

The Contribution of Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) towards World Culture

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Abstract: In Indian tradition, the religious development of a person is completed when he experiences the world within himself. Sri Ramakrishna, a Bengali temple-priest propagated a new interpretation of the Hindu scriptures. Without formal education, he interpreted the essence of the scriptures with unprecedented simplicity. With deep insight into the rapidly changing social scenario, he realized the necessity of a humanist religious practice. Therefore, adopting a modern perspective, this paper attempts to highlight the contribution of Sri Ramakrishna in India towards the world culture. Qualitative methods through a systematic sociohistorical analysis that summarized the literature based on documents, books and journals are used in this paper. The results show that the Ramakrishna Mission movement has contributed significantly to Indian civilization in education, humanity, literature and spirituality. Although they are not politically involved, their contribution remains significant in shaping a free-thinking, self-respecting and fearless citizen towards British colonial in India.

Keywords: Contribution, Ramakrishna Mission, World Culture

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, national awareness among the Indians led to the formation of several organizations aimed at restoring Hinduism such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. The history of Ramakrishna Mission Movement can be traced back with the birth of Gadadhar Chatterjee, Sri Ramakrishna's earlier name on 18th February, 1836 in the Hoogly District of Bengal. He was born in a poor orthodox Brahmin family. He received no formal education from a school. At the beginning of his life, he worked as one of the priests at Dakshineswar Temple who conducted the worship of Kali, the divine Goddess. The name Ramakrishna was given to him by Tota Puri, a devotee of Sankaracharya. Sri Ramakrishna was beginning to attract a group of young men who came to him, raised questions, spoke of their own doubts. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a 19th century saint was the founder of the Ramakrishna Order of monks and is regarded as the spiritual founder of the Ramakrishna Movement [2]. The Ramakrishna Mission follows the inspiration of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, whose spiritual experience included Bhakti, Tantra, and Advaita Vedanta, as well as visionary realizations in Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity and from these experiences he claimed that all religions lead to the same divine realization [3]. Ramakrishna's teachings were popularized by Keshab Chandra Sen and other Brahmos before the larger public of Bengal through their speeches and writings [4]. The discovery of Sri Ramakrishna was one of the greatest gifts of the Brahmos to the Bengali intelligents of the nineteenth century. Keshab Chandra Sen was amazed by the simplicity and depth of Sri Ramakrishna when he first met with him on 15th March 1875 [5]. He recorded his experience as follows: 'We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago, and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit.' He admitted further, 'Hinduism must have in it a deep sense of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these Keshab Chandra Sen was deeply influenced by Sri Ramakrishna [6].

Although there have been many studies on the Ramakrishna Order, most of them focus on the epistemological underpinnings and philosophical orientations of the Mission, and those few studies which do highlight the service aspect, do so only in the manner of description. Some sociological studies have focused on how the Mission has contributed to development [7] [8] but they have done so without any attempts at drawing relationships of these philanthropic activities to the concept of civil society and world culture, which the proposed study attempts to interrogate.

2. Literature Review

The Establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna mission is a Hindu religious and spiritual organisation which forms the core of a worldwide spiritual movement known as the Ramakrishna Movement or the Vedanta Movement. Sri Rama Krishna was one

of the most notable and inspiring spiritual personalities who created a silent revolution in the realms of spirituality and moved millions around the world to engage in Spiritual Sadhana. Ramakrishna Mission was established by 1897 by his ardent disciple Swami Vivekananda with the twin objectives of working for one's own liberation as well as working for the welfare of the world at large [9]. They both made many reforms especially about the basic teachings of Hinduism from the Vedic books.

The nucleus of the Ramakrishna Mission was influenced by the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj movements following the impact of the modernization of Hinduism in the 19th century. This can be proved by the existence of a close relationship between Ramakrishna and the followers of the Brahma Samaj movement. From that association he was influenced by their thoughts on religion and moral. Therefore, it can generally be said that the Brahma movement was the catalyst for the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission movement in the 1870s in India. The Ramakrishna Mission movement was founded by Sri Ramakrishna. It started around the 1870s after 12 years of his experience in the spiritual realm. This can be proved by the words of Swami Shivananda, a friend of Swami Vivekananda that:

We did not found this order. It was the master who brought it into being during his illness. At that time he instructed Swamiji (Vivekananda) and others as how this order was to be organized and conducted.

