Christianity. Consequently, India remained the only country where Motherhood of God received recognition and flourished as a cult. The culture of *Mohenjo Daro* had Mother Deities. The ancient *Dravidian* people also worshipped Mother Goddess. In the *Vedas* too, we find reference of *Aditi*, the Mother of the gods, the Mother Deity *Umā Haimavatī* and the woman *Ṛṣi Vāk*.⁴

For Śrī Ramakrishna, God is both Personal and Impersonal; possesses form and is without form. He is both a *sākāravādi* and a *nirākāravādi*. Sir Brajendranath Seal, one of the greatest Indian philosophers of the twentieth century says about Śrī Ramakrishna:

“In corroborating truth from the absolute point of view he negated all conditions and modes, but from the relative or conditional point of view he worshipped Kali the Divine Mother as well as other modes and adumbrations of the Deity. He worshipped the one in all, and the all in one, and he saw no contradiction, but only a fuller reality in this. So also he reconciled *sakara and nirakara upasana*. For him there was nothing in the form of the Deity but God manifesting

Himself. The antagonism between matter and spirit no longer existed for him.”⁵

Once, Śrī Ramakrishna asked Mahendranath Gupta (M), a writer of the great religious classic – ‘*Śrī Śrī Ramakrishna Kathāmṛta*’--- “Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?” M replied that he believes in formless God. Śrī Ramakrishna said to M --- “...It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form...”⁶ (Gupta, 1942). The believers in the formless God and the worshippers of God with form are all proceeding to the same goal. God assumes form for the devotees (*bhaktas*), but He is formless for the *jñāni*. The *jñāni*, the *yogi* and the *bhakta* all are seeking the same God; only the names used by them are different. The *jñāni* calls Him ‘Brahman’, the *yogi* calls Him ‘*Ātman*’ or ‘*Paramātman*’; and the *bhakta* calls Him ‘*Bhagavān*’. Similarly, in different religions, God is called by different names. Muslims call Him ‘Allah’, Christians call Him ‘God’, the Father or Jesus Christ and the Hindus call Him ‘*Kṛṣṇa*’, ‘*Śiva*’ and so on. This can be illustrated as – the same ‘water’ is called ‘pani’ by the Muslims, ‘acqua’ or ‘water’ by the Christians and ‘jal’ by the Hindus. Here, it is noteworthy that Kabir, a mystic of the medieval period, consider God with form as his Mother and formless God as his Father. So, it does not matter whether we believe in God with form or without form; what is important is that our faith must be sincere and whole-hearted.⁷

Śrī Ramakrishna has deep and sustained experience of God. To the question of *Narendra* (Swami Vivekananda) – “Sir, have you seen God?” the Master says: “Yes, I have seen God. I have seen Him more tangibly than I see you. I have talked to Him more intimately than I am talking to you”⁸ (Gupta, 1942). He has compared God with chameleon. Sometimes, the chameleon appears red, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue, sometimes violet and at other times grey and so on. Again, sometimes, it possesses no colour. Likewise, sometimes God has attributes and sometimes, He is attributeless. So, quarreling about the aspects or attributes of God resembles quarreling about the colour of a chameleon.⁹ The nature of God is like that of a child. As the child is not under the control of any *guṇa*, so God is also beyond the *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. There is no end to God’s aspects. He is limitless and infinite. The diverse aspects of God is not comprehensible by means of reason or intellect, it is a matter of feeling or introspection. Śrī Ramakrishna describes this as –

“...Satchidānanda is like an infinite ocean. Intense cold freezes the water in to ice, which floats on the ocean in blocks of various forms. Likewise, through the cooling influence of bhakti, one sees forms of God in the Ocean of the Absolute. These forms are meant for the bhaktas, the lovers of God. But when the Sun of Knowledge rises, the ice melts; it becomes the same water it was before. Water above and water below, everywhere nothing but water. Therefore, a prayer in the Bhāgavata says: ‘O Lord, Thou hast form, and Thou art also formless. Thou walkest before us, o Lord, in the shape of a man; again, Thou hast been described in the Vedas as beyond words and thought’¹⁰” (Gupta, 1942).

