CHAPTER SIX

The external is the mirror in which we may behold the internal and spiritual.

- William M. Taylor

THE PARABLES OF CHRIST AND RAMAKRISHNA: A FORMALISTIC PERSPECTIVE
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Chapter Six

The Parables of Christ and Ramakrishna: A Formalistic Perspective

*The* teaching of Jesus is not the patient exposition of a system by a founder of a school. It is related to a brief and tremendous crisis in which he is the principal figure and which indeed his appearance brought about.

-Geriant Vaughan Jones

*Sri* Ramakrishna went beyond the boundary of orthodox Hinduism following the Christian and Islamic teachings.

-Hans Torweston

6.1. The Parabolic Form

Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa even as they used the parable as the most powerful homiletic medium to unravel divine truth, they also, in that process, immensely contributed to perfecting the formal features of the parable. The handling of the literary genre parable by Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is so very unique that the communication between the teacher and the follower was always free, direct, easy and never obstructed or distracted. The differences and similarities in the handling of the parabolic method of approach between Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in unearthing divine mysteries is also very revealing inasmuch
as both the parabolists were conditioned by a definite socio-historical milieu of their own.

Necessity urged the parabolists Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa to adopt the parabolic method of instruction. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ was moving with the ‘mob’ who were illiterate and they could not understand the hidden mysteries of the divine message that was conveyed to them except through this parabolic method. This apparent method attracted the common mob and they flocked around him in thousands to listen to the glad tidings of love and forgiveness, kingdom of God and Second Coming poured forth by the parabolist Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ narrated the parable of the “Sower and the Seed” the disciples asked him why he spoke in parables to the people. For this Jesus Christ answered “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. They have ears and they hear not and they have eyes but they see not” (Matt 13. 2, 3, 11-14). Because of their socially imposed inability to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ was forced to utilize the parabolic method to make his ministry easily accessible to the common man.
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa too, in a similar way, exploited the parabolic method to make the readers/listeners feel more at home while listening to a sermon which tries to interpret and explain the complexities of the ancient scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, a parabolist of the recent past, only hundred and fifty years old, has also used the parabolic method of teaching, meaningfully widening the scope, range and space the parable would otherwise occupy in a homiletic discourse. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, like Jesus Christ, resorted to this method for the simple reason that it paid rich dividends in terms of reaching out to the not-so-intelligent, and the not-so-scholarly through messages that sharply focused on divine mysteries. He spoke in a simple, artless, clear manner making it apparent to the reader/listener.

The disciples of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa were also equally humble men who also, at times, were not able to understand their master’s divine wisdom rendered to them even through parables. Jesus Christ’s disciples were mere fishermen and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa also had disciples who were uneducated. On a few occasions, therefore, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had to explain to their disciples the meaning of parables in order to make them comprehend the spiritual truth.
Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa were pregnant with creative imagination and artistic skill to invent stories and they were real masters in aptly applying them so as to convey the spiritual truth. They had the power of imagination and spontaneous rendering of the spiritual truth that they had obtained from God. They had the divine inspiration and they were able to narrate parables making the hearts of the readers/listeners feel enlightened and thus kindled spiritual fire in them. It is impossible for an ordinary man to impart spiritual truth through parables. No doubt, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa were great artists communicating the spiritual mysteries in a very effective way in the form of parabolic short stories. Even today their parables are highly commended because of their unsurpassed skill at handling them and at perfecting the parabolic method of teaching.

6.2. The Parable

The parable is a brief narrative in the form of a story bearing a moral in it. Parables make use of allegories, similitudes and fables. A parable reveals the truth, but an allegory conceals the truth. A similitude is in the form of comparisons, used to explain a particular truth. A fable is also in the form of short stories with animals as examples. Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna
Paramahamsa have used parables, allegories and similitudes. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, in addition, has used fables to impart spiritual truth.

Jesus Christ's parables are in a way modelled on the *Old Testament* parables, but basically they are born of the inventive genius of the master craftsman and story teller Jesus Christ. The wisdom teachers in the *Old Testament* (Proverb) used gnomic or wise sayings. This gnomic saying developed into parabolic sayings and then narrative parables and finally became full-fledged parables in the hands of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ's parables do not always go with explanations and, therefore, at time pose difficulties to the readers/listeners. "The Prodigal Son", "The Two Debtors", "The Good Samaritan", "The Lost Sheep", "The Two Sons" are all very plain and outspoken without any complication. A reader/listener can understand them very easily because the truth is revealed in an outright manner.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's parables are recreations of the stories in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha*. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has also used allegories and similitudes. The parables "All for a Piece of Loin-cloth", "Such Indeed is Maya", "How they Quarrel", "She is so Well off" and "The Jar of Desire is not Filled Up" are a few examples which reveal the spiritual truth very clearly. A reader is able to understand the spiritual truth
enmeshed in it without any difficulty. The truth is open to all. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables are mostly followed by explanations and therefore the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are much easier to comprehend than the parables of Jesus Christ.

