

**T.C.**  
**İBN HALDUN ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**MEDENİYETLER İTTİFAKI ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**MEDENİYET ARAŞTIRMALARI ANABİLİM DALI**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

**REVIVALIST DISCOURSE IN MODERN HINDUISM:  
A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT**

**İHSAN ALTINTAŞ**

**140401007**

**TEZ DANIŞMANI**

**YRD. DOÇ. DR. ÖNDER KÜÇÜKURAL**

**İSTANBUL 2017**



**T.C.**  
**İBN HALDUN ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**MEDENİYETLER İTTİFAKI ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**MEDENİYET ARAŞTIRMALARI ANABİLİM DALI**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

**REVIVALIST DISCOURSE IN MODERN HINDUISM:  
A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT**

**İHSAN ALTINTAŞ**

**140401007**

**TEZ DANIŞMANI**

**YRD. DOÇ. DR. ÖNDER KÜÇÜKURAL**

**İSTANBUL 2017**

**T.C.**  
**İBN HALDUN ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**MEDENİYETLER İTTİFAKI ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**MEDENİYET ARAŞTIRMALARI ANABİLİM DALI**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

**REVIVALIST DISCOURSE IN MODERN HINDUISM:  
A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT**

**İHSAN ALTINTAŞ**

**140401007**

**TEZ DANIŞMANI**

**YRD. DOÇ. DR. ÖNDER KÜÇÜKURAL**

**Enstitü Anabilim Dalı: Medeniyet Araştırmaları**

**Enstitü Bilim Dalı: Medeniyet Araştırmaları**

**Bu tez 06/06/2017 tarihinde aşağıdaki jüri tarafından oy birliği ile kabul edilmiştir.**

**Yrd. Doç. Dr. Önder Küçükural Prof. Dr. İsmail L. Hacınebioğlu**

**Yrd. Doç. Dr. Karim Sadek**

---

**Jüri Başkanı**

---

**Jüri üyesi**

---

**Jüri üyesi**

## **BEYAN**

Bu tezin yazılmasında bilimsel ahlâk kurallarına uyulduđu, başkalarının eserlerinden yararlanılması durumunda bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunulduđu, kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmadıđı, tezin herhangi bir kısmının bu üniversiteye veya başka bir üniversitedeki başka bir tez çalışması olarak sunulmadıđını beyan ederim.

İhsan Altıntaş

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyze Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's (1836-1886) revivalist discourse based on three perceptions (i.e. God-Nature, Self, and Society) in the context of the emergence of new religious movements in modern India. Unfortunately, the scope of the study of revivalist movements is generally limited to the Middle East and the Western world, whereas, this piece of work dedicated to South Asia region to make available sources for comparison of Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions in the context of modernity. This would be my larger contribution to the study of revivalist movements. I also aspire to provide an academic discussion to the intellectual scholarships in the field work of studying the religions and modernity.

The thesis is composed of four chapters plus introduction and conclusion part. Introduction part explains my methodological, theoretical and conceptual framework of how and why I study the revivalist discourse of Sri Ramakrishna, the importance of this thesis, literature reviews, my aims and positions in the Ramakrishna studies, some statements about my study. Chapter one explores the core dimensions of the socio-religious changes in Bengal in order to find the basic elements of the revivalism in Bengal Renaissance during 1800-1830s. Chapter two contains an overview of Ramakrishna's life considering his spiritual experience turning into religious doctrines. Chapter three examines Ramakrishna's revivalist discourses in his daily speeches as recorded in *the Gospel of Ramakrishna*. Chapter four concentrates how Ramakrishna's revivalist discourse was perceived by his disciples, especially by his foremost devotee Swami Vivekananda and how Ramakrishna Math and Mission started as an organization. Conclusion part includes all of my research findings of this master thesis project and also it gives a general overview of the concluding remarks of each chapter.

Outcomes of his revivalist discourse regarding God-Nature shortly are; everything in universe is an embodiment of God and God is active all the time and takes care of everything; regarding self, attachment to worldly things (i.e. women and gold and egotism) are the main problems of modern man and the solution is realization of God with guidance of a religious leader (guru) by experiencing renunciation, devotion, faith and meditation; regarding society, instead of dogmatism of religions and sects he purposes the idea of harmony of religions.

## ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı Hindistan'da ortaya çıkan yeni dinî hareketler bağlamında Sri Ramakrişna Paramahansa'nın (1836-1886) Tanrı-Doğa, İnsan ve Toplum tasavvurunda kullandığı ihyacı söylemi analiz etmektir.

İhyacı hareketler üzerinde yapılan çalışmalar genellikle Ortadoğu ve Batı dünyasıyla sınırlı kalmaktadır. Bunların aksine bu çalışma Güney Asya bölgesine yoğunlaşmış olup vahiy merkezli olmayan dinlerin (Hinduizm gibi) modernite ile karşılaşması üzerine yapılacak olan akademik çalışmalara kaynak sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

Bu açıdan bu tez ihyacı hareketler üzerine yapılan çalışmalara da katkı sunmakla beraber modernite ve din ilişkisine yoğunlaşan çalışmalara entelektüel anlamda akademik bir müzakere konusu ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu tez toplamda dört ana bölüm, giriş ve sonuç kısımlarından oluşmaktadır. Giriş kısmında kullandığım metodolojiyi, teorik ve kavramsal çerçeveyi, nasıl ve neden Sri Ramakrishna'nın ihyacı söylemini ele aldığımı, literatür taramasını, niyet ve çalışmamın sınırlarını ve çalışmam hakkında bazı kritik noktaları ele aldım.

Birinci bölümde, Bengal Rönesans'ı olarak adlandırılan uzun bir dönemin sadece 1800-1830'lu yıllarda Bengal'de ortaya çıkan ihyacı söylemin sosyal ve dinî değişimlerin arka planını oluşturan temel elementlerini tüm boyutları ile ele aldım.

İkinci bölümde ise Ramakrişna'nın hayatının genel bir özetini onun manevi tecrübelerinin nasıl bir dini doktrine dönüşerek değiştiğini dikkate alarak ele aldım.

Üçüncü bölümde Ramakrişna'nın ihyacı söylemi onun günlük konuşmalarında ve *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* adlı kaydedilmiş kitabında incelenmektedir.

Dördüncü bölüm Ramakrişna'nın ihyacı söyleminin onun müritleri özellikle baş müridi Swami Vivekananda tarafından nasıl algılandığı üzerine odaklanarak Ramakrişna Hareketinin bir kurumsal organizasyona nasıl dönüştüğünü tahlil etmektedir.

Sonuç kısmında ise tezimde elde ettiğim bulguları ve bütün bölümlerde ortaya çıkan çıktıları yorumlayarak ele aldım.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>BEYAN</b> .....	<b>I</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>ÖZET</b> .....	<b>III</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b> .....	<b>IV</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES AND ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>VI</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b> .....	<b>VII</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Literature Review and Background .....	4
Some Discussions on Hinduism.....	6
My Aim, Contribution, and Method .....	8
<b>CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHANGES IN THE BENGAL (HINDU) RENAISSANCE (1800-1830)</b> .....	<b>11</b>
1.1. Introduction .....	11
1.2. Establishments of the Main Associations in Bengal .....	12
1.3. The Argumentations of Missionaries and Orientalists on Hinduism.....	14
1.4. Press in the Way of Awakening the Hindu Pundits.....	16
1.5. Debates on Traditional Hindu Beliefs and Customs .....	18
1.6. Revivalist Discourses in the Magazines .....	19
1.7. Young Bengal Movement: Three Main Ideologies .....	22
1.8. Conclusion.....	23
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA (1836-1886)</b> .....	<b>26</b>
2.1. Childhood.....	26
2.2. Some Signs of Spiritual Journey .....	28
2.3. Coming to Calcutta (Kolkata) .....	29
2.4. As a Priest at Kali Temple .....	30
2.5. His Spiritual Guides .....	34
2.6. His Interests in Other Religions and Sects .....	36
2.7. Recognition of His Teachings by People .....	38
<b>CHAPTER THREE: REVIVALIST DISCOURSE OF RAMAKRISHNA</b> .....	<b>42</b>
3.1. Introduction .....	42

3.2. ON GOD AND NATURE .....	43
3.2.1. Realization of God .....	43
3.2.2. Debate of Form and Formless .....	46
3.2.3. Kali Mother and Her Sameness with Brahman .....	48
3.2.4. God in Nature.....	51
3.2.5. God in the Human .....	52
3.3. ON SELF.....	54
3.3.1. Worldliness and Renunciation and the Ego “I” .....	56
3.3.2. Love for God, Realization, and Faith.....	59
3.3.3. The Company of a Holy Man (Guru).....	60
3.3.4. To householders .....	64
3.4. ON SOCIETY.....	65
3.4.1. Harmony of Religions .....	67
3.4.2. Family and Women .....	68
3.4.3. Caste system.....	70
3.5. Conclusion.....	72
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT.....</b>	<b>75</b>
4.1. Narendra as Swami Vivekananda .....	75
4.2. Vivekananda’s Spiritual Journey and His Visit to USA .....	76
4.3. Establishment of the Organization .....	77
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: LIST OF SANSKRIT &amp; HINDI TERMS USED IN THE THESIS.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: A PICTURE AT BELURMATH AFTER THE INTERVIEW .....</b>	<b>95</b>

## **LIST OF TABLES AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**Table 1:** List of the first British Orientalists in India.

**Table 2:** The list of first publications and associations in Calcutta.

**Table 3:** Revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna regarding God-Nature.

**Table 4:** Revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna regarding Self.

**Table 5:** Revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna regarding Society.

Note: These tables made by me through my readings and analysis.

**RK:** Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

**M:** Mahendranath Gupta

**GRK:** The Gospel of Ramakrishna

**Keshab C. Sen:** Keshab Chandra Sen

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

After an intensive period of eight months, today is the day of writing acknowledgement which is final step towards completing my thesis. I must confess that writing this thesis has had a big impact on my life. I would like to thank to people who have supported and helped me throughout this period.

I would first like to thank my supervisor Dr. Önder Küçükural who has chaired this thesis project and Dr. Ercüment Asil who guided me during this period via “thesis development meetings” at the institute. Without their suggestions and advices this thesis would not get succeeded. I shall thank to all faculty members and administrations in the Alliance of Civilization Institute (ACI) for making a well academic circle with discussions, supports and encouragements. My second big thank goes to Dr. Jeffery D. Long (Elizabethtown College) who unofficially co-supervised me with his suggestions in making possible to continue in the right direction during making skeleton of the thesis. I also thank to Dr. Ankur Barua (University of Cambridge), Gwilym Beckerlegge (The Open University in UK) and Dr. John Stevens (SOAS University of London) who have sent me their suggestions via emails and Dr. Avijit Pathak (Jawaharlal Nehru University) whom I discussed while I was in India. And I shall thank to Dr. Veysel Bozkurt (Istanbul University), Dr. Ismail Latif Hacınebioğlu (Istanbul University) whom I talked over issues in Istanbul regarding my thesis and academic carrier. My deep thanks go to Dr. Faris Kaya who always morally encouraged and supported me in my personal and academic works.

I should thank to South Asian Strategic Research Center (GASAM) and The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) for granting scholarship to make possible one month field study in India. During this field study, I was pleased by warm welcoming of the members of Ramakrishna Movement in New Delhi and Kolkata. My special thank goes to respected Swami Suhitananda (General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission) and Swami Bhajanananda (Assistant General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission) and Swami Shantatmananda (Head of Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi) for allowing me to have interview with them although their intense period of time. Through their discussions and sources they provided I continued my studies in a healthy way. I also shall thank to Science and Art Foundation (BISAV) for opening its door for graduate student in a nice library environment.

I cannot adequately thank to my friends Hossein Turner, Manu Puthur, Rajeev Raushan, Najeeb VR, Deepali Aparajita, Ankita Menon and who have helped me with Hindi and English terms and literature. Also my discussion with Hakan Gülerce who is writing a Ph.D. dissertation on Focolare Movement related Modernity and Christianity gave me chance and inspiration to look my studies in a comparative perspective. I cannot forget the contribution of my friend Gökhan Akdağ who has excellent knowledge of sociology.

I would like to thank my all family members and relatives, my friends who are with me in academic environment Ali Sönmez, Kadir Purde and close friends at ACI, Zeynep Çavuşoğlu, Özlem Başboğa, and Selameddin Baysal and also to hidden heroes of my life who always supported me in my academic works.

## INTRODUCTION

When British left India in 1947 they had already built three big metropolitan cities (i.e. Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta<sup>1</sup>) with large railway systems, telegraph, medical developments, educational institutions, public libraries, administrative system and so on. It is obviously true to claim that they (i.e. British colony) changed the general overview of new-born modern India. But these changes are the most visible side of the coin. What about the invisible changes that occurred in the mind of the Indian people? At this point, this piece of work is dedicated to finding out one of the invisible changes in the religious discourse of Hinduism which is the emergence of the idea of revivalism.

It is unavoidable for me to explain what I mean by modernity and Hinduism while going through a subject that is modern Hinduism. By the term modernity, I mean two things. First; the tangible side of it which is technological and scientific and industrial developments in Europe which later on partly spread to the rest of the world. The other side of the modernity, which is intangible and ideological, consists of rationalization of the mind, idea of nationalism, the idea of individualism, the theory of capitalism or socialism etc. The term modernity as I use here refers to both sides of the modernity. Another term which is going to be used in this thesis is “Westernization” means a region referring to where modernity was born (i.e. West).

It is well known that Hinduism is almost indefinable in history. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), who has valuable works to his credit on Hinduism, is a strong reference to be read for details. Through my readings, I could define Hinduism as polytheistic as well as monotheistic. There exist plenty of gods worshipped and also there is the idea of one supreme God. Inside, there is Brahmanism, caste system, belief of reincarnation, theology, philosophy, mythology. As a textbook, there exist Vedas and Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and Puranas. This is the traditional religion of Hindus in India since two thousand years according to historical evidence. Rather than religion sometimes it is called “way of life” because of its porous and flexible borders and mixture with other religions. In

---

<sup>1</sup> These three large cities have been renamed by the central government in New Delhi after end of the British imperial period in 1947 as follows: Bombay: Mumbai, Madras: Chennai, Calcutta: Kolkata.

this thesis, when I use the term Hinduism I mostly mean this kind (i.e. a way of life) of traditional acculturation of Hinduism.

A famous Scottish educational missionary and orientalist John Nicol Farquhar stated in his very early book, entitled *Modern Religious Movements in India* published in 1915, that the Indian social and religious movements are outcomes of the Western influences.<sup>2</sup> This claim takes us back to Eastern-Western civilizational debates. David Kopf considers this issue in his introduction as a correspondence of the eastern and western world, which is a claim that I strongly agree with, because, most of the modernist thinkers and writers of the Bengali intelligentsia approach this issue as an eastern-western encounter. For instance; a famous philosopher and poet Rabindranath Tagore in his writings on internationalism as an inter-civilizational alliance wrote that he believes in the true meeting of the East and the West,<sup>3</sup> a famous patriotic saint Swami Vivekananda in his book entitled *The East and the West*<sup>4</sup> claimed that every nation has a different culture but still there could be a harmony between two sides. Especially, the religion which is the foundation of India could help other nations in a spiritual way. Another Indian Renaissance thinker, nationalist, and poet Sri Aurobindo claimed that East and West can/shall meet from two opposite sides and merge with each other to establish a foundation that builds a unified humanity a common world culture.<sup>5</sup>

Also, it should not be forgotten that the 19<sup>th</sup> century is much closer to Italian renaissance in Europe compare to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I mean the discourse of the renaissance was already fresh in the world and it is normal to come across the same argument in any other part of the world. It is arguable to name it as a westernization of modern India or modernization of Indian tradition. Specifically, reformist ideas have emerged in eastern part of Indian subcontinent because of the city, Calcutta became the capital city of British colonialism in early 18th century. Calcutta was intentionally designed by British rulers to establish the European education system in India. As a capital city, Calcutta was more eligible

---

<sup>2</sup> John Nicol Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Oakley Press, 2009), 387.

<sup>3</sup> Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (Bloomsbury, 1997), 197.

<sup>4</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The East and the West* (Advaita Ashrama, 1929).

<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance In India And Other Essays On Indian Culture* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2002), 72.

than any other city in the Indian subcontinent to establish European-style institutions, newspapers, and textbooks because it has become a center city where Hindu elite classes started to live. I do not claim that the Hindus pundits smoothly adopted the western culture. Whereas, it is clearly known that there were revolts against British such as those of Rangpur (1783), Bishnupur (1789), and Chuar (1795-1799).<sup>6</sup> But I am referring to the transformation of socio-religious changes among the Hindu intellectuals.

During my two year experiences of living in India between 2012-2014, I observed most of the religious rituals of Hinduism practiced on the streets, temples, festivals and daily life. And my Hindu friends whom I lived with were practicing Hindu rituals as a culture. I could say practice as they learned from their family; worshiping many gods and goddesses, sacrificing and offering things to the statue of gods, doing yoga, religious festivals etc. From that time the question existed in my mind what keeps them so alive and sincere in their beliefs. This question guided me to study of modern Hindu religious movements while living among them. I came across with the image of Swami Vivekananda wherever I go to a Hindu festival or conference. Mostly he was referred to be the person who reformed and re-established Hinduism in contemporary India. Searching more about him took me to his movement Ramakrishna Math and Mission based in Calcutta (Kolkata). This movement actually is a very large organization which is established according to life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda's great master (guru) Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who dedicated his life to revive belief of Hindu people and all humanity. Ramakrishna's teachings have been adopted by millions of Hindus today in India and abroad. This was my personal interaction with the movement.

Coming back to the theoretical debate, when I say modern Hinduism I mean the Hinduism which met, influenced and shaped by the both sides of the modernity that came to India through British colony just after the 1800s. A question can come to mind, why I call Ramakrishna's teachings as revivalism but not reformism? It is because, in my opinion, reformism is to reform the old customs with the tools of outsiders. For instance, Ram Mohun Roy was trying to reform Hinduism by emphasizing rational thinking for rebuilding the classic Hinduism. To him, Hinduism can reach the highest level by adopting rationality. He

---

<sup>6</sup> Pulak Naranyan Dhar, "Bengal Renaissance: A Study in Social Contradictions" *Social Scientist* 15, no. 1 (1987): 26-45, 27.

was clearly influenced by the modern way of thinking. But revivalism is something different, it is a creating a new form from the already existing one. Many fresh things come in but still, the old spirit remains. For instance, Ramakrishna emphasized God-realization or emphasized Vedanta but it is still the old one as well as new one. Also, I must clarify that within this thesis, I do not claim that Indian traditional culture, life in the villages or general belief system have totally changed, I just claim there is a change process in their organizing cultural customs and beliefs.

## **Literature Review and Background**

David Smith in his work, entitled *Hinduism and Modernity*, gives a big picture of Hinduism in sense of tradition and modern outlook. His claim, looking at Hinduism through the eyes of modernity, but attempting also for looking at back at modernity through the eyes of Hinduism, is visible in every chapter of his book. Meanwhile, he looks from the perspective of outsiders as well as insiders. To him, the terms of “Modernity” and “Hinduism” are dichotomy but both terms have mutual points too. Therefore, he well analyzes in which points both are contradictory in which both are agreeable.

In general view, revivalist movements have played important roles in shaping the modern world during the late 19th and 20th centuries such as Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, the Unification Church, and Scientology movements. These movements borrow many elements from different religious and philosophical traditions. Some sociologists have claimed that such movements fulfill the psychological and social needs of young people seeking a meaning for life which they cannot find in the old religious traditions.<sup>7</sup>

The Bengali (Hindu) Renaissance (1772-1941) of modern south Asia is one of the most important phenomena in the last two centuries. The term renaissance is used here because it is mainly produced and used by the first Orientalist movement in Bengal in the late decades of the 18th century and it is an alive term in current South Asian Studies scholarships too. It gave birth to the rise of modern Indian nationalism as David Kopf argues in his book, and encouraged Hindu believers to rejuvenate the classic Hindu religion in the realms of philosophy, religion, and culture. Some of the leaders of the Bengali Renaissance movements

---

<sup>7</sup> John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 513.

have re-interpreted the Vedas and the Upanishads in a way that suits Hinduism in the modernized world. In the early years of the Bengal renaissance, a religious and social movement, the Brahma Samaj [Society of Brahma], was established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). In the following years, another religious movement, the Arya Samaj [Noble Society], had been established to promote values and practices based on the infallibility of the Vedas, especially in Punjab by Swami Dayananda (1824-1883). David Kopf's (1969) work *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* is essential to my work which I am keen to find out the way how Hindu intellectuals encounter with the British Orientalists. Kopf provides large evidence that the college of Fort William has become a center for oriental studies in Bengal. Although he does not include how Muslim intellectuals have encountered with British orientalism but it is not in my consideration. Kopf, through this piece of work unlike Edward Said, claims that Orientalism can have a positive contribution to the revitalization of the tradition. Bengal Renaissance is used as a case example to support this idea which I agree with, indeed.

Among the revivalist movements, still the most influential movement is the Ramakrishna movement. It was established in 1897, by Swami Vivekananda who was the foremost disciple of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna. A German-born philologist and orientalist, Max Müller, who is one of the founders of the western academic field of Indian studies and the discipline of comparative religion, written a book on the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna, published in 1899. The introduction of the book gives a lot of details about the classic old Hindu religion. In continuation of this, he provides detailed information about the life of Sri Ramakrishna and mobilization strategies of the movement. The last part of the book is dedicated to the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. It is a primary source for me because of its early publishing time. Through this book, I am able to compare what a foreign thinker understands from Ramakrishna's sayings.