Śrī Ramakrishna’s mind reeled constantly on God. A mere hint about God put him into *samādhi*. He sees God everywhere especially in ‘man’. He said that ‘*Jīva is Śiva,*’ i.e., God exists in every being.¹¹ The Divine is both in us and out of us. God is neither completely transcendent, nor completely immanent. The unity of man and God is the fundamental theme of the *Upaniṣads*. The difference between the God as spirit and God as person is one of standpoint and not of essence. So, there exists no fundamental contradiction between the idea of God as an all-embracing spirit and the idea of a personal God.¹² The impersonal Absolute and the personal God are not two different realities unrelated to each other, nor they are inseparably related to each other as substance and quality. Rather, 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 *Kāli* or the personal God.¹³ The difference between the Personal God and the Impersonal Absolute is like the difference between ice and water. As Śrī Ramakrishna says –

“ ‘When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive, neither creating, nor preserving, nor destroying, I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the impersonal God. When I think of Him as active, creating, preserving, destroying, I call Him Shakti or Maya or Prakriti, the Personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference... It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other...’¹⁴” (Rolland, 1931).

Evelyn Underhill in her introduction to Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘One Hundred Poems Of Kabir’ said: “Kabir is one of those mystics who have resolved the

perpetual opposition between the personal and the impersonal, the transcendent and the immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature; between the Absolute of philosophy and the ‘sure true Friend’ of devotional religion”...¹⁵ (Tagore, 1915).

2.2. God and the Absolute:

It becomes evident from the above that Śrī Ramakrishna teaches that Brahman or the Absolute and *Śakti* or *Kālī* or God are the same reality in two different aspects or states. This very teaching of Śrī Ramakrishna solves the thorny problem of the relation between God and the Absolute. In Philosophy, the word ‘Absolute’ denotes Ultimate Reality, which embraces all things and beings. On the contrary, ‘God’ signifies a personal being that creates, preserves and destroys the world. The world of finite things and beings lies outside the being of God, but it is very much dependent on God. The Absolute, on the other hand, includes both God and the finite things and beings. Hence, God is not identical with the Absolute; and a question arises as to how God is related to the Absolute.¹⁶

Regarding the relation between God and the Absolute, different Philosophers of the West and India, put forward different views. F.H. Bradley stated that God is not the same as the Absolute. He is different from the Absolute and is an aspect or appearance of It. The Absolute is real, but God being an appearance of It, is unreal. God as the creator of the world and the object of human worship must be outside of and external to them. He is limited by the world and the finite selves, and becomes a limited and finite God. But religion

requires that there must be perfect unity among God, man and the world. That is, God must be the all-inclusive reality or the Absolute. As Bradley says, “We may say that in religion God tends always to pass beyond himself. He is necessarily led to end in the absolute, which for religion is not God”¹⁷ (Bradley, 1897). This view, instead of explaining properly the relation between God and the Absolute, explains away God by demoting Him to the sphere of appearances and, therefore, almost denies Him. A satisfactory solution of the problem must show that God possesses absolute reality, though He is the object of worship. Again, Philosophers like Spinoza, Hegel, Lotze and Whitehead maintained that God and the Absolute are not two different realities. God being the Supreme Self is the ultimate reality or the Absolute. That is, God is the Absolute; and He is both the ultimate ground of the world and its creator and moral governor.

Some *Vaiṣṇava Vedāntins* say that God as the Supreme Person is the ultimate reality; and the Absolute or Brahman is an aspect of God. Actually, of God and the Absolute, if we want to consider one as an aspect of the other; we may say that God as a determinate Personal being is an aspect of the indeterminate Brahman or the Absolute, and not vice versa. But this view makes the Absolute wholly immanent in the world and ignores its transcendent aspect. *Śāṅkara* holds that God and the Absolute are not two different realities; rather, they are the same reality conceived from two different points of view. From the practical standpoint (*vyāvahārika-dṛṣṭi*), Brahman (Absolute) is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world; and therefore, is an omnipotent and omniscient being. But from the transcendental standpoint (*pāramārthika-dṛṣṭi*),

Brahman is not the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. The essential nature of Brahman is that It is indeterminate or characterless (*nirguṇa*). Brahman is only apparently associated with creativity (*māyopāhita*) and appears as *Īśvara* or God. That is, Śāṅkara's opinion is that Brahman or the Absolute is the ultimate reality; and God is an appearance of Brahman. His view is rich and adequate in comparison with the views of Western philosophers and *Vaiṣṇava Vedāntins*.¹⁸ On the other side, Śrī Ramakrishna's view on the relation between God and the Absolute help us reach towards infiniteness and completeness of thought.

