CHAPTER VII

Sri Ramakrishna and his influence on Swami Vivekananda

Vedānta philosophy, based on the spiritual truths embodied in the Upaniṣads, not only forms the basis of Hinduism, with its numerous sects and denominations, but also contains the core-principles of other religions. Through his unparalleled spiritual struggles and realisations, Sri Ramakrishna became a living representation of the spirit of the Upaniṣads. Not that he had studied these texts or was instructed in them with their Sanskrit commentaries in the traditional way. He had little to do with book bearing and panditry. Just as the seers and sages of the Upaniṣads realised those spiritual principles and truths, Sri Ramakrishna experienced them within himself through his self-discipline, concentration, purity and the resulting super-consciousness. Vedāntic scholars who had listened to his enlightening talks or merely came into his presence - marvelled at his spiritual insights and wisdom. His own youthful disciples, some of whom
had deep acquaintance with the Upaniṣads and their commentaries, equally marvelled at the Vedāntic wisdom of their Great Master. Swami Vivekananda, the chief among the disciples and easily the most learned of them in the philosophies of East and West, found in Śrī Ramakrishna the soul of the Upaniṣads, the key to the understanding of the harmony underlying the apparently divergent teachings thereof:

"I through the grace of God had the great good fortune to sit at the feet of one whose whole life was such an interpretation, whose life, a thousand-fold more than whose teaching, was a living commentary on the texts of the Upaniṣads, was in fact the spirit of the Upaniṣads living in a human form"¹.

In another context he said, "Without studying Ramakrishna Paramhansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedānta, of the Bhagavata, and the other Puranas. His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of national religious existence in India"².

Swami Turiyananda another great monastic disciple of

² Swami Vivekananda: Sri Ramakrishna as I saw Him, p.5.
Sri Ramakrishna, was from his early boyhood given to an orthodox life of discipline and study of the Gita, the Upanisads and the works of Sāṅkara. He loved this life so much that he once even began to think that visits to his Master were a distraction! Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this and at the next opportunity revealed thus to Turiyananda the true spirit of the Vedānta:

'Well, I hear you are now given much to the discussion of the Vedānta. That is very good. But does it not amount to this - Brahman is real, the World is unreal? Or is it anything else?'

These simple words spoken directly from the Master's personal experience of Vedāntic truths, took the breath of Turiyananda, who had been labouring the impression that to understand Vedānta — what to speak of winning liberation — one had to study the different Vedāntic texts and other related subjects. Now he came to know that the essential thing about Vedānta was to get a firm conviction about the reality of Brahman and the impermanence of the phenomenal world, and to make that conviction a fact of experience through meditation. Swami Turiyananda later said that, that was a turning point in his life.

A philosopher by reflection on the fundamental problems

3 Swami Saradananda : Sri Ramakrishan The Great Master, p.367.
of life and universe achieves reflective understanding regarding them. Indian philosophy on the other hand, aims not only at theoretical understanding but also at the realisation of Truth. In other words, reflection here culminates in realisation.

We may say without fear of contradiction that reflection is the starting-point of all philosophy — Eastern and Western.

Sri Ramakrishna was not interested in acute thinking or thread-bare analysis. So he cannot be called a philosopher in that sense. He was more a man of realisation than of ratiocination. But though Sri Ramakrishna was not a philosopher in the technical sense of the term, he led a life of spirit or illumination and the depth of his spiritual existence was expressed in his spiritual message. His delivery of spiritual message flowed out of the depth of his realisation. He only expressed what he experienced. That is why, his expression had a universal appeal. We have no hesitation in saying that his delivery of spiritual message was replete with deep philosophical significance. "When a Ramakrishna has known the grasp of such truths, they donot remain with him as ideas. They quicken into life, into seeds of life, and fertilised by his credo, they flourish and come to fruition in an orchard of realisations, no longer abstract and isolated, but clearly defined, with a practical bearing on daily life, for they nourish the hunger
Philosophy is vitally concerned with the problem of ultimate Reality. Indian philosophers opine that though different persons may view Reality from different angles of vision in accordance with special aptitude and taste of their own, they represent the same Reality from different perspectives. True to Indian tradition Sri Ramakrishna preaches that the different living faiths are nothing but the alternating means for the realisation of God. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna is a God-intoxicated man. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "He knew nothing of Vedanta, nothing of theories. He was contented to live that great life and leave it to others to explain". Sri Ramakrishna says that you busy yourself with five different things, but I have one ideal only. I don't enjoy anything but God. There must be an all-consuming desire to know God. Then alone shall we succeed in coming face to face with Him. As the drowning man pants for a breath of air, even so the soul must pant after God. Cry unto the Lord with a yearning heart. Then thou shalt see Him.

People, he says, shed a joyful to tears for their wives and children; they shed a river of tears for money. But who cried for the Lord? You will see God if your love for Him

4 Romain Rolland: (Quoted from Swami Tejasananda's book on The Ramakrishna movement, its ideal and activities.
5 Swami Vivekananda: Sri Ramakrishna as I saw Him, p.134.
is as strong as the love of the worldly man for the things of this world, or of the mother for her children, or of the chaste wife for her husband. You must love God with heart and soul. Sri Ramakrishna goes on to say that we human beings who are engrossed with so many problems of life in the days of our ignorance, should not say that there is no God. To quote his words, "You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God. One should feel a yearning for God like the yearning for a man who lost his job and is wondering from one office to another in search of work. He is born in vain, who having attained the human birth so difficult to get, does not attempt to realise God in this very life." Sri Ramakrishna lived in God, moved in God, had visions of God, heard the voice of God, sometimes called Him Father, sometimes Mother, sometimes Friend and sometimes Brother. Even now and then he went off into trance and would say - "I am He! I am He!" Swami Vivekananda is justified in concluding that "Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was God incarnate ......... He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole

6 Thus spake Sri Ramakrishna, P.4.
cycle of the national religious existence in India? He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. He had the realisation of God in his life and persons coming in contact with him had no other alternative but to conclude that he is God incarnate. This is true not only of Swami Vivekananda and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who had realisation of God through Ramakrishna but also of persons who visited him. To quote Sri Aswini Kumar Dutta, "But no sooner did I leave his presence than it flashed on me, 'Great God! Whom had I been speaking with?'".

Sri Ramakrishna very often used to say that God is to man as magnet is to iron. Why does He not then attract man? As iron deeply imbedded in mud is not moved by the attraction of the magnet, so the soul deeply imbedded in Mayā feels not the attraction of the Lord. But when the mud is washed away with water, the iron is free to move, so the soul when by constant tears of prayer and repentence washes away the mud of Maya that compels it to stick to the earth, it is soon attracted by the Lord to Himself. He further says that man

---

7 Swami Vivekananda : Sri Ramakrishna as saw Him, pp.4-6.
9 Aswini Kumar Dutta : Quoted from Golden Jubilee Soubenir Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama, Bombay, p.15.
suffers so much simply for want of devotion to God. One should therefore adopt such means as would help the thought of God to arise in the mind at the last moment of one's life. The means is practice of devotion to God. If this is done during one's life-time, the thought of God is sure to occur to one's mind even at the last hour.

To Sri Ramakrishna the realisation of God is the highest human ideal attainable only by development of high spiritual life. For this everyone has to conquer lust and greed - 'Kam and Kancana', and turn all this thoughts and actions towards God. They are the most formidable enemies of our spiritual life. One can get rid of sex perversion by attaining the attitude, Sri Ramakrishna prescribes regarding human beings of both sexes: to regard every woman as the symbol of the Divine Mother and every man as a child of God. It will release the Muladhara-locked mind and send it sky - rocketing to higher planes of consciousness where everything is divinely blissful and nothing vile. To a disciple he once said, "You must practice discrimination. "Woman and gold" are impermanent. God is the only Eternal Substance. What does a man get with money? Food, clothes, and a dwelling place - nothing more. You cannot realise God with its help. Therefore money can never be the goal of life."\(^{10}\)

It is rightly said that Sri Ramakrishna is the heroic conqueror of sex and greed, is one to whom Brahman - consciousness is as natural as breathing; he is the crest-jewel of devotee, the

\(^{10}\) 'M' Katha[mrita p.22.
saviours of mankind, and the deep ocean of the grandest spiri-
tual synthesis. Swami Vivekananda tells us that Sri Ramakrishna's
purity was that of a baby. He never touched money in his life
and lust was absolutely annihilated in him. Do not go to great
religious teachers to learn physical science, their whole energy
has gone to the spiritual. In Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa the
man was all dead and only God remained; He actually could not
see sin, he was literally of purer eyes than to behold unicity.
The purity of these few Paramahansas is all that holds the world
together. If they should all die out and leave it, the world
would go to pieces. They do good by simply being, and they
know it not; they just are. Sri Ramakrishna is very clear in
emphasizing that one need not require renunciation of worldly
life if the aim of realising God was steadily kept in mind. He
tells us that Be in the world, but be not of the world - like
the lotus leaf in water. The question arises in our mind - Do
we require elimination of passions for the purpose of the reali-
sation of God? Sri Ramakrishna's reply was - Why should it be
eliminated? Give it a new turn and direct it towards God! This
idea was stated by the following parables -

As an unchaste woman, busily engaged in household
affairs, is all the while thinking of her secret love, even so,
O! them man of the world, do thy round of worldly duties; but
fix thy heart always on the Lord.
As a wet-nurse in a rich family brings up the child of her master, loving the baby as if it were her own, but knows well that she has no claim upon it; so think ye also that you are but trustees and guardians of your children whose real father is the Lord God in Heaven.

Too long have we made a distinction between life in the world and life of religion, and we have been widening that gulf century after century inspite of the clear and definite teaching of the Gita. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda came to bridge this gulf between life and religion. In the words of Ramakrishna, wherein the essence of the philosophy of Vedanta, the message of the Gita, is given in a brief utterance:

Live in the world; but don't allow worldliness to enter into you.

Worldliness should not be allowed to enter our hearts; if it enters, life will become heavy with selfishness and pettiness, jealousy and exploitation, making for stagnation. But with the stirring of the ever-present divinity in the heart, life flows out in a spirit of love and service making for dynamism and progress. So Ramakrishna adds by way of an illustration:

The boat will be on water but water should not be in the boat. This is the wrong place for the water and bad for
the boat. For then, the boat will become stagnant and unfit, for the purpose for which it is meant.

Living in the world one is safe, says Sri Ramakrishna, if one has Viveka (discrimination of the Real from the unreal) and Vairagya (dispassion for worldly things) and along with these intense devotion to God.

What we are to do when we are placed in this world? Sri Ramakrishna’s obvious answer is—Give up everything to Him, resign yourself to Him, and there will be no more trouble for you. Then you will come to know that everything is done by His will.