Today, Ramakrishna movement has millions of followers and more than a hundred centers all over India engaged in medical, educational, religious, and relief activities. In these centers, the teachings of Ramakrishna have been formulated into concrete moral practices. These teachings are God-realization, Kama-Kanchana [women and gold], Jiva as Shiva [worship the living God], and harmony of religions. Another work which gives significant

information about the emergence of Ramakrishna movement written by Beckerlegge<sup>8</sup>, in his book, Beckerlegge investigates the movement from a theoretical perspective and touches upon some social issues as well as social service, modern famine, and human rights from the perspective of the Vedanta philosophy. The book is a collection of essays including the exploration of the role of the Ramakrishna movement in Britain. This academic book provided me a lot of data to study and to help show that this movement is an example of revival debates in contemporary India.

### **Some Discussions on Hinduism**

I believe that, in order to understand the new revivalist movements in contemporary India, there must be a connection with the traditional Hinduism. Unlike other world religions, Hinduism has a different story. It has no founder or date of birth, as such. The assumption we have about its name is that the word Hindu is derived from the name “Sindhu” to refer to the inhabitants of the lands near and to the east of the Indus. In most major religions the ideas, ethics, and politics are established by charismatic leaders whereas Hinduism is just defined as the religion of the people of India over four thousand years. The essentials of Hinduism (which are texts and stories) do not have any author and it is one of the oldest surviving religions. Because of its antiquity, the early history of Hinduism is unclear. Most of the claims and information we have are based on archaeological and historical works.

Hinduism is often labeled as a religion, but it is actually more than that: it is a vast and complex socio-religious body which reflects the complexity of Indian society. A rich geography, many languages, various castes, and dialects, lots of different creeds, racial diversity, and all these elements have shaped Hinduism and made it so heterogenic. With the colonization period starting in the 18th century, many new approaches towards tradition, religion, and culture have been introduced by the British administrators. The most interesting change in the colonial period for me is their understanding of the religion. Indians already had the experience of living with Muslims for centuries. After the Christian missionary activities in British colonial India, the Hindus have come to together to unify their own religion in order

---

<sup>8</sup> Gwilym Beckerlegge, *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

to survive in the face of the missionary challenges of the 19th century. Mostly, revivalist religious movements played a significant role in mobilizing various Hindu communities and castes.

The Bengali Renaissance is considered as the awakening moment for the Hindu communities and caste groups in the modern age. It has been a great causal factor in the rise of modern Hinduism. The European Renaissance was mainly intellectual and aesthetic. But the renaissance in India was characterized primarily by moral and spiritual aspirations. The city of Kolkata, where the British were mostly active, has been a place which has given birth to many new religious movements during the Bengali Renaissance. For instance, the Brahmo Samaj is the first movement founded by Ram Mohan Roy in 1828. It was a monotheistic reformist and renaissance movement of the Hindu religion.

With the rise of modern Hinduism during the Bengali Renaissance, some questions have been asked on the essentials of Hinduism, such as whether Hinduism itself was a colonial construction/invention or not. Regarding this issue Brian Smith has claimed that Hinduism was an imagination of British colony in India.<sup>9</sup>

Lorenzen, in his article claims that the idea of the invention of Hinduism is false.<sup>10</sup> The evidence instead suggests that a Hindu religion - theologically and devotionally grounded in texts such as the Bhagavad-Gita's, the Puranas, and philosophical commentaries of six darshanas - gradually acquired a much sharper self-conscious identity through the rivalry between Muslims and Hindus in the period between 1200 and 1500, and was established firmly before 1800.

Contrary to the above claims, there is another prevailing argument which claims that Hinduism is an actual coherent historical religion. Even the word "Hindu" was in the literature of the Persian language for many centuries. According to Parpola, the word "Hindu" is first attested in 515 BCE, in an inscription from the Persian Emperor Darius.<sup>11</sup> In my thesis,

---

<sup>9</sup> Brian K. Smith, "Questioning Authority: Constructions and Deconstructions of Hinduism," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 3 (1998): 313–39.

<sup>10</sup> David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 630–59.

<sup>11</sup> Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

neo-Hinduism will be considered as a new understanding of the Hindu religion under the study of Ramakrishna's spiritual experience.

### **My Aim, Contribution, and Method**

My aim is to find out Ramakrishna's revivalist discourses that he produced in the book *The Gospel of the Ramakrishna*, in order to contribute to field of religious studies and sociology of religion. In this thesis, the position of the Ramakrishna movement is located among the revivalist movements in contemporary India. One of the purposes of this thesis project is to fill the gap in the social scientific studies of revivalist movements in the Indian subcontinent. I think, this kind of study contributes to the future of theoretical and practical studies. Thus, a major living religion in Asia with millions of followers abroad (i.e. Hinduism) will be understood in a better way. Unfortunately, the scope of the study of revivalist movements is generally limited to the Middle East and the Western world, whereas, this piece of work dedicated to South Asia region in order to compare and contrast a non-Abrahamic religion with others in future. This would be my larger contribution to the study of revivalist movements. One of the contributions of my thesis would be also providing an academic discussion to the Turkish intellectual scholarships in the field work of studying the religion and modernity.

Another argument is that this kind of socio-religious study of revivalist movements has been done from a socio-political perspective instead of from ontological, moral philosophical and sociological aspects. I argue that focusing on the discourse of Ramakrishna and finding what makes his argument different from classic Hindu philosophy will very much contribute to the revival studies. I intentionally, do not aim to study which kind of mobilization strategies that the Ramakrishna mission exploited. Rather, I consider what Vivekananda has learned from his Master that made him establish a service which today has national and international centers.

This qualitative research study is mainly based on discourse analyses of the book *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*. My data are combination of primary and secondary sources in my

analyses of the development of revivalism (i.e. Ramakrishna movement) in the history of India.

Among the primary sources, the first and most important data is my field study of the Movement. In September 2016, I won a one-month international research scholarship provided by the South Asian Strategic Research Center (GASAM) and The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) to do field study in India. During my field study, I have visited the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belurmath and Ramakrishna Mission in New Delhi. This opportunity gave me chance to conduct interviews with the monks of the movement and discuss with followers of the movement and join jnana yoga in the temple. All experiences I have gained with them can be found as a comment in this thesis. Also, the responses from the monks I received is inserted into the body of the thesis whenever I relate to the current issue. Therefore, this work is done by the theoretical study as well as practical experience. Another significant primary source of this thesis is the authentic book (i.e. the Gospel of Ramakrishna) and academic books I bought in the bookstore of Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Kolkata/India.

The English version of this book *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* includes two volumes containing fifty-two chapters, and it has 1162 pages. It is a textual recording of the conversations of Ramakrishna with his disciples, devotees, and visitors, recorded by Mahendranath Gupta as five volumes in the Bengali language and published initially in 1902 in India under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. Gupta wrote the book under the pseudonym of "M." Later on, in 1942, this religious text was translated and published by the founder of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, Swami Nikhilananda. I have used the English version of the book since I cannot read in Bengali but it is fortunate for me that most of the books, articles, and data are available in the English language. When I visited the Belur math, during the interview I asked about the position of the book in the movement. And the monks responded:

As a movement we believe this book is completely authentic. Why because it took over fifty years for M to write this book. But you see so graphic details, who said what, who laughed, all kind of details of behaviors and sayings are there. M was very well educated; he was expert on Hindu mythology literature as well as English language. Another reason why this book is in the center of our movement is that while Swami Vivekananda was alive he and the Holy Mother have checked

it. It was clearly approved by them. They stated that it is very authentic and original.<sup>12</sup>

I also pay attention to Vivekananda's own writings (who is the founder the movement), in order to find out how he perceived the ideas of Ramakrishna as part of his establishment and mobilization of the movement.

---

<sup>12</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

## **CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHANGES IN THE BENGAL (HINDU) RENAISSANCE (1800-1830)**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The Bengal (Hindu) Renaissance (1772-1941) of modern South Asia is one of the most important phenomena in the last two centuries. As it is understood from the term “renaissance”, it refers to a set of social and religious changes in Bengal. The Bengal Renaissance encouraged Hindu believers to rejuvenate the classic Hindu religion in the realms of philosophy, religion, and culture. The Hindu intelligentsias of the time have re-interpreted the Vedas and the Upanishads in a way that suits Hinduism in the modernized and westernized India.

In this chapter, I explore the core dimensions of the socio-religious changes in the Bengal Renaissance focusing on revivalist discourse. So far, many significant studies have been done on this period from a historical perspective. In fact, this study does not deal with a historical perspective. Instead, it focuses only on the revivalist discourses of socio-religious changes in the Bengal.

Bengal Renaissance started in the 1770s and continued until the 1940s in present Kolkata or the old name Calcutta. My findings in this chapter will be useful to compare and analyze with the next second and third chapter of my thesis which deals with the revivalist discourses of Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886). According to David Kopf, who produced an influential work on Indian modernization, and in the preface to his book entitled *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization (1773-1835)*, he stated that the Hindu Renaissance had a strong connection with the Indian reformist movements during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In this chapter of my thesis, I have tried to find the basic elements of the revivalist discourse before Ramakrishna movement was born. I have tried to show how public awareness was built through main associations established by British orientalist and Christian missionaries. Also, with the role of the press; western ideas, cultures, and values have spread throughout Calcutta. Hindu intelligentsia has adopted these ideas and responded in the same way by starting to use their own local press to make Hindu people aware of the new modern western world. Therefore, I intentionally focused on their perception of re-

thinking their traditional customs to see which kind of revivalist discourses they use in their publications. At the end of this chapter, I have shown the transformation of these new ideas into socio-religious movements.

## 1.2. Establishments of the Main Associations in Bengal

Until the 1750s the major workers of the East India Company were merchants and politicians in Bengal and they stayed out of religious controversies.<sup>13</sup> After the 1750s along with the merchants, first orientalist have started to come to British India. It was inspired by the needs of the East India Company (1600-1857) to train a class of British administrators who can learn and study the languages, cultures, and religions of India. British orientalism officially starts after the arrival of an orientalist and merchant, Warren Hasting, (1732–1818), the first and most famous of the British governors general of India. With the encouragement of Hasting, many fresh orientalist have started to come to India to seek their knowledge of the East as well as for financial purpose. See the table of other famous orientalist:

Name	Arrived in India	European Education	Language Mastered
<b>Charles Wilkins</b>	1770	Somerset	Persian, Sanskrit, Bengali
<b>Jonathan Duncan</b>	1772	Secondary	Persian, Bengali, Sanskrit
<b>Nathaniel B. Halhed</b>	1772	Harrow, Oxford	Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian
<b>Robert Chambers</b>	1774	Harrow, Oxford	Persian
<b>William Hunter</b>	1781	Aberdeen, Marishal College	Urdu
<b>John B. Gilchrist</b>	1782	Heriot's Hospital, Edinburgh	Urdu
<b>Henry Colebrooke</b>	1783	Secondary	Sanskrit
<b>Niel B. Edmunstone</b>	1783	Oxford	Persian, Bengali
<b>Henry P. Forster</b>	1783	Oxford	Bengali
<b>William Jones</b>	1783	Harrow, Oxford	Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic

---

<sup>13</sup> Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 45.

**Table 1:** List of the first British Orientalists in India<sup>14</sup>

As it is seen in the table all of them mastered local Indian languages. Naturally, when they have reached to Calcutta they brought most of thoughts and scholarships including some set of values, attitudes, beliefs. Hasting believed that in order to successfully do activities in Bengal there must be Indianization process for British. British people must know how to think and behave like an Easterner. Despite this desire, according to Davit Smith, their main goal was to make them (i.e. Hindus) think and live like Englishman. Thus, the British would easily continue to colonize India.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Hasting had supported William Jones to establish an association called the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) to create consciousness among the English orientalist emigrants and also to encourage further oriental researches. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was, until the nineteenth century, an organization for the elites among the company officials where they regularly meet and discuss oriental issues with 100 members since 1790.<sup>16</sup> This period of British orientalism gave birth to many intellectual, religious and social changes in Bengal that are now known as the Bengal Renaissance.

The main focus of the first Orientalists was to learn Indian local languages. Hasting believed that in order to be successful in India one must love, communicate and learn their languages.<sup>17</sup> This was the main focus of the first orientalist movements in India. They aimed to raise up the attention for revitalizing their own language. Later on, the direction of the revitalization of languages has turned into the revitalization of traditional culture and religious customs of Indian religions.

During the 1800s the Asiatic Society of Bengal association was enlarged by the orientalists and converted to a proper college where there would be a possibility to educate Hindu intelligentsia. The College of Fort William had officially been established in 1800 by

---

<sup>14</sup> To see their enthusiasms on Indian languages and culture check Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. University of California Press, 1969.

<sup>15</sup> David Smith, *Hinduism and Modernity* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 25.

<sup>16</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

the members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.<sup>18</sup> More than a hundred of original works in oriental languages were published by orientalists mostly sponsored by the College of Fort William.

In the college the departments were established for each major language and culture of India, having one professor and a couple of assistant teachers. Department of Persian, Arabic, Hindustani Language, Sanskrit, Bangla, and Vernacular Languages have actively begun to produce linguistic works. All the Departments had a number of pundits who made up the native element of the College staff. In all, twelve Faculties were established by 1805. It was a dream that this college which is so productive in the cultivation of arts and sciences that someday it should turn into the “Oxford of the East”.<sup>19</sup>

Publication facilities have become available in Calcutta after many scientific works on language and culture of India have been done in the college. Very soon, a Christian missionary association Serampore Mission Press would be launched in 1801, the Hindustani Press in 1802, the Persian Press in 1805 and the Sanskrit Press in 1807.<sup>20</sup>

Serampore mission press, later on, has established the Serampore College on behalf of the Baptist Mission Society in 1818 with a view to imparting religious teaching to the local people. One of the objectives of the college was to offer secular higher education as well. Serampore missionaries had the policy to make education accessible for local people in order to have the possibility to invite them to Christianity. But the concern of Orientalists was quite different. The Orientalists propagated that the Western civilized nations (i.e. British society) should first help Asians rediscover the lost roots of their own civilizations.<sup>21</sup>

### **1.3. The Argumentations of Missionaries and Orientalists on Hinduism**

Another face of the coin in British colonialism is that along with the Orientalists the Christian missionaries have also actively established their projects in changing and shaping

---

<sup>18</sup> Rahman, Tariq, “Fort William College”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. accessed online on 20 January 2017.

<sup>19</sup>“Fort William College - Banglapedia,” accessed online January 20, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> See; B. S. Kesavan, *History of Printing And Publishing in India* (National Book Trust, India, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 97.

the mind of Hindu intelligentsia in Bengal. Through presses, colleges and civil associations Serampore missionaries who are located in north Bengal became the most popular amongst all the missionary societies in India.<sup>22</sup>

Serampore Missionaries claimed that as much as people receive education through missionary works in India they would have a tendency to convert to Christianity. According to an evangelical missionary Charles Grant, Indian civilization was barbaric because its religion is humiliating.<sup>23</sup> They claimed that Hinduism in the history was not a proper religion. If it was true religion Hindu people would not convert to Islam and would not give birth to new religions in the history. Therefore, there must be a chance for them to see the great light of Christianity which only can bring wealth and justice to Indian society.

In another opposite side, the Orientalists, who have stronger associations, defended the Hinduism that it produces moral values itself, like other classic world religions.<sup>24</sup> The Orientalists had a more secular view of education compared to missionaries. Therefore, in the first step of their establishments, nothing about Hinduism was mentioned until Hindu pundits had started to contact them. They were rather concerned with language, traditional customs, and daily culture. Later on, with the reviewing of Indian history and tradition the idea of revitalization has emerged as an abstract notion. I think it happened in this way because the first step was systematization of linguistic studies as always it is in the oriental history. In the second step, views on religion and philosophy have been discussed among the oriental scholars.

After the linguistic works, the orientalist gave importance to review classical Hindu sacred books. Because only within this way the Hindus could eliminate the ignorance which surrounds them. According to the orientalist, India lives in Hindu medievalism just as Europe had lived before. They believed that India had the same destiny with Europe. European monks kept their people in darkness for many centuries. By revealing classical sacred books of Christianity (i.e. the Bible) during renaissance period, people obtained enlightenment. With

---

<sup>22</sup> See; E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions* (Cambridge University Press, 1967).

<sup>23</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 134.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5.

the help of free scientific knowledge, works, and education - European societies became the most civilized and developed nations in the world. In the same way the orientalist believed in, if the Hindus get rid of Brahmans who keeps Hinduism in their hands only, the Hindus will have the chance to access scientific knowledge in their own civilization. Therefore, the Hindus must go beyond Brahman's interpretation of the Hindu sacred books like *Vedas*, *Puranas*, and *Upanishads*.<sup>25</sup>

#### **1.4. Press in the Way of Awakening the Hindu Pundits**

With the development of the printing press which is brought by the British, Calcutta Gazette Press in 1783 was first time seen in the history of Bengal.<sup>26</sup> Journalism and newspaper printing have become common until the 1780s. By the emergence of the printing press, significant books became available to anyone.<sup>27</sup>

This event was one of the most important developments in the awakening of the people of Bengal. Another significant issue is that urbanization process had started towards the center of the city. People especially from elite classes have started to move to a center of the urban area where publication and education opportunity were available. Most of the Brahman-Hindu scholars have started to come to Calcutta after the 1790s to attach with new educational institutions functioned by British orientalist.

As we mentioned above, the College of Fort William had a significant role in producing scientific studies. Printing and publishing became available under the college. Just after the functioning of the college the Hindustani Press in 1802, the Persian Press in 1805 and the Sanskrit Press in 1807. Another significant press was established by Serampore missionaries to spread consciousness on the Sanskrit language. With the help of the Serampore press, the *Bible* has been first time published and *Ramayana* was translated by the college.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 102.

<sup>26</sup> See; *The Calcutta Gazette: Or, Oriental Advertiser. Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784[-1832] Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India* (O. T. Cutter, n.d.).

<sup>27</sup> Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

The availability of the press was a great opportunity for the missionaries since they were giving access to Indian local people. The assumption was that in a very short of time the western Christian theology would reach to every single person in the city.<sup>29</sup> In the below list I would like to show how in short period of time press and associations have been established mostly by Indians.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Established in</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Owner</b>
<b>Calcutta School Book Society</b>	1817	Civil Association	Indians
<b>The Hindu College</b>	1817	College	Indians
<b>Calcutta School Society</b>	1818	Civil Association	Indians
<b>Dig Darsan</b>	1818	Magazine	Missionaries
<b>Samachar Darphan</b>	1818	Magazine	Missionaries
<b>Friend of India</b>	1818	Magazine	Missionaries
<b>Sambad Kaumudi (Mirror of the News)</b>	1819	Weekly Newspaper	Indians
<b>Brahmunical Magazine</b>	1821	Magazine	Indians
<b>The Samachar Chandrika</b>	1822	Newspaper	Indians

**Table 2:** The list of first publications and associations in Calcutta. Those owners who are Indians actually encouraged and sponsored by the College of Fort William. This table is made by me through my readings.

These are the only some examples of the printing presses in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It seems like Hindu intelligentsia had many things in their mind to publish in order to save or change the public opinion. Since most of them were graduate students of the college of Fort William the western sciences and the development of European thought were at the center of their discussion. Apparently, some questions have been answered in their mind like why we (Indians) are not as developed as the Europeans, how to make Indian people aware of the modern world, we have to take up our civilization as it is backward now etc.

---

<sup>29</sup> Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Psychology Press, 2004), 79.

## 1.5. Debates on Traditional Hindu Beliefs and Customs

The College of Fort William became a center where Hindu intelligentsias used to gather regularly. Lack of intellectual works have taken the attention of Hindu graduate students and made them mindful of the idea of revitalization. Soon, the students in the college established two important associations:

1. Calcutta School-Book Society (1817)
2. Calcutta School Society (1818)<sup>30</sup>

The aim of the Calcutta School-Book Society was to write and publish textbooks and supply them to schools and madrasas in the country. The membership of the society was open to all, and anyone could become a member on payment of a subscription.<sup>31</sup> Like the Calcutta School-Book Society, Calcutta School Society was also established by the Indians to publish textbooks for schools. The success of this society was that more than two thousands students had been brought under the supervision of the society.

These two significant associations sponsored the translation of the British textbooks into Indian languages and some works in the local languages. Through these associations, thousands of Indian students, for the first time in their life became aware of the western sciences, literature, and history. The works in the local languages, especially in Bengali, became very much adopted by the people. Actually, these two associations became a bridge between local indigenous people and western thought. Therefore, it is true to claim that these associations have played a big role in shaping the modern Indian mind.

These two important local associations, later on, transferred into a college entitled the Hindu College.<sup>32</sup> The financial problem of the Hindu college was solved by the new Calcutta rich Hindu elite families such as Tagore, Debs, Mullicks, and Ghoshal. They encouraged the

---

<sup>30</sup> M. A. Laird, "The Contribution of the Serampore Missionaries to Education in Bengal, 1793-1837," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31, no. 1 (1968): 92-112, 101. see more Basak, N. L. *Origin and Role of the Calcutta School Book Society in Promoting the Cause of Education in India, Especially Vernacular Education in Bengal (1817-1835)*. Bengal, Past and Present 78 (1959): 30-69.

<sup>31</sup> Also, this opportunity had given chance to Muslim intellectuals to be involved with the educational works but in this thesis I do not concern on their intellectual frameworks.

<sup>32</sup> J. M. Steadman, "The Asiatick Society of Bengal," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 4 (1977): 464-83, 473.

managing committee to instruct most of the education in the English language.<sup>33</sup> In this college, the Hindu thought and identity was a front issue although they sought to continue European style of education which was secular education.