2.3. Brahman and Śakti:

Brahman (Absolute) and *Śakti* (God), according to Śrī Ramakrishna, are non-different or identical. He illustrated this truth by an analogy of fire and its burning power. We cannot think of fire without its burning power, nor can we think of the burning power without fire. To quote him, "One cannot think of Brahman without *Śakti*, or of *Śakti* without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute"¹⁹ (Gupta, 1942). Hence, *Śakti* cannot exist without Brahman just as waves cannot exist without water. If we accept *Śakti*, we will have to accept Brahman also.²⁰

Śrī Ramakrishna's view is that Brahman is both without form and quality (*nirākāra* and *nirguṇa*); and with form and quality (*sākāra* and *saguṇa*). Brahman is beyond knowledge (*vidyā*) and ignorance (*avidyā*). It is beyond *māyā*, i.e., the illusion of duality. It is unattached to good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness. Again, according to Śrī Ramakrishna, except Brahman, all other

things have been polluted by contact with our lips like a morsel of food. That is, Brahman remains untouched by human lips ‘(*Brahma ucciṣṭa hay nā*)’.²¹ Traditional *Advaita Vedānta*, on the contrary, regards Brahman as formless and quality - less (*nirākāra* and *nirguṇa*). It states that Brahman alone is real (*nitya*) and all else is unreal (*anitya*). Everything else is super-imposed on Brahman. This is the path of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*). For the *jñāni*, in the Supreme Fourth state (*Tūriya*), Brahman alone exists. However, for the ignorant, there are other three states of existence --- waking (*jāgrata*), dreaming (*svapna*) and deep-sleep-state (*susupti*). A non-existent ignorance is super-imposed on Brahman. In *Advaita*, the concept of *Īśvara* is there. Brahman added with ignorance (*māyā*) is called *Īśvara*, which represents a lower grade of reality.²²

Īśvara creates, preserves and destroys the world; comes down as *avatāra* and possesses every quality we can think of. According to Śrī Ramakrishna, *Īśvara* is neither unreal nor a lower grade of reality than Brahman. The ideas of low and high are worldly concepts and a way of looking at things. This *Īśvara* is *Śakti* for him. *Vedas* also speak of *Śakti*. In the *Kena Upaniṣad*, there is the reference of *Umā Haimavatī*. When the gods could not recognize Brahman, Brahman disappeared and in its place stood *Umā*. This *Umā* is *Īśvari* or *Śakti*, to be gender specific. Hence, just in a moment, Brahman is transformed in to *Śakti* in the *Upaniṣadic* story. Śrī Ramakrishna equated *Śakti* with Brahman. The conception of *Śakti* as stated by him is the same as that of the *Saguṇa* Brahman of the *Vedānta*.

For Śrī Ramakrishna, that which is Brahman is also *Kāli*, the Divine Mother, and the Primal Energy. *Kāli* is one who communes with *Mahā-kāla* i.e., the Absolute.²³ He has told his followers – “ ‘... you should accept the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy ...’²⁴” (Gupta, 1942). This attitude of regarding God as Mother is the last word in *sāadhanā*. “ ‘O God, Thou art my Mother and I am Thy child’ ” – this is the last word in spirituality.²⁵ Śrī Ramakrishna stated that the Divine Mother has assumed all female forms and that is why he looked on all women as mother irrespective of their status or character. He also worshipped the *Shoḍaśi* (literally means ‘maiden sixteen years old’) as his mother. When Śrī *Sāradā Devi* asked him what he thought of her, he said: “The Mother who is in the temple, the Mother who gave birth to me and is living in the Nahabat, is verily standing as you before me”.²⁶ His idea of motherhood of God and regarding all women as manifestation of the Divine Mother raises the dignity of women and sublimates man’s attitude towards them.

The Divine Mother or *Kāli* is ‘*kalpataru*’ (wish-fulfilling Tree). By going nearer to Her, man gets the four fruits --- *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. She advised Śrī Ramakrishna to remain in ‘*bhāvamukha*’, i.e., on the borderline of the Absolute and the Relative. He believes that his Divine Mother is not only formless, but has forms as well. One can see Her forms and behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love.²⁷ In this context it may be pointed out that *Kamalakanta*, a Bengali *Śākta* poet of the 19th century, in one of his songs said that the Mother has different colours on different occasions; and sometimes

assumes the male shape and sometimes the female and sometimes even the vast outer space:

*“Ma kakhono shevta, kakhono pita,
Kakhono nila lohita re,
Kakhono purusha kakhono prakriti,
Kakhono shunya rupa re.”²⁸*

