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Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva: A Strategic Character of Religious and Social Renaissance of India

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Abstract:

Renaissance is essentially an intellectual awakening. The most important sign of an intellectual awakening is criticism, a critical analysis and questioning of all the dogmas held hitherto in, different fields of knowledge such as metaphysical, social, economic and political, etc. The Renaissance thinkers questioned all old concepts and principles in this field. This was partly due to the intellectual influence of the west passed through Western education. It is noteworthy that most of the Renaissance thinkers were educated in the west. This gave them an opportunity to compare their own thought and social institutions with the thought and social institutions of the west. As a result of this comparison, they could on the one hand realize their low status and on the other hand understand its reasons. Therefore, naturally, they felt an urgent need of social reform. Examples of this class of thinkers can be found in Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Kesha Chandra Sen, Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva, Swami Vivekananda and Ram Tirtha among others. These were undoubtedly the first people to question the medieval thinking and practices in India. Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva is one of the prominent persons of them who implemented the renaissance by combining the traditions and culture of the East as well as the west. In this regard, I will try to highlight the aspects of Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva's ceaseless work to Indian renaissance and its relevance to modern time also.

Key word: Spiritual, tat tvam asi, renaissance, cultural, reconstruction, brahmanical caste and sudras.

Introduction: Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva was one of the greatest saints of modern India. Ramakrishna was born in a poor Brahmin family of Bengal. He showed a religious bent of mind from his childhood. He had no formal education but his discourses were full of wisdom. He was the chief priest of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta. People from all walks of life visited Dakshineswar to listen to his discourses.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva was a man with a liberal outlook. He firmly believed that there was an underlying unity among all religions and that only the methods of worship

were different. God could be approached by any form of worship as long as it was done with single-minded devotion. Different religions were all different roads to reach the same God. He believed that service to man was service to God, for man was the embodiment of God on earth. As man was the creation of God, man-made divisions made no sense to him. Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva was a great teacher who could express complicated philosophical ideas in a simple language for everyone to understand. He believed that religious salvation could be attained through renunciation, meditation and devotion. Now the question is that how did Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva reform our modern religious and social thinking?

Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva as a Religious Reformer: He was not at all an academic philosopher, still less a social reformer or a politician, but his great religious status and power of consciousness force influenced national leaders far and wide. In the tradition of ancient Indian philosophy and religion he preached monism. According to him reality is one though it manifests in different ways at different places. Through the help of small stories he explained to his audience that ultimately the essence of everything is the same. The ancient Indian Mahavakyas of *Aham Brahmasmi* and *Tat tam asi* were the main bases of his religious teachings. He, however, synthesized Advaita Vedanta with Vaishnava cult of Bhakti. On the other hand he had equal respect for other great religions of the world including Islam, Christianity and Buddhism.

He preached that the essentials of all these religions are the same and there is hardly any occasion to fight on this issue. God realization is the aim of life and Ramakrishna could realize God not only in inner consciousness but sometimes even in his physical body. His contact so much impressed Swami Vivekananda that the latter immediately became his disciple and toured the entire world to preach the teachings of Ramakrishna.

As Socrates' ideas are known through the dialogues of Plato, similarly the teachings of Ramakrishna are better known through the speeches of Vivekananda.

The chief aim of sadhana according to Ramakrishna is the realization of God. He preached discarding desire for material prosperity and lure for women and gold. This, however, does not require escape from the worldly life but a constant meditation upon God. Ramakrishna believed that passions can be eliminated by their re-direction towards God. He explained this idea by several parables such as:

"As an unchaste woman, busily engaged in house hold affairs, is all the while thinking of her secret lover, even so, O thou 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."

The life of Ramakrishna was a laboratory for the synthesis of great religions. He believed that all the religions of the world were true and any one may lead to salvation. He experienced that the spiritual practices in any religion were equally effective. Every religion leads to the path of salvation. He was asked how God could be both immanent and transcendent, to which he said,

"Exactly as water can exist in a liquid, solid and invisible form." Again, "As water is called by different names in different languages, so different religions call God by different names like Hari, Shiva, Allah, Christ, etc., but all denote the same God." He was further asked that "If the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that the God is painted differently by different religionists?" He answered: "God is one but his aspects are different: as one master of the house is father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, and is called by these different names by those different persons, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which he appears to his particular worshippers." This spirit of catholicity and tolerance is the essence of the teachings of Ramakrishna and therefore of Vivekananda. Admitting his debt to Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, while delivering an address at the Shakespeare club of Pasedona, California, on January 27, 1900 said: "Now, all the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his ideas. Nothing is mine originally except the wicked ones. But every word that I have ever uttered which is true and good is simply an attempt to echo his voice."

From the discussion so far, the conclusions drawn from Thakur Sri Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa Deva are as follow:

1. **Yata Mat Tata Path:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva preached the message of 'Yat Mat Tat Path' among the nations. He realizes through his sadhana that one can reach God through all the sādhanā paths like Śaiva, Hindu, Buddhist, Islām, Christiān, Sākāra, Nirākāra, Dvaita, Advaita etc. - All paths of Sādhanamārga are true and infallible.
2. **Karma is Dharma:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva says that there is no need for rituals, chanting, mantra tantra, yāg, yajna, austerity, cleanliness, renunciation of family etc. to attain God. Only through sincerity can one realize the real truth. For the pursuit of God, he said to give up attachment to the world, he did not talk about renunciation of karma - he talked about niškāma karma. He hated negligence and escapist mentality in the name of God pursuit.
3. **Jivaseva in Sivajñana:** Dharma to Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva means the welfare of living beings and Jivaseva. Not kindness to the living being, but 'Jivaseva in Shivjñana' is the basic ideal of religion. Rituals alone are not worship, but the service of living beings to Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva is the ultimate religion. As a result of his preaching, ritualistic Hinduism was uncomplicated and revived.
4. **Religious Ideology:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva states that attaining God is the main purpose of worship and progress on the path of consciousness is the religion of man. All paths of Sādhanamārga are true. According to him, the soul is

pure and immortal. So it is wrong to call people sinners. He proved by his life and efforts that Hindus are not pagans, they worship Chinmayi in Mrinmayi.