Nevertheless, the educational plan of the Hindu college was based on secular Western sciences. Actually, it was a project to transmit western thoughts on Indian society via the local people. In my opinion, although the syllabus of the college's education was secular, they were somehow conservative Hindus. The instructors mostly were Hindu pundits and all students produced articles comparing Western-Hindu Civilizational manners, which provided perspective to see how to make social changes within the Indian society.

### **1.6. Revivalist Discourses in the Magazines**

Now, I would like to mention the revivalist discourses used in the published magazines and newspapers. It is obviously hard to mention all the discourses but at least as a case study I chose the first and foremost debates from the *Dig Darsan Magazine* (1818), Ram Mohun Roy's *Sambad Kaumudi* (1819) and the *Chandrika* (1922).

The target group of the *Dig Darsan* established by the Serampore missionaries largely was Indian youth. It was the first journal spreading western thoughts to the students at the Hindu College. In a paper, the *Dig Darsan* introduced a series on the history of Europe. It brought attention to the superpower of Europe. The Missionaries commented in the journal;

Europe was in a state of barbarism and the center of universal power was in Asia. The seat of Empire has now transferred to Europe where the arts and sciences have attained their highest perfection and from whereby a singular revolution in human affairs, they are now flowing back in those countries, in which they have been almost extinguished.<sup>34</sup>

The ultimate aim of missionaries was to convince the Hindus that now Europe held the power of great civilization, which everyone was to follow. Therefore, Indians too should engage with Western thought by knowing the supreme western religion, which is Christianity. Further, there was news of the world in the journal including local events.

---

<sup>33</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Dig Darsan, "Progress of Events in Europe" 1818, 170.

The second important newspaper established was *The Kaumudi* by Ram Mohun Roy.<sup>35</sup> Roy was the main figure in the Bengal Renaissance with this famous nickname as “the father of modern India”. Roy came to Calcutta in search of a livelihood as many people used to do it.<sup>36</sup> Nothing is clear about his engagement with the College of Fort William but he was nonetheless involved with the intellectual debates on Indian tradition and customs. He was a reformist Hindu believer and influenced by modern Western education.

Roy in his publications took a very strong effort to direct the attention of Hindu elites to the basic pillars of Hinduism. To him, because of Brahman’s suppression, Hinduism has gone to a wrong way. To correct the Hindu belief there must be the idea of only one God like in the Abrahamic religions. The reason behind being undeveloped and uncivilized is to have idolatry in Hinduism. Therefore, he called upon Hindu intelligentsia to discuss this sensitive issue. To take action, Roy published his translation of the Vedanta in 1815. He committed himself to a view of Indian culture as he believed.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Rammohun published his first journal, the bilingual *Brahminical Magazine* (1821), for the expressed purpose of defending his concept of monotheistic Hinduism against the contrary views of the Serampore missionaries.<sup>38</sup> As David Kopf states Roy most probably was influenced by his knowledge of Islam because he knew Persian very well and even wrote a book in the Persian language before this magazine.

Roy believed that image worship practiced in India was a false practice.<sup>39</sup> He stated that since Hindu belief is one of the true religions, how come there should be idolatry within it? Roy has translated the Vedanta into Bengali local language to make Hindus be aware of their original religion.<sup>40</sup> Roy found that the reason behind the wrong pattern of Hinduism is that knowledge and real scholarships have not been produced by its religious institutions. Indeed,

---

<sup>35</sup> Amit Sen, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (People’s Publishing House, 1946), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Pulak Narayan Dhar, “Bengal Renaissance: A Study in Social Contradictions,” *Social Scientist* 15, no. 1 (1987): 26–45, 32.

<sup>37</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 199.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Amit Sen, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (People’s Publishing House, 1946), 4.

though these western scholars mentioned the unity of the supreme God, such concept already existed in the Hindu belief.<sup>41</sup> However, it has been covered by misinterpretations.

Another sensitive issue that Roy found was the very regressive custom of *Sati* (known as widow burning or self-immolation).<sup>42</sup> *Sati* literally means true or virtuous wife. According to Hindu traditional belief when husband dies, his wife in order to show her faithful devotion to her husband - sacrifices herself with her husband which means she is burned with her husband's body. It was never a universal Hindu practice and mostly practiced by high-caste Hindu Brahmins. He strongly argued that *sati* should not exist any longer in the society.

Another serious debate was on a large number of Gods and goddesses in Hinduism. Roy insistently wrote necessarily there must be a monotheistic system for Hinduism.<sup>43</sup> Even the backwardness of the Hindu society is because of the existence of innumerable Gods. Roy maintained that many daily Hindu practiced in the present day indeed does not exist in the true content of the sacred books. For instance, nothing authorizes the burning of widows.<sup>44</sup> The caste system is also misused in Hinduism as Roy claims and it must be abolished.

All these attacks of Roy have brought a big attention to Hindu intelligentsia to rethink the pillars of the Hinduism. By the early 1820s, Roy was engaged in an intellectual conflict on two fronts. He was criticized by the traditionalists of the Bengal, he was also attacked by the Europeans as well, because of his cultural attitudes.<sup>45</sup> Since he was a critic of the traditional Hinduism conservative Hindu pundits were attacking him, and when he defended a new form of Hinduism, missionaries used to attack him.

As a result of his reformist ideas, eventually, he and his followers founded Brahma Samaj (Society of God).<sup>46</sup> Roy paid much attention to the idea of Vedic Golden age and stated

---

<sup>41</sup> Brian A. Hatcher, "Remembering Rammohan: An Essay on the (Re-)emergence of Modern Hinduism," *History of Religions* 46, no. 1 (2006): 50–80, 57

<sup>42</sup> W. J. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 292.

<sup>43</sup> Brian A. Hatcher, "Remembering Rammohan: An Essay on the (Re-)emergence of Modern Hinduism," *History of Religions* 46, no. 1 (2006): 50–80, 57.

<sup>44</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 200.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>46</sup> Brian A. Hatcher, "Remembering Rammohan: An Essay on the (Re-)emergence of Modern Hinduism" *History of Religions* 46, no. 1 (2006): 50–80, 57.

that it must be the goal of the new reformed movement.<sup>47</sup> He believed that Vedic knowledge would bring real religious thought for Hindus.

A group of conservative Hindu scholars had opposed Roy's approach on traditional Hinduism and published newspaper *Samachar Chandrika* (1822). They believed that the moral and cultural values that Hindus already have are sufficient to be a perfect religion. *The Chandrika* intellectuals looked upon their own history in a conservative way. For instance, one of the Hindu scholars among the conservatives Radhakant Deb claimed that *sati* practice is a symbol of the classic Hinduism and it shows the loyalty of the wife to her husband. A series in the journal was established by the two opposite groups in the following years. Like Brahmo Samaj movement, with the guide of Deb, the conservatives have established a Hindu society called "Dharma Sabha" in the 1830s.<sup>48</sup>

Another anti-reformist Sanskrit scholar Mrityunjay Vidyalankar had opposed Roy's attack on idolatry. Mrityunjay emphasized on the sacred book *Puranas* and claimed that there is no contradiction between the teachings of *Vedas* and *Puranas*. He responded to Roy that of course the statue is not a God, it is only a symbol of God. God can be in anywhere in any time but in order to concentrate on his Divinity, there must be some material as a sign. All the deities and statues are the representative of one true God.<sup>49</sup> According to Mrityunjay, image worship can exist in the society.

### **1.7. Young Bengal Movement: Three Main Ideologies**

From 1818s until the 1830s there was a period where the Hindu intelligentsia underwent an identity crisis. This Hindu intellectual movement, known as the Young Bengal movement - had various approaches in terms of explaining their cultural identity. As far as I see there are three main groups in the Young Bengal movement.

The first group was gathered around Henry Louis Vivian Derozio at Hindu college. Derozio was the instructor of English language between 1828 and 1831. He used to encourage

---

<sup>47</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 201.

<sup>48</sup> See; Shail Mayaram, "Hindu and Islamic Transnational Religious Movements" *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 1 (2004): 80–88.

<sup>49</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 207.

his students to think in a rational way on Hindu tradition and adopt a western scientific method for their future.<sup>50</sup> They had a vision of disseminating secular or non-religious rationalism which is built on Godless education.<sup>51</sup> He and his disciples were very keen to have a connection with westerners whether they are missionaries or orientalist. I refer to this group as “Westerners”.

Another group gathered around Roy’s idea of reformation of Hindu culture but still keeping their Hindu identity. This group openly opposed irrational customs of Hindu tradition such as *sati*, *idolatry*, and *caste* division. Roy and his fellows established a religious movement called Brahma Samaj in 1828 in order to have a consciousness to trim Hindu religious thought.<sup>52</sup> I refer to this group as “Reformists”.

Those intellectuals who were very much connected to Hindu identity have gathered and opposed most of the reformist ideas proposed by the Derozions or Roy’s followers. They claimed abolishing of *sati* is disrespectful action against Hindu values. This practice might be seen inhuman but still, it does not give authority to foreigners (British) to abolish one of the customs of the Hindus moral values. Practice of Sati was officially banned in 1829 by the Governor General Lord William Bentinck. By December 1830, the older generation of the intelligentsia had institutionalized their protest against Bentinck by organizing what they called the *Dharma Sabha*.<sup>53</sup> In the context of the cultural issues that brought it into existence, the Dharma Sabha may best be defined as a society in defense of the Hindu way of life or culture. I refer to this group as “Conservatives”.

## 1.8. Conclusion

My concluding remarks are the general view of my findings in this chapter. Modernization processes have influenced most of the societies in the world and there has been remarkable influence of modernization upon these societies. Every society did not respond to

---

<sup>50</sup> Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Psychology Press, 2004), 82.

<sup>51</sup> Pulak Narayan Dhar, “Bengal Renaissance: A Study in Social Contradictions” *Social Scientist* 15, no. 1 (1987): 26–45, 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Psychology Press, 2004), p.82.

modernity in the same way but mostly the degree of the influence more or less was the same. The Indian case was quite different from other societies. They directly had connections with western thought through British colonialism. These direct connections pushed the Hindu intellectuals into two opposite positions where there is a fight between the old and new, conservative orthodoxy and reformation of the Hindu identity, medievalism, and modernity.<sup>54</sup>

The Orientalists and the missionaries played a significant role in shaping the modern Indian mind. They intentionally named the period of social religious change as “renaissance” because they wanted to examine the eastern experience of the Renaissance on Indian so-called “uncivilized society”. Ram Mohun Roy once said, “I began to think that something similar to the European Renaissance might have taken place here in India.”<sup>55</sup> It shows that Indian man also internalizes the idea of renaissance which is initially reformism but later on becomes revivalism. To me, reformism is bringing something new into the already existing one, but revivalism is creating a new from the already existing one.

The discourse of the renaissance was still fresh when British orientalists had published their studies. Through interactions, magazines, and newspapers the Hindus has encountered the western way of thinking and culture. They assisted modern Bengali intelligentsia in terms of formation of peoples’ life. They began systemizing local languages, training schools, establishing colleges and associations, publishing magazines, journals, and newspapers. The first libraries were established by them and they taught European medicine.

The British rulers in India chose Calcutta as their capital metropolis city, where the economic and intellectual debates were carried out in the following decades. When most of the orientalists had reached Calcutta, no institutions or organizations were established yet. They have had regular meetings and serious scientific works on the Indian local languages and histories. It was their dream to build an eastern civilization according to their desire and plan. Therefore, initially, they have encouraged the Hindus to rethink on their roots. Eventually, they openly advocated the idea of reformation of traditional culture and belief.

---

<sup>54</sup> Sajal Nag, “Modernity and Its Adversaries: Michael Madhusudan, Formation of the Hindu ‘Self’ and the Politics of Othering in 19th Century India” *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 5 (2007): 429–36, 429.

<sup>55</sup> David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (University of California Press, 1969), 3.

Publications and printing presses have helped them to reach every corner of the city. In this step, the missionaries have benefited from such an opportunity. The orientalist mostly were secular-minded. They emphasized scientific knowledge, enlightenment, and a developed civilization. On the other hand, the missionaries emphasized the idea of a great civilization reflecting the Christian world, as opposed to the perceived barbarism of Hinduism in comparison to western thought.

Availability of press has instantly influenced the modern Indian mind. Intellectual debates were carried on through the magazines and newspapers. Especially the associations established by the Indians in the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century played a major role to enable broad access to basic knowledge.

*Dig Darsan* was the first journal published by the missionaries which introduced Western thoughts and history in the local languages. Through the comparison of the history of Europe with that of India, it attempted to provide a perspective for Indians to rediscover their identity. Roy, in his newspaper, announced a series of new thoughts on traditional Hindu customs. He attacked the practice of sati, the caste system and the Hindu way of polytheism. He established the first reformist modern Hindu movement, the Brahmo Samaj. Very soon, intellectual debates started among the young Bengali groups. A group of conservative Hindu scholars reacted against Roy's ideas in the newspaper *Samachar Chandrika* and established a conservative Hindu society called *Dharma Sabha*. Another anti-reformist Sanskrit scholar Mrityunjay Vidyalankar opposed Roy's claims on monotheism. He believed polytheism is not a problematic issue in Hinduism.

These conflicts among the intellectuals produced three major groups, where all of them were named under the umbrella of the Young Bengal Movement. The first group, the "westerners" were organized under the leadership of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio at Hindu college. The second group, the "reformists" - gathered around the teachings of Ram Mohun Roy. The third group which is known as the "conservatives" were guided by Radhakant Deb.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA (1836-1886)

This chapter contains an overview of his life. Knowing Ramakrishna's life would definitely give us many ideas to understand his revivalist discourse. One problem I have faced during searching on his life is it was difficult to obtain the true story of his life. There are many exaggerated stories about his life, therefore I have tried to eliminate them and use trustworthy references. The most trusted sources I came across were that by Max Muller who was a Indologist scientist, very well known in Germany in the field of South Asian Studies. While Muller wrote his book Swami Vivekananda was still alive. Muller had personally contacted him via letters and asked him to give information about Ramakrishna's life as much as possible. Therefore his unique connection makes his words more objective. Other sources like Ramakrishna himself, I would say, R. Rolland, Swami Tapasyananda, and J. N. Farquhar are still the most relevant sources for those who wants to study Ramakrishna's life and teachings.

### 2.1. Childhood

About the birthday of Ramakrishna there was bit confusion between Farquhar and Muller. In the book of Muller on Ramakrishna, his birthday was mentioned on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1836 but later on, Farquhar clarified according to Indian local evidence that his birth date as 18<sup>th</sup> February in 1836. However, this is not a big issue. Ramakrishna's father, Khudiram Chattopadhyata, who was from a Brahman family, used to live in the village of Dereypore in district Hooghly of West Bengal in poor condition.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the village was mostly composing of low caste families except for the Chattopadhyata family.

While he was in the village in 1824, Khudiram was forced by his landlord to become a false witness against a neighbor in the court but he refused this unjust action. So, the landlord brought a false case against him and deprived him of all his property.<sup>57</sup> Because of this reason

---

<sup>56</sup> Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna; Life and Teachings* (Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda," in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 3.

he had to migrate to another village called Kamarpukur in the same district with losing all properties. In this village, there were rice-fields, tall palms, royal banyans, a few lakes, and two cremation grounds. Also, a highway passed via the village to the famous temple of Jagannath at Puri. The villagers were mostly farmers, craftsmen and also passengers who are on the way to go holy areas and pilgrims.<sup>58</sup> In that village or nearby used to happen festivals like singing religious hymns celebrating sacred days of Hinduism.

Khudiram himself was a very religious man. Despite all bad conditions he went on a heavy pilgrimage of more than 1500 miles on foot to distant Rameswaram in the south India in 1824. Ramakrishna's description of his parents would give us some idea about his parent's religious attitudes. He said:

My mother was the personification of rectitude and gentleness. She did not know much about the ways of the world; innocent of the art of concealment, she would say what was in her mind. People loved her for her open-heartedness. My father, an orthodox Brahmin, never accepted gifts from Sudras. He spent much of his time in worship and meditation, and in repeating God's name and chanting His glories. Whenever in his daily prayers he invoked the Goddess Gayatri, his chest flushed and tears rolled down his cheeks. He spent his leisure hours making garland for the family Deity, Raghuvir.<sup>59</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna had a very pious family. His father had another pilgrimage which is all about Ramakrishna's story. At the age of sixty, Khudiram went on a pilgrimage to Gaya in 1835. According to the story while in this holy temple at night in his dream Lord Vishnu appeared and told him to be born as his son.<sup>60</sup> This was the divine commandment from Vishnu Deity of that temple as it is said. According to other sayings that about the same time Khudiram's wife had a similar dream that she had been carrying a God while she was pregnant.<sup>61</sup> In 1836, February 18, the child was born. Initially, his name was given by his father as "Gadadhar". Gadadhar means the "Bearer of the Mace", an epithet of Lord Vishnu.

In his childhood, according to Ramakrishna's and his village neighbors' sayings, he was full of fun and life, charming and restless boy remembered with a smile always. No one was

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, *Sri Ramakrishna on Himself* (Advaita Ashram, 2014), 10.

<sup>61</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, First Published in 1929 (Advaita Ashrama, 2012), 6.

aware of his spiritual power that someday he will be revealed the inspirations by the Lords.<sup>62</sup> In his childhood, he was the darling of the whole village; he was a healthy, energetic and social person. About himself he told:

During my younger days, the men and women of Kamarpukur were equally fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate other people's gestures and conversation, and I used to entertain them that way. The women would put aside things for me to eat. No one distrusted me. Everyone took me in as one of the family.<sup>63</sup>

Also, Gadadhar used to memorize all religious songs, dramas and ritual actions. Especially he was an expert on singing religious songs with nice voice and drew of images of Gods. He went to school but his formal education did not progress much because he was naturally artistic and did not like very formal and general education. Later on, he opposed this kind of education and called it as "bread-winning education".<sup>64</sup>

At the age of seven, Gadadhar lost his father. The death of his father had a tremendous effect on his life. He started to think on death and he gave more attention hearing stories from Puranas. And he became interested in talking to monks and pious pilgrims who would stop at Kamarpukur on their way to Puri. This way, he was able to observe them and understand how to reach a higher level of meditation and worship.

## **2.2. Some Signs of Spiritual Journey**

Gadadhar's experience with the spiritual world was quite unique. At the age of six or seven happened an ecstasy to him. According to story one day, while he was walking by carrying a balk of a paddy field, the sky was very clear and blue; he saw a mass of sombre rain clouds overspreading the sky and flight of white cranes speeding across that background. With this amazing view young Gadadhar reached a spiritual level that he could not speak but just joy with the beauty of nature, immediately he lost all external consciousness.<sup>65</sup> It is not

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, *Sri Ramakrishna on Himself* (Advaita Ashram, 2014), 11.

<sup>64</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda," in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 20.

<sup>65</sup> F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*, First Published in 1898 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014), 34.

known how many hours he stayed in that mood. When he woke up he was at home. Most probably someone on the way saw him and carried him home. It was his first ecstasies that he tasted something from the spiritual world.

In the village, he was a beloved child and most of the women used to take him with them when they go to pilgrimages. On the journey, he used to sing religious songs and experiencing worshipping the goddess. Approximately after two years of the first ecstasy, he had the second ecstasy. According to the story, in a religious festival which is dedicated to the worship of Siva, a dramatic play was arranged. The actor of that drama somehow did not show up that night and the role was given to Gadadhar. While his friends were dressing him for the role suddenly the temperature of his body changed and he became an absent-minded. He went on stage slowly and saw the image of Siva. During the play, people realized that he was lost in meditation and unconsciously tears coming from his eyes. The play was stopped because of this event and Gadadhar stayed in that mood till morning.<sup>66</sup>

### **2.3. Coming to Calcutta (Kolkata)**

Gadadhar's spiritual experiences kept him away from the school. He grew up in this way till he was seventeen. Soon, his elder brother required him to go with him to Calcutta in order to manage the financial conditions of the family. At the age of sixteen, Gadadhar went to Calcutta with his elder brother, Ramkumar, in 1852. Ramkumar becomes a priest at a Hindu temple and took up the responsibility of running a Sanskrit school. In Calcutta, Gadadhar continued his journey in the spiritual world. He spent most of his time worshipping, reciting religious songs. This situation must have wondered his elder brother that he insisted on pursuing his education, but he replied "I do not care for this bread-winning education"<sup>67</sup> He preferred searching for wisdom which illuminated the heart and gave spiritual satisfaction above all worldly desires. Not only this anomalous attitude, also the way of Gadadhar's

---

<sup>66</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda," in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), p.5.

<sup>67</sup> Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna; Life and Teachings* (Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2014), 12.

worshipping made his elder brother worries. But, he accepted Gadadhar the way he was, because presumably, he wanted him to stay in the city and get used to it.

To see from the socio-economic perspective it is fair to say that the attraction of metropolis city, Calcutta, captured the attention of Ramkumar. Urbanization process speeded up mostly after the 1850s in Bengal. When they came to Calcutta, Gadadhar witnessed a totally new environment which was different from the village, Kamarpukur. Culture, dresses, buildings, people looked totally different from the rural area. People were different from the simple and pious villagers and the monks which he enjoyed to serve did not exist in the city.

As I mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis the Hindu society had undergone a set of social-religious changes in the last decades. The British rulers replaced the Mughal empire and new metropolises were created by the British governors. Railway system, telegram, technological developments, printing press, newspapers, educational institutions, industry and migrations, urbanization process, and huge trade etc. all of them have changed the face of Calcutta in the early decades of 19th century. Superstitious practices dominated the religious life and more importantly, secular western education shaped the way of thinking and living of traditional life. Christian missionaries had adopted a position against Hindu religion claiming that only Christianity would bring happiness to Hindus in modern life, also advertising the bad aspects and history of Hinduism such as sati, caste system, barbarism, and irrational way of thinking.