2.4. Kāli – Her image and significance:

The image of *Kāli* represents that She wears a garland of freshly severed heads and a garment of freshly cut arms dripping blood. Her eyes are red. She has four arms, flowing dark hair and bloodthirsty tongue. She is a dark person who lives in the graveyard and jackals surround Her. She stands on Her husband who lies flat on the ground. Her third eye between the brows is open and is emitting fire. Two of Her four hands have terrible weapons, though the other two have blessings to offer. So, *Kāli* is pictured as the Terrible. *Kāli* combines in Herself ferocity and beneficence. The concept of *Kāli* has much deeper symbolic significance. It is noteworthy that Śrī Ramakrishna used to address *Kāli* as *Ānandamayī*, i.e. the embodiment of Bliss. It appears from this that there is no contradiction in his eyes between Her apparent fierceness and inherent blissfulness. To the self-centered man seeking power and pleasure, *Kāli*, the Power of Involution, is necessarily terrible; but to the true spiritual aspirant, She is the shatterer of ignorance and bestower of supreme bliss.²⁹ In the ‘Gospel of Śrī Ramakrishna’ there are beautiful descriptions of Her. One such description we can

get from the song sang by Śrī Ramakrishna on October 18, 1884, the day of the worship of Mother *Kāli*. The song is:

“The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight

To the blue lotus flower of Mother Śyāma’s feet,

The blue flower of the feet of Kāli, Śiva’s Consort.

Tasteless, to the bee, are the blossoms of desire.

My Mother’s feet are black, and black, too, is the bee;

Black is made one with black! This much of the
mystery

These mortal eyes behold, then hastily retreat.

But Kamalakanta’s hopes are answered in the end,.

He swims in the Sea of Bliss, unmoved by joy or
pain”³⁰ (Gupta, 1942).

Śrī Ramakrishna accepts that the form of *Kāli* is terrible, but She is compassionate and loving Mother. He exclaims “Kāli, the Embodiment of Destruction! No, Nitya-Kāli, my eternal Divine Mother!”³¹ He describes to Keshab Chandra Sen the different aspects of *Kāli*:

“... It is She alone who is known as Mahā-kāli, Nitya-kāli, Śmaśāna- kāli, Rakshā kāli -, and Śyāmā - kāli. Mahā- kāli - and Nitya- kāli are mentioned in the Tantra philosophy. When ... darkness was enveloped in darkness, then the Mother, the Formless One, Mahā-

kāli, the Great Power, was one with Mahā- kāla, the Absolute. Śyāmā - kāli has a somewhat tender aspect and is worshipped in the Hindu households. She is the Dispenser of boons and the Dispeller of fear. People worship Rakshā-kāli, the Protectress, in times of epidemic, famine, earthquake, drought, and flood. Śmaśāna-kāli is the embodiment of the power of destruction ...”³² (Gupta, 1942).

Kāli appears terrible because She does a terrible job of destroying our past karma. She is called *Phalahāriṇi*, the remover of the karma-phalas. She is always playful and sportive. This universe is Her play. *Kāli* is also called *Bhavatāriṇi* – ‘She who helps souls cross over the ocean of worldliness’. Karma-phalas bind us to the world and so we suffer endlessly. *Kāli* releases us from this bondage. As Śrī Ramakrishna says:

“Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her māyā worldly people become entangled in ‘woman and gold’, and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation. She is called the Saviour, and the Remover of the bondage that binds one to the world”³³ (Gupta, 1942).

Just as Lord Śiva’s neck became blue because He drank poison; likewise, *kāli* becomes dark because She drinks the terrible poison called our *saṃskāras* (past impressions). That is, Her colour is due to our *saṃskāras*; and ornaments are due to our *karmaphalas*. Śrī Ramakrishna remarks that She appears black because She is viewed from a distance. This distance is spiritual distance, not physical one. Once we know Her intimately then She is no more black. For example, the sky

appears blue from a distance; but when we look at it close by, we will find that it has no colour at all.³⁴ *Kāli* stands on *kāla* or time. Indian mythology equates *kāla* with *Śiva* or *Yama*. *Kāla* means destiny. Fate is born out of our past tendencies. *Kāla* makes us suffer for our misdeeds. But *Kāli* subjugates the acts of *kāla* and protects the devotee. She bestows boons and fearlessness.