Alternative ways of Jñāna, Karma, Yoga and Bhakti may lead to the path of God-realisation. In the path of Jñāna one has to reject this and that with a view to realising the sole reality of consciousness which is identical with consciousness and bliss. This consciousness is neither subjective nor objective and is beyond all characterisation. We cannot express it though we can realise it. This characterisation is known as Indeterminate Brahman. In Ramakrishna’s words, "Jñāna Yoga is communion with God by means of knowledge. The Jñāni’s object is to realise Brahman, the Absolute. He says, "Not this", "Not this" and thus leaves out of account one unreal thing after another until he gets to a point where all Vichara (discrimination) between the real and the unreal ceases, and Brahman is
realised in Samādhi". When a man reaches such a stage, the world becomes eternally negated and he himself realises his identity with Brahman like a salt doll when it goes to fathom the depth of the ocean. Sri Ramakrishna says that God is the infinite Being, while Jiva is only a finite being. How then can the finite grasp the Infinite? It is like a doll made of salt trying to fathom the depth of the ocean. In doing so that salt doll is dissolved into the sea and lost. Similarly, the Jiva, in trying to measure God and know Him, loses its separateness and becomes one with Him. The path, according to Sri Ramakrishna is a difficult one and very few can have realisation by following this path. In Sri Ramakrishna's words, Very few persons are fit for the attainment of Jñāna. The Gītā declares: One among thousands desires to know Him, and even among thousands of those who are desirous to know, one perhaps can actually know Him. The less one's attachment to the world, that is, for 'woman and gold', the more will be one's Jñāna (knowledge of God).

Karma-margo implies the disinterested performance of one's duties. But disinterested performance of one's duties presupposes the discriminative knowledge of interested and disinterested activities. In other words, Karma-margo involves an element of Jñāna without which an action only binds and

11 'M' Kathamrita, p.141 (First volume).
does not liberate us. Disinterested performance of action is very difficult because ego-consciousness cannot be easily got rid of. So Ramakrishna does not prescribe Karma-marga for all. In Sri Ramakrishna's words, Work without attachment, however, is exceedingly difficult, especially in this age. Hence communion by prayer, devotion and love has been enjoined as better adopted to this age and philosophy. No one, however, can avoid work. Every mental operation is work. The consciousness, 'I feel', or 'I think', involves work. What is meant by the path of devotion in its relation to work is that work is simplified by devotion to, or love of God. In the first place, this love of God reduces the quality of one's work by fixing one's mind upon one's own ideal, that is God. Secondly, it helps one to work unattached. One cannot love God and at the same time love riches, pleasure, fame, or power. He who has once tested the drink prepared with sugar candy does not care for that made with molasses.

As Yoga as a method of liberation implies meditation and other disciplines, it is very difficult to practise. So Sri Ramakrishna rules out the possibility of following this path by all.

But Sir Ramakrishna prescribes Bhakti for all because
purity and self-control will come of their own accord when a man begins to love God. He repeatedly asks us to put ourselves in the hands of the Divine Mother, and she will give us Viveka (discrimination), vairagya (renunciation) and jñāna (knowledge). We will have to cry for her sincerely and passionately and she is bound to come. Sri Ramakrishna gives us an illustration to explain this: As long as a child is busy playing with his toys, his mother will be attending to her duties of cooking and washing inside the house. But when the child is wearied with the play and throw all his toys and cries loudly for his mother, she leaves all her duties and rushes to her child and takes him in her arms. The true devotee, says Ramakrishna, always says that - O Lord, Thou art the doer (Karta). Thou doest everything. I am a mere instrument in Thy hands. I do whatever, Thou make me do. All this is Thy glory. This home and this family are Thine, not mine; I have only the right to serve as thou ordained. When the true devotee calls the Divine Mother in like manner, she is bound to respond. Bhakti can arise only when there is whole-hearted devotion to God like the devotion of a chaste wife to her husband. It is a fact that Pure Bhakti is very difficult to obtain. Through Bhakti the mind and soul must be absorbed in God. Then comes Bhava (the higher form of Bhakti). In Bhava a man becomes speechless, his breath is stilled and the Kumbhaka (suspension of breath in Yoga practice)
sets in of itself, just as, when one shoots at an arm, one becomes speechless, and the breath is stopped. Of all the four paths Sri Ramakrishna prescribes Bhakti for all. From a study of his personal life we come to know that even after his Advaita realisation, he was like a child in the hands of his Divine Mother. God was to him a living and loving Mother — a greater reality than mother in flash and blood. Explaining the nature of Divine Mother or Kālī to the scholar Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Sri Ramakrishna sang the following song of Saint Ramprosad: —

Who is there who can understand what Mother Kālī is? Even the six dārsanas (Indian philosophical system) are powerless to reveal Her.

It is She, the scriptures say, that is the inner Self. Of the Yogi, who is Self discovers all his joy; She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits every living thing. The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb; Nor do you see how vast it is? In the mūlādhāra (sacral plexus)
The Yogi meditates on Her, and in the sahasrāra (the brain);

Who but Śiva has beheld Her as She really is?
Within the lotus wilderness (heart) She sports besides Her Mate,
the Swan (Śiva, the Absolute).
When man aspires to understand

Her, Rāmprasad must smile!

To think of knowing Her, he says, is quite as laughable

As to imagine one can swim across the boundless sea

But while my mind has understood,

alas! my heart has not;

Though but a dwarf, it still would strive to

make a captive of the moon.¹²

From a study of the life of Ramakrishna we have come to know

how he constantly talked to her, consulted her, and played with

her, heard her voice — nay, he would feel the very breath

of her nostrils. It was not for us to prove how that was possible,

but it was a fact for him. At the same time he had no supersti-

tions about Her. As a believer in the alternative paths, he

also followed Jñāna margo and had experience of 'Nirvikalpaka

samādhi', But he refuses to remain long in that plain or

spiritual experience. He is anxious to enjoy the sweet relation

between the devotee and the devoted in diverse ways. This

would be clear from the following prayer of Sri Ramakrishna:

Please do not make me a dry ascetic, allow me to live in joy

and sweetness. In his own words, "Many are the names of God."

¹² Ramprasad: (taken from Swami Ranganathananda's Eternal

Values for a changing society, p. 372).
and infinite the forms that help us to know Him. By whatsoever name or form you desire to know Him, in that very form and under that very name will you see Him. Different creeds are but different paths to reach the one God; various and different are the ways that lead to the temple of Mother Kāli at Kalighat (in Calcutta). Similarly various are the paths that take men to the house of the Lord. Every religion is nothing but one of these paths"\textsuperscript{13}.

"As a mother in nursing her sick children gives rice and curry to one, sago and arrowroot to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out different paths for different men suitable to their natures"\textsuperscript{14}.

It follows - To quote Sri Ramakrishna again, "Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Mohammedan should follow Mohammedanism. For the Hindu - the ancient path, the path of the Aryan rṣis, is the best. A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions"\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{13} Sayings of Ramakrishna p.152.
\textsuperscript{14} Sayings of Ramakrishna, p.155.
\textsuperscript{15} Sayings of Ramakrishna, p.156.
The life of Sri Ramakrishna illustrates the variety of processes open to individuals for the realisation of their spiritual aspirations. He explored for humanity all the approaches to the realm of eternal wisdom; for there was no religious faith that he did not practise and no truth that he did not realise in his own life. His life is as such a bold and triumphant ascent from the level of dualistic worship to the height of Absolutism through graded rungs of spiritual experiences. He has verified in his life that the three great orders of metaphysical thought—dualism, modified monism and absolute monism, are stages on the way to the Supreme Truth. They are not contradictory, but rather when added the one to the other are complementary. Thus his life is an eloquent reaffirmation of the Upanisadic truth that all, from the highest to the lowest, are but the embodiments of the same Reality—the difference being only in the degrees of manifestation of the divinity already in all, and that this supreme knowledge is attainable by whatsoever paths men may strive for it. The different paths—Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti and Yoga, all lead to the same goal, if followed with steady zeal and application and no colour, caste, or creed is any the least bar to the sacred temple of self-realisation. In the words of the French Savant, Romain Rolland, "Sri Ramakrishna was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people."\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\) Romain Rolland: The Life of Ramakrishna, p. 13.
symphony composed of thousands of voices and thousands of faiths of mankind. In other words, he lived, in the span of fifty years, the entire life of the human race and gave out in the fulness of his spiritual ecstasy, the whole of his being unto the world.

In his discourses to his disciples Sri Ramakrishna says, "There are three dolls - the first made of salt, the second made of cloth, and the third of stone. If these dolls are immersed in water, the first will become dissolved and lose its form, the second will absorb a large quantity of water but retain its form, and the third will remain impervious to water. The first doll represents the man who merges his self in the universal and all-pervading self and becomes one with It; he is the liberated man. The second represents the Bhakta or the true lover of God, who is full of Divine bliss and knowledge. And the third represents the worldly man who will not admit even a particle of true knowledge into his heart". 17.

Sri Ramakrishna had clear conceptions about the impersonal (Nirakara) and personal (Sakara) God. The relation between the two is the same as relation between fire and its burning power (dahika sakti) which is inseparable or non-different from fire? So one cannot think of fire without

17 Ramakrishna : Quoted from Golden Jubilee Souvenir (1923-73) Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama, Bombay, p.50.
thinking of its burning power. Similarly we cannot think of the rays of the sun without thinking of the sun itself. Therefore no one can think of the Brahman as apart from 'Sakti'. The eternal energy is creating, preserving and destroying everything and that energy is called Kālī, the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna further said that Kali is the Brahman, the Brahman is Kālī; Kālī and the Brahman are one and the same. I call Him the Brahman when He is absolutely inactive, that is, when He neither creates, nor preserves, nor destroys the phenomena, but when He performs all such actions, I call Him Kālī, the eternal Energy and the Divine Mother. So the Absolute Brahman and the Divine Mother are one and the same Being, the difference is in their names and forms, (namā-rupa), just as the same substance is called by pani, aqua, water, etc. To a disciple he questions, Have you any idea of God with form and without form? They are like ice and water. When water freezes into ice, ice has a form, when the same ice is melted into water, all form is lost. In this connection we may note with profit the conversation between Vijoy Krishna Goswami and Sri Ramakrishna -

Vijoy Krishna Goswami questions- If the Brahman, the Absolute, be the Divine Mother, then is she with form or without form?

Sri Ramakrishna replied, The Absolute Brahman and the
Divine Mother of the universe are one and the same. Where there is no activity of any kind, that is the state of the Absolute Brahman, but where there is evolution and involution, there is the manifestation of the Divine Mother. When the water of the ocean is calm without a wave or ripple, it is like the state of the Absolute, when the water is in motion and with waves, it is the state of the creative energy or Divine Mother. So the Divine Mother is both with form and without form.