The form ‘parable’ is a development from the past gnomic sayings seen in the Book of Proverbs in the *Old Testament*. Parables are ever old and ever new. They have taken shape and form in the hands of the parabolists Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. This parabolic form has further developed into allegories. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables are developments of the stories in Hindu puranas, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha*. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa a ‘practiser’ of all religions may have come across the parables of Jesus Christ and he has adopted the ‘parable method’ and the ‘parable-strategy’ of Jesus Christ. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has also developed the form of a parable in a wider range. It may be assumed that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables are modifications of the parables of the Hindu *Puranas* and the parables of Jesus Christ.
6.3. The Allegory

Jesus Christ has also used allegories which are full of symbolic representations. An allegory is a symbolic representation of facts to express a spiritual truth. Jesus Christ’s allegories are “The Sower and the Seed”, “Wheat and the Tares”, “The Ten Virgins” and “The Wedding Garment”. In the allegory, “The Sower and the Seed”, explanation and interpretation are given by Jesus Christ. The other parables mentioned can also be considered as allegories but the interpretation of which is left to the creative fecundity of the listeners themselves. When a reader or a listener comes across a parable/allegory he can interpret the meaning as he has understood or a divine person can interpret it as revealed to him by God.

According to Peter Ribbs, “Parables make the listeners react; to reinterpret, reevaluate his behaviour, thought and emotion patterns” (90). Jesus Christ’s parable “The Wheat and the Tares” is full of symbolic narration but has no explanation. This parable can be considered as an allegory. But the narrator provides sufficient clues to the reader to interpret it as revealed to him by God. The wheat represents the righteous and the tares the unrighteous people. Jesus Christ brings the reality of the world where both the holy and unholy live. The harvest season represents the Last Judgment Day and on that day the wheat is stored while the tares are burnt, meaning the righteous enjoy
the heavenly bliss and the unrighteous perish in hell. The servants can be interpreted as angels who take away the good souls to heaven and the bad souls to hell. The purpose of this allegory is to make the reader/listener alert and prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Similarly the parables "The Ten Virgins" and "The Wedding Garment" can be taken as allegories. Allegories garb the meaning and it is based on the capacity of the reader/listener to interpret it. "The Ten Virgins" represents the people of this world, the five prepared and the other five unprepared for the kingdom of God. The prepared virgins or the five virgins have lamps, which represent salvation and oil, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The foolish virgins lack these and they are despised by the bridegroom i.e. Jesus Christ. Again in the parable "The Wedding Garment" the garment represents salvation. Those who have not attained salvation will suffer in hell.

Another reader may interpret these allegories in a different way. The problem of interpretation is given by Hugh Martin who aptly captures the issue of interpretation:

This is not to say that the lesson of the parables is obvious. No one can study the commentators without being amazed by the divergent meaning that scholars can draw out of the same verses.
Part of the trouble is due to western ignorance of the orient setting. More is often due to theological presuppositions which the parables must be made to fit. But most of the trouble is caused by trying to be too clever and by insisting upon treating all the parables as if they were allegories. Yet even to the sincere and well-equipped modern scholar there is much that is puzzling, and for all of us the parables point the way over uncharted seas. The mind of Jesus is too great for us to compass. (23)