Eventually, a serious number of Hindu intellectuals who were educated in the city started to ask questions on the existence of God, gods and goddesses. They came to believe that there was no metaphysical truth. The only truth is the one which comes through our senses and experiences. God and religion were illusions of the traditional history. So atheism and agnosticism became popular among the Indian youth. Consequently, many customs, rituals, and beliefs were changed. The caste system was questioned, laws about food were removed, and early marriage was abolished by some Hindu groups. As Ramakrishna would say the soul of India was killed and immediately it needed a spiritual awakening.

#### **2.4. As a Priest at Kali Temple**

After three years of their living in Calcutta, a new temple established and dedicated to goddess Kali at Dakshineswar founded by a rich and pious lady named Rani Rasmani who was from sudra caste (low caste). This temple was the place where Ramakrishna reached to

the highest level of his spiritual journey in the following decades. There is a story about the establishment of this famous temple. According to the story while Rani Rasmani was on a pilgrimage to the holy city Varanasi in a dream she was ordered by God Kali to make a temple. Due this dream she afforded to build this temple which stands directly on the east bank of the Ganges and she was looking for a Brahman priest who could serve in this temple. Ramkumar was invited to be the one of the priests of the temple. He eventually left the Sanskrit school and shifted to the temple. Initially, Ramakrishna did not accept to go with Ramkumar because of the caste level of Rasmani.<sup>68</sup> Later on due to her sincere belief, Ramakrishna accepted to be a formal assistant priest of the temple in 1855.

Ramakrishna accepted the offer and started to live in the temple. Day by day he underwent into a state of deep concentration and ecstasy. Unlike other priests, who only follow a certain type of worship, he would sing an inspiring song for hours with a devotional abandon. Another feature of his spiritual journey is spending hours in meditation outside in the night.

Ramakrishna's extreme devotion of worship and meditation made people think that he was mad. Ramakrishna gradually began to approach the image of Kali as it was a living person. Muller records;

He now began to look upon the image of Kali as his mother and the mother of the universe. He believed it to be living and breathing and taking food out of his hand. After the regular forms of worship, he would sit there for hours and hours, singing hymns and talking and praying to her as a child to his mother, till he lost all consciousness of the outward world.<sup>69</sup>

With this mood, he spent days and days after. He would get angry when someone came to join his worship to the mother Kali with worldly material thoughts. He believed that the inside temple nothing should be allowed to disturb spiritual thought. To Ramakrishna, there are three pangs of hunger that human beings face. First one is the hunger of stomach, second is the hunger of the sex and the third one is the hunger of the heart. Worldly-minded men only

---

<sup>68</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda," in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 10.

<sup>69</sup> F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*, First Published in 1898 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014), 36.

can full fill the first and second as animals can do, but the third one is almost absent.<sup>70</sup> Therefore he focuses on the third hunger which other people are not aware of it much. Through worship of Kali, meditations and spiritual journey Ramakrishna made efforts to fulfill this hunger.

His relation with Kali turns into the relation of a child and mother. Sometimes, he would act like a child and cry in front of the image of Kali saying “Art thou true, Mother, or is it all fiction- mere poetry without any reality? If Thou exist, why do I not see Thee? Is religion a mere fantasy and art Thou only a figment of man’s imagination?”<sup>71</sup>

He believed that God could be seen. If a man was not able to see God, it implied that there was something wrong with the devotion. He would re-meditate for long hours outside of the temple in a silent night meditation. Spending days and nights without food and sleep but still Ramakrishna was not able to see God. This situation disappointed him a lot. Ramakrishna, later on, describes this issue:

Life seemed to be not worth living. Suddenly my glance fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother’s temple. I determined to put an end to my life. When I jumped up like a madman and seized it, suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself. The buildings with their different parts, the temple, and everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead, I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent, ocean of Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides, with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious. What was happening in the outside world I did not know; but within me, there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother.<sup>72</sup>

This very complicated issue is debatable. Not only in this case, Ramakrishna would continue his claim until the end of his life. This issue would be the most questioned point when people gather around him. Everyone asked him how to see God as he did. Then, he would instruct them according to his unique experience in the religious world. Now, listen from a western scholar about Ramakrishna’s claim of seeing God. Rolland says:

---

<sup>70</sup> Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna; Life and Teachings* (Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2014), 21.

<sup>71</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, “Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda,” in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 13.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

My own view, if I may be pardoned the presumption, is that he saw nothing, but that he was aware of Her all-permeating presence. He called the Ocean by Her name. His experience was like a dream, to give a lesser example, wherein without the slightest feeling of incongruity, the mind attaches the name of the being filling its thoughts to quite to quite a different form; the object of our love is in everything; all forms are but its cloak.<sup>73</sup>

After this significant event, Ramakrishna continued to see Kali as living being more and more. During talking, sleeping, walking, eating or anything he would think as if the image of Kali is with him. He had begun to think that the spirit of Kali was around him everywhere. One day Ramakrishna fed a cat with the food that was supposed to be offered to Kali. As it is well known there are certain rules about the offered food. When the manager of the temple saw this incident he immediately reported to the incharge of the temple. Then, Ramakrishna was asked to describe the incident. He said:

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kālī temple that it was she who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness - all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss - the Bliss of God. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kālī temple, but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this was the Divine Mother - even the cat.<sup>74</sup>

Later on, Mathur Babu responded to the manager saying that let him do whatever he wished. This kind of experiences shows that he increased the dosage of his spiritual journey. After a period of time, he would ask to get knowledge of everything regarding nature, human being, Goddess, and world only from Kali.<sup>75</sup>

After some period of time, his body had lost power because of long meditations, fast and sleepless. His abnormal spiritual experiences made people around him to worry. Soon, his mother and his younger brother came to Calcutta to take him to the village in 1859 for a while to rest even if possible to offer him the idea of marriage which could bring him to the world.

---

<sup>73</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, First Published in 1929 (Advaita Ashrama, 2012), 15.

<sup>74</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda," in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 15.

<sup>75</sup> F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*, First Published in 1898 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014), 41.

They became very happy to see that Ramakrishna welcomed the idea of marriage. When he was taken his village he was twenty years old. His family finally found a girl who was five years of age and lives in a village nearby Kamarpukur. As it is known in Indian local culture the child marriage was happening during that time which makes us surprise today. They were married in 1859. Later on, his wife who will be named Sri Sarada Devi and will be worshiped as “divine mother” by his disciples. Almost a year has passed after his marriage than he came back to the temple to continue his spiritual journey. Now, he aims to devote himself more in worshipping and meditation. Even his friends tried to take him to a famous physician in Calcutta to get him cured of his madness. But the doctor told them all treatments are vain for him because he is in a state of divine inebriation and that his condition was not curable by medicines.<sup>76</sup>

Ramakrishna was constructing his philosophy of God, Nature, self, society, and the spiritual world those days in the temple by living alone, meditating, thinking only on these issues. For instance, his well-known attitude towards worldly things actually originated his religious experiences like following quotes in Muller’s work:

I would sit by the Ganges, with some gold and silver coins and heap of rubbish by my side, and taking some coins in my right hand and a handful of rubbish in the left, I would tell my soul, My soul! this is what the world calls money, impressed with the queen’s face. It has the power of bringing you rice and vegetables, of feeding the poor, of building houses and doing all that the world calls great, but it can never help thee to realize the ever-existent knowledge and bliss, the Brahman. Regard it, therefore, as rubbish.<sup>77</sup>

In his daily life at the temple he would continue to meditate in order to see God in every nature. He had experienced sleeplessness and a burning sensation all over the body and spiritual journey restarted. When he sat for a meditation he would get disconnected from the world, nothing would disturb him.

## **2.5. His Spiritual Guides**

In 1861, a very significant event happened in Ramakrishna’s life. He had two important spiritual guides to reach a higher state of spiritual journey. A Brahmin woman nun

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 42.

(sannyasin), who was born in Bengal, slightly over fifty years old, came to Dakshineswar to meet Ramakrishna. She was the first person who understood Ramakrishna's situation and she tried to help him. She knew how to practice yoga, breathing exercises, developing supernatural powers, connect both body and mind and all intellectual drill. She also very well knew the book Tantras, old manuals written for the worship of Kali.<sup>78</sup> One she said him "My son, everyone in this world is mad. Some are mad for money, some for creature comforts, some for name and fame; and you are mad at God."<sup>79</sup>

She transformed all her experiences to Ramakrishna. She realized that the experience that Ramakrishna is having is only possible if someone can be an Incarnation of God. She asked the manager of the temple, Mathur, to arrange a meeting and invite pundits in order to openly proclaim that Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God.<sup>80</sup> The meeting conducted in front of the temple. The declaration was welcomed well by the pundits such as Gauri and Vaishnavacharan, the leader if the Vaishnava society. About a year later she left the temple and never was seen again.

In 1864, another important sannyasin called Totapuri who is known as "naked man" came to Dakshineswar to meet Ramakrishna. He was a philosopher, devoted person to Vedanta and experienced spiritual journey over forty years. Totapuri was aware of Ramakrishna's religious power. He aimed to teach him how to realize the unity. After three days of practicing yogas Ramakrishna reached the highest stage called the Nirvikalpa stage of Samadhi where there was no longer any perception of a subject. He was shocked with speed development of Ramakrishna. He said "Is it possible that he has attained in a single day what it took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve? Great God! It is nothing short of a miracle!"<sup>81</sup> Totapuri was a sannyasin who taught people the truth by traveling and never wished to stay more than three days stayed at the temple eleven months for the sake of Ramakrishna. He wished to learn from the great Master, Ramakrishna.

---

<sup>78</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 190.

<sup>79</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda," in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 18.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 29.

After the departure of Totapuri towards the end of 1866, Ramakrishna remained in that state of cataleptic ecstasy for more than six months, to merge his identity with the absolute.<sup>82</sup> Ramakrishna still was not satisfied with all ecstasies. He was eager to learn different experiences of realization of God. In this point Muller says “whenever he wished to learn and practice the doctrines of any faith, he always found a good and learned man of that faith coming to him and advising him how to do it. This is one out of many wonderful things that happened in his life.”<sup>83</sup>

## 2.6. His Interests in Other Religions and Sects

In his state of cataleptic ecstasy, he had started pay attention to the God Ramlala, the Divine Child. His heart became filled with the motherly tenderness. He began to regard himself as a woman. His way of speech changed, dressed like women and freely behaved with ladies such some ladies some of them from Mathur’s family.<sup>84</sup> Later on, when he started to worship Hanuman the Monkey God, he felt to behave like a monkey jumping over the place to place and acting like them.<sup>85</sup>

Day by day, his fame spread in the neighborhood and many souls started to visit him at the temple to satisfy their spiritual hunger. Because of the flow of visitors, Mathur arranged a room inside the temple for welcoming them. Not only Hindus, Sikhs some Christians and Muslims also came to see him. One day, Ramakrishna saw a humble Mussulman Sufi and realized his sincere submission to God. He asked him to stay with for some days to discuss religious matters. After some days the other priests in the temple were shocked because Ramakrishna left worshipping Kali, dressed like a Mussulman, recite the name of Allah, prayed namaz. He totally forgot Hindu gods and goddesses. He shifted to outside of the temple. The patron of the temple, Mathur Babu, begged him to desist but he did not. After

---

<sup>82</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, First Published in 1929 (Advaita Ashrama, 2012), 45.

<sup>83</sup> F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*, First Published in 1898 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014), 50.

<sup>84</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, “Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda,” in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 24.

<sup>85</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, First Published in 1929 (Advaita Ashrama, 2012), 18.

some time as he said he realized the Mussulman God “the brahman with attributes. Now, the river of Islam had led him back to the ocean of absolute.”<sup>86</sup>

In 1874, after passing eight years in the temple now he began to search on Christianity. One of his devotees, Sambhu Charan Mallick, read the Bible to him. Ramakrishna was fascinated by the teachings of Jesus after hearing the Bible.

Sri Ramakrishna found his identity merging with the Christ as it was merged with the Kāli, Rāmā, Hanuman, Rādhā, Krishna, Brahman, Prophet Mohammed and Buddha. Ramakrishna again has gone into Samadhi and communed with the Brahman attributes.<sup>87</sup> So he experienced the sense of Christianity as well. Till the end of his life, he believed that Jesus was an incarnation of God like Buddha and Krishna and him as his disciples believed in.

We see his same attitude towards Buddha. According to evidence, he has not acted like Buddha but he believed Buddha was an incarnation of God and accepted his divinity. In the case of Jainism, he greatly respected the founders, the Tirthankaras and accepted him as true doctrine. His opinion on Sikhism was also positive. He respected the ten gurus of Sikhism.<sup>88</sup>

About his experiences that he had with other religions and sects he said while he was preaching to his devotees as follows:

I have practiced all religions - Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity - and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look, I see men quarreling in the name of religion - Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmōs, Vaishnavās, and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Śiva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well - the same Rāmā with a thousand names. A lake has several Ghāts. At one, the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it 'Jal'; at another, the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it 'pāni'. At a third, the Christians call it 'water'.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>87</sup> Swāmi Nikhilānanda, “Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda,” in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974), 34.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 47.

In 1868, Mathur Babu and Ramakrishna with more than one hundred persons went to a pilgrimage to sacred places in northern India. This trip is very important for my study because it shows his implementation of ideas towards people outside of a sacred temple. In this pilgrimage, he took the opportunity to not only seeing temples but also contacting with many religious people belong to different culture and sects, met many sannyasins who live in those places, famous religious leaders such as Trailanga Swami of Benares and Ganga Mata of Brindabana.<sup>90</sup> In this long trip he saw the socio-economic condition of the outward world. Especially he had very much pity on people who lived in villages and did not have basic things in their life. He requested Mathur Babu to feed all the villagers and provide some clothes.<sup>91</sup> To him, the service of man is exactly like worship of God. This moral principle, later on, will be one of the basic aims of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission through affording of Vivekananda. After two years he went on a pilgrimage to Nadia to fulfill his spiritual deep trance.

In 1872, his wife who aged now eighteen came to Dakshineswar to see her husband as she heard that Ramakrishna became a great religious man. She wanted to learn her fate from him. When she reached the temple Ramakrishna welcomed her very kindly but told her that he cannot receive her as a wife anymore since he devoted himself to high religious state. Ramakrishna approached her as a representative of his mother, the Goddess Kali, offered her flowers, worshiped her and asked her blessings. She told her that she does not want anything but just to learn how to realize God and also to become one of his personal devotees who can cook his meals and take care of his health and comfort.<sup>92</sup> Later on, she will be one of the most significant figures in creating the community of Ramakrishna and spiritual leader of young lady disciples.

## **2.7. Recognition of His Teachings by People**

Meanwhile, crowds of men and women began to increase daily. Now, a new phase started in Ramakrishna's life. He felt to transform whatever experiences he had to give to the

---

<sup>90</sup> F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*, First Published in 1898 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014), 54.

<sup>91</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, First Published in 1929 (Advaita Ashrama, 2012), 56.

<sup>92</sup> F. Max Muller, *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*, First Published in 1898 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014), 52.

world in order to salvage the soul of humanity. Rather than affording deep yoga and ecstasy, he had started to teach people who regularly visited him and wished to become his devotee. He would sit hours and hours preaching them about salvation, God, inspiration, soul, and spiritual experiences. Once he said, “I would suffer willingly all sorts of bodily pains, and death also, a hundred thousand times, if so doing I could bring one single soul to freedom and salvation.”<sup>93</sup>

As I mentioned in the first chapter of my thesis the Brahma Samaj movement which is representative of reformism which was established by Rammohun Roy, now, it was under control of leader Keshab C. Sen. Sen was the idol of young Bengal in those days. He was highly westernized in his thoughts and had acritical view of Hindu social system and modes of worship. In his adulthood, he visited England in 1870 and saw the western world. Keshab C. Sen was an intellectual writer of books and magazine articles and his fame used to spread across Bengal even in England. He believed in the reformation of Hinduism and also considered himself as a disciple of Christ. For the first time when they met in 1874 at the temple, Keshab C. Sen became a great admirer of Ramakrishna. He was very much influenced by Ramakrishna’s personality and thoughts. He started to visit him regularly to get to know about his religious experiences and the goddess Kali.

It was a turning point that after several meetings when Keshab C. Sen wrote about Ramakrishna in the magazine articles referring to his sayings and his interesting religious experiences. Soon, his writing spread all over Bengal. Soon, many intellectual admirers of Ramakrishna gathered such as Jadu Mallick, Maharaj Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Kristodas Pal, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Sivanath Sastri, Vijay Krishna Goswami, Devendra Nath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Viswanath Upadyaya, and Aswin Kumar Dutt.<sup>94</sup>

Those mentioned names were from the Bengal intellectuals. The number of people who wished to become his devotee and disciple and live at his service increased day by day. At this point, there were two groups of people. The first group was that of elderly people who were already married and settled down their life such as Ramachandra Datta, Manmohan

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>94</sup> Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna; Life and Teachings* (Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2014), 123.

Mitra, Surendra Nath Mitra, Kedar Nath Chatterji, Suresh Chandra Datta, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Nag Mahashay and Mahendra Nath Gupta and women like Gopaler-Ma, and Gouri-Ma.<sup>95</sup>

Another group was comprised of young disciples who established the official organization on the basis of the beliefs of Ramakrishna. Among the young disciples, Swami Vivekananda is the most famous one. He became a world-teacher spreading his Master's belief. He was a rationalist, knowing science and philosophy. After the death of his master, he has gone to America to give a speech on the behalf of Hinduism in the World Religions Parliament in 1893. His fame spread throughout the world and today he was known as the father of modern Hinduism in India and also the founder of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In the third chapter of this thesis, I shall explain the details of his life and thoughts. Other significant disciples were Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal), Swami Premanananda (Baburam), Swami Yogananda (Yogen), Swami Nirranjananda (Nirranjan), Swami Turiyananda (Hari), Swami Shivananda (Tarak), Swami Ramakrishnananda (Sasi), Swami Abhedananda (Kali), Swami Trigunatitananda (Sarada), Swami Advaitananda (Gopal Senior), Swami Akhandananda (Gangadhar), Swami Saradananda (Sarat), Swami Adbhutananda (Latu), Swami Subodhananda (Khoka), Swami Vijyananda (Hariprasanna).<sup>96</sup> Another significant disciple named Mahendranath Gupta is important because he was the one who recorded the *Gospel of Ramakrishna*.

In the following months and years, large groups of people gathered to visit him and receive his blessings. He would informally give speeches about God, devotional life and his religious experiences but never mentioned and allowed others to mention worldly matters, news or anything not related to God. This kind of preaching was not only held at his room in the temple but also at disciple's houses where he was invited. As a preaching method, he would talk to individuals directly or group in a public gathering. Whomever he accepted as a disciple he would contact personally and show his pure of love which makes him unique. During the preaching, he would welcome all kinds of critique.

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 132.

The book, *the Gospel of Ramakrishna*, which is the core point of this study, has been recorded by Mahendra, known as “M.” starting from 1882 to 1886. M. arrived at Dakshineswar in 1882. He was a member of the Brahma Samaj movement and was headmaster of the Vidyasagar High School at Syambazar, Calcutta. He was welcomed by Ramakrishna very well and tagged as one of his marked disciple. As was mentioned above the six years of Ramakrishna can be called as a period where his teachings have started to reach public. This period I call it as the outcome of all experiences he had before. Therefore, this book plays a very significant role for those who is concerned on Ramakrishna studies. M. recorded all details of his word while Ramakrishna was speaking or preaching. Initially, it was a diary but due to M.’s sincere work, it has been recognized as an excellent book in India and abroad. The version of the book which is analyzed in this thesis is the first translation into English by Swami Nikhilananda and published in the USA, in 1942.

It was towards the end of summer of 1885 that he became ill because of a pain the throat. But still, he did not care much advises of doctors. He continued to join festivals with singing, dancing and preaching all the time. Soon, his illness increased and the doctor diagnosed as cancer. This news made his disciples very sad. They arranged a proper place where he can be under the treatment. With the following months, his body sinking slowly. At the same time he was not able to have a bit of food. Sunday, August 15, 1886, he fall into a Samadhi and left the world. This news made all his disciples and admirers very sad. His body was taking to the Ganges and burned according to the custom funeral of Hinduism.

## CHAPTER THREE: REVIVALIST DISCOURSE OF RAMAKRISHNA

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter is about Ramakrishna's revivalist discourses in his daily speeches as recorded in *the Gospel of Ramakrishna*. In this section I have focused on three major concepts i.e. God-Nature, Self, and Society. These three concepts already existed in the traditional Hindu sacred books but my concern is to find out how Ramakrishna revives them in his daily discourse.

First of all, I need to mention that (as I showed in chapter two), he was illiterate and did not know any other languages. He spent most of his life searching God, going on pilgrimage, doing deep yoga, experiencing ecstasies and living in the temple since the age of seventeen. But his words were strong, and the examples he uses were lighting the minds of the people around him. When Mahendranath Gupta, who was a person of higher education, went to him for the first time he asked a maid who was serving in the temple "does he read many books?" and the reply was "books? Oh dear no! They are all on his tongue."<sup>97</sup> M's question is meaningful I believe. Because in that time education became the most important issue in a city where society was transforming from traditional to modern.

As I mentioned above, in approximately the last six years of his life the number of his disciples and followers had increased. He would ask young people who wished to attend his preaching whether they were married or not. If he is not married, then he becomes happy. He believed that marriage was bound to get involved with Ramakrishna's way of service. This concern will be essential to becoming a monk in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission organization.