You have faith in the formless Divinity. Therefore, you have faith in my mother as formless. When you have faith in form, the Divine Mother will show you how she is. Then you will know that it is not that She is merely the Absolute Existence; she will come to you and speak to you. Have faith and you will get everything. If you have faith in the formless Divinity, you must make that faith as firm as a rock. But donot be dogmatic, you must not dogmatise about God. You must not say that He is like this and not like anything else .......

The Absolute Brahman and the Divine Mother are one and the same.

Explaining further to Bijoy Krishna Goswami Sri Ramakrishna said, That which is Brahman is called Kālī, the Mother, the Primal Energy. When inactive, it is called Brahman. Again when creating, preserving and destroying, it is called
Sakti. Still water is an illustration of Brahman. The same water, moving in waves, may be compared to Sakti, Kālī. What is the meaning of Kālī? She who communes with Mahakālī, the Absolute, is Kālī. She is formless and again, she has forms. If you believe in the formless aspect, then meditate on Kālī as that. If your meditate on any aspect of Her with firm conviction, she will let you know Her true nature. Then you will realise that not merely does God exist, but He will come near you and talk to you as I am talking to you. Have faith and you will achieve everything. Remember this too. If you believe that God is formless, then stick to that belief with firm conviction. But don't be dogmatic; never say emphatically about God that He can be only this and not that. You may say: I believe that God is formless. But He can be many thing more. He alone knows what else He can be. I donot know; I donot understand. How can man with his one ounce of intelligence know the real nature of God? Can you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jar? If God through His grace even reveals Himself to His devotees and makes him understand, then he will know; but not otherwise. 18.

Explaining to the Brahma Samaj leader Keshab Chandra Sen, the difference in approaches between the paths of negation, jñāna and affirmation, bhakti, Sri Ramakrishna said that the jñānis, who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedānta, 18 Sayings of Ramakrishna, p.373.
say that the acts of creation, preservation and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestations of Śakti, the divine Power (known also as Maya). If you reason it out, you will realise that all these are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the Reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very Śakti is insubstantial, like a dream.

"But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in samādhi, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Śakti. Even when you say, "I am meditating", or "I am contemplating", still you are moving in the realm of Śakti, within its power.

Thus Brahman and Śakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognise its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays.19

Thus 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 Sayings of Ramakrishna, p. 134.
The standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna becomes more clear when we go through the following passages of Swami Visuddhananda.

"Tota Puri was an out and out Advaitist and he regarded Sakti or Power of Brahman as illusory. To him the universe and everything was Māyā and he had attained to the Nirvikalpa Samādhi by altogether denying it. "This universe", he used to say, "is in a state of flux, unstable and hence unreal; Brahman, the underlying Reality is alone true". Sri Ramakrishna pointed out to him that Sakti and Brahman are non-separate. Brahman has manifested Itself as the universe through Sakti, in other words, the universe is Brahman Itself. As we cannot think of the fire as apart from its burning power, the milk from its whiteness, so we cannot think of the Brahman as apart from Its Sakti. When we take the one we must take the other also. Hence the Sakti is Brahman Itself and is to be regarded as co-existent with It. This Sakti is represented as the Divine Mother and is worshipped by Her devotees. It is She who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. If Brahman is alone taken as the only Reality minus the universe, It will weight less, so to speak.

Deviotion devotio so the Brahman plus the universe in all its totality from orthodox view of Advaita should be taken together as Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna thus opened the eye of his Guru, Tota Puri, who lived with him for a year and went away illumened."20.

Thus Sri Ramakrishna identified Indeterminate Brahman with the Divine Mother. They are as water and ice are. Viewed from the standpoint of a Jñāni, Reality is indeterminate, but viewed from the standpoint of a Bhakta, the same indeterminate Reality becomes tangible, palpable and visible. Divine Mother is the manifested form of the Brahman which is Indeterminate and formless. It is sheer transformation; but transformation with a qualitative change as water when transformed into stream becomes energised. It is obvious therefore that both Jñāni and Bhakta are correct in their views from their respective standpoints.

We must bear in mind that though Sri Ramakrishna makes a synthesis for the realisation of God, he prefers Bhakti-Yoga to other paths. He tells us that the best path for this age is bhakti-yoga, the path of bhakti prescribed by Narada: to sing the name and glories of God and pray to Him with a longing heart, O God, give me knowledge, give me devotion, and reveal Thyself to Me! The path of Karma is extremely difficult. Therefore one should pray: O God, make my duties fewer and fewer; may I, through Thy grace, do the few duties that thou givest me without any attachment to their results! May I have no desire to be involved in many activities. If a man becomes mad with love of God, then who is father, who is mother and who is wife? He loves God so deeply that he becomes
mad. He has no duty, he is absolved from all debts. When a man reaches that state he forgets the whole world; he becomes unconscious of even of the body which is so dear to him.

But there is a fusion of Bhakti and Jñāna in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

As is well-known, Sri Ramakrishna was a supreme bhakta, and a supreme jñāni in one. He not only reached the goal of all bhakti cults, but practised the highest Advaita Vedānta under the guidance of Totapuri. And to the utter surprise of his tutor he attained the experience of nirvikalpa samādhi in three days. However Sri Ramakrishna's main object of worship was Divine Mother in the form of Kāli. But his Kāli was Brahman-mayi, the 'Embodyment of Brahman'. As he used to say, Brahman and Brahma-sakti (the power of Brahman) are non-different. Brahman when active, is called Śakti, when actionless, is called Brahman. This position does not in any way contradict the fundamental tenets of Advaita Vedānta, as Śaṅkara himself has stated that Śakti and Śaktiman (power and its possessor) are non-different. That Divine Power by which Brahman acts for the sake of blessing the devotees, that power am "I"—for Śakti and Śaktiman are non-different. In fact, all the tantric practices of Sri Ramakrishna culminated in the vision of same-sightedness. By dedicating himself body, mind and soul to the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna has attained this oneness of
vision. This he showed that bhakti too leads to jñāna just as the converse is also true.

That the Advaita Knowledge results not only in the transcendental experience of nirvikalpa-samādhi, but in the constant perception of the immanence of the One, was fully proved in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. The Advaitic experience, when brought to the plane of immanence, finds expression as infinite love. As Sri Ramakrishna always used to say, one should
first ride to the nitya state (the Absolute) by negating the relative as 'not this', 'not this', and later return to the plane of lila (the relative). But when one has reached the nitya returns to the plane of the Relative, he does not any more see differentiation here, but he sees merely that One manifesting Itself as the many, and this vision must result in selfless love for all that exists, for all are That. As Swami Vivekananda said that faith is a wonderful insight and it alone can save; but there is the danger in it of breeding fanaticism and banning further progress.

Jñāna is all right; but there is the danger of its becoming dry intellectualism. Love is great and noble; but may die away in meaningless sentimentalism. A HARMONY OF ALL THESE IS THE THING REQUIRED. SRI RAMAKRISHNA WAS SUCH A HARMONY.

Swami Saradananda said regarding this Great Master:
He came to feel in his heart of hearts that the realisation of non-duality was the ultimate aim of all kinds of disciplines. For having performed Sadhanas according to the teachings of all the main religious denominations prevalent in India he had already been convinced that all took the aspirants towards the non-dual plane.

In his teachings Sri Ramakrishna advised the generality of devotees to follow the path of bhakti, as that is the most suitable path for this age. However when he found fit recipient for the Advaita knowledge, such as Swami Vivekananda, he taught him the highest Advaita.

Swami Vivekananda followed of course, in the footsteps of his Master. But while the emphasis of the Master was on bhakti, the disciple emphasized on Advaita knowledge in his preaching. For the fields of their (Ramakrishna and Vivekananda) preaching and activities were strikingly different. But on many occasions the Swamiji revealed his devotional nature and the intensity of love of God within this heart. He remarked once: He (Sri Ramakrishna) was all bhakti without, but within he was all jñāni, I am all jñāni without; but within my heart, it is all bhakti.

Thus in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the age-old apparent conflict between jñāna and bhakti has been resolved.
and reconciled. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly said that pure knowledge and pure love are both one and the same "THE SAME BEING WHOM THE VEDĀNTISTS CALL BRAHMAN, IS CALLED ĀTMAN BY THE YOGIS, AND BHAGAVAN BY THE BHAKTAS. THE SAME BRAHMAN IS CALLED PRIEST WHEN HE CONDUCTS WORSHIP, AND COOK, WHEN HE IS EMPLOYED IN THE KITCHEN" 2

Both Ramakrishna and Rāmānuja hold that Brahman and God are identical and the world is not false. But Sri Ramakrishna differs from Rāmānuja on some important points. ACCORDING TO RĀMĀNUJA, JIVA IS A PART OF BRAHMAN WHEREAS SRI RAMAKRISHNA BELIEVES IN THE ESSENTIAL IDENTITY OF THE TWO. Unlike Rāmānuja, Sri Ramakrishna accepts sūdha jñāna as a possible method of attaining liberation. As a Vaisnava, Rāmānuja upholds the view that Brahman is Vasudeva, while Sri Ramakrishna who is apparently a Sakta- a worshipper of Kālī, the Divine Mother identifies Absolute formless Brahman with Kālī as in form. In the ultimate analysis according to Sri Ramakrishna, there is difference between Śiva and Kālī.

Though Sri Ramakrishna is a worshipper of Divine Mother, still he has not accepted Tantric philosophy in liberal terms in toto. Tantric instruction accepting both Śiva and Śakti as ultimate Reality according to Ramakrishna is not ultimate

21 The message of Ramakrishna, p.6.
though it can be accepted as such on some aspects. The dualism of Siva and Sakti may be reduced to the monism of Siva and Sakti as a power indistinguishable from One Divine. Moreover, the ultimate reality as indeterminate and formless may be realised from viewpoint of a Jñānin according to Sri Ramakrishna, though the possibility of such a realisation is negated in Tantra Shastra.