The interpreters and commentators have interpreted and explained the parables in various ways as revealed to them by God. But the meaning of some of the parables is not very clearly revealed because of the absence of authorial explanations. It cannot be assumed that Jesus Christ did not give explanation when he spoke to the people two thousand years ago. What the disciples heard was recorded very late and perhaps they might have failed to add the interpretations along with the parables or they themselves might not have understood the spiritual truth very clearly. Whatever it may be, it is very apparent that explanations are not given in parables like “The Wedding Garment” and “The Ten Virgins”.
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has also utilized allegories to represent the spiritual truth. His allegories are always followed by explanations and so reader/listener can understand the truth without difficulty. "A Disciple and her Pot of Curd" (TP 84) can be considered as an allegory with explanations. The disciple can be represented as the people who are living in this world and who have faith like the disciple who offered the guru a pot of curd. The guru can be considered as Brahman to whom the people give offerings. The guru expected more milk and he threw the curd away. But God accepted the offering of the disciple and blessed her abundantly. As explanation goes with the parable very clearly, the reader/listener can understand without much effort the truth garbed in it.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables are not in the strict sense of the term allegorical. His parable “In the Forest of the World”, which may be considered as an allegory, is very similar to the parable of Jesus Christ’s “The Good Samaritan”. In the allegory “In the Forest of the World”, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa makes use of symbols Tamas, Rajas and Satva, representing darkness, worldliness and truth. The parable “All for a Piece of Loin-cloth” is also allegorical in the sense that the loincloth is a symbol of worldliness.
All the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are very plain and outspoken and since the feature of an allegory is to conceal the truth, these parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa cannot be said to be allegorical. A reader/listener has to break the shell with much difficulty to enjoy the kernel inside it. The parables of Jesus Christ are thus more allegorical when compared with the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

6.4. The Similitude

Jesus Christ has used comparison and similitude to express a spiritual truth. Jesus Christ’s most famous similitude is the similitude of “The Mustard Seed”. The mustard seed is the symbol of the kingdom of God. His other similitudes like “The Pearl”, “The Lost Coin”, which also reveal the spiritual truth relating to the importance of the kingdom of God. Comparison or similitude resembles each other in form and this method of comparison is much more effective and make the homiletic presentation more appealing, persuasive and rhetoric.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa also employs comparison but then they are not as evocatively specific and profound as the comparisons of Jesus Christ. At the same time, however, every truth that Sri Ramakrishna
Paramahamsa tries to convey is in the form of comparison. Man must be completely detached from the pleasures of the world “just like the lotus leaf that floats in water and does not get drenched”. Similarly his theme of unity of religion is revealed through a simple comparison. “Different paths lead to the same goal just like the different doors lead to the same house” (TP 32). Similitudes or comparison is a defragmented integral part of his teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parable “The Salt Doll went to Fathom the Ocean” has close resemblance with the similitude of Jesus Christ “You are the Salt of the Earth”. The salt parable expresses different spiritual truth, yet they resemble alike in the material chosen. The salt doll gets dissolved in water and loses its shape and form when it tries to measure the depth of the ocean. The parable of salt used by Jesus Christ dissolved in water and it gives taste. It not only turns the water salty but also becomes nothing and cannot be identified. The parable of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa “If You must Serve but One Master” is a similitude-parable bearing the same idea conveyed by Jesus Christ that “One Cannot Serve Two Masters”. If he does so he will love the one and despise the other. Therefore, when one goes through the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa it is evident that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa may have been influenced by the parables of Jesus Christ.
6.5. The Fable

The only difference in the form of parabolic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is the use of fables. While there are not any fables used by Jesus Christ, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa uses a lot of fables or rather shows himself as a powerful fabulist in his preachings and spiritual discourses. In the fable, "Such is the Pride that Money Begets", Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa makes the animals, elephant and the toad speak. This fable quite convincingly emphasizes the fundamental spiritual value that money/material consideration is a great hindrance to bring man closer to God. The other fables are "How a Yogi Slips from Yoga", "Enmeshed in Maya Brahman Weeps" and "The Salt Doll Went to Fathom the Depth of the Ocean", "An ant went to a Sugar Hill" (TP 66), "A Peacock that Tasted Opium" (TP 189) and "The Root of all Trouble" (TP 17)

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa used both the animate and inanimate to effectively drive home his homiletic message. His fables are also in the form of a story with animals as examples. A parable and a fable have close identity with each other in the tone and tenor of its expressions. It is generally believed to be modelled on the legendary Aesop’s fables. But the fables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have an independent development and this
medium of instruction too has reached its perfection in the hands of the parabolist Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

But Christ’s parables are not like Aesop’s fables, although Jesus Christ has also sparingly used and that too only animal images, but not fables. “The Lost Sheep” is a parable where animal image is used. As A.M. Hunter rightly points out: “And his animals, and parables are not like Aesop’s-fables. His lost sheep has no argument” (15). The other animal images are seen in “The Prodigal Son” where the pigs are mentioned. The difference between Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in the handling of such parables is that in Jesus Christ’s parables animals do not speak, yet the animal image has a deeper symbolic / metaphorical connotation. On the other hand, the animals in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s fables, do speak, thus serving as a ‘character’ in a parable to convey the moral. For example, the toad remarks, “How dare you walk over my hole” (TP 46).