In this section, I try to use fewer Hindu religious terms in order to make the text understandable for outsiders and those who are beginner readers of Hinduism. It is interesting that Ramakrishna has met the leader of the Arya Samaj movement. Most probably he followed the new argument of reformist thinkers. He also met the great creator of modern Bengal, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891).

---

<sup>97</sup> Mahendra Nath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Kolkata: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2013), 85.

## 3.2. ON GOD AND NATURE

### 3.2.1. Realization of God

Now, we shall look at his revivalist discourse regarding his interpretation of God and Nature. In this chapter, I elaborate how he approaches this with respect to the debate of forms of God, relation of God with nature, his unique emphasis on Realization of God, the importance of Kali Mother and God as Human.

Ramakrishna claims that the most important crises is that people had during the social and religious changes in the late decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the problem of not being able to realize God. A human being is bound to realize its creator. He metaphorically illustrates this claim in the form of a relation between a Mother and her child. A child cannot live without his mother, and thus similarly a man cannot live without Realization of God. This is a core idea of Ramakrishna's entire life. I would say that this is his unique contribution to the interpretation of God.<sup>98</sup>

According to Ramakrishna, the human being sometimes becomes busy with the worldly matters just as the child becomes busy with his toys. But this worldly business is not worth anything. Just as there is a moment where a child realizes that it is missing his mother, so too the man should be able to realize that he is missing his creator. Through this realization, the God, or as he calls the "mother" would return to him and would fulfill whatever this child or human being wants.

This is a small but very important example of his interpretation of God. Based on this interpretation he lays the foundation for all of his approaches regarding nature, self, and society. At this point, it turns into an important issue where he tries to revive the damaged state of Hinduism in the modern age. I shall continue his understanding of God in more detail.

I begin with a most confusing point where the nature of Brahman is described by him. For him it is located at the center of all religious discussion. Therefore, now we need to look how Ramakrishna describes the Brahman. In 1882, when he goes to visit a great scholar (also

---

<sup>98</sup> Mahendra Nath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Kolkata: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2013), 164.

known as a key figure of the Bengal Renaissance) named Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) he mentions the undefinable description of Brahman. He says:

What Brahman is cannot be described. All things in the world - the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, the six systems of philosophy - have been defiled, like food that has been touched by the tongue, for they have been read or uttered by the tongue. Only one thing has not been defiled in this way, and that is Brahman. No one has ever been able to say what Brahman is.<sup>99</sup>

Brahman is the supreme power (consciousness) above all gods and goddesses. Ramakrishna claims that its nature cannot be known in a normal way. Therefore, he claims to show the path of feeling the Brahman. As I mentioned above through the example of the mother-child relation, a man can realize the Brahman that he personally believes. To him, the Brahman is “mother”. In his thought, the Brahman which is absolute God is addressed in the Vedas as the Mother Kali.<sup>100</sup>

Incarnation is the main key in understanding revivalism in Hinduism. Ramakrishna uses the same path in interpreting gods and goddesses. To him, the truth which describes the God is actually established in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. This truthfulness also known as *Satchidananda* is called Brahman in the Vedas, Krishna, and Rama in the Puranas, and Siva in the Tantras.<sup>101</sup> And this truthfulness is now called by Ramakrishna as the Kali Mother.

In Ramakrishna’s thought, the realization of God happens through observing the universe. And human beings have various levels in interacting with the universe. In the same way, Ramakrishna connects with God. He says:

God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear of God, another thing to see God, and still another thing to talk to God. Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some, again, have tasted it. You feel happy when you see milk; you are nourished and strengthened when you drink it. You will get peace of mind only when you have seen God. You will enjoy bliss and gain strength only when you have talked to Him.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Mahendra Nath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, First English Version Published in the USA:1942 (Kolkata: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2013), 113.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 408.

As it is seen from the passage, there are different levels of knowing the God. It depends on man's position towards God. He claims the highest level is the one where the human being realizes Him.

Another significant idea related to the realization of God is that God incarnates himself as a man in order to warn and teach them how to find the truthful way. Similarly, different ideas exist in other world religions too. For example, God sends the renewers of religions to earth to show the true path as described in the Abrahamic faiths (e.g. the idea of the 'mujaddid' in Islam).

In Hinduism, it is quite different from Abrahamic religions. It is believed that God incarnates himself as a man from time to time<sup>103</sup> or at every age.<sup>104</sup> The man who is showing the way of truth to the people is actually part of the God. God always is active and has forms and plans. Initially, Ramakrishna does not claim that he is the new incarnation of God in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but eventually he will be called by his devotees and followers as a new incarnation of God in the modern age. He says about incarnation as follows "Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize."<sup>105</sup>

Ramakrishna undoubtedly had a unique spiritual experience in relation with God. Sometimes he claims that the Divine Mother (God) revealed to him in a flash,<sup>106</sup> sometimes God talks to him,<sup>107</sup> sometimes he sees God directly.<sup>108</sup> About his personal relation with God he says:

Who can ever know God? I don't even try. I only call on Him as Mother. Let Mother do whatever She likes. I shall know Her if it is Her will, but I shall be happy to remain ignorant if She wills otherwise. My nature is that of a kitten. It only cries, 'Mew, mew!' The rest leaves to its mother. The mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen and sometimes on the master's bed. The young child wants only his mother. He doesn't know how wealthy his mother is, and he

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 796.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 254-5.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 919.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 806.

doesn't even want to know. He knows only, 'I have a mother; why should I worry?' Even the child of the maidservant knows that he has a mother. If he quarrels with the son of the master, he says: 'I shall tell my mother. I have a mother.' My attitude, too, is that of a child.'<sup>109</sup>

As it is seen from the passage he describes his position as the child of the mother. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that sometimes he would act, laugh and behave like a child which made people around him feel strange. I would say he was a sincerely faithful man in the sense that whatever he believed he applied it to his daily life. He would not hide anything from his mother.

These are the general views of Ramakrishna's understanding of God. M. sometimes comments after he writes what he saw from his master. In relation to this point, M. says that what Vedas call the supreme Brahman who is indeed Kali known with different names in different religions such as Allah or Jesus.<sup>110</sup>

### **3.2.2. Debate of Form and Formless**

The most important and curious issue in traditional Hinduism and Ramakrishna's belief in God is the issue of whether God has a form or not. This was the question when Ramakrishna met M for the first time. Today it might be abnormal to ask a Hindu this question as most of them carry out the clay image of a God in front of their car, and mostly a small part of the home is left for the statue and on the street etc. But during the nineteenth century, the Brahmo Samaj movement was against any kinds of forms and idolatry and this new idea of the "formless" became highly dominant in Calcutta. Normally classic orthodox Hindu's would definitely affirm the idea of form, but the answer of M was different for he said "Sir, I like to think of God as formless"<sup>111</sup> and Ramakrishna's response also was interesting. He said:

Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 331-332.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 989.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 88.

This idea of formless of God would be interesting if it would be born before the Bengali Renaissance because the influence of the Brahma Samaj movement was very dominant among the Hindu intelligentsia. Ramakrishna takes a position not to deny the belief in God as formless initially but later on, we will see in his preaching many times that he would claim that God with form would be an easier way to realize his existence.

He preached in all his speeches that a man is free to accept God in a form or without form. When M protested by saying that worshipping clay was wrong, Ramakrishna responded by claiming that the Lord of the Universe is the real teacher in showing how to worship. He adds “Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it?”<sup>113</sup> Ramakrishna claims that God would definitely intervene if there is a false worship. He pays attention to God and assumes that He actively teaches us. The man just needs to seek it.

It is true that although he did not object to the idea of God without form, I observed that he tries to defend the form of God. He defends it as follows:

Even if the image is made of clay, there is a need for that sort of worship. God, Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.<sup>114</sup>

This behavior of him shows his plural perspective<sup>115</sup> which will be elaborated in detail when I try to explain his strong defense of the harmony of religions in the following sections. While visiting a Brahma Samaj devotee, he explained the form and formless issue via a story as follows:

Listen to a story. Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: 'When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green.' Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was gray, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last, they started quarreling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 89, 163, 211, 239.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 238.

went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied: 'Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, gray, and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none. "In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes; then again He has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can appear in various colours, and he knows, further, that the animal at times has no colour at all. It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument."<sup>116</sup>

Ramakrishna in his daily speech symbolizes such abstract theological issues via known anonymous stories in order to make his devotees understand better. This issue of form becomes notable for Ramakrishna because in the Kali Mother temple the Kali has a form which is black colour. He explains:

My Divine Mother is not only formless, She has forms as well. One can see Her forms. One can behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love. The Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms. I saw Her yesterday. She was clad in a seamless ochre-coloured garment, and She talked with me. She came to me another day as a Mussalman girl six or seven years old. She had a tilak on her forehead and was naked. She walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.<sup>117</sup>

Regarding this debate, Ramakrishna has a critical view towards the Brahmo Samaj belief system because they claim that God cannot be known with form. Though he does say that approaching God only with form is a wrong idea. For God is the one who can reveal himself either with form or without form. To him everything is possible.<sup>118</sup> In his thought, perceiving God is a totally personal thing. No one can generalize it or standardize it.<sup>119</sup>

### **3.2.3. Kali Mother and Her Sameness with Brahman**

As I mentioned above the ultimate God Brahman has forms although he is formless too. In Ramakrishna's thought, the Kali Mother is a form of God. To him, Kali and Brahman are the same thing. He said:

The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 952.

in play, as it were. This Power is called Kāli. Kāli is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kāli. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call It Kāli or Śakti. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form.<sup>120</sup>

Ramakrishna gives an example of this sameness. He, as always, uses a metaphor of water. Water is called in different languages by various names. For instance, in India, it is called in Hinduism as “jal” but the same water is called by Mussalmans as “pani” and in English “water”. These all three names are one and the same thing. Like as in this example the God-Brahman is called by Mussalmans as “Allah” by Christians as “God” and in different forms by such names as “Rama”, “Jesus”, “Durga”, “Hari”.<sup>121</sup>

After mentioning the sameness of Kali with Brahman we shall now move to her active role in the universe. He believes that God is engaged with three kinds of activity: creation, preservation, and destruction. The Divine Mother (Kali) is in a process of re-creating all the time.<sup>122</sup> This universe is her play. The Divine Mother is always playful and sportive.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 149, 807.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 149-50.



When one of his devotees asked him why the Divine Mother has a black complexion he answered:

You see Her as black because you are far away from Her. Go near and you will find Her devoid of all colour. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand, and you will see that it has no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away from the Divine Mother, you will find Her blue, like the grass-flower.<sup>124</sup>

As it is seen in the picture and of course in many temples in India she has different number of hands. Somewhere it is shown less than ten and sometimes ten. Again he explains that it depends on the person who perceives her.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 947.

### 3.2.4. God in Nature

According to Ramakrishna God dwells himself in Nature. God and nature are combined. None of them can be approached or considered separately. He pays attention to being as a manifestation of the God.<sup>126</sup> He explains via a story as follows:

In a forest there lived a holy man who had many disciples. One day he taught them to see God in all beings and, knowing this, to bow low before them all. A disciple went to the forest to gather wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard an outcry: 'Get out of the way! A mad elephant is coming!' All but the disciple of the holy man took to their heels. He reasoned that the elephant was also God in another form. Then why should he run away from it? He stood still, bowed before the animal, and began to sing its praises. The Mahut of the elephant was shouting: 'Run away! Run away!' But the disciple didn't move. The animal seized him with its trunk, cast him to one side, and went on its way. Hurt and bruised, the disciple lay unconscious on the ground. Hearing what had happened, his teacher and his brother disciples came to him and carried him to the hermitage. With the help of some medicine he soon regained consciousness. Someone asked him, 'You knew the elephant was coming - why didn't you leave the place?' 'But', he said, 'our teacher has told us that God Himself has taken all these forms, of animals as well as men. Therefore, thinking it was only the elephant God that was coming, I didn't run away.' At this the teacher said: 'Yes, my child, it is true that the elephant God was coming; but the Mahut God forbade you to stay there. Since all are manifestations of God, why didn't you trust the Mahut's words? You should have heeded the words of the Mahut God.'<sup>127</sup>

The relation between God and the universe is a key to knowing God. This relation must be well recognized by the individual. Because, the universe becomes a barrier in understanding God. He says "This universe is His glory. People see His glory and forget everything. They do not seek God, whose glory is this world."<sup>128</sup> Ramakrishna believes that the main problem among people is forgetting the Creator and focusing on his creation. This is the main illusion that the human being is inflicted with.<sup>129</sup>

In his thoughts, God manifests himself in different beings in different levels. It shows the variety of his creations.<sup>130</sup> It does not matter if it dwells in a bad thing or a good

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 92-3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 611, 1050.

thing.<sup>131</sup> All of them are the same in respect to God. Therefore we see any kind of nature and human being in the universe. As I mentioned before, the Kali Mother is the one which Ramakrishna has chosen as his idol, God. Relating to this he adds:

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kāli temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness-all was Consciousness. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kāli temple; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything-even the cat.<sup>132</sup>

The idea of God's manifestation in nature follows the idea that God dwells in the human being. This topic of Ramakrishna's understanding of religious man and the self is elaborated on in the following chapters. Since it is related to this topic I would like to quote a passage from his gospel. He says:

It was shown to me that each plant was a bouquet adorning the Universal Form of God. That was the end of my plucking flowers. I look on man in just the same way. When I see a man, I see that it is God Himself who walks on earth, as it were, rocking to and fro, like a pillow floating on the waves. The pillow moves with the waves. It bobs up and down.<sup>133</sup>

### **3.2.5. God in the Human**

As mentioned above, God manifests himself in all creations. This idea might be considered as a general view already existent in Hinduism but Ramakrishna emphasizes the idea of God's manifestation as human.<sup>134</sup> This is a very important turning point for my thesis because of the revivalist discourse would start when he claims that God dwells himself as a man. Since his adulthood he was called by many people as the incarnation of God in the new age, and thus he eventually comes to the idea of his spiritual uniqueness. He would not call himself as God's incarnation until the age of 46 which is after 1882. But I will not mention his mission of reviving the religion in this section. In chapter three under the title of "the company of Holy man (guru)" his claims related to this issue will be elaborated. Here, I just

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 450, 981, 1051.

bring his argument concerning how and why God incarnates himself as a man. He clearly says:

In order to bring people spiritual knowledge, an Incarnation of God lives in the world in the company of devotees, cherishing an attitude of love for God.<sup>135</sup> And Rāma, Krishna, and Chaitanya are examples. By meditating on an incarnation of God one meditates on God Himself.<sup>136</sup>

He defines that God plays a role in the world as a man and if the normal people want to seek God they must follow this incarnation.<sup>137</sup> The incarnation issue is quite complicated in his thoughts. He explained that the Brahman is the supreme consciousness which cannot be described therefore he, the Brahman, incarnates himself to make it easier for the human being.<sup>138</sup>

To Ramakrishna, God's formless existence is very heavy and it is beyond the level of understanding of human beings. The human being has limitations in understanding Him. Therefore if one believes that God is formless then it is true, but also it is very difficult to follow Him in this way. Forms of God and his incarnations are steps to make people understand him in a simple way. He said:

Brahman alone is real and the world illusory that is reasoning. And everything but Brahman is like a dream. But this is an extremely difficult path. To one who follows it even the divine play in the world becomes like a dream and appears unreal; his 'I' also vanishes. The followers of this path do not accept the Divine Incarnation. It is a very difficult path. The lovers of God should not hear much of such reasoning. That is why God incarnates Himself as man and teaches people the path of devotion. He exhorts people to cultivate self-surrender to God. Following the path of devotion, one realizes everything through His grace both Knowledge and Supreme Wisdom.<sup>139</sup>

And another issue is that he thinks God manifests himself in everything like in a cat or in a rock, but the greatest manifestation of him is the one which is through the human being.<sup>140</sup> He gives more details about incarnation. He says when God incarnates himself as a

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 394.

man he behaves exactly like a man. No one can understand it easily. The incarnation has hunger, illness, happiness, thirst, fear and so on.<sup>141</sup>

Another reason why god incarnates himself as a man (avatar) in his thought is that it becomes an easy way for human being to meditate on his incarnation. If it was not incarnated for the human being it would be very difficult because God is beyond speech and mind in his thought.<sup>142</sup> Therefore God has decided to show the devotional way to meditate on him. A turning point in his thought is since in traditional Hinduism the God has been worshiped in the form of the statue and clay, then why can God not be worshiped in the form of a man?<sup>143</sup> We see here he is personalizing the God, apparently saving the god from unconsciousness to consciousness, though of course while doing this he never denies clay or any form of God. He just claims that the greatest manifestation of god in the universe is the man. By his words:

Do you know why God incarnates Himself as a man? It is because through a human body one can hear His words. He sports through it. He tastes divine bliss through a human body. But through His other devotees God manifests only a small part of Himself. A devotee is like something you get a little juice from after much sucking - like a flower you get a drop of honey from after much sucking.<sup>144</sup>

### **3.3. ON SELF**

In this section I intend to picture Ramakrishna's personality which is obviously that of a religious man, and also I try to discover how he perceives himself as an incarnation of God. My findings in this section will be useful to understand the pillars of the current movements (i.e. Ramakrishna Math and Mission). The strategies Ramakrishna employs to mobilize his devotees and followers will be essential to the emergence of the movement. It must be borne in mind that when Ramakrishna pictured the image of man in his Gospel, it was during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This means that it was after a huge set of social and religious changes in Bengal. Through modern education at the colleges, Hindu intelligentsia had delved into a new understanding of the modern world. Christian missionaries carried out their activities in order to convert Hindu intelligentsia and the public into Christianity. (See more in

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 864.

details at chapter one). Here I touch upon various issues regarding man, mostly based on the question of how a modern Hindu man should approach religion and God and why the man is not able to realize God and what can be the solution for modern Hindu man's problems. Also my next intention is to see how Ramakrishna grounds himself as an incarnation of God.

First of all I have to make a clear statement that Ramakrishna divides people into two categories in terms of human nature. The one who realizes God is the one who lives in happiness and the one who has not realized God lives in darkness. This is the main theme of this part. In the previous part, I divided God and his glory which means the universe. At this point, his glory becomes an obstacle if the man is not aware of it. He mostly symbolizes the obstacles under the titles "women" and "gold".

According to Ramakrishna, there are different levels of a human being directly given by God from birth. This is because God does not dwell merely in just a certain type of people. In every kind of people, God can be seen. He said:

It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God. But some water is fit to be used for worship, some water for washing the face, and some only for washing plates or dirty linen. This last sort cannot be used for drinking or for a holy purpose. In like manner, God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all - holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words, but with others, he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people.<sup>145</sup>

As it seen from the passage, Ramakrishna sees bad people as also the manifestation of God. But the attitude of man towards bad people, of course, should not be harmful. He/she should stay away from this kind of people.<sup>146</sup>

Ramakrishna describes and divides man into four categories depending their attitude.

The first one is those who are bounded by the fetters of the world and can be called "worldly people". They are not able to even think of God for a minute and are always busy with worldly affairs. The second group is the "seekers of God"; those people are on a line where they want to be free from attachment to the world. The third kinds of people are "liberated souls" who are not attached to the world. They just live in a spiritual world with no

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

connection to worldly things. They always meditate on God. Fourth is the one who is “ever-free”. Those people live in the world for the sake of goodness for others which mean instructing normal people for the spiritual journey.<sup>147</sup> These are Ramakrishna’s description of a human being in his thought. According to Ramakrishna the numbers of people decrease from the first group to the fourth group. He gives an example as follows:

Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear anymore; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.<sup>148</sup>

### 3.3.1. Worldliness and Renunciation and the Ego “I”

The concept of realization that Ramakrishna has is actually related to his understanding of the universe. He believes that within God two things exist. The first one is Vidyā-māyā, which leads to God. Knowledge, devotion, compassion and renunciation belong to the realm of Vidyā. These essential realms are there to make a man realize him. But on the other hand, there is another side which is avidyā-māyā. Avidyā is the side where the man stays away from him. Mostly these are worldliness which means women and gold, possessions, and the ego “I”.<sup>149</sup>

As it is mentioned above Ramakrishna divides a man into four categories. This division helps us now to understand why and how man is not able to realize God. From the first group of people, he said those worldly people are not able to realize God because of their attachment to the world. These attachments are women (lust) and gold (greed).<sup>150</sup> By conceptualizing women he does not mean anything against women. While preaching to women he would use

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 856.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 88, 183, 417, 430, 731, 822, 806, 687, 204.

the same meaning via the words man and gold. With the “gold” metaphor he means the desire for worldly things.

