

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, birth name Gadādhara Chattopādhyay was an Indian Hindu mystic and religious leader born in 19th century Bengal. He lived a life of manifold spiritual realization, experiencing Reality along numerous paths of varied faiths. He found that though these experiences differ in their specific forms and characters, yet they all relate to the same Reality and reveal only different forms and aspects of it. Ramakrishna was skilled with words and had an extraordinary style of preaching and instructing, which may have helped convey his ideas to even the most skeptical temple visitors. His speeches reportedly revealed a sense of joy and fun, but he was not at a loss when debating with intellectual philosophers. His philosophy presents not only a novel outlook to spirituality and how we perceive the Absolute, but is also a guide on how to approach life in all its difficult practicality. His philosophy encompasses true realization of the divine (*jñāna*) as well as being one with fellow beings through his teaching, “*Jive dayā noy, Shiv jñāne jiv sevā*” (not kindness to living beings, but serving the living being as *Śhiva* Himself) which is considered the inspiration for the philanthropic work carried out by his chief disciple Vivekananda. Religion, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is neither religious knowledge about God nor philosophical speculation on God; it is the direct experience or realization of God. When intolerance in Religion spreads poison of violence in today’s progressive society, it really seems that the significance of the pursuit of this coordinated incarnation was far-reaching. Establishing unity in diversity, unification in pluralism, searching for connections in isolation seeking harmony in apparent contradictions are pinpointing of successful coordination ideals. In this paper we shall try to sketch an outlook of the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna.

Keywords: reality, religion, harmony, coordination, philosophy

Introduction: As a boy, Sri Ramakrishna attended schooling with some regularity in his village Kāmārpukur for 12 years, however, he rejected traditional schooling saying he was not interested in “bread-winning education”. Kāmārpukur, being a transit-point in well-established pilgrimage routes to Puri, brought him into contact with renunciates and holy men. He became well-versed in the *Purāṇas*, the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Bhāgavata Purana*, hearing them from wandering monks and the Kathaks—a class of men in ancient India who preached and sang the *Purāṇas*. He could read and write in Bengali. In his later life he imparted gems of wisdom in his rustic colloquial Bengali, through parables and stories. According to contemporary reports, Ramakrishna's linguistic style was unique, even to

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those who spoke Bengali. It contained obscure local words and idioms from village Bengali, interspersed with philosophical Sanskrit terms and references to the Vedas, *Purānas*, and *Tantras*. These teachings made a powerful impact on Kolkata's intellectuals, various spiritual leaders, social leaders and attracted countless disciples from various parts of the world. A man may be very learned in scriptures and always quote the scriptures bearing on God, and still, he may be as irreligious as any man in the world. He may soar high in the sky of *śāstric* or scriptural learning and yet have his gaze fixed on the mean and the mundane, on woman and wealth, like, says Sri Ramakrishna, a vulture that flies high up in the sky but has its eyes fixed on the cremation ground in search of decomposed, foulsmelling corpse.ⁱ The reason for this is that the study of the scriptures without purification of the mind, discrimination and detachment bears no fruit.

Philosophy of life of Sri Ramakrishna and Kolkata's intellectuals: Young Gadādhara came to Kolkata from Kāmārpukur with his elder brother Ramkumar. Ramkumar used to earn as much as he could through worship. He hoped that his brother would help him in earning, but Gadādhara did not like the Glamour of the city. He did not like the scene of running after the sikh with pleasure. Knowing his own mental structure and needs, he made it clear to his elder brother that he had no interest in traditional education. Such a strong body, such an abundance of life, such a memory, above all so much love in the heart— with the help of these basic human resources cannot be the purpose of his life in the austerities of God? And if the purpose of life is to attain God, then why shouldn't its speed be one-way? Then Gadādhara came to the newly built temple of Rāni Rāsmani on the outskirts of Kolkata. The world was stunned to see an extraordinary example of the fact that attaining God is possible only through asceticism and longing. When intolerance of religion spreads the poisonous vapour of violence in the life of today's progressive society; it really seems like how far-reaching the significance of the pursuit of this cohesive incarnation was. When Vidyāsāgar asked about Sri Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar, Srīma (Māstārmaśai) said, "He wears cloths with red ribbon, wears shirts and shoes, lives in a simple house in Kālībāri i.e., there is no external sign. Just have only one feature: knows nothing but God. Always thinks of Him"ⁱⁱ. When Keshab Sen, a well-known Brahmin leader at home and abroad, published the wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna

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Paramahansa of Dakshineswar in the newspaper *Sulabh Samāchār*, the people of Kolkata started coming to visit him in curiosity. Using religion as a way to fulfill worldly desires was very contemptible in the eyes of Sri Ramakrishna. Mysterious occult powers, miracles— these have always been mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna as obstacles in the path of religion. “Visit not miracle-mongers and those who exhibit occult powers. These men are stragglers from the path of Truth. Their minds have become entangled in psychic powers, which are like veritable meshes in the way of the pilgrim to Brahman. Beware of these powers, and desire them not.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Needles to say, there was no question in the minds of these two types of people about the nature of Sri Ramakrishna. But he valued the insights and feelings of the ancients. So later on, when Ram Dutta, Girish Ghosh, Manomohan Mitra and like other home fans started shouting at him as an incarnation of God, he told with prank that “at one time *Bāmnī*, Vaisnabcharan, Padamalochan, Goury Pandit of Indās called me *Avatār*. Now Ram, Girish, Manomohan call me *Avatār*.” The purpose of saying this was to emphasize the pursuit and erudition of those who declared him as the incarnation of God at that time, and now the devotees like Girish say what else to say, they say merely in devotion.

One day while talking to Bankimchandra, Sri Ramakrishna incidentally said, some people think that if you don’t read scriptures, if you don’t read books you can’t find God. They think they have to know about the world first, science is to be read first. When the assembled geniuses laughed, Sri Ramakrishna said more to him, “They say that God cannot be known without understanding God’s creation. What do you say, science first or God first?” In his conversation with Bankimchandra, Sri Ramakrishna simply touched his heart— one before, then many, first God then the living world. You need to get God first. Why are you doing so many worlds, creation, science, finance? Suppose you need to eat mangoes. How many mango trees in the garden, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves, what is your job in this news? Sri Ramakrishna did not utter the English word in his mouth but explained that everyone else is a ginger merchant.

There is no end to knowing God, his separate relationship with Narendranath from the first day of introduction. Narendra knew him (Sri Ramakrishna) so much day by day that by

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reasoning he explained the skeptical doctor Mahendranath Sarkar of Shyampukur, why boys worship Sri Ramakrishna in the knowledge of God. Vivekananda says, “Vegetable creation and animal creation— there is a point between them where it is very difficult to decide whether it is a plant or an animal. As such there is place between Man World and God World, where it is difficult to say whether the person is man or God.” Even though Vivekananda understood so much, standing in front of Sri Ramakrishna for the last time, even for a moment, it seemed, “If you say to yourself in this state, I am an incarnation, then I understand. And then indwelling Thākur said, “Still disbelief! He who is Rāma, he who is Krishna, is lately Ramakrishna in this body^{iv}.”

Philosophy, Sri Ramakrishna and the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna: Philosophy is an attempt at realizing the problem of universe. As philosophy aims at knowledge of truth, it has been termed in Indian context as the ‘vision of truth’. Sri Ramakrishna has used the word philosophy many times and pronounced it as *Phyalajaphi*. He told Sasadhar Pandit, “What will happen if you read a lot of scriptures? *Phyalajaphi*”. Again he told Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, “Judging by the philosophy, what will happen to you if you do all these things— money, values, lectures”. Who treats whom”. He was not a philosopher in the sense that we call him a philosopher. He is one of those rare postmodern men. We have already discussed his life philosophy. He said, “I felt it, you guys. I’m not just telling you what I am listening. Not hearing, speaking from my realization. Go ahead; you too can reach that state. Sri Ramakrishna has warned us ‘don’t accept it just because I said so, you will be judge and verify. When there is metal money, people would check it. So when we accept profound realty, we do not verify it? Scriptures also say so.’ So he said with courage, try to do it and follow the theory with justice and move forward. We can take this judgment as an argument, in English which is called hypothesis. Don’t try the ways. The way is to purify the mind with which I am judging. If there is filth inside the mind, then the vision of that mind will not be clear. So he said to clear the mind. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna— pure mind, pure intellect and pure soul are one. When the mind is pure, it is called— pure intellect. That pure intellect is the soul, your real nature. So to purify this mind will sure reach reality. “The Pure Mind and the pure *Ātman* is one and the same thing. Whatever comes up in the Pure Mind is the voice of God.”^v

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The profound influence of the ideal of harmony is seen in the extraordinary personality of Sri Ramakrishna. *Jñānayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Rājyoga and Karmayoga*— all four *Yogas* were integrated in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna also indirectly realized that the Brahma, Jehovah, *Āllāh* by whatever name describes it, has basically pointed out the same truth. This fact comes to mind after the realization of the truth. He would also say that if God appears in direct vision, then one can say the truth. The one, who has seen, knows exactly that God is formless as well. Nobody can say about the varied different forms He takes.^{vi}