6.6. Christ and Ramakrishna as Parabolists

The next formalistic feature that demands elucidation is to see how far Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have succeeded in utilizing the parabolic method and to what extent their parables account for the
characteristic features of a parable. Jesus Christ’s parables are in the form of a short story bearing one single spiritual truth or moral. The parables “The Prodigal Son”, “The Two Sons”, “The Two Houses”, “The Good Samaritan” and “The Lost Sheep” are all in the form of brief narrative bearing one spiritual truth. Similarly the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are also in the form of a brief narrative bearing a single truth in it. His parables “All for a Piece of Loin-cloth”, “How a Child Actually Fed God”, “In the Forest of the World”, “How they Quarrel”, “The Jar of Desire is not Filled Up” are all in the form of short stories and they express one single truth.

One of the characteristic features of a parable is that it should reveal one spiritual truth. All the parables of Jesus Christ reveal one spiritual truth. Jesus Christ’s parable “The Ten Talents” (Matt 24.14-30) reveal one single truth that man must utilize the talents given to him by God. He will be blessed more if he uses his talents. If he keeps his talents useless then God will take from him the talent which he has given to him. Similarly the parable “Rich man and Lazarus” (Luke 16.19-31) conveys one single spiritual truth that those who suffer in this world will enjoy eternal bliss in heaven. He also draws the listeners’ attention to the fact that it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's parable "All for a Piece of Loin-cloth" can be taken as an allegory with the symbols. Loin-cloth represents the symbol of worldliness. "In the Forest of the World" expresses a single truth that Satva who stands for truth is not fully aware of Brahman and is not able to guide the traveller to reach Brahman. "The Jar of Desire is not Filled Up" reveals the truth that man can never be satisfied because he is always greedy. The parable "How They Quarrel" makes an awareness in the reader/listener that he should not quarrel claiming his religion to be the correct path to God or his faith is superior to other's faiths.

But the moment the parable becomes an allegory, one witnesses the blending of spiritual truths, the story with a single spiritual or moral truth gives way to a story of different layers, interpreted at different levels with multiple truths. For instance, the parables relating to the Second Coming and the Last Judgment day well abound in multiple truths. The parables "The Ten Virgins", "Wheat and the Tares", "The Wicked Tenants" have more than one spiritual truth. In other words, the parables with symbolic representations, particularly the allegories, are normally interpreted to yield more than one spiritual/moral truth.
In a similar way, some of the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa which may be treated as allegories point to more than a single spiritual truth. The allegory “In the Forest of the World” is an example of a parable with more than one spiritual truth. It throws light upon the reality of the world, which is a mixture of darkness, worldliness and truth. There are various types of people in this world. It also reveals that the people are sometimes chained by the three robbers Tamas, Rajas and Satva. The central truth is Satva and the truth releases man from darkness and shows the way to Brahman. But Satva still is not fully aware of the path to God.

Again, the parable “Not, I a Beggar for Common Fruit” is a classic instance of the fine blending of spiritual truths when the parable assumes the form of an allegory. The fruit is the symbol of the fruit of life. Hanuman is not willing to yield himself for the sake of the fruit of the earth and to lose the eternal life. This parable also points out how clever Hanuman is in overcoming the craze for the wealth of this world. All allegories may be interpreted to have more than one meaning. In the words of Hugh Martin, “An allegory is a narrative in which every character and every progressive development in the story figuratively represents something else” (25).
6.7. Parabolic Material

The material for the parable is normally taken from the real life situation or the objects of nature which are very familiar to the reader/listener. Only then the preacher can meaningfully appeal to his listeners. Jesus Christ used the common things like mustard seed, wheat, coin, pearl, seed as basic materials in his parables. Strikingly enough, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has also used common things like the loincloth, salt doll, gold and even animals toad, elephant, mongoose, monkeys to impart the divine truth. Even in a simple thing these great masters found material substance for a great truth of life, be it socio-religious or ethico-spiritual. A thing that is thought to be trifle is made to be a magnificent one by Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

All individuals have noticed these objects of nature. But they have not thought of the deep spiritual reality embedded in them. Only men of great thought and understanding of the unscalable magnitude of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa could find great truth in these creations of God. No doubt Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are spiritually superior human beings, endowed with microscopic powers of observation of even the meanest objects of nature around them. And these meanest objects
tell the magnificent story of a mighty man’s life. Jesus Christ, the son of God and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, a godly man have acquired the spiritual knowledge in abundance to convert these ordinary, simple day-to-day material realities into something majestically divine.