(S.P.Sen 1978:372)

According to Locklin 2017 [10], the nucleus of the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission movement can be traced to the last message of Ramakrishna before he died, namely keep my boys together and teach them leading to the establishment of this movement. After the death of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda played the role of leading this movement until it grew and became famous all over the world. Initially the Ramakrishna Mission movement was an informal organization. It was founded in September 1886 in Barahanagar, Calcutta, India. In November 1891, it moved to Alambazar and on December 9, 1898 moved again to Belur, a village near the Ganges River. The establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission Movement officially began after the return of Swami Vivekananda from the United States in 1897. On May 1, 1897, a meeting was held in Calcutta which was the starting point for the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission movement. According to S.P. Sen (1978: 374-375), among the resolutions agreed in the meeting were:

- i. A movement will be established under the names Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.
- ii. The objective is to spread the teachings of Ramakrishna to the whole world. They also want to help those in need for universal benefit.
- iii. The goal of this movement is to get to know and unite followers of other religions and make them friends on the journey towards a common goal (in their beliefs).
- iv. Method of implementation:
 - Train followers of this movement to teach useful knowledge (spiritual and physical) to society.
 - Promoting industry and the arts.
 - Represents the teachings of vedanta as taught by Ramakrishna.
- v. It is through two ways namely:
 - Through Indian math (monastery) and ashrama (hostel) to be built all over India.
 - Sending members of this movement abroad to establish a spiritual center and subsequently establish close ties with the outside community.
- vi. The main purpose of this movement is only on the basis of spirituality and society without interfering the political and administration of a country.

Among the figures who contributed a lot and became the backbone of this movement were Swami Akhandananda, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda, Givish Chandra Gosh and many others. In addition, among Swami Vivekananda's friends who contributed a lot are:

- i. Swami Brahmananda; became the leader of this movement after the death of Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna called him the king of the spiritual world.
- ii. Swami Shivananda; became the second president of this movement and has been a source of inspiration for thousands of Ramakrishna Mission followers.
- iii. Swami Saradanda; was the secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission movement while led by Swami Vivekananda until the end of his life.

Basic Teachings of Ramakrishna Mission

The principles of Ramakrishna Mission teachings are different from the teachings of Hinduism. Through his own experience of the various religions that exist in the world, Sri Ramakrishna concluded that every religion has the same ultimate goal but through different paths [11]. According to him, Kali (God Mother) and Brahman are two aspects of one reality (2 in 1). He had studied Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. According to him, all religions

are true. God may be known by various names but in fact one is not many. At this stage Sri Ramakrishna is seen to have taken the basics of Islamic teachings that practice the concept of monotheism.

Sri Ramakrishna practiced meditation or asceticism [12]. Women and gold can hinder the spiritual development of a human being. Both represent worldly elements in the form of lust (women) and gold (worldly greed). Human lust can only be overcome when all women are considered the incarnation of Kali (God Mother) and greed for the world will be overcome when all worldly and worldly attractions are removed from the eyes of a human being [13]. This world is an illusion and man is deceived by the world. They forget the reality of self and can only be overcome by leaving the world to lead to the reality of eternal truth. Ramakrishna Mission rejects the caste system that exists in society. According to Sri Ramakrishna, the rejection of the caste system is proof that the love of God is still bestowed on human beings [14].

3. Result and Discussion

Worshipping God by Serving Humanity

The different spiritual services of the Ramakrishna Mission aim to serve the humanity without any discrimination of caste, creed, race or nationality. By total uplift it means the development of body, mind, and soul. It means the fulfillment of all physical, mental, and spiritual requirements. A person is not a lump of flesh alone; he or she has a mind and a soul too. Total upliftment means to fulfill the requirements of these three aspects.

Furthermore, a maternity clinic was established in southern Calcutta and in 1970 it was transformed into a large hospital and was known as Sri Ramakrishna Seva Pratistan. Apart from that, several medical centers have been established among them in Benares, Kankhal, Allahabad and Veindaban in India. A Tuberculosis Clinic in Ranchi and Vivekananda Polyclinic in Lucknow was established in 1970 and is one of the largest polyclinics in India. Treatment at the clinic is provided free of charge to help the underprivileged. This movement does a lot of charity work in India, among them are:

- i. Assistance for famine victims (1896) in 72 districts for example in Bihar and famine disaster in Bengal (1943). With the help of this movement, this movement has succeeded in saving thousands of human lives.
- ii. Assistance to flood victims (1899) in 78 districts such as floods in west Bengal.
- iii. Medical assistance:
 - Plague (1899-1900)
 - Cholera (1913)
 - Small pox (1936-1937)
 - Influenza (1918-1919)
 - Malaria (1943)
- iv. Hurricane relief
- v. Fire assistance
- vi. Landslides and earthquakes relief such as the earthquake in Koyna.
- vii. Assistance of refugee victims and resettlement of refugees from Bangladesh.