Though basically a non-dualist, Sri Ramakrishna's non-dualism differs at several points from the philosophy of Śaṅkara. Unlike Ramakrishna Śaṅkara believes in the ultimate Reality of Indeterminate Brahman and ultimate falsity of the Determinate Brahman. According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is ultimate Reality, the world is an illusion and the Jiva is essentially identical with Brahman. In Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, Brahman alone shines in Its purity, and everything else is totally rejected in the ultimate stage of spiritual realisation. But Sri Ramakrishna differs from Śaṅkara on this fundamental issue. To him, nothing is rejected at the ultimate stage, everything shall be viewed in its proper perspective. He expresses his views by means of an analogy. When a man ascends to the top floor of a building, he is to reach it through other floors. But this never means that the other floors become non-existent with the attainment of the top floor. A
spiritual aspirant hankers after the non-dualistic knowledge which he attains through the cognition of Pluralism and Dualism. With the attainment of non-Dualistic Knowledge, Pluralism and Dualism are not rejected as false, they are to be understood as stepping-stones to Non-dualism. Moreover Sri Ramakrishna opines that with the realisation of Ultimate Reality which is ONE WITHOUT A SECOND, the world is not cognised as false. It only appears as the manifestation of the Reality.

Unlike Śaṅkara Sri Ramakrishna accepts Śakti or the creative activity on the part of the Reality as real. Just as the burning power is inseparable from fire, so Śakti is inseparable from Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna we have already pointed out, does not bother about acute thinking or threadbare analysis. He expressed what he experienced in his heart of hearts. So he did not stop by merely stating that Śakti is inseparable from Brahman. He goes on to say that Brahman and Śakti are ultimately identical. When Brahman creates the universe, we call Him Śakti, and when He ceases His creative activity we call Him Brahman. In the words of Dr. S.C. Chatterjee, "Śakti (Brahman's energy) is not Māyā in the sense of a magical power of creating illusion, but a real power of creativity in Brahman or is Brahman Himself as engaged in the activity of creation, maintenance and destruction of the world".22

22 Dr. S.C. Chatterjee : Classical Indian philosophies, their synthesis in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 150.
IT (THE VIEW OF RAMAKRISHNA) IS MORE POSITIVE THAN ŚĀNKARA’S ADVAITA WHICH IS MORE NEGATIVE. It is reconciled with Dvaita, Visistadvaita, and Sakti-Advaita of Tantra and other types of Advaita. While Śāṅkara's Advaita cannot, from the transcendental standpoint be reconciled with these, although some sort of compromise among them may be effected from the empirical or practical standpoint. In Sri Ramakrishna’s philosophy, Brahman is the ultimate reality and the only reality, one, without a second. But while for Śāṅkara it is, from the Transcendental standpoint perfectly indeterminate and qualityless (nirguna), for Sri Ramakrishna, it is even from the transcendental standpoint, both indeterminate and determinate, qualityless and possessed of quality. According to Śāṅkara, Māyā as creative power is not an essential character of Brahman, it is only an apparent, accidental predicate that we illusorily ascribe to Brahman. According to Sri Ramakrishna, Brahman and Sakti or the Divine Mother are non-different. Even when the creative activity of Brahman ceases and the lila-rupa disappears, Sakti as formless Mahakali, rests and is equipoised in the formless Brahman.23

"The Upaniṣadic texts, 'All this is Brahman' does not mean for him (Ramakrishna) as it does for some Advaitins, that there is not all but only Brahman. For him all are, and are

23 Dr. S.C. Chatterjee: Classical Indian Philosophies, their synthesis in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, pp. 49-50.
In Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's approach to the problems of life and spiritual practice, there is a definite shifting of emphasis from the mere negative to the positive and this is bound to influence the world of speculative thought and spiritual endeavour in the ages to come.

Regarding Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda tells us that it was given to him (Vivekananda) to live with a man who was as ardent a bhakta as a jñāni. In another context Swamiji says that Such a unique personality, such a synthesis of the utmost of Jñāna, Yoga, Bhakti and Karma has never before appeared among mankind. The life of Sri Ramakrishna proves that the greatest breadth, the highest catholicity and the utmost intensity can exist side by side in the same individual, and that society also can be constructed like that, for society is nothing but an aggregate of individuals. The formation of such a perfect character is the ideal of the age. He goes on to say, that in point of character, Paramahamsa Deva beats all previous records; and as regards teaching he was more liberal, more original and more progressive than all his predecessors.

24 Dr. S.C. Chatterjee: Classical Indian Philosophies: their synthesis in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, p.112.
In other words, the older teachers were rather one-sided, while the teaching of this new Incarnation or Teacher is that the best point of Yoga, devotion, Knowledge and work must be combined now so as to form a new society ........ The older ones were nodoubt good, but this is the new religion of this age - the synthesis of Yoga, Knowledge, devotion and work.

Sri Ramakrishna discouraged discussion of all metaphysical subtleties and hair-splitting arguments regarding the existence of God. The only thing required was the intensity of yearning for God. He tells us that we may not believe in the existence of Radha and Kṛṣṇa, but we must have the love of Radha for Kṛṣṇa. We may not believe in the existence Hanumana and Rama, but we must have feeling of Hanumana for Rama. And always our love of God is more important than our theoretical knowledge of God. When we go into a mango-grove, we should eat the sweet fruit and not go about counting the leaves of all the trees. When a jug of water from a tank is able to quench our thirst, why do we worry ourselves about the exact quantity of water in the tank? When we want to purify ourselves by touching the Ganges, surely we won't attempt to touch all the Ganges from Hardwar to the sea. The only thing we need is to realise God. Why do we bother much about the world, creation, science, and all that? Our business is to eat mangoes.
What need have we to know, how many hundreds of trees, there are in the orchard; how many thousands of branches and how many millions of leaves? Man is born in this world to realise God; it is not good to forget that and direct the mind to other things. We may come to eat mangoes and by eating the mangoes, we can be happy.

Next in importance is Sri Ramakrishna's advice to entire human race to stick to the religion he or she belongs. He instructed his disciples according to their different qualifications and tendencies. He would ask some to meditate upon God without any form, others he would tell to have strong devotion towards God with form. To him all religions were different paths leading to the same goal – God who may be called by different names, such as God, Allah, Isvara, Jehoovah etc. As different rivers taking their start from different mountains, running crooked or straight, all come and mingle their waters in the ocean, so the different sects with their different points of view, at last come unto Three. This is not a theory, it has to be recognised.

Ramakrishna asks his followers to stick to the religion he is born without having recourse to hatred with respect to votaries of other religions condemning them to go to hell instead of Heaven. With a view to illustrating this he employs
the parable of a daughter-in-law. As in the household the good daughter-in-law honours and respects her father-in-law, mother-in-law, her father and mother and loves her relatives and friends but her especial love follows freely towards her husband, with whom alone she shares her bed, similarly, a man should honour and respect other religions, but stick to and practise his own religion with chastity and spirit. "As many religions, so many are the paths". Therefore Sri Ramakrishna refuses to accept any dogmatic belief that one religion is superior to other. Nor does he believe in religions conversion. He asks a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Buddhist a better Buddhist. Mere change of one's religion does not help any one to realise God. If one has recourse to spiritual discipline sincerely in accordance with one's own religious persuasion, one is sure to have realisation of God. Every man is free to follow his own religious ideas in conformity to his taste and aptitude. Just as a mother prepares different dishes out of the same fish keeping in view the taste to suit the several taste and digestive capacity of her children, in the similar manner the different views of Reality and the different ideas or faculties are accepted by men according to their mental bias or bent. Sri Ramakrishna insists on saying that as all views of Reality are valid alternatives, none can be
rejected as false. It has been very aptly remarked that it was SRI RAMAKRISHNA THAT FIRST REVEALED TO THE WORLD THE POWERFUL IDEA OF THE TRUTH, NOT IN, BUT OF EVERY RELIGION. In Swami Vivekananda's words, "ALL THAT I AM, ALL THAT THE WORLD ITSELF WILL SOMEDAY BE, IS Owing TO MY MASTER, SRI RAMAKRISHNA WHO INCARNATED AND EXPERIENCED AND TAUGHT THIS WONDERFUL UNITY WHICH UNDERLIES EVERYTHING, HAVING DISCOVERED IT ALIKE IN HINDUISM, IN ISLAM, AND IN CHRISTIANITY".

The great harmony of different religious of the world which he actually established by personal tests, was expressed in four simple words - Yata mat tata Path - "as many religions, so many are the paths or every religion is a path to salvation". Dr. R.C. Mazumder rightly observes, "This catholicity of views may be regarded as a great contribution of Ramakrishna to the modern world which has divided religion into so many water-light compartments". Swami Vivekananda rightly points out, "MY MASTER'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND IS : 'BE SPIRITUAL AND REALISE TRUTH FOR YOURSELF'. HE WOULD HAVE YOU GIVE UP FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR FELLOWBEINGS. HE WOULD HAVE YOU CEASE TALKING ABOUT LOVE FOR YOUR BROTHER, AND SET TO WORK TO PROVE YOUR WORDS; THE TIME HAS COME FOR RENUNCIATION, FOR REALISATION; AND THEN YOU WILL SEE THE HARMONY IN ALL THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD.

25 Swami Vivekananda : Sri Ramakrishna as I saw Him, pp.22-23.
YOU WILL KNOW THAT THERE IS NO NEED OF ANY QUARREL. AND THEN ONLY WILL YOU BE READY TO HELP HUMANITY. TO PROCLAIM AND MAKE CLEAR THE FUNDAMENTAL UNITY UNDERLYING ALL RELIGIONS WAS THE MISSION OF MY MASTER. OTHER TEACHERS HAVE TAUGHT SPECIAL RELIGIONS WHICH BEAR THEIR NAMES, BUT THIS GREAT TEACHER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY MADE NO CLAIM FOR HIMSELF. HE LEFT EVERY RELIGION UNDISTURBED BECAUSE HE HAD REALISED THAT IN REALITY THEY ARE ALL PART AND PARCEL OF THE ONE ETERNAL RELIGION"27. IT WAS ALSO THE MAIN AND CONSTANT THEME OF VIVEKANANDA'S DISCOURSE IN THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS IN U.S.A. WHICH GAVE HIM THE POSITION OF A WORLD TEACHER. Paying his highest tribute to Sri Ramakrishna, Rabindranath Tagore says -

"Diverse courses of worship
From varied springs of fulfilment
have mingled in your meditations.
The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite
has given form to a shrine of unity in your life
Where from far and near arrive salutations
to which I join mine own"28

(Tenth Edition)

28 Rabindranath Tagore : (quoted from Golden Jubilee Soubenir
In Mahatma Gandhi's words, "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light"\(^{29}\). In the words of Will Durant, Ramakrishna represented the **ETERNAL SOUL OF INDIA**, calm and majestic with a unifying, pacifying love for all living things. In his life of Ramakrishna, Romain Rolland says that in Sri Ramakrishna, we find the fullest expression of the **ETERNAL SPIRIT OF INDIA**. Paying his tribute to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo says, "Sri Ramakrishna represents a synthesis in one person of all the leaders. In follows that the movements of his age will unify or organise the more provincial and fragmentary movements of the past. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the epitome of the whole. His was the great superconscious life which alone can witness to the infinitude of the current that bears us all oceanwards. He is the proof of the Power behind us, and the future before us."