Sri Ramakrishna teaches that it is the same reality that is the nameless and formless Brahman for the *jñānī* and *Ātman* for the *yogīn* and *Bhagavān* for the *bhakta* or devotee. The *jñānī* follows the negative path of reasoning i.e., it is not the world, nor the individual selves. In the higher state of realization there is the experience of Brahman of the reality as the unthinkable and indescribable Absolute i.e., as nameless and formless. For devotee the world with all its wonderful objects is the manifestation of the glory of God. To them reality is revealed as the loving, gracious and glorious *Bhagavān*. For the *yogīn* the Supreme reality is revealed by withdrawing his mind from all objects and concentrating it within him and what he finds there is the permanent, conscious self. So he speaks of the ultimate Reality as the pure self— the *Ātman*. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, “just as the same water of the ocean is congealed into the form of ice by extreme cold and is dissolved into formless water by the heat of the sun, so reality takes on form and shape for the devotee but is formless for the *jñānī* and the *yogī*. He who is Brahman is *Ātman*, He is also *Bhagavān*.”^{vii}

When Sri Ramakrishna engaged himself in the *sāadhanā* of different sects of Hinduism or in the *sāadhanā* of other religions, he practiced according to that community or the rituals of that religion, etc., and realized their expected theories. There are many ways to realize the absolute truth. Every religion and community of religions has its own path. Ramakrishna used to say, countless views, countless paths. He made the above decision by sincerely following different paths. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, “I had to practice each religion for a time — Hinduism, Islām, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the *Śāktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedāntists*. I realized that there is only one God towards whom all are travelling; but the

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paths are different.”^{viii} And further said, one should not think, ‘My religion alone is the right path and other religions are false.’ God can be realized by means of all paths. It is enough to have sincere yearning for God. Infinite are the paths and infinite the opinions.’^{ix}

In this context, Srīmā Sārādādevī used to say that “I don’t think that he practiced all religions in order to promote harmony.” He was always immersed in His thought and remained blissfully unaware of passing days and night. The idea of interfaith harmony is also true. All the other thoughts were suppressed as one thought was prominent at other times. It is very clear that the decision to reconcile religions came naturally in Thākur's life; he did not make any decision by reading the scriptures or by reasoning. In a multi-religious society in terms of interfaith harmony, Sri Ramakrishna used to advice devotion for the individual and all religious equally ideal for the group. He used to say when you associate with outsiders, you should love everyone, so that they become one—they will no longer harbor hatred. Then you can enjoy the peace within yourself. “When the lamp of knowledge is lit, look at *Brahmamayī*’s face in your room”, which means that you will be able to see the self in your own home.^x

Knowing the fact that God exists in every human being, human beings should associate with all human beings irrespective of their religion, race or language. In addition to this, the duty of a religious person is to give due respect to the God inherent in every human being, apart from worshipping God in the mosque, in the temple. ‘Lovers of God do not belong to any caste.’ "Never get into your head that your faith alone is true and every other is false. Know for certain that God without form is real and that God with form is also real God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.”^{xi}

For Sri Ramakrishna, it is Brahman as the Divine Mother i.e., *Śakti* or *Kālī* that has verily become everything of the world. He says that Brahman and *Śaktī* or *Kālī* are non-different, and the same reality which is called Brahman in its static being, is called *Kālī* in the state of its sportive creative activity.^{xii} This shows that God and the Absolute are same identical reality in two different aspects or states. God is not an unreal appearance of the Absolute, nor a

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lower grade of reality than the Absolute. He is the Absolute itself as moving, acting and creating worlds without number, sustaining them and finally destroying them all “The primordial energy that Kālī is’, says Sri Ramakrishna, ‘is by its very nature an incessant creative activity (icchāmayī); it creates, sustains and destroys worlds; that is how it is plays and enjoys the delight of it’.^{xiii} For him all things and beings of the world are divine in different forms and degrees of perfection; all manifest the same divine cit or consciousness, although it is in different forms and degrees. There is nothing undivine and unconscious in the whole universe. “As the shell, the pith and the kernel of the fruit are all produced from one parent seed of the tree, so from the one Lord is produced the whole of creation, animate and inanimate, spiritual and material.”^{xiv}

Conclusion: Thus there lived, in our age, a man who saw God face to face. Having realised the fountain of Divine Love, he radiated love for all without any national or geographical limits. Every particle of his being was filled with God-consciousness. Though living in this world, he seemed to be a man of the other world. The man in him was completely transformed into God. Of such, the Vedas declare: "He who realizes Truth becomes one with Truth. By the vision of the Divine, man himself becomes Divine." The life and teachings of this God-man have a tremendous significance for the people of modern times. Living during the transitional period of the nineteenth century when science was most arrogant, and practicing austerities in a suburb of Calcutta, the most materialistic city of India Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated that ideal spiritual life is always possible and that it is not the monopoly of any particular age. The revelation of God takes place at all times and the wind of Divine Mercy never ceases to blow. Who could live, who could breathe if God did not form the very core of our existence? Disciplines laid down by religion can be practiced even today if we have the requisite earnestness; and the vision of Truth, revealed to man in olden times, cannot be denied to us now if we are eager for it. We, especially followers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology should mediate on the principle of uniformity of all religions, and try to shape our beliefs, viewpoints and actions accordingly. Only then will Sri Ramakrishna’s practical religion and its inherent conformity enlighten other people.

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