CHAPTER II

The Impact of the Teachings of Śrī Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa on Swāmī Vīvākananda.

Śrī Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa, the God Man of Modern India, was born at Kamarpukur in the Hooghly District in Bengal in the year 1836. Śrī Rāmakrishna was originally called Gadādhar, The "Bearer of the Mace", an epithet of Lord Vīshnū, before he became a Sanyāsin. It was as early as the age of six when he had his first experience of spiritual ecstasy and he fell unconscious. When he was seventeen years of age, his brother took him to Calcutta to assist him in his duties as a family priest and later got him appointed as a temple priest in a Kali temple which had been built by a rich widow, at Dakshineshwar on the banks of the holy Ganges.

It was at this stage that began the period of storm and stress in Śrī Rāmakrishna's life. Born in an orthodox brahmin family Śrī Rāmakrishna knew very well all the formalities of worship, its rites and rituals and more important than it all, the inner meaning of these rites. The duties that he was called upon to discharge in the temple brought to a focus the vague yearnings and the unsatisfied longings of the preceding years of boyhood. It was not long before the young Śrī Rāmakrishna became fully convinced that the aim of all secular learning was mere material advancement and nothing more, so he resolved to give up
such study and devoted himself solely to the pursuit of spiritual knowledge. The worship in the temple intensified Śri Rāmakrishna’s yearnings for a living vision of the Mother of the Universe. The first glimpse of the Divine Mother made him more eager for her uninterrupted vision. And as his spiritual mood deepened he began to feel himself to be a child of the Divine Mother and finally surrendered himself completely to Her Will and let Her direct him. And it was his claim that the sustaining presence of the Mother never failed him in his distress or doubt. All who encountered Śri Rāmakrishna were left greatly impressed with his purity of life, ecstatic love for God, guilelessness, truthfulness, integrity and holiness.

In a way, it would not be a falsehood to say that the true starting point of the present Hindu renaissance was Śri Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa. For, his life represents the entire orbit of Hinduism and not just a mere fraction of it. Śri Rāmakrishna was a jñāni as well as a bhaktā. To him God was both personal as well as impersonal, that is, Reality became for him, as much a state of his own soul as a beloved person outside it. According to him 'the innumerable gods and goddesses of the Hindu Religion are none less than the human aspects of the indescribable and incomprehensible Spirit, as conceived by the finite human mind. They understand and appreciate human love and emotion help men to realize their secular and spiritual ideals.
and ultimately enable men to attain liberation from the miseries of phenomenal life." According to Śri Rāmakrishna, man must realize God, feel God, see God, talk to God and that is religion. The central idea of religion is realization of God and this is open to everyone alike. We must, in order to make this momentary life complete, perceive facts of religion, we have to perceive God and experience his being.

Śvāmi Vivēkānanda or Narendranath Dutta as he was formerly known, in his longing to know the truth of reality, turned to Śrī Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa and at their very first meeting Śrī Rāmakrishna instantaneously recognised that Naren was the one who would carry his message to the world. No doubt Naren came to him with all the doubts and scepticism of the modern age and influenced by Western thought, unwilling to accept even the highest truths of religion without verification. Yet with the restlessness for the knowledge of truth filling his entire being. It was Śrī Rāmakrishna who purged his mind off its impurities and taught him that though reason is the best instrument in the relative would, yet it cannot carry one beyond relativity. And to know the truth one should go beyond this relativity to the realm of the Absolute wherein the whole truth lies.

During his training with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the story of Naren or Swami Vivekananda's life can be told in terms of ideas and realizations. It was little by little that he was led from doubt to beatitude, from darkness to light, from anguish of mind to certainty of bliss, from the seething vortex of the world to the grand expense of Universal Oneness. He was taken out of bondage to infinite freedom, from the pole of little learning to that of omniscence which is nothing but the consciousness of Brahman. He was lifted out of all conceptions of God-head into the glorious awakening and awareness of the subjective nature of True Being. This True Being which is above all form, above all sense, all relative good and bad, into the reality which is the absolute beyondness of Brahman.

The result of the contact of these two great personalities, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Narendranath was the emergence of Swami Vivekananda, who was to become the heart of New India. From the merging of these two powerful currents of thought and experience came Neo-Hinduism (Vedântism), the faith of all, in which all is life fulfilment and nothing which is life denial. Even ascetism and retirement were to be supplemented by work and service to others.

So close and deep was the relationship of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, so pure their love and regard for each other, that the disciples of both always think of them as two souls in one. For the thought of one implies the awareness of the other. This intricate relationship which took
its divine birth served a great impersonal purpose - the revival of the religion of the Vedas and the preaching of the Modern Gospel to the peoples of the earth.

One may say that there is nothing new in the teachings of Sri Rāmakrishna, for he came neither to destroy nor to fulfil claims of any new religion. But he came only to bear personal testimony to the eternal truths of Hinduism. Swāmi Vivekānanda says, "It was no new truths that Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa came to preach, though his advent brought old truths to light. In other words he was the embodiment of all the past religious thought of India." Coming to some of the main teachings of Sri Rāmakrishna that had remarkable impact on Swāmi Vivekānanda there are, firstly, that God realisation is the essence of all religion and the aim and end of all human existence. He was according to Swāmi Vivekānanda the first man to say that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we sense the phenomenal world. Secondly, he taught an extremely significant truth that all the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic, but are just various phases of one eternal religion. He said that all religions are paths that lead to the same goal or truth. The Truth or substance is one but is known to various people by different names and this is no way makes the One different. This idea of universality is one of the best ideas that he made known. He said, "As different rivers, taking their start from different

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1. Sharma, D.S; Hinduism through the ages, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1989), p.133
mountains, running crooked or straight, all came and mingle their waters in the ocean, so the different sects with their different points of view, at last all came unto thee." Thirdly, his idea of love to God. Love of God will bring about renunciation, good works, self surrender, knowledge and realization in fact everything that is necessary for spiritual development. Love of God, he felt and believed, is like a prophylactic against the world.

Sri Ramakrishna was an embodiment of renunciation, humility and love. His eternal message to the modern world lies in his words, "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality, and the more this is developed in man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have same good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only these who have attained spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are powers of light." And

2. Ibid P.187
One such 'Power of light' that he left behind for the world was in the form of Swami Vivekananda who under the impact of his master's teachings set forth to proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all existence and religion. The influence exerted by the life and teachings of Sri Ramanakrishna Paramahamsa is beautifully brought out in the words of Professor Radhakrishnan, who rightly says, "He is one of those rare beings in whom the flame of spiritual light burns so brightly that all who came near are able to share the illumination and see the world new-born as on the first day."

Thus, illumined and influenced by Sri Ramanakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda gave out his glorious light to the world in the form of his sublime precepts of self purity, truth of oneness, unworldliness, spirituality, service and inebriation in the love of God.