**SO GREAT A BIRTH INITIATES GREAT HAPPENINGS. MANY ARE TO**

\(^{29}\) Mahatma Gandhi : Life of Sri Ramakrishna (Forward), p.vii.
BE TRIED AS BY FIRE, AND NOT A FEW WILL BE FOUND TO BE PURE GOLD; BUT WHATSOEVER HAPPENS? WHETHER VICTORY OR DEFEAT, SPEEDY FULFILMENT OR PROLONGED STRUGGLE, THE FACT THAT HE HAS BEEN BORN AND LIVED HERE IN OUR MIDST IN THE SIGHT AND MEMORY OF MEN NOW LIVING IS PROOF THAT GOD HATH SOUNDED FOR THE TRUMPET THAT SHALL NEVER CALL RETREAT! HE IS SIFTING OUT THE HEARTS OF MEN BEFORE HIS JUDGMENT SEAT; OH, BE SWIFT MY SOUL, TO ANSWER HIM:

BE JUBILANT, MY FEET!
WHILE GOD IS MARCHING ON!" 30

Swami Shivananda, the Second President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission and a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said of him, "I have not yet come to a final understanding whether he was a man or a superman, a god or God Himself. But I have known him to be a man of complete self-effacement, master of the highest renunciation, possessed of the supreme wisdom and as the very incarnation of Love; and as, with the passing of days, I am getting better and better acquainted with the domain of spirituality and feeling the infinite extent and depth of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual moods, the conviction is growing in me that to compare him with God, as God is popularly understood, would be minimising and lowering his

30 Sri Aurobindo : (Quoted from Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama Bombay Golden Jubilee Soubenir, 1923-73, p.18.)
supreme greatness. I have seen him showering his love equally on men and women, on the learned and the ignorant, and on saints and sinners, and evincing earnest and increasing solicitude for the relief of their misery and for their attainment to infinite peace by realising the Divine. I dare say the world has not seen another man of his type in modern times, so devoted to the welfare of mankind."31.

It is rightly said that RAMAKRISHNA BROUGHT ABOUT A SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE PERSONALITY AND MENTAL MAKE-UP OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA. "IT WAS HIS MASTER WHO HAD TAUGHT HIM THE DIVINITY OF THE SOUL, NON-DUALITY OF GOD-HEAD, THE UNITY OF EXISTENCE AND ONE MORE GREAT THING - THAT IS THE UNIVERSALITY OR HARMONY OF ALL DIFFERENT RELIGIONS"32

THIS TRAINING OF VIVEKANANDA AT THE HANDS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA, BY WHICH THE YOUNG DYNAMIC INTELLECTUAL BECAME A MAN OF GOD, ONE WHO SAW GOD IN HIMSELF AND IN ALL BEINGS, ONE WHO BECAME LIKE HIS MASTER UNIVERSAL IN HIS SYMPATHY FOR MAN IN THE EAST AND THE WEST, IS A MOMENTOUS CHAPTER IN MODERN HISTORY, FRAUGHT WITH GREAT CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FUTURE.

Referring to Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda says:

31 Swami Shivananda : (Quoted from Ramkrishna Mission and Ashrama Bombay, Golden Jubilee Soubenir, 1923-73, p.16.

32 Swami Nikhilananda : Vivekananda, a Biography, p.53.
'THE TIME WAS RIPE FOR ONE TO BE BORN WHO IN ONE BODY WOULD HAVE THE BRILLIANT INTELLECT OF ŚĀNKARA AND THE WONDERFULLY EXPANSIVE, INFINITE HEART OF CHAITANYA; ONE WHO WOULD SEE IN EVERY SECT THE SAME SPIRIT WORKING, THE SAME GOD; ONE WHO WOULD SEE GOD IN EVERY BEING, ONE WHOSE HEART WOULD WEEP FOR THE POOR, FOR THE WEAK, FOR THE OUTCASTE, FOR THE DOWNTRODDEN, FOR EVERYONE IN THIS WORLD, INSIDE INDIA OR OUTSIDE INDIA; AND AT THE SAME TIME WHOSE GRAND BRILLIANT INTELLECT WOULD CONCEIVE OF SUCH NOBLE THOUGHTS AS WOULD HARMONISE ALL CONFLICTING SECTS, NOT ONLY IN INDIA BUT OUTSIDE OF INDIA, AND BRING A MARVELLOUS HARMONY THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION OF HEAD AND HEART INTO EXISTENCE.

Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years .......... Let me now only mention the great Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfilment of the Indian sages, the sage for the time, one whose teaching is just now, in the present time, most beneficial. And mark the divine power working behind the man. The son of a poor priest, born in an out-of-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped literally by thousands in Europe and America, and tomorrow will be worshipped by thousands more. Who knows the plans of the Lord!"33. Swami Vivekananda questions, "Was Sri Ramakrishna the Saviour of India merely? It is this narrow idea that has

brought about India's ruin, and her welfare is an impossibility so long as this is not rooted out .............THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN, BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR, THE LITERATE AND ILLITERATE, BRAHMIN AND CHANDAL - HE LIVED TO ROOT OUT ALL! AND HE WAS THE HARBRINGER OF PEACE - THE SEPARATION BETWEEN THE HINDUS AND MOHAMMEDANS, BETWEEN HINDUS AND CHRISTIANS, ALL ARE NOW THINGS OF THE PAST. THAT FIGHT ABOUT DISTINCTIONS THAT THERE WAS, BELONGED TO ANOTHER ERA. IN THIS SATYA-YUGA THE TIDAL WAVE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S LOVE HAS UNIFIED ALL"34

In another context Swami Vivekananda said about Ramakrishna that "THE MASTER WAS THE CONCENTRATED EMBODIMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, LOVE, RENUNCIATION, CATHOLICITY AND THE DESIRE TO SERVE MANKIND. IN HIM THE IDEAL BECAME THE ACTUAL, THEORY AND PRACTICE HAD GONE HAND IN HAND AND SET AT REST ALL SCEPTICISM.

In a different context he wrote, RAMAKRISHNA HAD NO PEER; NO-WHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD EXISTS THAT UNPRECEDENTED PERFECTION THAT WONDERFUL KINDNESS FOR ALL ..........SUCH INTENSE SYMPATHY FOR MEN IN BONDAGE"35

Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who acquired a first hand knowledge of the spiritual elevation of his Master said, "IN HIM I FOUND THE EMBODIMENT OF THE

34 Swami Vivekananda : Sri Ramakrishna as I was Him, pp.48-49.
35 Swami Vivekananda : Sri Ramakrishna as I saw Him, p.100.
Absolute truth of the highest philosophy, as well as of the universal religion which underlies all sectarian religions of the world and became his humble disciples. To understand Sri Ramakrishna, a knowledge of the scriptures, the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Puranas, the Tantras as well as, Eastern and Western philosophies is needed. Though I have such a knowledge, I donot venture to write about his philosophy. Hence I have said thus in my hymn to Sri Ramakrishna:

"Oh! Lord, Divine Ramakrishna, I donot know thy real nature, Ocean of mercy, I prostrate again and again before thy real nature, Whatever it might be."

Sri Ramakrishna has compared Swami Vivekananda with other spiritual luminaries of his time in the following manner: that if Keshab Chandra Sen had one power which made him famous, Vivekananda had eighteen such powers in the fullest measure; that though the hearts of Keshab and Vijoy Krishna Goswami were brightened by the light of knowledge like the flame of a lamp, the very sun of knowledge had risen in the heart of Swamiji and removed from there even the slightest trance of māyā and delusion; that in taking stock of his special devotees,

36 Swami Abhedananda: Quoted from 'The Bases of Indian Culture - Commemoration volume of Swami Abhedananda', p.642.
the Ishvarakotis (those who are born with a Divine Incarnation and have spiritual knowledge from birth), some were like lotuses of ten petals, some like lotuses of sixteen petals and some of a hundred petals - but among lotuses the Swamiji was a thousand petalled one; that though the other devotees may be like pots and pitchers, the Swamiji was a huge reservoir; that though the others were like minnows, smelts, or sardines, Vivekananda was like a huge red-eyed carp. Further, what Swamiji became in the end was largely due to what Ramakrishna made him - and we may say that Swami Vivekananda the man, as the world knew him, was the spiritual power - Ramakrishna in another form.

Referring to Vivekananda, Sarada Devi said of him: "Naren is an instrument of Takur (Master) who makes him write these words for inspiring his children and devotees for doing his work, for doing good to all the world. What Naren writes is true and must be fulfilled hereafter." 37

Swami Vivekananda himself said about it: "All that I am, all that the world will someday be, is owing to my Master, Ramakrishna." 38 "If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words or deeds, if from my lips has ever

38 Vivekananda : Sri Ramakrishna as I saw Him, pp. 22-25.
fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was all his ...... All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been His inspiration. His words, and he himself. From America he wrote to a friend in India, "I AM AN INSTRUMENT, AND HE IS THE OPERATOR. THROUGH THIS INSTRUMENT HE IS ROUSING THE RELIGIOUS INSTINCT IN THOUSANDS OF HEARTS IN THIS FAR-OFF COUNTRY. THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN HERE LOVE AND REVERE ME ...... HE MAKES THE DUMB ELOQUENT AND MAKES THE LAME CROSS MOUNTAINS'. I AM AMAZED AT HIS GRACE. WHICHEVER TOWN I VISIT, IT IS IN AN UPROAR. THEY HAVE NAMED ME THE 'CYCLONIC HINDU'. REMEMBER, IT IS HIS WILL - I AM A VOICE WITHOUT A FORM".

The central theme of this thesis is to discuss this transformation in Swami Vivekananda brought about by Sri Ramakrishna. In a letter to a brother - disciple, he exclaimed, "I AM HIS CHILD, NOURISHED BY HIS HEART'S BLOOD".

It is no exaggeration to say that Sri Ramakrishna with a view to communicating his message to the world wanted a mouthpiece which he found in Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna

and Vivekananda were indispensable to each other. Sri Ramakrishna was thought and Swami Vivekananda was expression of that thought.

Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are twin souls, for one is the counterpart of the other, the dominant note of one is 'Prema' and 'Bhakti' and that of the other is 'Jñāna' and 'Sakti'. Spiritually speaking Ramakrishna is the feminine soul and Vivekananda its masculine complement. One is intelligible only with reference to the other.