6.8. Parabolic Language

The language of the parable is not traditionally bound. The language of the parable is always direct, simple, forthright and totally devoid of jargons and cliches. It is a language that almost borders on the conversational or the colloquial idiom of the common man. Thus, for instance, Jesus Christ spoke to the common mob in Aramaic and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa spoke to the people in Bengali. The language may change from one individual to another individual but the matter or the substance remains the same. The English collections of the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa now available are the translations from (Greek) Aramaic and Bengali respectively. Any original matter is superior to the translated or even the transcreated product. If the parables in translation have such a vividness then it is necessary to brood over the superior quality of the original products in (Greek) Aramaic and Bengali.
Although generally the parabolist has a penchant for a language which is spiced with conventional or colloquial forms of expression, the vocabulary, the choice of words, the newer collocational inventions, impressive diction, persuasive style, rhetorical presentation in a parable invariably betray the colloquial tone of the spoken language. Thus, normally the language of expression of the parable rises to lofty heights of grandiloquent utterances. The simplicity of the language of the parable is, therefore, an apparent simplicity which is by and large deceptive simplicity. It is indeed the substance and the thought process that the language of expression clothes in a parable make it a lofty, heightened language, although in ordinary manifestation it may appear to be very simple. This is evident in parables of Jesus Christ such as "The Sower and the Seed", "The Ten Virgins", "The Mustard Seed", "The Narrow Door" and in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables "As You from Nearer to Nearer", "Childlike would the Man of Highest Wisdom".

The form of the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is prose and not poetry. Even though they are in prose, they do not lack in imagery and descriptions. The allegories of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are also full of images and symbols. The vivid descriptions make the truth memorable. Nature is portrayed in a more realistic
way in the parables of Jesus Christ. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has also very clearly portrayed in the parables the spiritual truth in a very realistic way.

The parable “Forest of the World” and “The Fear of Desire is not Filled Up” are full of descriptions, symbols and images. Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are indeed inspired men of great imagination endowed with the poetic genius, using the parabolic method to evoke emotions and enlightenment in the heart of the readers or listeners. Therefore their parables, though not in the poetic form, bear all the qualities of poetry.

Even though Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa utilizes Sanskrit words like Upadhi, Tamas, Rajas, Satva, he makes it easily comprehensible to his listeners by giving the explanation and meaning of the difficult words he uses. These words only add beauty and colour to the parable. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's knowledge of the Sanskrit language was perhaps an added advantage to him in explicating the difficult theological concepts of the Vedanta philosophy whose metalanguage is invariably Sanskrit. Both Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa were well versed in all their scriptures and this knowledge also makes the language of their parables at once lucid and rigorous. It is the linguistic form that enhances the richness in meaning and enriches the multiple layers of truth.
6.9. Humour and Pathos

The parables of Jesus Christ lack the open, hilarious humour that one can witness in the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. It is more serious and outspoken. However Jesus Christ's parables “The Lost Sheep”, “The Prodigal Son” and “The Lost Coin” are at once very serious and satirically humorous narrations about the lost soul and the need for repentance. These parables describe the joy in heaven when a sinner repents and turns over a new leaf. All the parables relating to the second coming and last judgment create panic rather than humour in the parables. Surprisingly enough, “The Wedding Garment”, “The Ten Virgins”, “The Wheat and the Tares”, “The Wicked Tenants” are all full of subtle humour creating a suppressed laughter in the reader/listener. But the subtle understatements of Jesus Christ have the hammer-striking impact of a typically British humour. The evocatively powerful satire that interfuses itself in many of his parables, provides pungent, stinging humour in all its devastatingly destructive force.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's parables are full of humour and pathos. There is the blending of seriousness and humour. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's parables interpret divine mysteries in a delightful way and one is able to enjoy and attain divine wisdom. Sri Ramakrishna
Paramahamsa’s parable “Enmeshed in Maya Brahman Weeps” is in the form of a short story. This incident is taken from the *Vishnupurana*. God sent Vishnu to the earth into the sow’s body to destroy a demon. But after performing his duty Vishnu was satisfied to remain in the sow’s body. But the Brahman had to destroy the sow to take Vishnu to heaven. This is narrated in a very humorous way to bring out the spiritual truth that man forgets the divine nature and his vision and mission when he is a slave to the pleasures of this world.