2.5. Tantra and Vedānta:

Tantra is a discipline where *Kāli* is described as *varṇamayī* and it became prevalent in the latter part of the Buddhistic age. In it, a woman is regarded as the representation of the Divine Mother. *Tantra* is also called *Śāktism* or the Mother cult. It states that *Śakti* stands on *Śiva* and *Śiva* sustains *Śakti*. *Śakti* cannot be separated from *Śiva*. This *Śiva* is pure Consciousness or *Paramesvara*.³⁵ As Sir John Woodroffe in his book '*Shakti and Shākta*' said – "Shiva and Shakti are one (according to Tantra). The Shaiva (in the narrower sense) pre-dominantly worships the right side of the Ardhanārīshavara-Murti, the Shakta worships the left (vamo or Shakti) side..."³⁶ *Tantra* states that there are six centres in the body called *mulādhāra*, *svādhīsthāna*, *manipura*, *anāhata*, *visuddha* and *ājñā*. Above these centres is the *Sahasrāra*, where the Primordial Energy unites with *Paramśiva* or *Paramesvara*.³⁷ In *Tantra* or the Mother Cult, the *Saguṇa* Brahman is regarded as the Mother of the universe. In the course of the developments of Mother Cult, the *Tāntriks* popularized the idea of psychic powers and supplemented the practices of the *yogins* with their own techniques of repetition of *Mantras*. The inevitable consequence of these developments is that a large number of worldly-minded people without any touch of renunciation were

attracted by this bait of psychic powers into the sphere of the worshippers of Mother Cult. Because of the incorporation of too much worldliness in this cult, it became degraded into a system of occult practices that bounded on black magic.³⁸

Tantra is an extremely difficult path and in it the devotee assumes various attitudes such as, the attitude of a handmaid (*dāsya*), a hero (*madhur*) or a child (*vātsalya*) in order to appease the Divine Mother or *Śakti*. Śrī Ramakrishna said that to consider oneself as Her handmaid is good. *Hanumān* had this attitude toward *Rāma*. A wife feels this mood also. She serves her husband with all her heart and soul. A mother also has a little of this attitude.³⁹ A hero's attitude is to please the Divine Mother in a way as a man pleases a woman through intercourse. In 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' we find a reference of the fact that in north-west India, a bride holds a knife in her hand at the time of marriage which implies that the bridegroom with the help of the bride who is the embodiment of *Śakti*, will sever the bondage of illusion.⁴⁰ In this attitude, woman also tries to please man through intercourse. *Rādhā* had this attitude toward *Krishna*. However, Śrī Ramakrishna never worshipped the Divine Mother in this attitude. He says: "... My natural attitude has always been that of a child toward its mother..."⁴¹ This attitude is very pure also.

Śrī Ramakrishna learnt *Tantra* from *Bhairavi Brāhmani (Yogēswari)* towards whom he had a filial affection. He regarded her as a part of *Yogamāyā*. Before he started practicing the discipline of the *Tantras*, he undertook permission from the Divine Mother. After getting permission, *Brāhmani* made him undertake one by one all the disciplines of the sixty-four main *Tantras*; and he got through

them successfully by the grace of the Divine Mother. Some remarkable incidents took place during Śrī Ramakrishna's *Tāntric sādhanā*. One such incident is bringing of a beautiful woman by *Brāhmani*; and instructing him to sit on her lap and perform *japa*. Though he got scared at first, still by uttering the name of the Divine Mother, he sat on the lap of the woman and merged in to *samādhi*. On another occasion, the *Brāhmani* brought a piece of rotten human flesh and asked Śrī Ramakrishna to taste it. Being shaken by aversion he said: 'can it be done'? *Brāhmani* replied – 'why not? See how I do it'. When he saw *Brāhmani* doing so, the idea of the terrible *Chandikā* form of the Mother aroused in his mind. Repeatedly uttering 'Mother', he entered in to *samādhi*; and hence, he felt no aversion when *Brāhmani* put that piece of rotten human flesh in to his mouth. Then *Brāhmani* said to him that he had reached the desired end of a very difficult *Tāntric sādhanā*. During the whole course of his *Tāntric sādhanā*, he kept intact the filial attitude towards women.⁴²

In the course of his *Tāntric sādhanā*, various psychic powers manifested in him, but he never allowed his mind to go after them. Knowing that he possesses psychic powers (*siddhis*), his nephew *Hṛday* began to persuade him to use them for worldly advantages. He with his childlike devotion and faith, asked the Divine Mother to show him the right way in this difficult situation. Immediately, a vision dawned on him in which he saw an ugly person relieving himself in the field. This very vision is nothing but an indication of the Divine Mother that the psychic powers are as unpleasant as that dirty refuse. Many years later, he wanted to confer these powers, which he never used, on Swami Vivekananda; but Swami