From our common experience we may say that most people in religious history begin with faith. But Vivekananda began with reason. His attitude was like that of Saint Paul. "Prove everything; hold fast that which is true", said Saint Paul. In a similar manner Swamiji says, "Prove everything; hold fast that which is true. Seeing is believing. There is no better proof than that". So whenever anybody talked of God or preached of religion, he went to him and said, "Have you ever seen God?" But he could get no downright answer till he met Sri Ramakrishna. So far he was led by the idea that all religious preachers were as blind as those who went over to them for spiritual enlightenment. He was up for one who had real initiation and spiritual enlightenment. So when he heard that Sri Ramakrishna was a God-intoxicated man, he went right up to him. Swami Vivekananda was very much impressed by the manner of life
which Ramakrishna used to live. But he wanted some positive proof of what Ramakrishna used to utter publicly. So he put him the identical question, "Have you ever seen God?" Sri Ramakrishna's answer was as pointed as the question was straight or pointblank. He once said, "I have seen God as intensely as I see you and I can show Him to you too, if you only follow me". A vivid narration of the answer he received from Ramakrishna at that time has been expressed by Swami Vivekananda in the following passages -

He (Ramakrishna) used the most simple language, and I thought "Can this man be a great teacher? (and I)qrept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: "Do you believe in God, Sir?" "Yes", he replied. "Can you prove it, Sir?" "Yes". "How?" "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intense sense" (way). That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world"41. Sri Ramakrishna further said that God can be realised. One can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wives and children, for wealth or property, but who

41 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. 4, p.179.
does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself. In later years Swamiji used to say referring to this incident: As I heard these things from his lips, I could not but believe that he was saying them not only like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realisations. Here is a true man of renunciation. He practices what he preaches. He has given up everything for God. "God can be seen and spoken of", he told us, 'just as I am seeing you and speaking to you. But who wants to see and speak to God? People grieve and shed enough of tears because their wives or their sons are dead or because they have lost their money and their estates. But who weeps because he cannot see God? And yet - if anyone really wants to see God and if he calls upon Him - God will reveal Himself, that is certain" 42.

To Ramakrishna, religion is not a matter of intellectual assent or dissent, nor is it a cloth to be put on or put off at one's own sweet will. It is as a matter of fact a principle of life, a matter of actual experience to the sense of the soul as gross matter is perceptible to the sense of sight and touch. In paying tribute to Sri Ramakrishna, Arnold Toynbee writes, "Religion is not just a matter for study; it is something

42 His Eastern and Western Disciples : Life of Swami Vivekananda, p.47.
that has to be experienced, and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness ....

....His religious activity and experience were in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere."43

In Swami Vivekananda's words "SRI RAMAKRISHNA CAME TO TEACH THE RELIGION OF TODAY, CONSTRUCTIVE, NOT DESTRUCTIVE. HE HAD TO GO AFRESH TO NATURE TO ASK FOR FACTS AND HE GOT SCIENTIFIC RELIGION, WHICH NEVER SAYS, 'BELIEVE', BUT 'SEE'; 'I SEE, AND YOU TOO CAN SEE'. USE THE SAME MEANS AND YOU WILL REACH THE SAME VISION. GOD WILL COME TO EVERYONE, HARMONY IS WITHIN THE REACH OF ALL. SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S TEACHINGS ARE THE 'GIST OF HINDUISM'; THEY WERE NOT PECULIAR TO HIM. NOR DID HE CLAIM THAT THEY WERE; HE CARED NAUGHT FOR NAME OR FAME" 44.

Vivekananda was deeply impressed by the way in which Sri Ramakrishna used to say to his disciples, Do not accept anything because I say so. Test everything for yourselves. A famous dictum of Sri Ramakrishna was - Test me as the money-chargers test their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly. Vivekananda found in Sri Ramakrishna

43 Arnold Toynbee : (Quoted from India's contribution to World thought and culture), XV,

44 Swami Vivekananda : Sri Ramakrishna as I saw Him, pp.61-62.
a master who approved doubts and did not accept unquestioned obedience. Sri Ramakrishna's teaching - Try to see the truth from all angles-and through every perspective developed in Vivekananda independence of thought leading to increasing his self-reliance and regard for truth. Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that all human beings, in fact, all beings were to be seen as the manifestation of the one Brahman deeply impressed Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna's unhappiness at the sight of poverty and misery and his stress on service to mankind impressed Swami most. Sri Ramakrishna's life and teaching induced in Swami Vivekananda deep compassion for the down-trodden in society. Between self-liberation and the liberation of the masses from poverty and ignorance, he chose the latter. Let us see how Vivekananda was moulded by the life and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna.

The first great truth that Swami Vivekananda learned from his Master and taught to all mankind is that religion is a matter of realisation. To quote his words, "RELIGION CANNOT LIVE IN SECTS AND SOCIETIES .......RELIGION DOES NOT CONSIST IN ERECTING TEMPLES, OR BUILDING CHURCHES, OR ATTENDING PUBLIC WORSHIP. IT IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN BOOKS, OR IN WORDS, OR IN LECTURES, OR IN ORGANISATIONS. RELIGION CONSISTS IN REALISATION." 45

Religion is the means to attain God-consciousness. The utility of different religions has in the fact that they are necessary to suit diverse tastes and temperaments. Very often we find that people quarrel about religions by emphasizing rituals, myths and secondary details while neglecting the essential philosophy. Man, Swami Vivekananda repeatedly tells us, does not proceed from error to truth, but truth to truth — from truth that is lower to truth that is higher. The salvation of the Hindus, the Christians, the Muslims and the Jews lies in unswerving devotion to their own faiths. By this, he insisted, does not preclude the necessity of enriching one's own religious consciousness by learning spiritual truths from other faiths. Mutual respect should be the relationship between one religion and another. When a man realises truth, he sees the essential oneness of all religions. The question remains to be answered — In which way Vivekananda is a Vedāntist? He did not accept Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta in toto. He varied from him in major points and in variation and shifting of emphasis. Vivekananda reoriented and expanded Śaṅkara's Vedānta having borrowed some new light from Buddhism and having received the eternal truths of religion as expressed and experienced by Śri Ramakrishna in the following manner —

1. God is One

2. He is worshipped by many through different
systems, the systems that evolve to suit their individual
taste and temperaments.

PECULIARITY OF RAMAKRISHNA'S INFLUENCE ON VIVEKANANDA - HOW IT AFFECTED HIM

3. "Religion is One - religions are many"


5. Jiva is Śātva.

6. Unity of existence - identification even with non-living as well as with living beings.

There is variation in religious practices of different religions. Each religion must borrow new spirit and light from other religion or religions which are not in his religion for one's fulfilment and fuller comprehension of God. In this way he upheld the supremacy of Vedāntic philosophy as comprehended and enriched by him. This is his new religion that Vivekananda gave to the world. Vedānta is the true religion which sees oneness of all religions, unity of existence. It is not Śāṅkara's Advaita Vedānta or humanism of Buddha simply or wholly. It has aspects from each, yet it is not the summation of these. It occupies a vital part in Swamiji's doctrine. Yet Swamiji expanded the ideas both horizontally and vertically. In shape and form it is a new image with a livelier, brighter and fuller view of life or Eternal Being. This view of God threw light on the concept of this material life and the created beings of the world, for which the other concept of
religion he found out which is Advaita Vedānta reoriented.

"These are His manifold forms before thee;
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings, without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God." 46

Thus religion in Vivekananda's conception is not an isolated pursuit, cut off from reality of life, quite unconcerned about the weal and woe of life, it is integrated with life, and woven into the texture of life also, making it all-pervasive.

In this aspect of the matter it cuts asunder the vitriolic attack of Karl Marx epitomised in the well-known dictum "Religion is the opium of the people". Swamiji's concept of religion is a far-cry from the medieval concept of it as practised and preached by the Church and the papacy of the middle ages. It is the 'true religion' as envisaged in Vedānta philosophy or the God-consciousness in a fuller sense which encompasses the entire world within its orbit.

46 দেববন্ধ সন্তুষ্ট সাধনে
জলে বেঁধা নিঃর্বাচিত খেলা
কীতে মহা কোলে যেই জন
সদা স্নান আচরিয়ে রক্ষা

Unless we give this new dimension to religion the world cannot survive the impact of industrial civilisation. Peace will ever remain a mirage. Universal brotherhood of men, one world concept of the politician will be meaningless jargon, propagandists' stock-in-trade.

True religion makes one noble, full of love for the people, at the same time it makes man God-conscious. Religion is divine-inspiration for the people to see God everywhere and love men not simply as brothers and sisters but as the visible manifestation of God. In which way does it hamper the growth of civilisation and humanism based on universal good and brotherhood and peace? So instead of denigrating religion better it is to re-instate it in its pristine glory - in its true perspective.

True religion stands for Vedàntist concept of it. It is hard to practise unless one's soul is illumined with the light of God and the vision of God. To achieve that mental frame is not easy. It requires constant devotion, faith, constant meditation and sacrifice. This is the goal for which the entire world should aim at and strive for. Vivekananda stood for such an approach to life. As he said,

I shall inspire men everywhere

Everywhere until
The world shall know that
It is one with God" 47

His soul shall find no rest unless the world would realise
the eternal truths involved in it.

In short, 'Religion is one', and that is Vedānta; but
religions are many, according to the different needs, capacities
and surroundings of various groups of men. In one of his
letters Swami Vivekananda says that We want to lead mankind
to the place where there is neither the Veda nor the Bible
nor the Koran, yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas,
the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that
religions are but the varied expressions of The Religion which
is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him
best.

Again just as Vedānta does not confine itself to any
one manifestation of the Divine Spirit as the goal to be
reached, so it does not confine itself to any one path like the
other religions of the world. It recognises the value and the
importance of all the paths leading to the goal. Action devotion,
meditation, knowledge - all have their due places in its
scheme of religious life. Its Karma-Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja

(Tenth Edition)
Yoga and Jñāna Yoga give a complete chart of religious life. Guidance is therefore given to all kinds of aspirants in all stages of growth. Vedānta is not the pigeon-hole of a single creed to which all minds have to be thrust. There is room in the mansion of Hinduism for all classes of men from the lowest peasant having the crudest conception of God to the highest mystic who sees God as the uncreated light in his own heart. A narrow religious view creates trouble and takes people away from the truth. It is a serious mistake to force all individual into one path. What is most important is reaching the goal, realisation of God whatever the path is followed. Everything else is secondary. As Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly pointed out that Religion is realisation. One should experience God. In fact, this is one of the main teachings of Vedānta. Vedanta looks upon the various religions of the world as so many approaches to one and the same Supreme Being. They are the varied expressions of one eternal, universal religion, man's search for God. "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". Swami Vivekananda recited this verse in

Sanskrit while delivering his address at the opening session of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893.