According to his claim one cannot realize God if he/she is attached to the worldly things.<sup>151</sup> Basically he warns that a man should know that he/she does not possess anything in this world. He/she has to sacrifice him/herself to God who is the owner of everything. If the man should possess something in the world it means he has a love for it which is very wrong because the love human being has must be submitted to its Creator, and not to his Creation or glories.<sup>152</sup> The main concern of Ramakrishna is the relation of the man with the worldly things. Worldly things would not allow a man to have a love for God. He continued "Man cannot really help the world. God alone does that - He who has created the sun and the moon, who has put love for their children in parents' hearts, endowed noble souls with compassion."<sup>153</sup>

The only way to avoid this illness of worldliness is through renunciation of the worldly things.<sup>154</sup> If a man wants to realize God he/she must leave the worldly things. But one should not forget that Ramakrishna does not call all people around him to renounce the worldly things. In the following part I will discuss his instructions for householders in details. Once a Brahmo devotee asked him how a man should depart himself from the worldly things in order to realize God.<sup>155</sup> If a man decides to renounce the world then the way should be repeating the name of God as much as possible.<sup>156</sup>

Ramakrishna himself was a person who totally renounced the worldly things. Once he went to the Registry office to register some land but at the time of signature, he could not sign it because he felt uneasy about the idea of himself actually owning land.<sup>157</sup> Not only in case of land or possessions, he had the same sensitiveness towards woman too. He believes that once

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 120, 154.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 183, 417, 856, 759.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 417.

if a person renounces the world he/she should not look at man/women as a partner anymore and the person should not touch money too. He said:

He (the one who renounced the world) must not look even at the portrait of a woman. A monk enjoying a woman is like a man swallowing the spittle he has already spat out. A sannyasin must not sit near a woman and talk to her, even if she is intensely pious. No, he must not talk to a woman even though he may have controlled his passion...also he must not touch gold, that is to say, money. It is bad for him even to keep money near him, for it brings in its train calculation, worry, insolence, anger, and such evils. There is an instance in the sun: it shines brightly; suddenly a cloud appears and hides it.<sup>158</sup>

During the interview I asked about today's understanding of renunciation in the movement regarding followers and monks. He replied:

We actively run the same system but in a professional way. When a person wants to renounce the material world we welcome whoever he/she is. The person takes the name of swami which means highest veneration and becomes sannyasin after succeeding some level of spiritual world. During this evolution the people changes his/her surnames and forget all of old association including family, child and possession. I have been living as a sannyasin over forty years.<sup>159</sup>

Another important point that Ramakrishna makes is the answer of a question how it is not possible to be able to renounce the world since it is openly very bad for man's spiritual world is the egotism human being has is like a cloud blocks the he light of sun.<sup>160</sup>

Egotism is the problem in seeing the line between real and unreal. As he uses in the passage it is an obstacle.<sup>161</sup> This egotism makes a man arrogant. The ignorance causes man to claim that he does everything, that he is a doer, and that a house, family, friends, children, and all property belong to him which is indeed wrong.<sup>162</sup> But when a man succeeds to have divine knowledge then egotism does not exist anymore.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 430. (Brackets added by me)

<sup>159</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Shantatmananda, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016. (The other sannyasins I met at Belurmatah mostly were sannyasin of over 40-50 years experiences.)

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 640, 459-60, 846.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 666.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 846.

### 3.3.2. Love for God, Realization, and Faith

Here, now, I shall move to the level where a person renounced the world and wants to reach god. The renunciation is the biggest step as Ramakrishna says. After the renunciation, having pure love, chanting his name, yearning from the heart, praying to him, devotion and meditating on him will help man to realize God after the renunciation.<sup>164</sup> He provides a convenient reason to realize God. He adds:

People talk about leading a religious life in the world. But if they once taste the bliss of God they will not enjoy anything else. Their attachment to worldly duties declines. As their spiritual joy becomes deeper, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. More and more they seek that joy. Can worldly pleasures and sex pleasures be compared to the bliss of God? If a man once tastes that bliss he runs after it ever afterward. It matters very little to him than whether the world remains or disappears.<sup>165</sup>

As seen from the passage he declares that people are not aware of divine bliss. If they knew it they would never think of worldly things. He mentioned that the person should have initially a love for the pure divine.

Regarding those obstacles I mentioned previously, Ramakrishna comments that those feelings should be turned towards god. For instance, if the person has lust, anger and greed then these must be directed and changed to a love directed towards God.<sup>166</sup>

It also should not be forgotten that when he says he sees God or talks to God he does not mean that physically he does it. Once M asked him when one sees God, does one see Him with these eyes? He said no it is not possible with these physical eyes. If the person gets the pure life he/she also gets 'love body', endowed with 'love eyes', 'love ears', and so on. It is only possible to see him with these love eyes and hear his voice with these love ears.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 548, 514, 759, 95-6, 347, 90.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 833.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 459-60.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 127-8.

Another significant pillar in the relation with God, is “faith” according to Ramakrishna.<sup>168</sup> Faith is seen in his thought as pure feeling towards God. He gives an example from ancient Hindu stories. He said:

Once a man was about to cross the sea. Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf, tied it in a corner of the man's wearing-cloth, and said to him: 'Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here - the moment you lose faith you will be drowned.' The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his cloth. He opened it and found only a leaf with the name of Rāma written on it. 'What is this?' he thought. 'Just the name of Rāma!' As soon as doubt entered his mind he sank under the water. If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins - such as killing a cow, a Brahmin, or a woman - he will certainly be saved through his faith. Let him only say to God, 'O Lord, I will not repeat such an action', and he need not be afraid of anything.<sup>169</sup>

According to Ramakrishna faith is an essential thing. If one is fulfilled with faith and love he has nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. Because the one who believes in the Divine Mother is the owner of everything.

### **3.3.3. The Company of a Holy Man (Guru)**

This part is important because it has the seeds of his revivalist discourse declared very openly. According to Ramakrishna, God incarnates himself at every age in order to teach people the reality. These are the holy men or, in Hinduism, the “guru” who is known as the religious teacher in the traditional Hinduism. Ramakrishna locates the holy man at a highest level and says that without the company of a holy man and his guidance and help it is impossible to get salvation.<sup>170</sup> Actually, it is the transformation of theoretical knowledge into practical rituals. Every single day people would, especially starting from 1882, gather around him, pray all together to God, dance, sing spiritual songs and get instructions and advice from him about the realization of God. Now, I shall begin to ground his arguments concerning why people should keep the company of the holy man.

According to him, the way a man can approach reality is only via holy company and prayer. So to concretize, he gives an example of a physician like when a patient is not well he

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 106, 323, 734-5.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 95-6.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 920, 204, 106.

tries to see him as soon as possible to get treatment properly. Like the same thing, the man, in order to seek God should live with the holy man.<sup>171</sup> He said:

The holy man whom everyone must follow at least is the guru of his time. Through the guidance of the guru, a man eventually will realize God. But everyone cannot be a guru. It is a very heavy duty. Therefore in every age, God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity.”<sup>172</sup>

This passage is the general picture of his claim. He believes that he is the one who makes people be aware of the difference between God and his glory. He said:

No one else is here, and you are my own people. Let me tell you something. I have come to the final realization that God is the Whole and I am a part of Him that God is the Master and I am His servant. Furthermore, I think every now and then that He is I and I am He.<sup>173</sup>

He describes himself as one of the incarnations of God in the modern age.<sup>174</sup> In his thoughts, the divine man constitutes total religious guidance in order to make people realize God. He even suggests to people that one should keep pictures of the holy men in one's room.<sup>175</sup> This would increase divine ideas inside that person. Another reason why a company of a holy man is needed is explained by Ramakrishna. He says:

God is known by the mind and intellect that are pure. Therefore it is necessary to seek the company of holy men, practice prayer, and listen to the instruction of the guru. These purify the mind. Then one sees God. Dirt can be removed from water by a purifying agent. Then one sees one's reflection in it. One cannot see one's face in a mirror if the mirror is covered with dirt.<sup>176</sup>

Another significant reason that Ramakrishna defends is his reinterpretation of the role of sacred books in Hinduism. To him scriptures and books are important but these are not the efficient way to realize God. The best way is a company of a holy man.<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 622.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 1050.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 463.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 514, 571, 640, 682, 749, 759, 1003, 734.

According to Ramakrishna, rather than studying the books and scriptures we should just know simply what it says and apply its message to our relations with God. There is no need to spend time on it. He has the same attitude towards philosophy<sup>178</sup> and science<sup>179</sup> too. He does not pay attention to mind, reasoning or intellect. To him, there are certain types of holy men in the world. All of them are not the same. He adds:

Like the physicians, there are three types of religious teachers. The inferior teacher only gives instruction to the disciples but makes no inquiries about their progress. The mediocre teacher, for the good of the student, makes repeated efforts to bring the instruction home to him, begs him to assimilate it, and shows him love in many other ways. But there is a type of teacher who goes to the length of using force when he finds the student persistently unyielding; I call him the best teacher.<sup>180</sup>

But he makes it clear that becoming a holy man and teaching others is very difficult. Without realization, if a man tries to guide others he would definitely fail. It will be like the blind leading the blind as he says.<sup>181</sup> The best holy man who has realized God becomes like a madman. He says:

One cannot attain it unless one has seen God. But there are signs that a man has had the vision of God. A man who has seen God sometimes behaves like a madman: he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings. Sometimes he behaves like a child, a child five years old-guileless, generous, without vanity, unattached to anything, not under the control of any of the gunas, always blissful. Sometimes he behaves like a ghoul: he doesn't differentiate between things pure and things impure; he sees no difference between things clean and things unclean. And sometimes he is like an inert thing, staring vacantly: he cannot do any work; he cannot strive for anything.<sup>182</sup>

In the second chapter where I discuss his life, it is easily seen that this description above exactly refers to his experience of life. Because, from childhood to his last years he was known by people as being like a madman. His closest friends and disciples would describe him as if he was a five year old child. Actually here, he declares his holiness indirectly. But in

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 1003.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 734.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 293-4.

some conservation he directly declares it.<sup>183</sup> He also supports this claim from the Ramayana.

He added:

It is written in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana that Lakshmana asked Rāma 'Rāma, in how many forms and moods do You exist? How shall I be able to recognize You?' Rāma said: 'Brother, remember this. You may be certain that I exist wherever you find the manifestation of ecstatic love.' That love makes one laugh and weep and dance and sing; if anyone has developed such love, you may know for certain that God Himself is manifest there.<sup>184</sup>

Interestingly sometimes he would deny his holiness which he declared before. I think it is because of his humbleness.<sup>185</sup> But eventually, he approaches the relation between the guru and his devotees as a child-mother relation. Indeed, he welcomes and talks to his devotee as if really they are his children. He adds:

One must have faith in the guru's words. The guru is none other than Satchidananda. God, Himself is the Guru. If you only believe his words like a child, you will realize God. What faith a child has! When a child's mother says to him about a certain man, 'He is your brother', the child believes he really is his brother. The child believes it one hundred and twenty-five percent, though he may be the son of a Brahmin, and the man the son of a blacksmith. The mother says to the child, 'There is a bugaboo in that room', and the child really believes there is a bugaboo in the room. Such is the faith of a child! One must have this childlike faith in the guru's words. God cannot be realized by a mind that is hypocritical, calculating, or argumentative. One must have faith and sincerity. Hypocrisy will not do. To the sincere, God is very near; but He is far, far away from the hypocrite.<sup>186</sup>

When I asked to the monks about his approach to Ramakrishna, whether Ramakrishna is accepted by Ramakrishna members as prophet or Saint he replied:

Ramakrishna's position depends on the person who lives in spiritual world. Some people can just accept him as a great Saint, some as a prophet, some God descended on earth just like the Son of God (Jesus) or of the same statues. It depends upon one's spiritual evolution. Ramakrishna is a huge shining spiritual personality. So, the nearer you go the greater it looks. It depends on your thinking of Ramakrishna. If you want to progress in spiritual life, you must understand, his

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 672.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 691.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 734-5.

personality which is so central to this religious movement.<sup>187</sup>

Undoubtedly Ramakrishna's personality is at the center of the movement. This claim can be explained by the theory of charismatic leadership introduced by Max Weber. According to Weber, the personality of charismatic leader is at the center of the group, movement or society and he or she is admired by his/her volunteer devotees. Because it is believed that somehow he or she is chosen by God.<sup>188</sup>

### 3.3.4. To householders

We mentioned before in the renunciation part that if a man wants to realize and see God, first of all the man should be aware of vidya and avidya. After this awareness, the man must leave the worldly things to gain divine bliss. But all these processes take time and it must be under the guidance of a holy man. Among his disciples, there were many older men too. Even the author of the gospel, Mahendranath Gupta himself, was a householder. When people used his teachings or came to him for some advice he would not tell them "you are already lost" or that "there is no way for your salvation". His total advice for the householder, businessman, father, mother and normal people is full of hopeful sentiment. He just warns them how to balance between the material world and spiritual world. He said:

Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all - with wife and children, father and mother - and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you. "A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her Master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rāma' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind, she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all. If you enter the world without first cultivating a love for God, you will be entangled more and more. You will be overwhelmed with its danger, its grief, its sorrows. And the more you think of worldly things, the more you will be attached to them."<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Shantatmananda, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Max Weber, *Ekonomi Toplum*, trans. Latif Boyacı (Yarın Yayıncılık, 2012), 54, 362.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-8.

He encouraged these types of his devotees to enter the spiritual world. He suggests to M that even he can try to increase his income but his intention must be to serve God not to enjoy the money.<sup>190</sup> To other householder visitors, he mostly emphasized on changing the direction of things towards God instead of leaving them.<sup>191</sup>

### 3.4. ON SOCIETY

I should clearly say that Ramakrishna himself did not intentionally have any idea about the structure of a society. Here, I just try to find out what he thinks of some issues related to society like caste systems, his approach towards other religions and beliefs and families etc. Another contribution of this part would be based on some of my comments on which I draw his imagination of self in the previous part. Also, I try to connect some of his revivalist discourse with the first chapter of this thesis on Bengali renaissance. As I mentioned in the first chapter, the most important socio-religious discussion in Bengali renaissance was on the forms of God, modern Hindu man, caste system, family, widow marriage etc.

I must say that during all my readings and through visiting Belurmath/Kolkata and interviews with the monks of the movement, I realized that he was an orthodox Hindu religious teacher. He was not a reformist but he was a revivalist. The influence of Keshab C. Sen on his attitudes is very obvious. *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* indicates that it easy to feel that Ramakrishna was locating himself theoretically against Keshab C. Sen. Actually, he was trying to bring Keshab C. Sen into the realm of Hinduism because Keshab C. Sen was the leader of the Brahma Samaj movement, which is not an orthodox Hindu movement. Keshab C. Sen used to hesitate to be like Ramakrishna in realms of religious thoughts.<sup>192</sup>

In order to understand Ramakrishna's thought on daily life in the city I would like to quote his observation of Calcutta on September 7, 1883, as follows:

The other day I went to Calcutta. As I drove along the streets in the carriage, I observed that everyone's attention was fixed on low things. Everyone was brooding over his stomach and running after nothing but food. Everyone's mind was turned to 'woman and gold'. I saw only one or two with their attention fixed

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 152, 361, 732.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 298.

on higher things, with their minds turned to God.<sup>193</sup>

This is his observation of the city life during his days. To him, all those material things are low things. Therefore the efforts of people do not make sense to him. He believes if someone devotes himself to the path of God's way then he should not worry about his livelihood. Money comes to him itself.<sup>194</sup> He uses the same method towards social reformers too. According to him, the reformers, who try to change the society with the abolition of the caste system, widow remarriage, intercaste marriage, women's education, and such social activities, run in circles. Because of being so much busy with these reforms their mind is preoccupied with worldly things.<sup>195</sup>

Ramakrishna's inner awareness always makes him warn his followers to do charity. He personally also was very much charitable. While going on pilgrimage he used to give food to poor people. Therefore he used to encourage his students in charity works.<sup>196</sup> This charity work is now one of the most important activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. From these points, we can understand he was imagining this as a kind of social humanitarian work. He finds that most of the problems, hunger, and poverty that society has is because of their perception of the world. He believes that not only Calcutta people seem to be so attached to the worldly things. It is problem of all societies.<sup>197</sup>

His attitudes towards Hinduism are subtly hidden in his *Gospel*. He does not openly use the words like reviving Hinduism or modern Hinduism etc. but in one of his visitings, he saw his devotee keeping the pictures of God and goddesses instead of English modern art pictures on the wall of the home and he became pleased and called him "a real Hindu".<sup>198</sup> This clue is very much significant in showing his attitudes towards his position in Hinduism.

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 902.

### 3.4.1. Harmony of Religions

The discourse of “harmony of religions” is very much dominant in Ramakrishna’s thought. So far it can easily be found in his entire life that he is very much vocal about this idea. And also I need to mention that pluralism is the most mentioned ideology of the movement. It became a kind of symbol of the movement. Even the main temple of the movement represents the harmony of religions by using other religion’s symbols like the dome of mosques and churches all incorporated in a holistic motif within the temple.

Ramakrishna has a completely pluralistic perspective towards world religions. As we know, pluralism, unlike inclusivism and exclusivism, accepts all the religions and doctrines as true ways of reaching God.<sup>199</sup> It does not matter under which name you believe in God. All of them are true. No one’s particular attachment or conception can be false. Ramakrishna’s view on other religions is totally pluralistic. To him, all religions eventually have a goal to reach God. He said: “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.”<sup>200</sup>

Ramakrishna focuses on the ultimate goal of all religions. The ultimate goal of religions lies in bringing salvation to man. So, every man has different levels of perception.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, according to him, no one can claim that his perception is the only truth and that everyone must have the same.<sup>202</sup> He added:

You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him: Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as 'Baba' or 'Papa', but the babies can at best call him 'Ba' or 'Pa'. Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by

---

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 694.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 589.

different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many.<sup>203</sup>

He was very much against dogmatism.<sup>204</sup> Because like in the example of calling water by different names, no one should insist that his religion alone is true. He said:

Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Saktas, Saivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnanis of the time of the rishis, and you, the Brahmajnanis of modern times, all seek the same object. A mother prepares dishes to suit the stomachs of her children. Suppose a mother has five children and a fish is bought for the family. She doesn't cook pilau or kalia for all of them. All have not the same power of digestion; so she prepares a simple stew for some. But she loves all her children equally. "Do you know my attitude? I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature (all laugh). I feel myself at home with every dish-fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder, pickled fish. And further, I equally relish rich preparations like fish-head, kalia, and pilau."<sup>205</sup>

### 3.4.2. Family and Women

In this section, I deal with Ramakrishna's thought on family and women. He has two conceptions of women which manifest as two extreme sides. First one is woman as a divine bliss and a candid as a mother, the mother which is Kali Divine mother. The second face of the coin is very bad, and that is woman as a worldly object which is very much dangerous because it becomes a barrier to see God. Therefore Ramakrishna changes his attitude towards women from time to time. Actually, he was involved in a traditional child marriage in his village. When his wife grew up and came to Kolkata to see him he had already renounced the world. Therefore he never had a wife as we normally think of or perceive it. But he accepted her as a divine mother. He very much respected her and served her in whatever way he could. Now this passage would show in general how he perceives women. He said:

I am very much afraid of women. When I look at one I feel as if a tigress were coming to devour me. Besides, I find that their bodies, their limbs, and even their pores are very large. This makes me look upon them as she-monsters. I used to be much more afraid of women than I am at present. I wouldn't allow one to come near me. Now I persuade my mind in various ways to look upon women as forms of the Blissful Mother. "A woman is, no doubt, a part of the Divine Mother. But as far as a man is concerned, especially a sannyasin or a devotee of God, she is to

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 608, 609.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 608-9.

be shunned. I don't allow a woman to sit near me very long, no matter how great her devotion may be. After a little while I say to her, 'Go and see the temples.'<sup>206</sup>

A wife endowed with spiritual wisdom is a real partner in life. She greatly helps her husband to follow the religious path. After the birth of one or two children, they live like brother and sister. Both of them are devotees of God-His servant and His handmaid. Their family is a spiritual family. They are always happy with God and His devotees.<sup>207</sup>

He pays great attention to and upholds the respect for the mother's position in society. He says that if they become guilty in a very bad crime the child should not renounce his mother. Because the mother is divine bliss.<sup>208</sup>

After 1882, when he started actively receiving his followers, devotees and disciples women also regularly used to come to the temple to get instruction from him. He would not talk much to them. He would even warn his devotees to be careful about their visiting.<sup>209</sup> During these days his wife, Sri Sarada Devi, used to only cook for him and take personal care of him.<sup>210</sup> He said:

After the birth of one or two children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister and talk only of God. Then both their minds will be drawn to God, and the wife will be a help to the husband on the path of spirituality. None can taste divine bliss without giving up his animal feeling. A devotee should pray to God to help him get rid of this feeling. It must be a sincere prayer. God is our Inner Controller; He will certainly listen to our prayer if it is sincere.<sup>211</sup>

During my interview with the monks of the movement, we have also touched upon discussion regarding women. I directly asked the position of the women in the movement. The monk said:

We have a lot of women devotees in the organization. But there is separate wing them called Sarada mission. They follow the teachings of Ramakrishna but their women leader is Sri Sarada Devi. They are totally independent, equal to us and

---

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 648.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 455.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 889.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 731.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 731.

they also have monks.<sup>212</sup>

### 3.4.3. Caste system

Ramakrishna's attitude towards the caste system is such that he openly does not deny its reality, though he tries to bring it under control. According to him, the caste system is constituted of the lowest levels of society who are totally worldly people who have not realized God. The solution according to him is definitely "love". Love would remove the attention of those people tied to the cult of the caste system. He said:

The caste-system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love.<sup>213</sup>

Among his regular visitors, followers and disciples used to be various people who belong to different castes. Although he personally belonged to a Brahmin caste, he never had a negative attitude against lower caste people. According to him, the caste depends on one's relation to the God. If he has connected with women and gold it is he/she who should not serve the food, and not the low caste man.<sup>214</sup> If there is love and devotion in the heart of one person he/she cannot have caste discrimination anymore. In his imagination the devotee of God is the best person in this life. He said:

One can eat food even from an untouchable if the untouchable is a devotee of God. After spending seven years in a God-intoxicated state at Dakshineswar, I visited Kamarpukur. Oh, what a state of mind I was in at that time! Even a prostitute fed me with her own hands.<sup>215</sup>

During the interview I accessed to open this sensitive topic. I asked about the approach of the movement on caste system, the monk stated as follows;

That bondage we have to work on it in order to make it right. The ultimate goal of human is to evaluate him/her self to get salvation. By birth, everyone must be able do spiritual development. The caste which was in the past actually as Vivekananda emphasize is the division of labor not discrimination over one to another. No one is superior or inferior in this life. In this movement we receive

---

<sup>212</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 614, 341.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 628.

everyone from every caste.<sup>216</sup>

I have one remark to add that during my visit to Belur Math and Ramakrishna Ashram in Delhi the monks I met there said that they are receiving many new monk candidates these days from lower caste people.