5. **Women's Mukti:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva believed that women are the embodiment of God Himself. Recognizing women's suffering and leadership, he proclaimed the high glory of women. During Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva's time women were at the very bottom of the society as well as the religious system. But he never saw women differently. He had equal rights with men and women. He treated everyone equally regardless of caste, creed and religion.
6. **Humanism:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva believed that every human being possessed infinite energy. His propagation of humanist ideals broke down caste barriers in society. His use of rustic manners, half-naked appearance, reluctance to aristocracy was a protest against the emerging middle-class culture of the time.
7. **Down to Earth Ideology:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva used to present his ideals to people in very simple language, using various story analogies. All kinds of people from the lower or upper class of society used to rush to him to hear the ideals of religion from his mouth. Swami Vivekananda, Keshavchandra Sen, Girishchandra Ghosh, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Vinodini dasi etc. people from different walks of life gained closeness to Thakur Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva as a Social Reformer: Sri Ramakrishna was probably the most celebrated mystic of all times. A simple man, sometimes with childlike enthusiasm, he explained the most complex concepts of spiritual philosophies in most simple parables, stories and anecdotes. His words flowed from a deep sense of belief in the Divinity and his experience of embracing God in a very real form. He directed that the ultimate goal of every living soul is God-realization. Having practiced different facets of Hinduism as well of other religions like Islam and Christianity, he preached that all of these religions were different paths that lead up to a single goal - God. His conversations with his disciples were recorded by his devotee Mahendranath Gupta and the collective work was titled as Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, To get rid of the thought that he belonged to a higher Brahmanical caste, he began to eat food cooked by the shudras or lower-caste.

Apart from his direct disciples, Ramakrishna had profound effect on Sri Keshab Chandra Sen, an influential Brahma Samaj leader. Ramakrishna's teaching and his company led Keshab Chandra Sen to reject the rigidity of Brahma ideals that he initially was attached to. He recognised polytheism and heralded the Naba Bidhan movement within the Brahma order. He propagated Ramakrishna's teachings in his Naba Bidhan periodicals and was responsible for popularisation of the mystic among the elites of the contemporary Bengali society.

His influence reached all strata of the society; he did not differentiate between devotees based on caste. He even embraced the sceptics, won them over with his simplistic charm and unselfish love. He was a force of revival to re-energise the decaying Hinduism in nineteenth century Bengal. Notable Disciples Foremost among his innumerable disciples was Swami Vivekananda, who was instrumental in establishing the philosophy of

Ramakrishna at a global stage. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 to carry out the visions of his Guru Ramakrishna.

After the death of Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva, his influential activities and opinion had not stopped. He produced some very intellectual disciples like Vivekananda who continue to use his doctrines as the main mantra of India's religious renaissance. As a result, we find out the different types of religious activities of Ramakrishna Mission, which is founded by Swami Vivekananda. Now I will try to sketch a blueprint of the aims and ideals of Ramakrishna Mission.

Aims and Ideals of Ramakrishna Mission: On May 5, 1897 a meeting of the disciples of Ramakrishna under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda unanimously adopted the following aims and ideals of Ramakrishna Mission:

1. The Association (Sangha) shall be known as the Ramakrishna Mission.
2. a) This new Mission is to preach the truths which Sri Ramakrishna has. for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement:
 - b) To conduct the activities of the movement for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one underlying Eternal Religion.
3. Its methods of action are:
 - a) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses.
 - b) To promote and encourage arts and industries, and
 - c) To introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they are elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.
4. It should have two branches of action:
 - a) Indian Work Department and
 - b) Foreign Department.
 - a) The activities of the Indian Department should be directed to the establishment of Maths and Ashrams in different parts of India for the training of Sannyasins and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others;
 - b) Whereas its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to start centers there for the preaching of Vedanta in order to bring about a close relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.
5. The aims and the objects of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.
6. Anyone who believes in the Mission of Sri Ramakrishna, or who sympathizes or is willing to cooperate with the above mentioned aims and objects of the Association, is eligible for the membership.

Under the able presidentship of Vivekananda Ramakrishna Mission did very important work in the field of social and religious reform. Its branches were spread throughout the country and even outside India. After Vivekananda the illustrious followers of the Mission such as Swami Yogananda and Swami Brahmananda carried on the work of the Mission.

Conclusion: I think no other person in this country has before Thakur Shri Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva as transcendent form religious superstitions as he. No other saint has ever made this point as clear as did Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva. He inspired a Muslim to be a true Muslim, and a Christian a real one also.

Under his inspiration the Hindus retrieved their faith in Hinduism, even though they had an English education. It is indeed a great ideal for the Indians, who are divided into various religions and sects. The significance of this ideal still remains to be cherished.

Though Ramakrishna could not build up an all-India movement by his teaching as did Keshab Chandra with his oratory, he too, could not agree to the disparities of caste and creed in Indian society.

He firmly believed that by obtaining self-knowledge or proper devotion to God men would no longer go by the labels of caste and creed and I think it's only way to be a religious reformer really.

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