The salt doll went to fathom the depth of the ocean and it got dissolved in it. Facts are presented in a funny way. A yogi, once while performing his *yoga*, reached the Samadhi stage and people thought him to be dead. But when the body could not be taken out the wife asked the leg of the yogi to be cut instead of the door. This fickleness of love of the wife towards her husband is presented in a very humorous way. The spiritual truth here is love of God is more than the love of man. This type of humorous narration is not seen in the parables of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ spoke with authority and he is very serious in conveying the spiritual truth. The parable of “The Sower and the Seed”, “The Prodigal Son”, “The Wedding Garment”, “The Wheat and the Tares” are all very plain and outspoken and very seriously narrated
with a powerful impinging satire and situational irony which, in a way, offers the subtle sense of humour of Jesus Christ.

In the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa there is pathos. When one reads the parables, one feels sympathy toward the 'prodigal son' and feels pity for his folly. Similarly in the parable “The Wedding Garment”, when a person without the wedding garment is cast out there is pathos. But the spiritual truth is revealed through pathos that the unrighteous will be punished in hell. Similarly Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s parables excel in pathos. In the parable “Siddha Stopped the Storm” there is pathos when the ship is drowned with a number of people. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa conveys the danger caused by having occult powers. Similarly in the parable “Enmeshed in Maya Brahman Weeps” the sow is killed to release Vishnu. Great spiritual truth is conveyed to mankind by creating pathos.

6.10. Embryonic Parables

There is the use of metaphors in the outburst of Jesus Christ calling the synagogue ‘a den or robbers’ (Matt 2.13) and that of compressed metaphors like, ‘the blind heading the blind’ and ‘straining gnats and swallowing
camels' (Matt 23.24). There are extended metaphors (Luke 6.38) which illustrate the transfer of a metaphor to a parabolic saying: "Every plant which my heavenly father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Matt 15.13). Jesus Christ has transformed the metaphor to parable (Matt 12.43-45). Metaphors are not used by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in his parables to the extent one finds them in Jesus Christ. The profuse use of metaphor/extended metaphors by Jesus Christ makes his language more poetic.

Jesus Christ used many figures of speech and many metaphors which had almost the telling effect of a parable. He paved the way for the disciples or a preacher to be wholly pure and free from worldly things when he says about the blind leading the blind. Again he says that a believer must be like the light and the salt of the earth. The light of God is shed by a believer and he is like salt sacrificing himself for the glory of God. Salt represents sacrifice. It gets dissolved in water and gives taste. Similarly a believer or a devotee must sacrifice himself for the glory of God. Such metaphors are often explained by Biblical commentators as embryonic parables or embryonic parabolic figures of speech (IDB 60).

As Jeriant Vaughan Jones points out, "Jesus used the figures of speech to convey his meaning. They are the most embryonic parabolic figures of
speech and are best represented by such sayings “You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth” (83). The other metaphors are white-sepulchre (Matt 23.27). The similitudes are “wise as serpents” (Matt 10.16), “harmless as doves” (10.16), “I am the door” (John 9). “The judgment on the nation” (Matt 25.32) is considered to be not purely a parable but a semi-parable. Smith and A.H. Bruner does not include them in the parable (Jeriant Vaughan Jones 18). Osterly considers it as a land of picture partly allegorical and partly prophetic of the coming of Jesus Christ in his glory (169).

6.11 The Symbolism

The parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa are greatly symbolic in nature. In the parable of “The Wedding Garment”, the wedding garment is the symbol of salvation. “The Mustard Seed” is the symbol of the kingdom of God. In the parable, “The Sower and the Seed”, the seed is the symbol of word of God (Logos). The bird represents the devil. The parable “The Wheat and the Tares” is also full of symbols representing a particular truth of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the good will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. This symbolic representation of narrating the facts is seen not only in the parables but also in the allegories and similitudes of Jesus Christ.
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa also used symbols to represent a particular truth. He uses loincloth, gold, coin as symbols to represent the lust and pleasures of the word. Both Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa powerfully put to the use symbolic way of narrating the parables particularly when the spiritual experience or the theological doctrine they are trying to put across to the people are more complex and mind-boggling. Thus both Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa turn out to be not only famous parabolist-preachers but symbolist-teachers as well.

Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa while narrating the parables to the listeners, often question them, mostly resorting to rhetorical questions to make sure if they have understood the parable. They are like the magicians who make the heavens spellbound under his control and make them brood over the spiritual truth. Jesus Christ while preaching has asked “And why take ye thought for raiment?” (Matt 6.28). Similarly, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa while narrating the parable “How a Siddha Stopped the Storm” points out the disadvantage of having occult powers; he asks “What shall a man gain by having occult powers? Is he uplifted spiritually?” (TP 56). This sort of questioning and extracting answers from them is a common method employed by both of them.
6.12 The Parabolic Method

The parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa have won universal appeal because of the way in which they have handled the method. The parabolic method of teaching makes the readers/listeners keep the truth in memory for years to come. No wonder a child is taught in the form of short stories. The *Old Testament* and the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* and are in the form of stories. This method is a simple literary device which has reached its perfection as a sermon-strategy in the hands of the parabolists Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

Moreover the parabolic form revealed the truth in a very realistic way. The parabolists took the subject matter from reality. That is why this method has the universal appeal. Any individual whether he is educated or uneducated could understand the parable very easily because the subject matter is very familiar to him. Eta Linnemans explains this:

[... ] matter is taken from reality and a parable teller makes use of the most varied devices to make it a form to stress the point that matters to him at the expense of others. The parables are subjected to the popular law of narrative. There is the law of single prospective that is one is not asked to watch. The two
different scenes of events happening at the same time, as for instance the merciful servant and prodigal son from the parable of Jesus Christ. (11)

This method of teaching is meant for the uneducated/unlettered who flocked around Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Of course an educated person can also comprehend and enjoy a parable. But purely the view of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is to make the humble and the feeble be fed with the spiritual food. They have come to uplift the downtrodden, the meek and the oppressed and their aim is to socio-spiritually liberate them. That is also the reason why they utilized the parabolic method of exposition and instruction. Hence the parables are remembered even today and they have won universal appeal. The parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa will continue to bloom and spread its spiritual fragrance from generation to generation.

But if we go into the technicalities, it becomes clear that the method adopted by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is different when compared to the method used by Jesus Christ. Usually in Jesus Christ's parables the explanations are given only after the narration of the parable. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa while narrating a parable about seeing
Brahman "When Face to Face" (TP 164) he presents the truth in the beginning itself. He prepares the reader/listener to grasp the truth while narrating the parable.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa does not straightway start narrating the parable; but he first gives the meaning and then the parable and finally gives clear explanation and reveals the spiritual truth. But Jesus Christ's parables always start with the story and finally he conveys the meaning. A reader/listener is fully aware of the truth when he starts reading the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. But in the parables of Jesus Christ a reader/listener can comprehend the truth conveyed by the parabolist at the end.

The parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had songs accompanying them. In the parable "No Beggar, I for Common Fruit" (TP 120) Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa reveals the spiritual truth through a song. Hanuman did not care for money, honour or rich comfortable life. He longed only for God. When he ran away with a heavenly weapon that had been secreted in the crystal pillar, Monadodar tempted him with vanaus fruits so that he might come down and drop the weapon. But Hanuman could not be tricked. He sings this song:

Am I in need of fruit?
I have the fruit that makes this life
Fruitful indeed, within my heart
The tree of Rama grows,
Bearing salvation for its fruit.
Under the wish fulfilling tree
of Rama do I sit at ease
Plucking whatever fruit I will
But if you speak of fruit –
No beggar, I, for common fruit.
Behold, I go.
Leaving a better fruit for you.

The spiritual truth that “World and lusts of this world is a hindrance to bring man closer to God” is revealed in the form of a parable accompanied by a song sung by Hanuman. Jesus Christ’s parables are without any songs. They are very simple narrations to convey the spiritual truth.

The parables of Jesus Christ are used in two ways, one in a direct way so that the common people could understand the meaning of the parable easily. The other has an objective to keep it hidden so that only those who are interested may seek and find. “Therefore speak I to them in parables because
they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matt 13.10-13).

6.13 The Parable Sources

Parables are not new inventions by Jesus Christ or Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. They have only followed the methods of the old scriptures and adopted them in a very effective way to impart the spiritual truth. Jesus Christ followed the method of parables used in the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ used parables to make his homiletic discourse more effective and meaningful and easily reachable to all his listeners. He, at times, spoke with authority attacking them but at the same time imparting the spiritual truth to them. This way of conveying the message of God is seen in the Old Testament too. In the Old Testament there is a parable of the goats (1 Sam 12.1-6). There Nathan, the prophet goes to king David and warns him about his evil act of taking Uriah’s wife as his wife. Here the story is narrated to condemn him and make him realize his folly, his sinful act. A rich man had many goats and a poor man had one single goat. He petted it and loved it very much. He loved the goat as his daughter. One day a traveller came to the rich man’s house and to give him a feast he stole the goat of the poor man and
killed it and feasted with him. This parable is narrated in such a way that king David’s sense of justice is kindled and he repents for his sin.