Regarding other social issues when I asked to the monk “how do you locate Ramakrishna movement’s position in the Hindu tradition and what is your idea about the argument and differences which was not emphasized in classic Hinduism? The monk has replied;

In the classical Hinduism which is our sacred scriptures there is one saying that truth is one but sages call it variously. This was the statements made a thousand years ago which means that all paths to the reality are valid. It means that every religion is true and worthy. But in practice this was not being emphasized too much. I mean the other religions considered this idea but they approach truth as inferior or superior. But in Ramakrishna movement this is very clearly emphasized that all religions are equally valid paths to reality. This is a very major theme. Then we accommodate everyone and anyone who is a serious spiritual aspirant. There is no caste, creed and colour. Even there are people among us who have Christian, Muslim or Sikh background. We never differentiate between any one. We take everybody. So, this is extremely liberal.<sup>217</sup>

In Ramakrishna’s thought there two positions with respect to women. The first one is that women represent lust. This is very dangerous as he believes. Another side which is very pure is that women represent the Kali mother. A man should approach women as representing the Kali mother. Even if they are married after one of two children they must live as brother and sister to devote them to God.

In terms of politics I personally found no words about it in *the Gospel of Ramakrishna*. I know he was against British colonization but he did not take any practical action. According to him if spirituality is fixed then everything will be fixed. However, I again asked to the monk whether you have any political attitude towards state or not and he answered as follows:

---

<sup>216</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Shantatmananda, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016.

<sup>217</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

Our position is that we do not participate in politics directly but strongly we feel that, the constitution of the state should advocate harmony of religions rather than being irreligious. The constitution should provide the religious harmony. India is a country where thousands of religious cultures and belief alive. Being secular as irreligious is absolutely wrong. In fact much of problem of the country is because of the secularistic ideas. India should propagate the idea of harmony of religions in the constitution. It should give freedom to practice any religion and not banning rituals at all. That is very bad.<sup>218</sup>

### **3.5. Conclusion**

In this conclusion, I mention all my findings of Ramakrishna's revivalistic discourse regarding God-Nature, Self, and Society. According to Ramakrishna, the biggest problem of modern Hindu man is being blind to His God. As in the example of a child a man must cry for his God. If God is not realized nothing will be shown in nature because nature itself is the manifestation of God. The reason behind this blindness of the man is the worldly things such as possessing the land, sexual desire, hunger, attachment of man to women and family etc.

In Ramakrishna's thought, the supreme God is the Brahman. Brahman is supreme power (consciousness) above all Gods and goddesses. Since the Brahman is consciousness he sometimes incarnates himself as Rama, Krishna, and Siva as is mentioned in the Hindu sacred books. But he does not always incarnate himself and it is not necessary for him. The man can realize God's existence by looking at the universe. By observing the universe, the man would realize that God dwells in all animals, sky, and on earth. But one must be able to differentiate between God and his glory (creation). But the most significant of God's manifestation is through the human body. He claims that God dwells as a human being. Therefore all nature especially human being is highly respected.

His contribution to the debate of form or formlessness of God is unique indeed. As we know in classic Hinduism, forms are essential and accepted by most of the Hindu sects. Ramakrishna has a clear claim that God can have a form and also can be formless. This is not a big task for God. Eventually, he claims that it is true that approaching God with certain forms is an easy way to realize God. Nonetheless, he is a critic of anyone who claims that only one way is accepted. He focuses on faith. If someone does not have a faith in God's

---

<sup>218</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

existence it does not matter whether he believes in forms or formlessness of God. After believing him the man is totally free to accept God with form or without it. Ramakrishna's experience with Kali Mother is quite different to other forms of God. According to him, Kali mother is indeed Brahman who destroys, creates and preserves the earth. He calls him Kali, as Muslims call Allah, Christians call Jesus, and some other Hindus call Rama or Durga Hari.

The image of self generally settles for the realization of God. For this purpose, he suggests a man must be aware of women and gold. By women, he means lust and sexual desire and by gold, he means greed and desire for worldly things. There is several types of human beings; some of them are worldly people, he would call this people blind people. Another type is a seeker of God, and next are liberated souls who are not attached to worldly things. And the highest level is the ever-free who dedicate themselves to the rest of the people. The man in order to realize god must renounce the world and embrace love for God. While embracing love for God the man should leave his egotism otherwise his love would not turn into faith. If it changes into faith, then the man will have love eyes, love ears and a love body in the spiritual world.

Another revivalist discourse of his is through his belief that God from time to time comes to earth to teach truth to humanity in the form of a human being, and that it is not easy to realize his incarnations. According to his description of this incarnation, he is like a child fulfilled with the love of his mother, sometimes becomes mad, or suddenly laughs and cries. He does not openly claim of his incarnation but he accepts when it is mentioned. In order to get salvation Ramakrishna claims that a man must live in the company of a Holy Man (Guru) as if an ill person gets a doctors' operation. Because the man himself is not able to reach God and because his mind and intellect might not be able to realize him. Sometimes he needs to get help in his spiritual journey. Not everyone must live in the company of a Holy man. Especially householders and business men should balance their spiritual world with that of the material world.

His revivalist discourse regarding society mostly relies on the idea of the caste system, women, and family. Being an orthodox Hindu Brahmin sometimes directs him to oppose reformists like Keshab C. Sen. But he believes that the caste system practiced as discrimination in the society is wrong. Therefore he opposes the caste system. He says that if a man accessed love of God he/she definitely would be on a high spiritual level even if he/she

is from a lower caste. He also was very keen on poor people. Therefore he encouraged his disciples to do charity works as much as possible.

His most important idea which is now the core of Ramakrishna Math and Mission organization is the Harmony of Religions. He believed that the ultimate goal of all religions is reaching God. Therefore it does not matter in which religion or sect you belong, all of them undoubtedly are true and respectful. But no one can claim that his religion or sect is the only true way to reach God.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT

### 4.1. Narendra as Swami Vivekananda

When we look at Ramakrishna's life from a panoramic perspective we see that Ramakrishna has gathered most of his students last six years his life. Until that time we can say that he had personal experiences mostly, although he had many friends who visited him. He said "I shall make the whole thing public before I go"<sup>219</sup> This saying of him happens approximately after the 1880s. In this thesis, I would tag his being social after 1880 when Keshub C. Sen met him and wrote about him in the news and magazines. After 1880, young students have started visiting him. Soon, most of them became regular visitors. When they received the message of Ramakrishna some of them renounced the world and became sannyasin serving to their master some remained as householder but regular visitors. Among the devotees, Ramakrishna has paid special attention to Narendra because of his spiritual power. Narendra picked up the name "Swami Vivekananda" when he became a sanyasi. Swami is a title of respect given to any sannyasin.<sup>220</sup>

Vivekananda was well educated in Mission College in Calcutta. After his graduation, he was interested in studying laws. During the college he was introduced to Ramakrishna by his uncle. From the beginning Ramakrishna has realized the spiritual significance of Narendra. Ramakrishna has requested Narendra to become a regular visitor.

When Ramakrishna felt that he had not many days left, he summoned to Narendra to his presence and said "I leave these boys to your care. See that they practice spiritual exercises even after my passing away and that they do not return home."<sup>221</sup> Ramakrishna has taught Narendra by giving his all yogic powers. For this purpose, he would call Narendra every evening to his room and instruct him about how to keep the young disciples together and train them for their destined life of renunciation.<sup>222</sup> Once Ramakrishna has called Narendra to his

---

<sup>219</sup> Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Advaita Ashrama, 1957), 32.

<sup>220</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 200.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 33.

presence, and fixing his gaze on him, Narendra felt as though something like an electric current was flowing into him, and lost outer consciousness. When he gained consciousness, he found the master weeping. On being asked the reason for this, the master said “O, Naren today I have given you my all and have become a pauper! Though this power you will do great things, and only after that will you return to where you came from.”<sup>223</sup>

On August 16 1886 early in the morning, Ramakrishna passed away, next day evening his body was consigned to the fire at the cremation ground by the Ganges at Cossipore. In the following days, the disciples continued to stay at Cossipore garden house. At the roof of the house, they have arranged pictures and gathered all the time to meditate on teachings of Ramakrishna. As a leader, Vivekananda has already renounced the world and was keeping all the brothers under one roof. Vivekananda had gone into deep meditation time by time.

#### **4.2. Vivekananda’s Spiritual Journey and His Visit to USA**

The passing away of Ramakrishna has tremendous influence all of his students. They did not know what to do. Vivekananda was feeling a responsibility to keep them together but also he was eager to continue his spiritual journey. During these days Vivekananda left the Cossipore garden and went to visit some sacred places. Among other places, he has visited Tibet, in order to study Buddhism. In 1892 he toured all down the western coast of India, going as far south as Trivandrum, whence he turned north again and went to Madras. By this long trip he saw the economic and social condition of India. He had the idea of religious awakening for India’s future. But in this thesis I am not focusing on his social reform ideas.

During these days there was going to be held a Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Some friends in Madras proposed that Vivekananda should be sent to the Parliament to represent Hinduism. Funds were collected, and he traveled to America by way of Japan.<sup>224</sup> The gathering was held in September 1893; and Vivekananda made a great impression, partly by his eloquence, partly by his striking figure and picturesque dress, but mainly by his new, unheard of presentation of Hinduism.<sup>225</sup> In his speech, he mostly spoke of idea of harmony of

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 37-8.

<sup>224</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 201.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

religions and spiritual need of modern man.<sup>226</sup> He stayed some time in America, lecturing and founding Vedanta societies in several places. Two American disciples joined him, Madame Louise, who became Swami Abhayananda, and Mr. Sandsberg, who became Swami Kripananda. From America, he crossed to England, where he was joined by, his most notable disciple, Miss Margaret Noble, who took the name Sister Nivedita.<sup>227</sup> His representation of Hinduism made worldly famous through press, newspapers and news.

In January 1897, the Vivekananda arrived to Colombo with his small group of Western disciples, and from there he made a trip all the way up through India. He was welcomed everywhere by vast audiences of Hindus. People started to tag him as Savior of the ancient faith.<sup>228</sup>

Vivekananda speaking second time in the Shakespeare Club of Pasadena, California, on January 28, 1900, said:

Now, all the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his (Ramakrishna) ideas. Nothing is mine originally except the wicked ones, everything, I say, which is false and wicked. Bu every word that I have ever uttered which is true and good, is simply an attempt to echo his voice.<sup>229</sup>

### **4.3. Establishment of the Organization**

When he was back to India he was welcomed by large crowds of Hindu people. He immediately set about organizing regular work. Two monasteries were opened, one at Belur, near Calcutta, the other at Mayavati on the Himalayas, near Almora. In these monasteries opened its doors to receive young men who wishes to become sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Mission and to give them a training for their work. The monastery at Belur near Calcutta became the headquarters of all the work. During these days there was widespread famine in India then, and Vivekananda for the first time started a campaign to gather and to organize a

---

<sup>226</sup> To read his Chicago speech, visit Swami Vivekananda, *Chicago Addresses* (Advaita Ashrama, 2015).

<sup>227</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 202.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Advaita Ashrama, 1957), 7. (Brackets added by me)

number of enthusiastic followers at several centers for the relief of the famine-stricken.<sup>230</sup> In terms of doing humanitarian works the monks said during my interview:

There is one saying in Vedanta that the work itself is 'karma'. Swami Vivekananda, as he was instructed by Ramakrishna, has developed this idea into a belief which is 'work is worship'. Vivekananda paid very much attention to work. Therefore we work as much as we can. We believe all we do is a kind of worship.<sup>231</sup>

In 1898 Vivekananda's health gave way, and he was advised to go to Britain and America for a treatment. First he went to England for a short time and left for USA. In California he regained his health, he began to work again. During this visit the Vedanta Society was founded in San Francisco and New York City. It was then arranged that he should attend the Congress of Religions, which was to be held in Paris. After attending the Congress, he returned to India, but in very poor health.<sup>232</sup>

Still in India he took efforts to establish monasteries with his sannyasin brothers. A third monastery was founded, in Madras; and centers of philanthropic effort were formed in Madras, Benares and in the Murshidabad district of Bengal. He passed away rather unexpectedly on the 4th of July, 1902, at the early age of forty.<sup>233</sup> When I asked to Monk the position of Vivekananda in the movement he responded:

We relate everything to him. In terms of our work our practice and organizations, he is the complete guide. We also try to understand Ramakrishna through Swami Vivekananda in a better way. It is meaningful that Ramakrishna has already appointed him as a leader of devotees before he passes away.<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup>J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 202.

<sup>231</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Shantatmananda, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016.

<sup>232</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), 203.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

Sri Sarada Devi (The Holy Mather) and other disciples kept working on the monastery. Very soon they have established the body of trusty and select representative leader on behalf of the organization.

By this time, M has established the first version of his book the gospel of Ramakrishna in Bengali title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. This book is accepted as the most authentic book which shows the reality of his teachings. The first version was seen and approved by Vivekananda but later volumes were seen by the holy mother.

Within few years many other branches were open under the roof of the Ramakrishna movement. During the interview we discussed on the national and international reach of organization. He said:

As an international movement we establish branches anywhere when it is possible. Because we believe everyone should have access to reach Ramakrishna's teachings. The Math and the Mission together have more than 180 branch centers all over India and in different parts of the world. In Middle East we have subgroup organizations. It does not work officially as center but it has volunteer works and prays guided by our devotees. Wherever we are allowed to establish a branch we try to do in Turkey too.<sup>235</sup>

During my interviews we again came back to discussion of the feature of the movement. From the beginning of my research I was wondering their attributes towards other Hindu movements in India such Hare Krishna, Sai Baba etc. Regarding this question the monk said:

There are so many movements coming up every day. Ramakrishna mission is older than 120 years of age. So we have a very definite path and definite idea across history. Some other movements have a strict approach towards reality. They all are good in their own way. But Ramakrishna movement I must say has the broadest and most liberal movement. Anyone can find something here.<sup>236</sup>

During our discussion he always emphasized on the idea of various ways to reach truth. According to him this is dogmatism if any religious movement has claim that worshipping to only a certain God. The monk added that while one calls the creator as

---

<sup>235</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Shantatmananda, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016.

<sup>236</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

Allah others could call as Krishna etc. He also clarified that this basic ideology removes all the problems in the society quarrels and among religious movement.

Another issue we discussed was the theoretical background of their organization in the movement. My question was that since Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were very spiritual characters in terms of spirituality and rationality (material world) how you balance it in your mobilization strategies. He responded as “we do not find them contradictory to each other. So we teach our students and preach our followers both the aspects. Being rational as well as leading a life of spirituality is essential for us.”<sup>237</sup> From this response thinking which is a teaching of Ramakrishna and the interpretation provided by Vivekananda, one can understand that there is a balanced approach regarding the material and the spiritual. I would say that Ramakrishna led the spiritual world and Vivekananda led the material world. As a result, a monk renounces the world, become a sannyasin and do work as much as he/she can.

---

<sup>237</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda, Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.

## CONCLUSION

In this main conclusion, I aim to conclude all of my research findings of this master thesis project. It is a general overview of the whole body of the text too. Starting from the beginning I claimed in the “introduction” that British colony had tremendous influence on modern Indian social and religious thought through its modernity project. They have not only changed the structure of the cities but they had also brought many new social, religious and political ideas. By modernity, I meant there exists two sides. The first side means the technological and scientific and industrial developments in Europe and the second side means rationalization of the mind, idea of nationalism, the idea of individualism, the theory of capitalism or socialism etc. Modernity in Bengal has been consisting of both sides of the modernity.

Another significant issue I have to mention is that I have approached to Ramakrishna’s discourse as a sample of revivalism. I found his discourse rooted in the traditional Hinduism belonging three main philosophies. These are Tantra, Vedanta and Vaishnava. Based on these roots Ramakrishna claimed to have a new approach to reality. Therefore, I called his efforts as revivalist rather than reformist. Reformism is not suitable term to call him. Ram Mohan Roy might be called reformist because he tried use Christian terms of understanding God. He used tools of outsiders to reform Hinduism. But Ramakrishna instead, always emphasized on being real Hindu by referring to traditional Hinduism.

My concluding remarks of the first chapter are that modernity in India has interacted differently from other societies because of the British colonization. They suddenly met modernization tools such as railways systems, urbanized cities, education institutions, press, public libraries etc. Therefore this direct connection has created a big fight between the old (conservative orthodoxy) and new (reformation of the Hindu identity).

During this period, the Orientalists and the Christian missionaries have played a significant role in encouraging Indian intellectuals for social change. They intentionally called the period of social religious change as “renaissance” because they wished to have an eastern experience of the Renaissance which is so-called “uncivilized society”, the India. Soon, Indian intellectuals have been divided between defender of “old” and “new”. The orientalists have established higher education colleges, published journals, newspapers, and magazines

for assimilation of new generation. Christian missionaries also have supported this assimilation process in order to take attentions of Hindus for conversion.

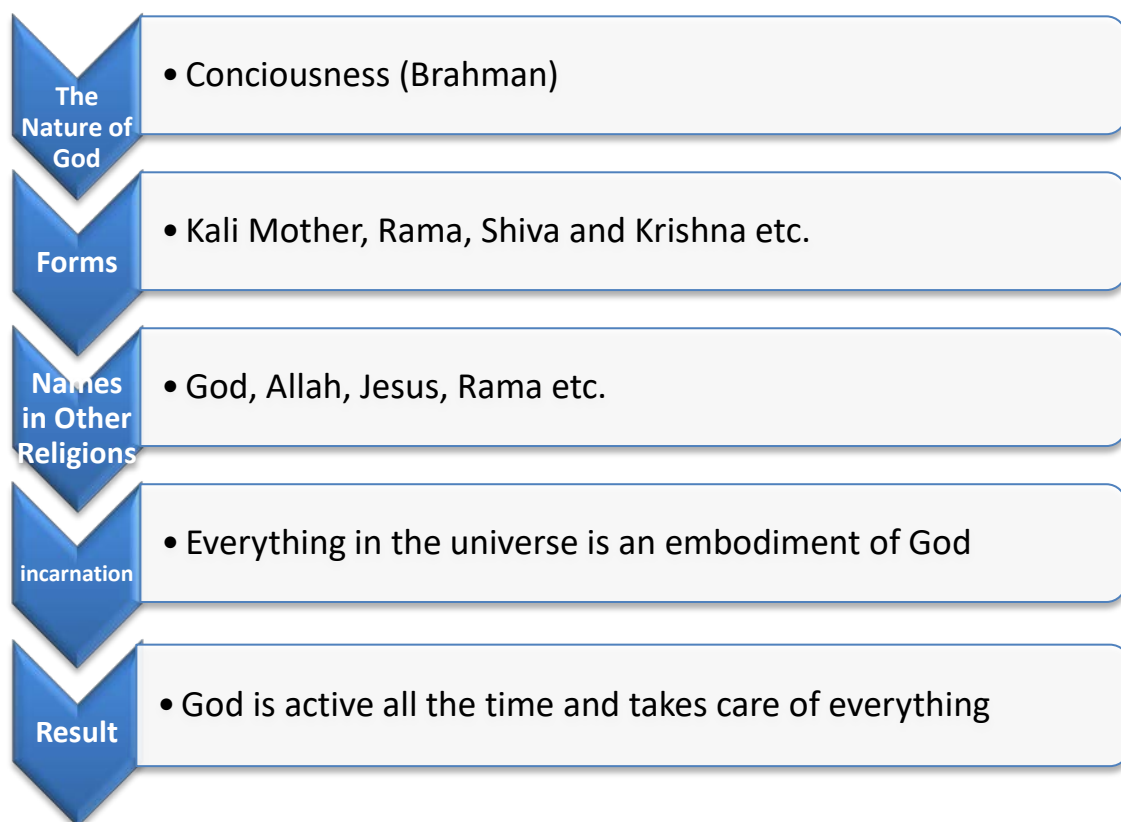
The conflict among the Hindu intellectuals has created three major groups. The first group was the “westerners” who were gathered under the leadership of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio at Hindu college. The second group was the “reformists” organized around the teachings of Ram Mohun Roy. The third group which was known as the “conservatives” were guided by Radhakant Deb. The arguments and challenge of these three movements can be studied in South Asian scholarships in order to see their interactions with modernity.

The reason I have separated a part only for the life of Ramakrishna is that most of the ideas he has was a result of his childhood and adulthood’s experiences. From his early age he started to go into Samadhi. He had a very fruitful and joyful life in his village. After entering to spiritual life, meditating, going pilgrimage, doing deep yogas, worshiping, and preaching people became center rituals of his life. A most important period started when he became a priest in Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. Many of his ideas have emerged during this period. He began to talk to Kali Mother, used to go deep Samadhi, realized that God as embodiment of Kali. Everything he saw was only Kali. According to the observation of his friends and his nephew Hriday, he gained all the spiritual power during these days. Another significant idea is that he was called by people around him as “incarnation of God” in the modern age. During this period he started looking for truth. He tried being a Muslim for a period, later on a Christian and so on. Finally, he declared that all religions are true and he offered his understanding of God as a new way. His own philosophy was recognized by people, soon. Starting from 1880 to 1886, he established a large number of devotee, disciple and follower circles. He preached all of his teachings during his last six years.