In the concluding address at the final session of Parliament of Religions on September 27, 1893, he declared:

"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: it has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church in the world, and that every system has proved men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help, and not Fight" "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and Peace and not dissension".\(^49\)

The next point closely allied to this is the Divinity

of man. In the Upanisads we are very much familiar with the word, "Amritasya Putrah" - the children of Immortality. The Upanisadic sages visualised that all human beings, irrespective of their race, their creed, their language, their religions, their nationality, their place of residence, the colour of their skin, or texture of their hair contain within them the spark of Divinity. Notwithstanding the Upanisadic teaching, Swami Vivekananda visualised pains and sufferings in the existing human society in which he lives, moves and has his being. He was deeply pained at the sight of the untold sufferings of entire human race in practical life. The gulf between ideal and actual must be overcome so that religion may have a meaning to those for whom it is intended. What is the use of preaching religion, the Divinity of Man, if in fact, men live in a condition worse than that of animals? Can a situation continue in which on the one hand, we say that all persons are Divine, "Amritasya Putrah" and on the other hand, we discriminate against people just because they happen to be born of a certain class, in a certain caste, in a certain community? Swamiji opines that unless the divorce between Religion and Society was annulled, nothing will be achieved. It was for this reason, he constantly preached the gospel of service and renunciation - "Thena Tyaktana Bhunjeetha" - You can renounce the world inwardly but outwardly, you must
Meditation in Kanya Kumari brought certain conviction in him regarding his future plan of action. Swamiji's gospel of service took a definite shape at that very moment. He expresses his feelings in a letter in the following manner -

"My brother in view of all this, specially of the poverty and ignorance, I had no sleep. At Cape, Comorin sitting in Mother Kumari's Temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock - I hit upon a plan: You are so many sannyasins wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics - it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva use to say, "An empty stomach is no good for religion?" "That those poor people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance. We have for all ages been sucking their blood and trampling them under foot."

It is obvious that Swami Vivekananda's feelings at that time played an important part in the formation of his gospel of service. The doctrine of service requires a saint to render its validity and a philosopher to give language to it. We may say that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda jointly fulfil their task in the sense that Swami Vivekananda is a commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. But some disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

do not agree to this contention. They heard Ramakrishna speaking disparagingly of Karma. According to them their Master Ramakrishna was a mystic. It is Vivekananda who familiar with the modern thinking, brought in these extraneous ideas from foreign sources. So at the initial stage, Swami Vivekananda was unable to convince some of his brother-disciples about his new conception of religion, namely, the worship of God, through the service of man. Very often brother-disciples heard Ramakrishna, the man of realisation, in fullness of Bhakti and Jñāna, speaking disparagingly of Karma. This would be clear from the following conversation of Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples during his life-time. In reply to Kalipada Paul's contention that doing good to society was their principal duty, Sri Ramakrishna said, that God alone can look after the world. Let man first realise God. Let him get Divine authority and be endowed with His power. Then and then alone he can think of doing good to others. Again to Sambhunath Mallick he said, "When God appears before you, would you seek schools and hospitals of him, or beg for Bhakti, Jñāna etc? Then give up all these thoughts of hospital building and think of God alone."50 Again, he said, "A man went to the Kali temple of Kalighat and went on distributing money to the beggars and in the process could not get time to see the Mother!"51 Therefore

50 & 51 Sri Sri Ramkrishna Kathamrī, p. 122.
it was argued that according to Sri Ramakrishna all work is an obstacle and if at all work is to be done, it should be done after realisation. Keeping in mind these conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples during Master's lifetime, Swami Jogananda bluntly said to Swami Vivekananda, "You did not preach our Master in America; you only preached yourself". Swamiji's reply was as pointed as the question put: Let people understand me first; then they would understand Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna is far greater than the disciples understand him to be. He is the embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas capable of development in infinite ways ...........

One glance of his gracious eyes can create a hundred thousand Vivekanandas at this instant! If he chooses now, instead to work through me, making me his instrument, I can only bow to his will"52.

But things came to a climax one day when Jogananda who Sri Ramakrishna has pointed out as belonging to his 'inner circle' of devotees, said that the Master had emphasized Bhakti alone for spiritual seekers and that philanthropic activities, organisations, homes of service for the public good and patriotic work were Swamiji's own peculiar ideas, the result of his Western education and travel in Europe and America.

52 His Eastern and Western Disciples : Life of Swami Vivekananda, p.505.
Swami Vivekananda became very much furious and he replied, "You think you have understood Sri Ramakrishna better than myself! ....... Your Bhakti is sentimental non-sense which makes one impotent ......... Hands off! Who cares for your Ramakrishna? Who cares for your Bhakti and Mukti? Who cares what the scriptures say? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully, if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in Tamas, to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of Karma-Yoga. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or anyone, I am a follower of him who carries out my plans! I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or any one, but of him only who serves and helps others, without caring for his own Bhakti and Mukti!"53

But Swamiji gradually recovers his temper and goes on to say: 'When a man attains Bhakti, his heart and nerves become so soft and delicate that he cannot bear even the touch of a flower! ......... I cannot think or talk of Sri Ramakrishna long without being overwhelmed. So I am always trying to bind myself with the iron chains of Jñāna, for still my work for my motherland is unfinished and my message to the world not fully delivered. As soon as I find that those feelings of bhakti are trying to come up and sweep me off my feet, I give a hard knock to them and make myself firm and adamant by

53 His Eastern and Western Disciples: Life of Swami Vivekananda, p.507.
bringing up austere Jñāna. Oh, I have work to do! I am a slave of Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me and will not give me rest till I have finished it. And Oh, how shall I speak of him! Oh, his love for me'".

"You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation! Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the highest. Kill out the desire for personal mukti. This is the greatest spiritual disciplines".

In this connection we have come to know illuminating discussion of Swami Vivekananda with his close relative from the book 'Sri Ramakrishna's life and message in the present age', written by Swami Satprakashananda. To quote Swami Satprakashananda, "When Swami Vivekananda returned to Calcutta the first time after preaching Vedānta in the Western world his close relative Ramchandra Dutta, a staunch devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, took him to task saying, "Well, Ville (nickname of Swami Vivekananda), you went to the Western World and all the time you harped on Vedānta. Why did you not preach Sri Ramakrishna, whose very name is conducive to man's liberation?" Swami Vivekananda replied, "Well, if I talked to them about Sri Ramakrishna, they would at once reply, "We have our Jesus Christ, what more have you to say?" "Now I have preached to

54 His Western and Western Disciples : Life of Swami Vivekananda, p.508.
them the religion and philosophy of Vedānta and the Vedāntic ideal of God-realisation. Naturally they would enquire, "Who is the man who has realised the ideal in this age?" Summing up the precise truths that are thus significant, the author writes: God is real; God can be realised; this longing for eternal life can be completely fulfilled; there are many ways to the attainment of this goal. And Sri Ramakrishna is a life that demonstrates these truths in practice.\(^5\)

A deeper reflection will reveal the fact that Swami Vivekananda's original inspiration was rooted in the Gospel of his Master and in the tradition. Jñāna and Karma, knowledge and action, represent the two halves constituting life. Both are necessary in a total scheme for life's fulfilment. The problem in every age of Indian philosophy has been the reconciliation of the two, making action leading to knowledge. This made the view of life more comprehensive and synthetic. The doctrine of Service, an essential teaching of Swami Vivekananda, is only another version of the doctrine of the harmony of Religion, an equally essential teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, and that the one cannot be without the other. The harmony of religions is the most unique of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings and it stands for the equal validity of all religions, if seriously followed. Religion stands for spiritual unfoldment and not mere creeds.

---

55 Swami Satprakashananda: Sri Ramakrishna's Life and Message in the present age (Preface).
and rituals. So whatever pushes a man forward towards final realisation is religion. And in that sense, does not life itself become religion? In this sense only Swami Vivekananda said, 'Let every man has his own religion'. 'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man', said Swamiji. So life with its joys and sorrows, good and evil, becomes the process of that manifestation. Hence the harmony is not merely of religions but of all lives. And Sri Ramakrishna realised this harmony, this oneness. The divinity of man is a fact with the saints. Others also can realise it, if they change their idea about man and serve him. Without the spirit of worshipful service, we cannot see the vision of the Divine in man, says a writer, and without that vision we cannot perceive every life as the fulfillment of the Divine, which is religion.

When we study the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find that he gave direct support also even to the service for physical needs. He himself exhorted Mathur Babu, his caretaker to feed the poor in Deoghar during a famine. He felt his identity with a bela-bowled boat-man or with Nature in the form of green grass. These are instances of his complete identification with non-living as well as all living beings. It will not be irrelevant to mention here that Ramakrishna saw in dogs and jackels the vision of great men - Rishis etc. of the previous births. Thus
we find that the concept of unity of existence in Vedānta became a reality with him and the service to humanity is only an application of this idea.

Furthermore, Swamiji got the maxim 'Serve jīva as Śiva (Jīva is man, Śiva is God) from Śri Ramakrishna "He who is called the Brahman by jānīs is known as the Ātman by the Yogins, and Bhagavan by the Bhaktas. The same Brahman is called the priest, when worshipping in the temple and the cook when preparing meal in the kitchen". When Ramakrishna uttered the word "Serve Shiva as jiva", Vivekananda was present there with other disciples. He said that today he had learned a precious truth. If the Lord gave him the opportunity he would put that precept into practical deeds.

In one of his lectures in India Swamiji said:

'He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the distressed, really worships Shiva; ............. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples ........ Talking about Shiva's beautiful eyes and nose and other features .......... He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children - must serve all creatures

56 Ramkrishna : Quoted from Golden Jubilee Soubenir Ramkrishna Mission and Ashrama Bombay, p.158.
in this world first"⁵⁷.

Thereafter Swamiji started his mission of service – worship God by serving His living forms.

It is easy, because it is our nature to work. If we simply give our work a spiritual turn, we will get everything that can be got in religion. It is easy in the beginning. It is easy in the middle, because we begin to get joy. And it is easy in the end, easily you realise the ultimate Reality.

Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once got a letter from a monk who was doing relief work in some famine-striken area. Knowing that Swami Turiyananda spent much time in meditation, the monk thought that he would get support from him. So he wrote to Swami Turiyananda, 'Here is a great deal of distraction. I want to leave this work and go for tapsya (prayer and austerity) in some quite place in the Himalayas', Swami Turiyananda gave him a severe scolding. 'What do you say? Swami Vivekananda has found out such an easy path for you and you just ignore it. Swami Vivekananda himself once told Swami Turiyananda, that he has found out a new path. "By serving others as manifestations of God, people will get the highest realisation" – is indicative of Swamiji's high spiritualism, realisation of Godhead in man is not the beginning

of religious enlightenment, it is fulfillment of our spiritual pursuit. The process works in a circuitous way, the beginning and the end meet and merged with each other. Then where is the beginning and where is the end!