Vivekananda also refused to have them since these are not helpful in spiritual realization. Hence, Śrī Ramakrishna freed the Mother cult from the dominance of the fad for psychic powers. Here it can be mentioned that in later *Buddhism* and medieval *Hinduism*, *Tantra* became popular for its sexo-mystical practices or *vāmācāra*.⁴³ *Vāmācāra* method leads to the downfall of an aspirant. Śrī Ramakrishna described this method of the *Tantra* as the ‘scavenger’s path’ to the mansion and warned aspirants against it.

Śrī Ramakrishna practiced *Tantra* by applying the method of ‘*samayācār*’. On many occasions, just by hearing the words – ‘hemp’, ‘wine’ etc. he went in to *samādhi*. After getting down from the plane of *samādhi*, he used to say –

“Mother, Thou hast indeed assumed the forms of the fifty letters. Those letters of Thine constitute the obscene and indecent words too. The *ka* and *kha* of Thy Veda and Vedanta, and those of the obscene and indecent words, surely are not different. The obscene and indecent words as well as the Veda and the Vedanta are verily Thyself”⁴⁴ (Saradananda, 1978).

During his *Tāntric sādhanā*, he saw ‘*Brahmayoni*’; and heard the ‘Anahata Dhavni’ or ‘*Praṇava*’ sound. Here it is worth mentioning that during the latter part of his *Tāntric sādhanā*, he could not retain his cloth, sacred thread etc. on his body for a moment even.⁴⁵

Though Śrī Ramakrishna devoted himself to *Tantra-sādhanā* at first, he never limited himself to *Tantra* only. After *Tantra-sādhanā*, he began *Advaita sādhanā* with the help of Totāpuri. According to *Vedānta*, Brahman alone is real

and all else is unreal. That is, *Śakti* is unreal too. But *Tantra* states that *Śakti* is not unreal. Just as Brahman is real, *Śakti* is also real, for Brahman and *Śakti* are nothing but the two aspects of the same Reality or Truth.⁴⁶ Therefore, it appears that *Vedic* and *Tāntric* traditions are opposed to each other. However, Śrī Ramakrishna realized the ultimate non-difference between *Vedānta* and *Tantra* and said that when the ultimate Reality does nothing, It is Brahman; but when It creates, sustains and destroys, we call it *Kāli* or *Śakti*. It is for this reason that his *Advaita* is called *Śaktādvaita*. He said that in this age *Vedic* path is not practicable; rather the discipline of *Tantra* is effective.⁴⁷

In fact, Śrī Ramakrishna has a veritable personality and wanted to enjoy God in many ways. He said that truthfulness is the *tapasyā* of the present age (*kaliyuga*). Truthfulness, submission to God and looking on the wives of others as one's own mother are the means to realize God.⁴⁸ Renunciation and discrimination are also necessary for realizing God. He also stated that we can realize God through *bhakti*; but it must be ripe *bhakti*. Knowledge and love – both are paths leading to God. According to Śrī Ramakrishna, everything can be realized through love of God or the Divine Mother. He said,

“Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: ‘O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedānta. Reveal to me what is in the Purāna and the Tantra.’ One by one She has revealed all these to me”⁴⁹ (Gupta, 1942).

Śrī Ramakrishna is a *Kāli*-worshipper and his *Kāli* is his God and Brahman. He experienced the presence of the Divine Mother or *Kāli* in

everything. He has given a description of his first experience of the vision of *Kālī* as –

“It was as if the houses, doors, temples and all other things vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere ! And what I saw was a boundless infinite Conscious Sea of Light! However far and in whatever direction I looked, I found a continuous succession of Effulgent Waves coming forward, raging and storming from all sides with great speed. Very soon they fell on me and made me sink to the Abysmal Depths of Infinity. I panted and struggled, as it were, and lost all sense of external consciousness”⁵⁰ (Saradananda, 1978).

He used the terms – ‘*Ādyāsakti*’, ‘*Brahman*’, ‘*Īśvara*’ and ‘*Bhagavān*’ to denote the Supreme Being or the Ultimate Reality or God. He has never spoken in theological terms and has no sectarian approach to God. The striking variety of his spiritual sensibility has been expressed in a periodical named ‘*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*]⁵¹ (Banerjee and Das, 1359).

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