Contribution Towards Education

The following are the major types of institutions started at different times during the 118 years of Ramakrishna Mission's existence in India to actualize Swamiji's educational vision as described above:

- i. A special school for female students in Calcutta founded by Sister Nivedita (1898).
- ii. Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deo-Ghar, Bihar; schools and hostels which are one of the earliest educational institutions established by this movement.
- iii. Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in Coimbatore, Madras; a college, school and industrial institute.
- iv. Ramakrishna Mission Boys Home, Rahara, Bengal. Started as an orphanage (1943), it is now transformed into a school, college, social education center and basic training college.
- v. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Navendrapur, Bengal. It started as a dormitory for Calcutta college students (1943). It is now a college, school, polytechnic and social training center.
- vi. Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College in Madras. It is the best college in southern India.

A few thousands of students (children, men, women) are being benefited every year through a few hundred institutions belonging to the above mentioned categories. The main inspiration behind all of these is the educational vision of Swami Vivekananda. One of the main characteristics of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission institutions imparting education, which in fact forms the very backbone of these institutions, is the active involvement and dedicated service of a large number of the monks, devotees and other aspirants of the Ramakrishna order.

Publication and Literature

The Sri Ramakrishna Mission also contributed a lot in the aspects of publication and literature. Bengal language, the mother tongue of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and English, the language in which Sri

Ramakrishna's teachings were spread throughout the world, were used in publishing newspapers and magazines. The Ramakrishna Mission has three English language magazines:

- Brahmavadia (1895)
- Prabuddha Bharata (1896 to the present)
- Vedanta Keshari (1914)

In addition, many other magazines have been published by this movement in various languages, including:

- Vedanta and The West, 1938 (Hollywood Center of America).
- Jivan Vikash, 1967 in Marathi (Nagour).
- Sri Ramakrishna (in Telugu).
- Sri Ramakrishna (in Tamil).
- Vivekjiyati, in Rajpur (in Hindi).

A newspaper company, Basumati was published by Upumpang Nath Mukerjee, one of Sri Ramakrishna's students. It is published in Bengal. The publication of this newspaper greatly helped the Ramakrishna Mission Movement and became a major contributor to the Ramakrishna Mission orphanage in Rahara, West Bengal. This movement also publishes many books in the form of religion and literature. Among them is Sri Ramakrishna Vathamrith which is published in 3 volumes. It is very popular in Bengali literature. Swami Vivekananda was inspired by modern Bengali prose, Chalia Basha and Modern India, Bartaram Bharata during his lifetime. In addition, many literary works have been published, namely:

- Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings (Max Muller)
- Life of Vivekananda: Eastern and Western Disiples
- Life of Ramakrishna (Advaita Ashrama)
- Life of Ramakrishna and Life of Vivekananda (Romain Rolland)
- The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (8 volumes) Advaita Ashrama

In terms of art, many artists are influenced by the spiritual elements in the teachings of Ramakrishna Mission. One of the example is Nandalal Bose. The architecture of the Ramakrishna Mission temple in Belur Math is the result of the influence of Hindu temple architecture, mosques and churches. It was the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda who combined the three religions in their teachings and practices. The architecture reflects the basic principles of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Ramakrishna Mission Activities around the World

Apart from India, followers of the Ramakrishna Mission also exist all over the world. In Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, for example, this movement focuses on communal activities as well as emphasizing the spiritual element in their daily lives. Meanwhile in the United States, Europe, England and France, the movement focused heavily on intellectual and spiritual activities. Since the time of Swami Vivekananda, the United States has been the cultural activity center of the Ramakrishna Mission in the west. No wonder they have the most members there ever. There are also Ramakrishna Mission centers in Gretz, France, London, Berkeley, Boston, Hollywood, New York, Portland, Providence, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis and Buenos Aires. Followers of the Ramakrishna Mission are usually taught about the culture and spiritual elements of Hinduism. One interesting thing is that it is well received by the intellectual community there. Among the famous figures who represented this movement in the United States were Swami Pravabananda and Swami Vikhilananda.

In Malaysia, followers of Ramakrishna Mission can be found in the cities of Kuala Lumpur (Bangsar, Brickfield) and Butterworth, Penang. They did the same activities as the followers of Ramakrishna Mission in India such as doing charity work, helping the poor, providing dormitory facilities to students as in Brickfield, Kuala Lumpur. According to [15], among the characteristics of Ramakrishna Mission followers in Malaysia are:

- i. They will say haariwm instead of naleme for greetings when met each other.
- ii. There are three long white mark on the forehead of the followers of Ramakrishna Mission.
- iii. Followers of Ramakrishna Mission are usually modest, polite, courteous and humble.
- iv. They do not eat meat, only eat vegetables (vegetarian) that they grow.
- v. They usually hang out with each other in their community.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ramakrishna Mission believes in the concept of universal religion which is heavily influenced by Christianity. They argue that all religions are true. This movement has also contributed a lot to Indian civilization in terms of education, humanity, literature and spirituality. Swami Vivekananda himself wanted to see India conquer the world through the spiritual power that exists in Hinduism. One of them is Yoga.

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