In his last years Swami Turiyananda was very sick. He was staying in one of the monastic centers. One monk was working in the hospital run by the ashrama. He came to Swami Turiyananda and told him that he found the work very distracting. Always when the work is difficult we say we shall go for meditation. And we find meditation difficult; then we don't know what to do. Swami Turiyananda said to the monk that if he serves a patient in the right spirit even for a single day, he will have the knowledge of Brahman. Leaving aside this easy path, where would he seek God?

From the following observations of Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, we have come to know that though he (Turiyananda) considered Karma to be secondary to Jñāna and Bhakti in his practical life, he was very much impressed by the life and teaching of Swami Vivekananda. The above conversations of Swami Turiyananda will corroborate our contention.

So if we can do one work in the right spirit, and if we can pursue our practice of it, the knowledge of Brahman will
be easy for us, will be easy for anyone. Let us follow this way - easy in the beginning, easy in the middle - and easy in the end and the result is sure.

"The idea of harmony of religions, the divinity of the soul, the oneness of existence - all take their basis in the vision of the divine in man. The democratic principle of giving value to the individual has its firm roots here. To get that vision, it is not merely our concept of man that must change, but our behaviour too". Sri Ramakrishna said: I now really find that it is the Lord who is moving about in the forms of men, sometimes a saint, sometimes a fraud, at other times a knave. But all of them are God and none but God. So I say, God in the form of saints, God in the form of knave, God in the form of liber knave. It is the highest realisation of God that can bring about such utterance. Unless one can have such a realisation, one cannot devote oneself fully and wholeheartedly to the service of man.

Sri Ramakrishna gave the spirit of service through these hints, the detailed work was left to his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda who gave it a language. Thus Swami Vivekananda raised Karma-Yoga to the status of an independent path (of religion). Down the ages it was considered to be secondary to Jñāna and Bhakti, inspite of Sri Kṛṣṇa's clear opinion

---

that through detached work alone the highest goal could be reached. Not only did Swami Vivekananda consider Karma-Yoga as the religious path suitable for this age but he exhorted people to adopt it without a shadow of doubt. The life work of Swami Vivekananda is to make spirituality intensely practical.

The two-service of the people outside and worship of God inside a temple - are not different things standing apart, but they form one integrated whole, in a comprehensive philosophy of life. It is, as taught by Sri Ramakrishna, to see God with eyes closed in meditation and to see Him with eyes open in daily life. Go to the temple and worship Him, and then pour out what you gain therefrom in loving dedicated service outside.

Vivekananda repeatedly said,

"I shall inspire men Everywhere until the world Shall know that It is one with God" 59

His soul shall find no rest unless the world will realise the eternal truths involved in it. Yet he was conscious that man

cannot be God-minded unless man has sufficient food to eat. In his Kanya-Kumari letter he wrote, "You are so many sannyasins wondering about and teaching people metaphysics - it is all madness. Did not our Gurudev use to say, "An empty stomach is no good for religion. That those people are leading the life of brutes simply due to ignorance". So he laid equal emphasis on the economic programme as well. Science and technology are the chief instruments for bringing about prosperity. But they should be made available to all. So he advocated universal education, shunning of superstition, prejudice and ignorance in any form, false ritualism and exhorted for work and more of work, for Western science and for fearlessness. 'Brave new world' with all your might. Love your country and love your countrymen, avoid superstition, castecism, untouchability etc. He was against all forms of exploitations and oppressions. This would be clear from his following observations - "We have for all ages been sucking their bloods and trampling them under foot". His patriotism and advocacy of universal love and universal religion is not heterogeneous or incongruous to each other. They are bound by the same instinct and spirit - the eternal spirit of humanity to find economic salvation, removal

of inequality, universal love, yet aspiration for God. People
strove for this harmonious development of humanity diluting
all discords to establish 'Kingdom of heavens' on earth as
it is in heaven through the ages. All these attempts and
striving for such a growth were baffled because of lack of
coordination of different aspects of human existence. Vain
attempt to mingle heaven with earth has been made by Rishis,
sages, prophets and perhaps politicians. Balance often tilted
for and against heaven and earth. Philosophers (Idealists)
often laid stress on Heaven at total denial or defiance and
at the expense of earth; others, materialist philosophers
(Carvaka, Marx, etc.) put all their weight with the material
aspects of life. But none has given equal and balancing weight
with both aspects of the world with so much candour, diligence
and scientific and perfect understanding until Swamiji did it
with his perfect knowledge of both aspects of life. In that
great task he had recourse to, Śaṅkara, Buddha, and Sri Rama-
krishna. Sankara's Advaita Vedānta gave him the understanding -
knowledge (Pragña), Buddha gave him the magnanimity of heart,
Sri Ramakrishna gave him spiritual vision to see the truths
behind the diversity that the Oneness of the Heaven and Earth
- Oneness of religion - Oneness of the entire existence -
unity of existence - one soul operating through all. This is
the highest achievement that humanity can reach 'through livin
and non-living beings' as his Guru Ramakrishna taught him.

His (Vivekananda's) legacy to the world will ever remain indelible and permanent.

He is the eternal spirit of humanity that has its source and beginning at the entire spiritual concept of creation and life and which will last as long as the humanity strives for spiritual upliftment and all-round growth, and perfection. He is the eternal spirit of rebellion against ignorance, superstition, oppression and hatred. He is the great exhorter of selfless Karma. He is all in one. This will be clear from the passage of Vivekananda which I have mentioned in page 212.

Here is a rebel, a rebel per excellence - who lays more emphasis on the well-being of the people - the way to salvation or the religion itself. God is completely identified with the people - in suffering and distress. Here is re-orientation of religion or Dharma.

That is why I compare him with Apollo - Eternal Spirit of Humanity - full of rebellion, of vigour, full of spirit, full of goodness and magnanimity, full of joy and optimism. Both spiritual and economic salvation was his aim. His is the full concept of life - an integrated scheme of life - both spiritual and mundane.

Yet it is not the whole of Vivekananda or the entire
truth about Vivekananda. He is equally a mystic and Vedāntist and a pragmatic philosopher. But his pragmatic approach issues out of Vedānta - an extension of its basic creed which the pedantic Vedāntist would not accept. Here heaven and earth meet and mingle. Vivekananda a Vedāntist, joins hands with a materialist transforming and elevating the latter to a higher stage. In this wedding of the two worlds, Marxism or Socialism becomes merged and submerged.

Yet in Vivekananda's philosophy there is not only the doctrine of service to humanity but exhortation of work - Karma for which there is exhortation in the Gītā.

"You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation! Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the highest. Kill out the desire for personal Mukti. This is the greatest spiritual disciplines".

Strangely enough this is an echo of Sri Ramakrishna too. Romain Rolland quoted Sir Ramakrishna as saying - Mother, I don't want salvation! I want to live with the people! Romain Rolland has placed Ramakrishna even above Christ.

On deeper reflection we find that we have no other alternative but to accept Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as

62 His Eastern and Western Disciples: Life of Swami Vivekananda, p.508.
an inseparable pair. The life of the one without the other will remain incomplete. All root and no fruit is of no avail and fruit is impossible without the root. Sri Ramakrishna is obviously the root and Swami Vivekananda the fruit. They may also be compared to lightning and thunder which give completion to the cloud phenomenon. Sir Ramakrishna may be said to be the source of energy and lightning, and Swami Vivekananda is the thunder and clap of lightning flash.

Swami Turiyananda opines that Swamiji did not preach even a single idea of his own. The correct assessment would be - to think in terms of one entity. Ramakrishna-Vivekananda which may be likened to one ocean of truth. In this illustration Ramakrishna is the ocean when it is calm. Swami Vivekananda is the ocean lashed into waves. It is the same ocean lashed into waves. It is the same ocean, the same truth, whether it is at rest or moving - which means Vivekananda is Ramakrishna in turmoil or action.

Calling Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as 'Universal Soul' Romain Rolland introduces them to his Western readers as the foremost of the heroes of the modern renaissance in India. To quote his words -

'From the magnificent procession of spiritual heroes,
I have chosen two men, who have won my regard, because with incomparable charm and power they have realised this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven - Pater Seraphicus and Jove, the Thunderer - Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.⁶³
Reference

1. 'M' : Kathamrita - Vol. I to 5.
2. Swami Nikhilananda / The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.
3. Swami Saradananda : Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga
   (Two volumes)
4. Swami Satprakashananda : Sri Ramakrishna's life and
   message in the present age with the authors
   Reminiscences of Holy Mother and some direct disciples.
5. Swami Saradananda : Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master.
6. Sri Ramakrishna - A biography.
7. Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission.
8. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna.
9. Sir Ramakrishna and Swamiji saw Him.
10. The message of Ramakrishna (a compilation).
11. Thus spake Ramakrishna
12. Romain Rolland / The life of Ramakrishna.
15. Swami Vivekananda : Spiritual Values for the modern age.
16. India's contribution to World thought and culture.
17. Max Muller : Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna
18. Jawaharlal Nehru : Sir Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

20. The first disciples of Sri Ramakrishna: The message of our Master.


23. Swami Abhedananda: Memories of Ramakrishna.

24. Swami Ramakrishnananda: Sri Ramakrishna and his mission.


27. Swami Vivekananda: Sri Ramakrishna as I saw him.

28. Swami Suddhasatwananda: Thus spake Sri Ramakrishna.

29. C. Rajagopalachari: Sri Ramakrishna Upanishads.

30. Swami Yogesharananda: The visions of Sri Ramakrishna.

31. Shri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna: An exhaustive Collection.

32. Swami Swaradananda: Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master.

33. Max Muller: Ramakrishna, His life and sayings.

34. Christopher Isherhood: Ramakrishna and his disciples.


36. Swami Ganeswarananda: Ramakrishna the man and the power.


38. Madhakumud Mukherjee: Sri Ramakrishna the fulfilment of Hinduism.
41. Swami Ghanananda: Sri Ramakrishna and his unique message.
42. His Extern and Western Disciples: Life of Swami Vivekananda.
43. R.C. Roy: Reflections on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.
44. Advaita Ashrama: The Disciples of Ramakrishna.
45. Suresh Chandra Dutta: Sri Sri Ramakrishna Dever Upadesh.
46. Dr. Satis Chandra Chatterjee: Classical Indian Philosophies: Their synthesis in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna.
47. Swami Nivedananda: Hinduism at a glance.
50. Dr. Satis Chandra Chatterjee: The Fundamentals of Hinduism.

Journals

1. Prabuddha Bharata
2. Vedanta Kesari.