Ramakrishna had a very strong tongue while preaching. When he spoke of something, everyone around him naturally used to pay attention to him. Although he was not well educated even was an illiterate he had good knowledge of Hindu tradition via pilgrimages, meeting gurus and definitely his family. While in Calcutta he had met religious leaders of reformist movements too. He knew what the problem of modern Hindu man in city was. Among the foremost problem he claimed was to not being able realize God. He believed that human being cannot be happy without realization of God like when a baby cannot be happy without his mother. But why people are not able to realize God although God is in

everywhere? His answer is simple. He says all is because of being attached to worldly things. He concretizes these obstacles as “women” and “gold”.

According to him the supreme God which is consciousness is Brahman, Kali Mother is the God (Brahman) as described in the Vedas. Like a fire cannot be thought with its burning similarly Brahman cannot be thought without Kali. Kali Mother destroys, creates and preserves. To him, since Kali is only one of the forms of God, he believes, there exist other forms too. He believes that other forms like Rama, Shiva and Krishna all are the forms of God. Even, a man can think of God as formless. Because, God can reveal himself with form or formless. It is his wish. No one can claim only a form or without form is true understanding of God. This is where his pluralistic approach relies. But everyone calls him in different names such as God, Allah, Brahman, Jesus etc. I would like draw a pattern to show his discourse of revivalism regarding God-Nature.



**Table 3:** Revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna regarding God-Nature.

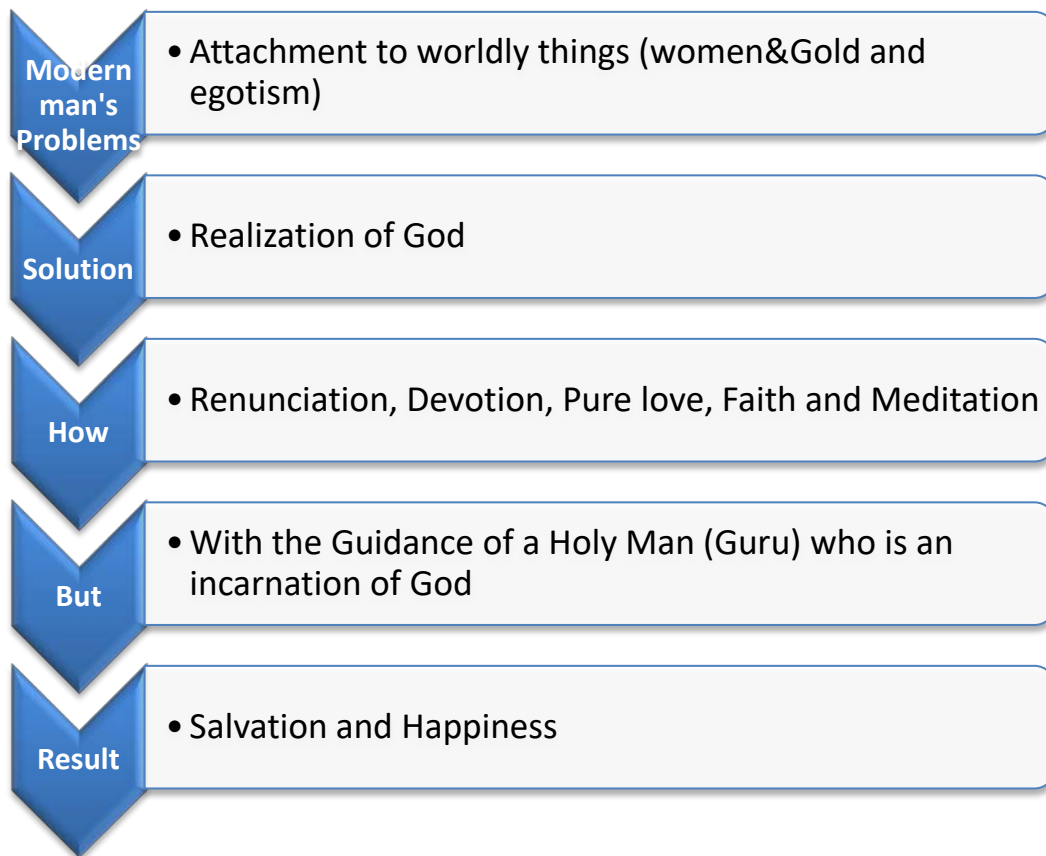
As it is seen in the table, Ramakrishna defines the supreme God as consciousness that is Brahman. Indeed, this is not a new approach in Hinduism and usually Rama, Shiva, Krishna and other deities are accepted as form of this consciousness. The unique contribution of

Ramakrishna is not only believing deities as forms of God but approaching everything in the universe as an embodiment of God. He inserts God into everything, plants, animals and human beings. While settling this approach he emphasizes that that universe should not an obstacle in realization of God. As a result, I can say that in this thought God is very active and He controls the destiny of human beings and everything like a mother taking care of her child.

In his thought God manifest himself in his all creations like in things, plants, animals and human beings. Only a man realizes God in everything when he sees God. Among his manifestations human being is the center of everything. Because human being is the best creation of God. Therefore, if a man wants to observe God's manifestation rather than universe he/she should focus on human being. Of course he/she observes from the universe too.

According to Ramakrishna, why God incarnates himself as human in every age is that it is easier than observing the universe and studying knowledge of God. Some people are eligible to realize God by birth but these are very rare. The majority of people because being so much attached with worldly things (women and gold) needs an embodiment of God for salvation. At this point Ramakrishna advertises himself as incarnation of God in modern age. Indeed, this claim rose among his disciples and friends. Ramakrishna just settles the theoretical background of it.

The answer of question why people cannot realize God is, according to him, is related his approach to the universe. To him, the universe including land, family, wife, husband, and children, everything somehow becomes a barrier for man to realize God. Therefore only solution is renunciation. If you want to get salvation you must renounce the worldly things. And also a man must use his power of "love" in a true way. Love should be submitted to God not worldly things. Another barrier for a man is the "egotism". A man should not have ego towards God. Ego just can be used just differentiate existence of person from God. Ramakrishna uses very well mobilization strategy regarding his philosophy of renunciation. He does not insist everyone to renounce the world. He made clear line that the householders can still get salvation if they as a family devote themselves to God. Later on, this line kept the young unmarried disciples and married devotees together. I would like draw a pattern to show his discourse of revivalism regarding modern man.

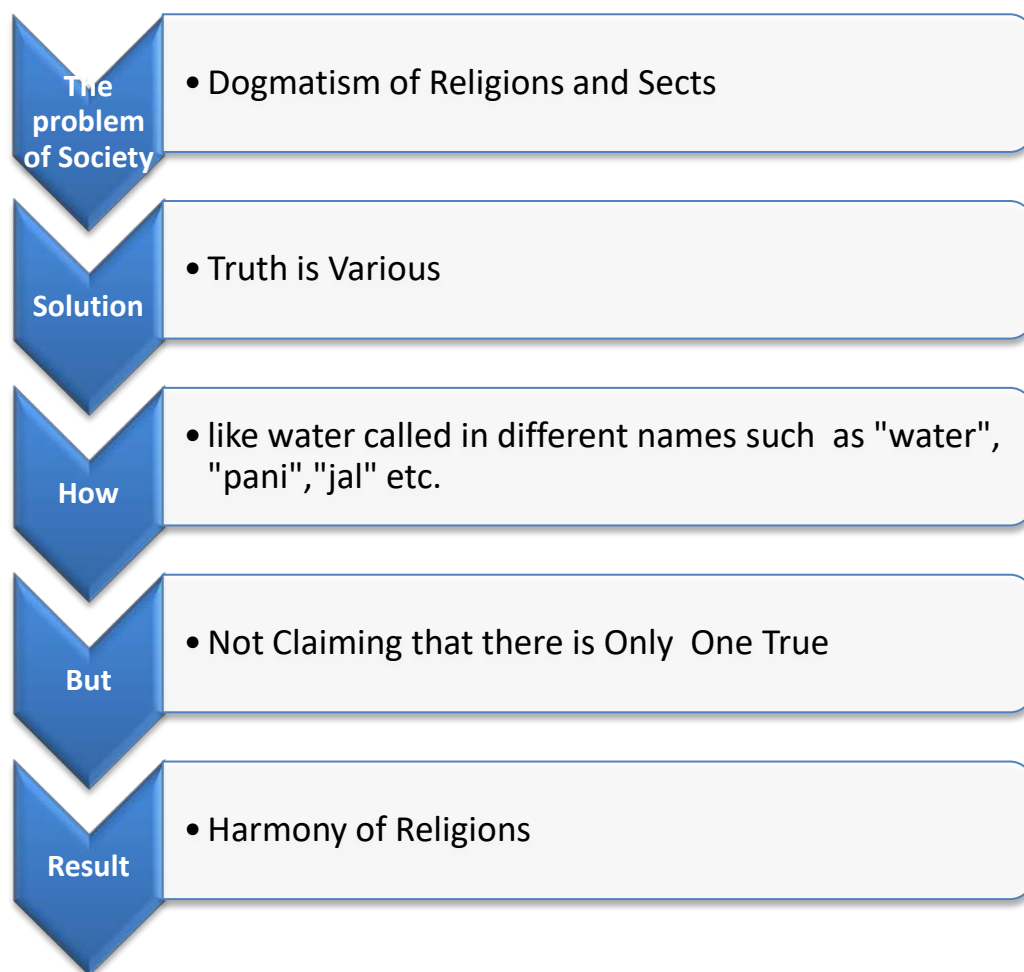


**Table 4:** Revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna regarding Self

In this table I try to show his contribution in solving the problems of modern man. As it is seen he clearly defines these problems as mainly attachment to worldly things (i.e. women&Gold and egotism). According to his revivalist discourse he is the one who can solve these problems by making people realize God. This mission today is the main goal of the Ramakrishna movement naturally. Renunciation, Devotion, Pure love, Faith and Meditation are the tools in the process of realizing God, but it can be adopted only through help of a holy man (guru) who is the incarnation of God. This is the revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna which makes him a spiritual leader in modern times. Through this discourse many young Bengali intellectuals gathers around him. After his death, this gathering turns into a national and international organization.

Regarding society Ramakrishna has paid very much attention to the idea of Harmony of Religions. As we discussed earlier, God reveals himself in different names and attributes. Therefore in society different group of people can exist with various claims. According to him all of them ultimately have same goal which is realizing God and getting salvation. Therefore

he claimed all of religions are true and they all must exist with the same goal. According to Ramakrishna, women as representative of Kali mother is the most respected creation. But women as a lust is worst creation. He locates the position of women according to realization of God. Regarding caste system he believed if one realizes God and get pure love no one will follow of caste discrimination in the society. I would like draw a pattern to show his discourse of revivalism regarding society.



**Table 5:** Revivalist discourse of Ramakrishna regarding Society.

As it is seen in the table, Ramakrishna defines the dogmatism as the most serious problem in the society. Obviously, he approaches society from a religious perspective. According to him religion is the essential structure of society. Therefore, if a problem solved among religions such as dogmatism major things will be solved as well. Regarding this problem, again he has a unique solution which is still the most important mission of the

Ramakrishna Movement today. According to him, accepting truth as only one is causing dogmatism which is not true. Indeed, to him, truth is various. It has many different aspects and no one claim that only one aspect exists. To him, instead of believing only one aspect of truth there must be recognition of other truths. He finally formulates this as harmony of religions.

Regarding the idea of harmony of religions I asked whether you have any particular program which brings this idea into practice, and he said:

Yes, we people go anywhere. I won't mind going Church. We celebrate Christmas here, in the mission, beautifully every year on 24<sup>th</sup> December. We mention Jesus as Crist and so on. We offer worship to Him. We call the fathers of the Churches. They come and sit in our temple and give speech about spiritual issues. We also invite Muslims and Sikhs religious leaders. They have come here in our conferences and gave talks in interfaith conferences.<sup>238</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> İhsan Altıntaş (Graduate Student), Interview with Swami Shantatmananda, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, A. F. Salahuddin. *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818-1835*. E. J. Brill, 1965.
- Altıntaş (Graduate Student), İhsan. Interview with Swami Shantatmananda. New Delhi, India, September 11, 2016.
- Aurobindo, Sri. *The Renaissance In India And Other Essays On Indian Culture*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2002.
- Bose, Nemai Sadhan. *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*. Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960.
- Bose, Sugata, and Ayesha Jalal. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. Psychology Press, 2004.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nation And Its Fragments Colonial And Postcolonial Histories*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Dhar, Pulak Naranyan. "Bengal Renaissance: A Study in Social Contradictions." *Social Scientist* 15, no. 1 (1987): 26–45. doi:10.2307/3517400.
- Dig Darsan. "Progress of Events in Europe," 1818.
- Dutta, Krishna, and Andrew Robinson. *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*. Bloomsbury, 1997.
- Farquhar, J. N. *Modern Religious Movements in India*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915.
- Farquhar, John Nicol. *Modern Religious Movements in India*. Oakley Press, 2009.
- Gambhirananda, Swami. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*. Advaita Ashrama, 1957.
- Guénon, René. *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*. Sophia Perennis, 2004.

- Gupta, Mahendra Nath. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. First English Version Published in the USA:1942. Kolkata: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2013.
- Handy, E. S. Craighill. "The Renaissance of East Indian Culture: Its Significance for the Pacific and the World." *Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 4 (1930): 362–69. doi:10.2307/2750560.
- Hatcher, Brian A. "Kālā's Problem Child: Another Look at Jeffrey Kripal's Study of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 2 (1999): 165–82.
- Hatcher, Brian A. *Vidyasagar: The Life and After-Life of an Eminent Indian*. Routledge, 2014.
- Hatcher, Brian A. "Remembering Rammohan: An Essay on the (Re-)emergence of Modern Hinduism." *History of Religions* 46, no. 1 (2006): 50–80. doi:10.1086/507928.
- Johnson, W. J. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Johnson, W. J. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Kesavan, B. S. *History Of Printing And Publishing In India*. National Book Trust, India, 1997.
- King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East."* Psychology Press, 1999.
- Klostermaier, Klaus K. *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Oneworld Publications, 2003.
- Knott, Kim. *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. University of California Press, 1969.
- Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*. University of Chicago Press, 1995.

- Laird, M. A. "The Contribution of the Serampore Missionaries to Education in Bengal, 1793-1837." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31, no. 1 (1968): 92–112.
- Lorenzen, David N. "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 630–59.
- Mahapatra, Debidatta Aurobinda, and Debidatta Aurobindo Mahapatra. "From Nation-State To Ideal Human Unity: An Analytical Discourse In Sri Aurobindo's Political Philosophy." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (2004): 145–60.
- Mayaram, Shail. "Hindu and Islamic Transnational Religious Movements." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 1 (2004): 80–88.
- McDaniel, June. *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*. University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Michaels, Axel. *Hinduism: Past and Present*. Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Muller, F. Max. *Ramakrishna - His Life and Sayings*. First Published in 1898. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama Publication, 2014.
- Nag, Sajal. "Modernity and Its Adversaries: Michael Madhusudan, Formation of the Hindu 'Self' and the Politics of Othering in 19th Century India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 5 (2007): 429–36.
- Nikhilānanda, Swāmi. "Introduction to The Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swāmi Nikhilānanda." In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, First English Version Published in the USA:1942. Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, India, 1974.
- Parpola, Asko. *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

- Potts, E. Daniel. *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions*. Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- Potts, Eli Daniel. *British Baptist Missionaries in India 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions*. publisher not identified, n.d.
- Radice, William. *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Ramakrishna, Sri. *Sri Ramakrishna on Himself*. Advaita Ashram, 2014.
- Raychaudhuri, Tapan. *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*. Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Richards, Glyn. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*. Routledge, 1985.
- Rolland, Romain. *The Life of Ramakrishna*. First Published in 1929. Advaita Ashrama, 2012.
- Sanyal, Sanjeev. *The Indian Renaissance: India's Rise After a Thousand Years of Decline*. World Scientific, 2008.
- Schiffman, Richard. *Sri Ramakrishna: A Prophet for the New Age*. First Published by Paragon House, USA, 1989. Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2010.
- Scott, John, and Gordon Marshall. *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Sen, Amit. *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*. People's Publishing House, 1946.
- Sen, Amiya P. *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal, 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Sengupta, Syamalendu. *A Conservative Hindu of Colonial India: Raja Radhakanta Deb and His Milieu (1784-1867)*. Navrang, 1990.
- Smith, Brian K. "Questioning Authority: Constructions and Deconstructions of Hinduism." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 3 (1998): 313–39.

- Smith, David. *Hinduism and Modernity*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
- Steadman, J. M. "The Asiatick Society of Bengal." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 4 (1977): 464–83. doi:10.2307/2738568.
- Tapasyananda, Swami. *Sri Ramakrishna; Life and Teachings*. Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press, 2014.
- The Calcutta Gazette: Or, Oriental Advertiser. Selections from Calcutta Gazettes of the Years 1784[-1832] Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India.*
- O. T. Cutter, n.d.
- Vivekananda, Swami. *Chicago Addresses*. Advaita Ashrama, 2015.
- Vivekananda, Swami. *The East and the West*. Advaita Ashrama, 1929.
- Watt, Carey Anthony, and Michael Mann. *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development*. Anthem Press, 2011.
- Weber, Max. *Ekonomi Toplum*. Translated by Latif Boyacı. Yarı Yayınılık, 2012.
- . Interview with Swami Suhitananda and Swami Bhajanananda. Belurmath, Kolkata, September 24, 2016.
- "Calcutta School Society - Banglapedia." Accessed February 1, 2017.
- [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Calcutta\\_School\\_Society](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Calcutta_School_Society).
- "Calcutta School-Book Society - Banglapedia." Accessed February 2, 2017.
- [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Calcutta\\_School-Book\\_Society](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Calcutta_School-Book_Society).
- "Fort William College - Banglapedia." Accessed February 2, 2017.
- [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Fort\\_William\\_College](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Fort_William_College).

## **Appendix A: List of Sanskrit & Hindi Terms Used in The Thesis**

**Samadhi** (absorbed concentration): A state of higher consciousness, free of material world which is reached after practicing deep yogas.

**Sannyasa** (renunciation): The fourth and last stage of a brahmin, in which all attachment to home, family and possessions are to be given up.

**Sannyasin** (renouncer): The one who has taken sannyasa meaning that someone who dedicates his/her life to the spiritual journey, yoga or meditation in Hinduism mostly referring to holy man.

**Brahman**: The supreme being, universal consciousness, the highest reality. It is also known Satchidananda which means infinity, eternity, omnipotence, immanence in all things, blissfulness. It is unborn and uncreated also it is the ultimate destiny of everything.

**Satchidananda**: It is definition of Brahman.

**Sanskrit** (refined language): It is language of classical Hindu literature believed as 'sacred' language, some believe it is the language of gods.

**Rama**: One of the major Hindu gods. In Hindu mythology, he was the oldest son of king Dasaratha who lived 3800-3700 BCE. He is considered to be the seventh avatar of Visnu.

**Vishnu** (the all pervade): One of the three great deities of medieval Hinduism. He is known in the Hindu scriptures as the Supreme Being and worshiped with thousands of names such unfallen, infinite, four armed, husband of Lakshmi, Lord of sense organs etc.

**Kali** (black goddess): The fierce aspect of Devi, associated with disease, death and destruction. She is usually represented by a black image, with a red tongue protruding from the mouth.

**Devi** (holy mother): A general term refers to supreme being, the highest principle, imagined as female. She has many names, expressing her many functions. She is worshiped throughout India. Among the fierce image is Kali which is worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna.

**Siva** (graceful): A deity worshiped in ancient Hinduism. Siva appears in some late Unpanishads and Puranas with many different names and attributes.

**Krishna** (black): One of the major Hindu God, the most popular avatar of the Vishnu, regarded by his devotees as supreme deity.

**Hanuman:** The monkey hero of Ramayana, mostly famous for his devotion to Rama. He has been widely worshipped as a powerful deity.

**Veda** (knowledge): The essential sacred books of Hinduism. It comprises four collections of hymns written in an archaic form of Sanskrit. These are Rgveda (Veda of Mantras), the Samaveda (Veda of Melodies), the Yojurveda (Veda of rituals), and the Atharvaveda (the Veda of incarnations).

**Vedanta** (end of Veda): It is conclusion and essence of Vedas. It is also a term used for the Upanishads and the system of Upanishadic philosophy including teachings of final emancipation from the cycle of birth and death.

**Tantra** (ritual, rule): The designation of a class of works connected to goddess worship. A class of text found in all major Indian traditions. (Saiva, Vaisnava, Sakta, Buddhist, Jaina).

**Puranas** (ancient, old): A huge body of narrative texts originally written in Sanskrit referring to the old periods. The Puranas themselves claim greater antiquity than the Vedas. Mostly mentioned issues are the creation of the universe, genealogies of gods and patriarchs, myths associated with various deities, roles for living, and description of heaven and hells as well as of the end of the world.

**Gita** (song): A religio-philosophical text in the form of an epic poem. Bhagvatgita is best known part of Gitas.

**Ramayana:** Adventures of Rama.

**Sri:** A meaning of Mister in contemporary Hindi literature

**Parvati** : one of the prominent goddesses of the Hindu pantheon and the consort of Shiva

**Swami:** (master): commonly addressed to a guru or a deity.

**Guru:** Teacher, an expert on meditation and sacred lore, spiritual master, who initiates and guides disciples in a particular tradition.

## Appendix B: A Picture at Belurmath after the Interview



Taken on September 24, 2016

**Right:** Swami Bhajananda (Assistant General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, India)

**Middle:** Ihsan Altintas (Ibn Haldun University, Alliance of Civilizations Institute, Graduate Student, Turkey)

**Left:** Prof. Dr. Syed Akhtar Husain (President Institute of Indo-Persian Studies, India)