In the *Old Testament* times also there existed the parabolic method of revealing the truth in an indirect way. Similarly the parable of Jesus Christ about “The Wicked Tenants” (Matt 12. 1-12), narrates the story of a householder who had a vineyard. He set a hedge around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and let it out to tenants and went to another country. When the fruit season came he sent his servants to the tenants to get the fruits. But they killed them. Again he sent his servants and the wicked tenants killed them. Finally he sent his son to them; but they thought that if they killed the son, the whole property, they could possess. The owner of the vineyard punished the wicked tenants and gave the vineyard to another tenant. Jesus narrated this parable and said “Have ye never read in the scriptures, the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner” (Matt 12.12-13).

This parable, even though it is in the form of a story, can also be treated as an allegory bearing symbolic representations. The son can be referred to as Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. God saw the people leading a sinful life and he wanted to redeem them. He sent prophets to the world. But the people
did not listen to them. Finally, he sent his only begotten son to redeem mankind. Jesus Christ utilized this method to make the common mob understand that he is the Son of God and to predict that as the wicked tenants have killed the servants they will also kill him. As was predicted Jesus Christ was crucified and he died for the sake of sinners. In other words, it becomes evident that Jesus Christ's parables are based on the model of the *Old Testament* parables.

As referred to earlier the sources of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s can be traced to the old epics of India. There are stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha*. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has narrated stories from the *Vishnupurana* as well. “Vishnu is everywhere” (*TP* 199) is a parable which shows that God is everywhere. There was a holy man who lived in ecstatic and lived a very reserved life. He did not speak to anyone. One day after begging for food he went and sat near a dog to eat the food. He threw a morsel of food into his mouth and the other into the dog’s mouth. The people gathered around him and laughed at him. To them he remarked, “Why do you laugh? Vishnu is seated with Vishnu” (*TP* 199).

“Enmeshed in Maya Brahman weeps” is also a story narrated by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa from the *Vishnupurana*. Vishnu is incarnated as a
sow in order to kill the demon Kiranyaksha. After destroying the demon Vishnu was happy in the sow’s body. He forgot his celestial nature to go back to heaven. So God had to destroy the sow’s body to take Vishnu to heaven. This parable proves that everyone is under the authority of the Divine Mother, Mahamaya, the Primal Energy. Even the incarnate God accepts the help of Maya to fulfil his mission on earth. Therefore they worship the Primal Energy.

Similarly there are stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. “Thus saw Arjuna” (TP 181) is a parable which shows that Sri Krishna is not the only incarnation of God, but there are other incarnations too. There are many Krishnas. Sri Krishna took Arjuna out one day. When he went some distance he showed Arjuna a big tree and asked him what he saw there. Arjuna said that there were black fruits hanging on the tree. Krishna asked Arjuna to go near and see. Arjuna then saw many Krishnas hanging on the tree.

“God Alone has Become All Things” (TP 174) is a parable about renunciation. Rama was once overpowered with the spirit of ‘Renunciation’. Dasaratha felt very much worried about it and he went to a sage. The sage came to Rama and saw him sitting in a gloomy mood. He asked him “Is the
world outside God?” (TP 74). Rama realized the truth that the world has evolved from the Supreme and he left ‘Renunciation’. Thus Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s stories are developments and recreation of the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha*.

The parable and the short story have similarities other than the spiritual truth that is embodied within a limited area of communication. But the parables evoke human interest, have vivid character sketches and a slender plot which portray the spiritual truth. Therefore, the parables used by Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa may be called a ‘mini short story’.

The boisterous humour and pathos and the profound description, the vocabulary and the diction together make the parables of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa a distinct literary genre in itself. The serious way of narration coupled with subtle understatements, simplicity, imagery, felicity of expressions, descriptions and richness of diction make the parables of Jesus Christ lofty, noble and inspiring. Both these parabolists have handled the parabolic method very effectively to impart divine truth to the people. They are eloquent preachers who have come down to earth to spread the gospel of God’s salvation and the kingdom of God and in whose hands the parable as a literary form has reached its dizzy heights and artistic perfection.